

Threads: The Gospel and Personal Evangelism

The Character of God and the Sinfulness of Man

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THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND THE SINFULNESS OF MAN **Romans 3:23**

As you find your seat, if you have a Bible, I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Romans 3. Heather and I had the opportunity to spend a night alone this weekend apart from kids. It was the second time we've done that since Joshua was born about seven months ago and it was quiet and there were no diapers to change and there were no noses to clean and there were all those little things that parents do on a moment by moment basis that were removed. It was just serene peace and quiet, for about 60 seconds and then we began to talk. You'll never guess what we began to talk about. Our kids, and the diapers we changed and the noses we cleaned. There is something about when kids get in your heart and on your minds; you can't get them out of your mouths.

This is the picture of personal evangelism I want us to see. What happens when God is such a consuming reality in our lives, reality with a capital "R"? His work in our lives so captivates our minds on a daily basis that He, who is our life, flows all through our minds, out through our mouths constantly. This is personal evangelism. It is the gospel. It's what we're talking about when we talk about threads. The gospel and personal evangelism, the opportunities we have every single day to let the core of the gospel, different colors and shades of the gospel, different threads of the gospel permeate our conversations, weave into the fabric of our lives on a day by day basis.

If you were not here last week we set the stage by seeing how we are servants of the gospel, set apart with the gospel, for the gospel to proclaim the gospel. So can gospel proclamation be a reality in our lives on a day-by-day basis? I want to submit to you that it can. What we're doing is we're looking for this next few short weeks in Romans 1-8, one of the clearest pictures of the gospel in all of the New Testament and we're going to look at five different threads of the gospel that are woven throughout these eight chapters. We're going to look at the first two of those five threads today.

What I want us to do is a little bit interactive. I want us to look at the first thread and then I want us to reflect on it and then look at the second thread and then reflect on it and then take away, look at practically how can these threads practically become part of our conversations in our lives on a daily basis.

So if you've got your notes there you see at the top Romans 3:23. It's kind of a foundational verse but we're going to be all over Romans 1-8. We won't have time to look at all of the passages that I'm going to mention. I would encourage you get your pen ready and write those down, write different places down so you can go back and look more in depth later, but this idea that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we're going to look at the character of God and the sinfulness of man tonight.

THREAD #1: THE CHARACTER OF GOD **God is the just and gracious Creator of all things.**

Start with the character of God, first thread, and what I've tried to do is take the character of God displayed in Romans 1-8 and bring it down to one sentence that summarizes the picture of God we have here and I'm going to encourage you at the end of our time together to maybe memorize these threads and memorize some of these verses that go along with them.

Thread number one, the character of God. God is the just and gracious Creator of all things. We talked last week about how God is the starting point of the gospel. The gospel flows from God. It is the gospel of God. We cannot understand the gospel unless we understand God. If we have a warped understanding of God, we will inevitably have a warped understanding of the gospel.

Now I don't have to tell you at this point that we live in a culture that has a very warped understanding of God. I could probably take it a step further and say we live in a Church world that has a very warped understanding of God. But that's another sermon for another day. Think about the culture. We have a culture that has a very warped understanding of God that's going to affect the way people in our culture understand the gospel.

This means that in any conversations we have with people who don't know Christ, we really can't assume anything when it comes to an understanding of God. People attach all different types of meanings to a concept of God. Oftentimes when I'm in conversations with people who may not know Christ and they will look at me and they will say, "Well I don't believe in God." The question I will inevitably ask them is what kind of God do you not believe in? They'll say, "Well I don't believe this God up in the sky who's looking down on us waiting for us to do something wrong so He can pounce on us," and they give this depiction of God and I look at them and say, "Well that's good, I don't believe in that God either. Let me tell you about the God I do believe in."

Now the question is when it comes to an understanding of God that's fundamental for understanding the gospel, amidst all the characteristics, the attributes of God in all of His glory, what is most important so to speak for us to share about the character of God? What I want you to see in Romans 1-8 is three primary characteristics that are highlighted over and over and over again. They're summed up in that sentence, "God is the just and gracious Creator of all things." We'll start with one characteristic.

He is Our Creator

He is our Creator. This is where Paul in Romans 1:18 starts his depiction of the gospel. He says in verse 18, "*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be,*" now listen to this, end of verse 18, 19-20, "*Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them*" (Rom. 1:18-19). Then he starts to talk about creation. "*Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse*" (Rom. 1:20). He starts with the fact that God has revealed himself as Creator to all men everywhere. This was the starting point of the gospel for Paul. We see that even in Acts 17 when he's speaking in Athens. He goes back to God as Creator.

