ChristCommunity
an Evangelical Free Church

THE CROSS

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INTRODUCTION

We believe the finished work of Christ on the cross makes it possible to enter the life we were designed to live.

If God is truly good and just, then He must eradicate all injustice, pride, selfishness, and evil from the world He has made, right? The question is how can He do so without destroying you and me, who are so wittingly and unwittingly complicit in these things? Can we be rescued from our destructive patterns of living that wreak havoc in our lives and those of everyone around us? Can we have relationship with the God, who if He is truly just, must judge us?

Christians have always held that the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross is what makes it possible for God to set the world right without destroying us and what makes it possible for us to enter the life we were designed to live.

The cross is the most universally recognized symbol of Christianity. It is a symbol of rescue and hope. In short, the cross is shorthand for the message of the gospel. The Apostle Paul, for example, writes about the Christian gospel as being "the message of the cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The word *gospel* is a translation of an ancient Greek word that means "good news" or "a good news report." This is vitally important to grasp because often the gospel is presented as "good advice" rather than "good news." *The gospel is not good advice* about what we can do rescue ourselves. Rather, *the gospel is good news* about *what God has already done* to rescue us.

THE CORE OF THE GOSPEL

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, the Apostle Paul gives a concise summary of the core content of the gospel, the good news message of the cross:

> *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*

The Good News

First, he explains that the good news of gospel, which he delivered to people in the city of Corinth, is something that he himself received. This message isn't something he conceived of on his own. It is a news report about events that actually took place in space and time, in geography and history.

The Heart of the Good News

Second, Paul gets to the heart of the good news: "*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.*" Sin is what Christians believe is at the root of what is wrong with the world. It is the reason that pain, loneliness, emptiness, disease, violence, and death exist in the world.

The Bible explains that human beings were made in God's image, to reflect Him in all His beauty, glory, and holiness (Genesis 1:26-27). Sin is simply anything we think, say, or do that misses the mark of reflecting God's holiness (Romans 3:22b-23). When Adam and Eve, the first humans, rebelled against God, they introduced sin into God's good world. Bryan Chapel writes that as a result,

> *All of us know shame and remorse. These actually reflect a spiritual reality we may not have recognized: we feel guilty because we were made to be like God, but we fail to live so (Romans 3:10).... The guilt we feel is an echo of the pain our heart registers any time sin distances us from the relationship we were designed to have with our God (What Is the Gospel?, 8).*

Our sin has disastrous results. We turn our backs on God, and reject Him. We hurt others. We are selfish. We ignore injustice and turn a blind eye to evil. Because God is good and holy, He cannot ignore or simply overlook the wrong that we have done. Just as a good judge or district attorney can't ignore or over look crime. Sin must be punished. Death is our destiny.

The good news that Paul communicates in these verses is that, because of God's unfathomable love for the world, He sent Jesus to be punished in our place. According to the Scriptures this was God's great rescue plan. Jesus, God's own son, took on a human nature and was born into the broken and sin-addled world as baby. Jesus—the God-Man, fully God and fully human—lived the sinless life that we were designed to live and died the death we deserved to die.

Jesus becomes our substitute, dying in our place, experiencing God's wrath so we don't have to. John Stott explains,

> *The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation.* For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. *Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be. God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone. God accepts penalties that belong to man alone (*The Cross of Christ, *159, emphasis added).*

When Jesus died on the cross, He was separated from God the Father. Jesus didn't merely faint or pass out. He died and as Paul states "*he was buried*." His followers did what one does with dead bodies, they buried Jesus. The good news is that the story doesn't end there.

The Reality of the Good News

Third, Paul explains that the only way that the message of Christ dead and buried can be good news is that "*he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*." If Jesus hadn't risen from the dead, then evil, death, and injustice would have had the final word, and Jesus would have been remembered as just another moral teacher or philosopher who, like Socrates, ended up dead because he irritated the establishment.

But Jesus isn't just another philosopher or teacher; He is—as the Nicene Creed puts it—"true God from true God," and death could not finally hold sway over the Author of Life. By rising from the dead, Jesus triumphed over death by death. He beat death at its own game, robbing it forever of its power to enslave and destroy.

A new day dawned that first Easter morning. The world was and is a different place. Not only is rescue from sin and wrath now available to all who put their trust in Christ alone, now the whole creation can be renewed and remade. Paul writes in his letter to the church in Rome,

> *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. …in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:20-21).*

What God has done for Jesus in raising Him from the dead, He will do for each one of us who by faith in Christ are His sons and daughters. Creation waits with eager expectation for the day when that work will be completed, for then it too will renewed and remade.

THE COMPREHENSIVE OUTWORKING OF THE GOSPEL

The message of cross, the gospel, has vast implications for every part of our life and world. These implications aren't the gospel, but they flow from the gospel—transforming and renewing us and the world in which we live.

The gospel is central to the identity of Christians; it is the way they make sense of the world. It is the way they grow and change. Pastor Tim Keller puts it this way:

> *…in our Christian life we never "get beyond the gospel" to something more advanced. The gospel is not the first step in a stairway of truths, rather, it is more like the hub in a wheel of truth. The gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom but the way we make all progress in the kingdom…. The main problem in the Christian life, then, is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, we have not "used" the gospel in and on all parts of our life ("The Centrality of the Gospel," [1]).*

The gospel is the key to becoming more like Christ. It is what enables us to live the life we were designed to live. It infuses our work and recreation with new meaning and hope. It reorders our love. It frees us from our constant need of approval from others because we have the approval of the only one whose opinion ultimately matters: God. The gospel changes everything.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- *What is most difficult for you to grasp about the gospel, the message of the cross? Why?*
- *Have you transferred your hope for recuse from yourself to Christ? If not, make a list of questions and objections you have and talk with a Christian friend or leader about them.*
- *If you have trusted Christ for your rescue and restoration, in what ways are you seeing the comprehensive outworking of the gospel in your life? Where else in your life do you need to apply the gospel in order to become more like Christ?*

NEXT STEPS

- Regularly attend a church that faithfully proclaims both the core and comprehensive outworking of the gospel. Whether here or elsewhere, make this your top priority in a faith community.
- Read Tim Keller's book ***The Prodigal God***.
- Read Romans 1-8, in the Bible and discuss it with a friend or group. This is the Apostle Paul's most extensive discussion of the gospel and its vast implications.
- Read Tim Keller's article "The Centrality of the Gospel."
- Consider joining a Community Group where you can join with others who are striving to understand and live out the gospel.
- Consider joining our Razors Leadership Pathway (beginning every September) in order to grow in your understanding of gospel and its vast implications.