Now obviously we live in a culture that denies this truth on a variety of different levels. Two main levels, a culture that says either number one there is no God or number two, we are

not created beings. We are part of a natural evolutionary process. We don't come from a divine Creator.

Now I want us to unpack those two thoughts just real briefly. This idea that there is no God, atheistic worldview that says there is no God. We need to realize from the very beginning that that statement in and of itself is unsustainable. I believe it's unviable as well. We'll talk about that a little bit later. But it's unsustainable.

To say that God is not there. Think about it. In order to say that something is not there, you have to have searched out all possibilities that it might be there. If I was going to say that a certain thing is not in this room at this moment then that means I would have to have searched out this entire room to see if that thing is here. In order to say God is not there that means you have to have searched all knowledge to see if God is there and if you've searched all knowledge then that means you have all knowledge and by definition that makes you God and therefore you deny your own divinity with your statement that there is no God. If you could just download that later this week and maybe listen to it really slowly then maybe that will kind of hit home.

But the reality is even the most staunch atheist would at least have to admit the possibility that God exists. There is a God. It's at least possible. We have to at least get that starting point and people would say at that point, "Well, regardless, we are not created. Haven't you heard about scientific theory, about evolution? Haven't you heard about a Big Bang a few billion years ago when particles came together and created the universe as we know it?" Well let's assume that those particles did come together billions of years ago. That's not a truth I'd be willing to embrace but let's just assume that that did happen. Even if that did happen, these particles that came together however many billions of years ago to create the universe as we know it still begs the question where do these particles come from? Molecules or atoms or whatever they are, they had to come from somewhere? They didn't just come out of nowhere. There's an old saying: out of nothing, nothing comes. If I have a cup of nothing in my hands, then what can you get from that? Nothing and nothing is what Aristotle said rocks dream about, nothing. Out of nothing, nothing comes. The reality is even an idea that these particles that came together that created a universe; they still had to come from somewhere. They're pointing to the same principle that Romans 1 is pointing us to that the design of creation points to a designer. These didn't just come from nowhere. They had to come from somewhere, maybe someone.

It's one of my favorite quotes; it's from a guy named Robert Zastrow. He was the one time director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies and I want you to hear what he said. He said,

The details differ but the essential elements in the astronomical and Biblical accounts of Genesis are the same. This is an exceedingly strange development, unexpected by all but the theologians. They've always believed the word of the Bible but we scientists did not expect to find evidence for an abrupt beginning because we have had until recently such extraordinary success in tracing the chain of cause and effect backward in time. At this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He had scaled the mountains of ignorance. He is about to conquer the highest peak. As he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.

God is Creator. He has revealed Himself as Creator to all men everywhere. This is the picture, and we see it even deeper as we progress through Romans. You see that He is the only one who can give life, 4:17, 5:18, 6:4, 22, and 23; Romans 6:23 that we're going to come back to a variety of different times, "*The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is,*" what? "*Eternal life.*" God is the giver of life. 8:19-21 talks about God and creation. This is a fundamental part of the gospel. God is Creator and as such, ladies and gentlemen, we belong to Him. He who created us knows us. He who created us has authority over us. We are not the master of our own fates. We are not the captains of our own souls. The Creator of the universe owns each and every one of us. He is our Creator, and we belong to Him, not just our Creator though.

He is Our Judge

Second picture we've got, Romans 1-8, of God clearly is God is our Creator and God is our Judge. This is probably the most dominant characteristic of God emphasized in Romans 1-8. You see in every chapter, almost every verse it seems, words like just, justice, right, righteousness, justify, justified. The whole picture in Romans 1-8 revolves around God as judge.

You see it in chapter 2 really clearly. Look with me chapter 2:1-16. We won't read the whole passage but what he's doing here is he's contrasting man's judgment and God's judgment. I want you to hear what he says. Verse 1, he says, "*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things*" (Rom. 2:1). Listen to what he says, how he emphasizes God's judgment here. He says,

Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed. God 'will give to each person according to what he has done' (Rom. 2:2-6).

That is a penetrating verse. "God 'will give to each person according to what he has done'" (Rom. 2:6). He begins to explain how that looks. You get down to verse 16. He says, "...*On the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*" He will judge men's secrets. He is our judge.

Chapter 3, next chapter, 3:5-8 talks about the justice and the righteousness of God; 3:25 says the whole point of the cross, Jesus went to the cross to demonstrate the justice of God; 4:5; 5:1; 6:14-15; Chapter 7, the whole chapter is built on the law of God and the justice of God, flows into 8:33, he talks about only God can justify, only God is qualified to be judge, even this mention of God's wrath that we've seen in Romans 1:18 is tied to His justice. You get to Romans 3; it says God is just in bringing wrath on us because in His justice God is dead set against sin.

Let this soak in. God will judge every single person in this room. Not just the person beside you, in front of you, or behind you. The God of the universe, the holy God of the universe will judge you. He will judge you, and all of your thoughts, the secret thoughts, all of your actions, and He will be just. He is our judge and as such, ladies and gentlemen, we are

accountable to Him. We're accountable to Him as judge. We will all stand before Him as judge, and His justice will reign.

Again this is one of those points where a gospel-centered worldview and an atheistic worldview diverge completely, because an atheistic worldview that denies the existence of God has no basis for right and wrong. Romans 1-2 are pointing us to the reality that we know that God exists because of the moral law that exists on our heart. Romans 2:12-16 it's talking about how we all, even if we don't have the Bible, we have a sense of right and wrong on our hearts and that can't come from some evolutionary process. It comes from a God, a divine moral lawgiver that gives us law written on our hearts. The reality is in evolutionary theory there is no basis for morality. Morality is up for us to determine what is right or wrong and there's no absolute right and there's no absolute wrong. This is what I want you to see.

I want to share with you a quote from Richard Dawkins, an avowed atheist. I want you to hear what he said and I want you to see here that the evolutionary process is so much deeper than just scientific theory. The moral implications are huge. Listen to what Dawkins said. He said, "In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt. Other people are going to get lucky and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, and no other good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is and we dance to its music."

Did you hear that? In an atheistic worldview, we are accountable to no one. We live in a world of blind physical forces and genetic replication and there is no justice. There is no right or wrong. We are merely dancing to our DNA and you may get lucky or you may get hurt but that's just the way it is. On the contrary a gospel-centered worldview points to a God who is Creator and a God who is judge, whose justice will reign and who we are held accountable to.

He is Our Savior

God is our Creator, He is our Judge, and the third characteristic highlighted in Romans 1-8 is God is our Savior. He is not a Creator or a Judge who is indifferent to our needs. What you see from Romans 1-8 is a balancing, an interweaving of the justice of God and the mercy of God, the justice of God and the grace of God. There are so many poignant moments in Romans where they are back to back, they are coupled together. Look at Romans 3:23-24. This is the verse that most people know. "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23). Don't miss what comes after that. Look at the end of verse 24. "*There is no difference for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" We're sinners deserving of judgment. Listen to what he says: "*And are justified freely by His,*" what, "*by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 3:24). Justice and grace, back to back right there.

You get over to chapter 4. He quotes from the Old Testament in verse 7-8 and he's talking about our sins and how we can't do enough good to overcome our sins and listen to what he says. He quotes from the Old Testament. He says, "*Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him*" (Rom. 4:7-8). Justice, he will be just but he's gracious.

You get to 5:1, "*We have been justified*"—judged right—"justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this," what? "*Grace in which we now stand*" (Rom. 5:1-2). We stand before God in

grace. That's the only way we are justified. It sets the stage for verses 6-8 when he says, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners," while we were deserving of judgment, "Christ," did what? "Christ died for us," Romans 5:6-8. Romans 6-7 continue this.

Then you get to Romans 8 and you get to verse 31 and you've got this picture of Paul saying, "If God is our judge and God is gracious and God has the final word, then what can anyone or anything in this world do to us?" He says, "What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can" what? "Be against us? He who did not spare His own son but gave Him up for us all, will he not also, along and with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31-32). Listen to what he says. "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns?" (Rom. 8:33-34). Who can condemn us? "Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things, we are more than," what? "Conquerors through Him that loves us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:34-39).

He is our Creator, He is our judge, and praise God, He is our Savior. He's our Savior and He mingles justice with mercy, justice with grace. This is gospel, this is the character of God and as our Savior we need Him. As our Creator, we belong to Him. As our judge, we're accountable to Him and as our Savior, we desperately need Him.

We need Him for every breath we breathe. Ladies and gentlemen, the only reason your heart is beating at this moment is because God in His grace is giving it rhythm. That is the only explanation for why we have breath at this moment, because of grace.

We live in a world that says we are self-sustained people, a self-made people. We are not self-sustained. We are radically God sustained. Even if you are here tonight and you hate God, your breath at this moment comes from the very one you hate.

So let's put our notes aside for a second and Bibles aside for a moment and let's thank together and exalt our Creator. Let's exalt the judge of the universe and let's exalt our savior. He reigns as the just and gracious Creator of all things. Will you stand with me and let's exalt His name? He is our Creator. He's our judge. He is our Savior.

THREAD #2: THE SINFULNESS OF MAN

We are each created by God, but we are all corrupted by sin.

So thread number two, the sinfulness of man. We are each created by God but we are all corrupted by sin. Now this thread, we need to think about this. We need to think about sharing this with others. We realize is obviously not the most effective thing to do to go up to your coworker tomorrow morning and get in his or her face and say, "You need to be saved." That doesn't work very well. At that moment the only thing they're thinking they'd like to be saved from is you.

And so, the challenge is when it comes to the sinfulness of man, how do you communicate to people that we're sinful? Not one of us likes to think about our sinfulness. We try to cover our sinfulness. This is the impossible task, evangelism. This is why proclamation of the gospel is impossible apart from the Holy Spirit of God. The gospel confronts us in our pride and in our sinfulness. Now we've tried, we've tried in our day to circumvent this problem and offer the gospel without confronting man's sinfulness. We've offered the gospel as something you can add to your life to make your life better, like Girl Scouts or piano lessons. The only problem is the gospel confronts us at the core of who we are and says there needs to be a radical change in our hearts because our hearts are corrupted by sin. So how do you communicate that? Well let's see how Paul communicates that in Romans 1-8.

We Have Rebelled Against God

Three different truths that really come together to give this picture of corruption, sins, corruption in our heart. Number one, we have rebelled against God. This is the whole point of Romans 1:21. After he gives us this picture of God as Creator, he says in verse 21, *"Although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools"*—we have become fools—*"and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles"* (Rom. 1:21-23). You get down to verse 25 it says, in our sin we *"exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and [we] worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised Amen"* (Rom. 1:25).

The picture, Paul says this is what sin is. Sin is not glorifying God as God. At the heart of who we are, we have taken God as the center of our life, as the sustainer of our life and instead of orienting our life around Him as the center, we have taken Him out of the center and we have put created things there. Most often ourselves or other created things. We have not glorified Him as God. We have rejected Him as God. We have exchanged His truth for lies. We have taken created things and put them in the place of the Creator.

This is the root of Genesis 3, the first sin entering into the world. God had said, "You may eat from any tree, any fruit except for this one," and what did Adam and Eve do? They figuratively look in the face of God and say, "You are not Lord here. We call the shots; we know what is best, exchange the truth of God for a lie, say I'm going to find my pleasure in what I want instead of what you want. I'm going to find my pleasure in the things of this world instead of in You."

The gravity of that one sin is heightened by the one who is sinned against, the one who is rebelled against. You picture it. This is the God who beckons storm clouds to come and they come. This is the God who says to the wind, "Blow here," and it does, that says to the rain, "Fall here," and it falls immediately according to His bidding. This is the God who says to the mountains, "You go here," who says to the seas, "You stop at this point." This is the God who speaks to everything in all creation, tells creation what to do and immediately creation responds in obedience. He looks at man and says, "Do this," and man looks at Him in the face and says, "No, no." We have all rebelled like this.

This is the whole picture of Romans 3:9-20. What Paul does, he gets to the end of these first three chapters and he pulls back to the Old Testament. He finds eight different verses in the Old Testament, different passages. He brings them into the New Testament and he said, "You want to know what man looks like in the sight of a Holy God? Look at rebellious man." *"There is no one righteous, not even one. No one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away. They have together become worthless,"* worthless (Rom.

3:10-12). *"There is no one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves..." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes"* (Rom. 3:12-18). This is a picture of man.

It's what Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." We have rebelled against God. Every single one of us, this is Genesis 8:21, *"Every inclination of [man's] heart is evil from childhood."* You and I are rebels against God. We have not glorified this God. We have rejected Him as God. This is what the gospel confronts us against.

We are Separated From God

We have rebelled against God. As a result, second, we are separated from God. This is that picture in Romans 3:23—*"All have sinned and fall short"* of His glory. Glory, Old Testament picture, associated with the presence of God. We've fallen short of His glory. This is the picture we see all throughout. Look over in Romans 6 with me, Romans 6-7, when Paul talks about sin in our lives. I want you to see how he describes the hold sin has over us. We'll start in verse 16 and we've got to kind of take this in context because he's speaking to people who are followers of Christ and he's talking about what they once were before they came to Christ and I want you to hear how he describes them, describes people in sin. Listen to what he says, verse 16,

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! (Rom. 6:16-21).

Here's the picture that he's giving us here. We are what to sin? "Slaves" to sin, enslaved to sin, separated from God and enslaved to sin. This is huge. We will never experience salvation. No one can ever see salvation, can ever understand the gospel until we realize we're in slavery and we need to be freed. Until we realize we're in slavery we have no cognizance of our need to be freed.

We are Dead Without God

We have rebelled against God and we are separated from Him, enslaved to sin, and the result of that is death. We are dead without God. This is Romans 6:23, *"The wages of sin is death."* This is exactly what he just said at the end of Romans 6:19, 20, 21. Those things—slavery to sin—result in death. Turn back one chapter to 5:12. Verses 12-21, over and over again, Paul shows us the relationship between sin and death. Listen to it in this first verse, Romans 5:12 *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned."*

That is a picture right there. Don't miss what he's saying. He's saying one man, Adam, Genesis 3, sin comes into the world and what comes with sin into the world? Death. Death comes to all men because all have sinned, every single one of us since Adam has a sinful nature. We've rebelled against God. We're separated from God and as a result we are dead without God. When you get over to Romans 7, look in what he says in verse 24. He's celebrating the gospel here but hear what he says. He says, "*What a wretched man I am!*" Romans 7:24, "*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of,*" what? "*Death.*"

Now here's the reality. It is not possible to be more dead or less dead. The only possibility here is dead. I'm going to emphasize that because we live in a culture where when it comes to the thought of our sin or our evil, our minds immediately go to comparison and we think, "Well compared to this picture or this person, not that bad." Nobody is more dead or less dead in sin. You're just dead in sin. That's the picture that we're seeing here and we cannot see a solution unless the problem is diagnosed correctly.

The problem is not, ladies and gentlemen, that we have done some bad things. The problem is not that we've made bad decisions. The problem is that at the core of who we are, we have rebelled against God, we are separated from Him, and we are dead without Him. People might think, "Well that sounds kind of extreme." It's exactly what happened in Genesis 3. He told them, "One sin, one sin and you will surely die." That's the picture, that death would be a reality. We think that's extreme but we've got to realize, again, it's not the gravity of sin. It's the gravity of the one who is sinned against. To think about it in just one sin, in one sin that you or I would commit, in one sin, that sin involves looking in the face of the Holy God, Creator of the universe, and saying to Him, "Your law is not good and you do not have authority over my life. I defy your jurisdiction in my life and I know what is best and I do what pleases me regardless of what an infinite offense it might be to you." We do that. We say those things every time we sin, any one sin, and the reality is in this room we have committed thousands upon thousands upon thousands of sins. We have rebelled against God, we're separated from God, and we are dead without God.

Now I know that we are talking tonight about sharing the gospel with others. But I am increasingly convicted that when it comes to this element of the gospel, it's not non-Christians who have a hard time being honest about sinfulness. It's all too often Christians, the Church, who prefer not to be honest about sinfulness.

We are a people who delight in glossing over our rebellion with religion. We give ourselves to religious routine, Sunday in and Sunday out, and we actually begin to think that God is fooled by our songs when we are holding on to such deep sin in our hearts and as a result we have created a God defaming religion that shuts the thought of honesty before God, that delights in coming into a room, singing songs, hearing a word of encouragement, and walking out and never having to deal with the gravity of sin in our hearts and we need to be finished and done with this God defaming religion. We need to be a people who are honest with God about sin. How can we ever proclaim the gospel that radically changes sin, radically transforms sinful hearts, if we are not willing ourselves to come honestly before this God?

So I want us, before we go any further, to take the next few moments, and I want to invite you to spend a few moments in confession before God, whether it is where you are seated now, there's places you can kneel at the side or down front. This is a fundamental part of worship, honest confession of sin. I want you to ask God to reveal areas of rebellion in your heart. I want you to ask God to show you areas of your life where He is not being glorified as God so you don't have to think for a second about the things you are hiding, holding

onto. God will judge men's secrets through the gospel and so I invite you to, I urge you, to not delay in being honest with God about sin in your life. Let's spend the next few moments in confession as Mandy plays and sings over us. I invite you to be honest with God.

Father, we praise you because we are a creation and you are our Creator and we are sinner and you are Redeemer. God we praise you that we can be honest with you about our sin. Father we pray that you make us a people who are honest with you about our sin and we pray that you will cover it with your grace and your mercy. God we pray that you would help us as your people not to gloss over the gravity of sin and as a result God that you will help us as your people to proclaim your victory over sin in the gospel. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

SEWING GOSPEL THREADS...

God is the just and gracious Creator of all things.

All right, get your pens out. Now what I want us to do is I want us to consider these two threads, the character of God and the sinfulness of man. How can we sew these threads in our daily conversations, in our daily lives? How can these threads become a reality in our mouths when we are talking with our kids, when we're talking to our spouses at home, when we're talking with coworkers, colleagues, when we are talking to neighbors, when we are talking at restaurants, grocery stores, where we're shopping? How can the gospel be more than just a presentation of a track we pull out of our pocket at the right time? How can the gospel permeate and be woven into the fabric of our every conversation?

What I want to do here, I'm going to throw out just all kind of ideas. The point here is not to give an exhaustive list or a definitive list but to get your minds thinking about how in the context of where you live and where you work, where you play, that the gospel can become a reality in your relationships and your conversations. So this is really to just get your mind going and mind thinking.

Talk About God Like He is Someone You Know

We'll start with that first thread. God is the just and gracious Creator of all things. How can that thread be woven in the fabric of your life on a daily basis? I want to encourage you, encourage us as a faith family especially, let's be a people that talk about God like He is someone we know, talk about God like He is someone you know. People say, "Well I can't share the gospel because I've not been trained to share the gospel." How many parents in this room have been trained in how to talk about your kids? How many grandparents in this room have been trained in how to talk about your grandkids? You have received no formal training and yet that's all we hear about from you, your kids and your grandkids. The reality is when something's on your mind, it comes out of your mouth. What happens when God who is our life, our minds are so consumed with Him that He is the Reality with a capital "R" in our everyday conversations. I'm praying that God will make us a faith family, that people will hear us and they say, "That's a people who know God, who walk with God, whose lives point to God and there's something biblical about this."

Talk About God Like He is Someone You Worship

Talk about God like He's someone you know and talk about God like He's someone you worship. I wanted to emphasize that because in some of the things we're about to talk about I want us to be careful not to talk too causally about God. Here's what I mean by that. Yes, God is our friend. Yes, God is our Father, but He is also our King and He is also

the sovereign and majestic ruler of the universe. As a result we don't talk about God the same way we talk about friends, fathers here on this earth. There's a difference here. Talk about God like He's someone you know and someone you adore, someone who is worthy.

Talking About God as Creator...

Now what does that look like? Talk about God like he's our Creator, with our kids, with our colleagues, with our neighbor. Acknowledge the glory of God in creation every chance you have. These are simple things, again, just to get your mind going. But think about the opportunities we have to talk about the glory of God in creation on a continual basis.

Don't say, "Look at that sunset. It is beautiful." Instead, say, "Look at the glory of God displayed in that sunset. He is beautiful." See the difference? One is talking about created things and the other's talking about the Creator. Acknowledge the glory of God in a storm like this afternoon to say, "Look at the glory of God revealed in creation." We have opportunities to do this every day, all day long, and not just in creation.

Acknowledge the presence of God in specific facets of your life. Don't miss it. Now the question, "What's going on in your life," takes on a radically new meaning when God is at the center of your life. When people ask you what's going on in your life, instead of just saying in a mechanical way where this or this or this is happening, why not, "God is working in my life in this way." You start a sentence like this and all of a sudden somebody is signaled to the fact that this person actually believes that God is real and actually believes that God is personally involved in their lives, maybe even doing good things in their lives. "God is blessing me in this way." We're taking the antenna in our life and we're pointing it toward God. The sovereignty of God is intended to be put on display in every facet of our lives. We're going through a major life decision. It's a perfect opportunity when people ask you about your decision-making, your thinking; it's a perfect opportunity to point to the fact that this decision is God's before it is yours, that you are owned by another, that you are not the master of this decision. He is. God is leading me in this direction. He's guiding me to make this decision. When He's our master, He is teaching us truths. He is showing us realization. We belong to Him every moment of every day. You realize how so much of our conversation is atheistic in nature? We talk like things are happening by chance or coincidence or they're just going on in our lives. It's not true. God is behind every detail of our lives. That changes the way we talk about our lives.

You see how we have opportunities, simple opportunities to point to God as Creator, as the one who we belong to, on a moment by moment, day by day basis. This is gospel truth penetrating our conversations.

Talking About God as Judge...

Now what about God as Judge? It's a little more challenging here. But I'm convinced when we are looking for opportunities to show the character of God, talk about the character of God, God delights in that. He's going to provide those kinds of opportunities.

Think about when things go wrong. When we see things go wrong in the world, we saw this last week in Sri Lanka. 25 people on a crowded bus bombed in an instant, killed by radicals there. We see that on the news and people lamented. To at that point express confidence in God because yes, there is injustice in the world but here's the reality. The gospel, God's justice will reign. It will reign and that gives a great amount of confidence. When little things go wrong in our lives, when things go wrong around us and in the world, there's a confidence in God. Let's be honest. We talked about it, the evolutionary atheist does not have. You heard Dawkins, and what does Dawkins say about Sri Lanka? 25 people killed on a bus. He says those bombers were merely dancing to their DNA and they were not lucky.

It's not evil, wrong or right. Unfortunately they just missed out and there's no justice in the end. Unviable worldview, the gospel-centered, we can express confidence in God even when things go wrong and express humility before God and to others when you do something wrong.

When we are guilty of something we undercut the gospel when we respond with pride, when we respond with denial. This is undercutting the gospel. When we realize that God is the judge of our lives and nothing is hid before him that changes the way we respond at work, at home, when we do something wrong. We respond with humility before God because we know that we have God as a judge. It changes the way we respond.

Talking About God as Savior...

What about God as Savior, the fact that we need God? I want to encourage you to constantly point out evidences of God's grace in and around you. We see God's grace everywhere, in Christians and in non-Christians. We talked about it. Every single one of us has breath in this room right now because of the grace of God.

When we see good things, this kind of ties in to the next one, constantly credit God as the source of everything good in and around you. When everything that is good comes from God, then that provides all kinds of fodder for conversations about the goodness of God. Now we've got to be careful here not to take this too far. There is a story about a preacher who preached a sermon and was standing at the back and one of the members came up to him and said, "Preacher that was a good sermon," and he looked back and was kind of blushing, and he said, "Well it was all God." The member looked back at him and said, "Well it wasn't that good," and I think there's a word there that reminds us to not attribute just every single thing. There are some things that we need to take credit for.

But the reality is anything, anything in me that is good comes from God. Anything at all that is in you that is good comes from God. As a result, to talk about evidences of grace in our lives, His provision in our lives on a daily basis, when we are living like we need God for every breath we breathe, it changes the way we talk. When we are living like we need God for every breath we breathe, it changes the way we talk about the things that are going on in our lives. We've got opportunities. You see that opportunity's around us every single day to point to God as Creator, as judge, and as Savior, the one we need, the one we belong to, and the one we're accountable to.

SEWING GOSPEL THREADS...

We are each created by God, but we are all corrupted by sin.

Now the sinfulness of man, the second thread, a little more challenging to talk about; how we are each created by God but are all corrupted by sin. I want to camp out for just a minute on that first part. We're each created by God. The message of the gospel is yes we are radically, dreadfully, totally, universally sinful. At the same time, we are made in the image of God, every single one of us created by God, Psalm 139, "Fearfully and wonderfully made."

Speak Respectfully to and About all People as Individuals Created in the Image of God

So as a result, the only news we have for people is not that they are sinful, it's also that they are created by God. That changes the way we speak. We speak respectfully to and

about all people as individuals created in the image of God. When we speak about people, regardless of their ethnicity, regardless of their social status, regardless of their economic status, regardless of their religious status, regardless of our opinions about them, we speak about people, we speak to people like they are created in the image of God.

This changes the way you talk about your spouse. It changes the way you talk about your ex-spouse. This changes the way you talk about your coworkers. This changes the way you talk about your boss. This changes the way you talk about people in the world. It changes the way you talk about presidential candidates. It changes the way you talk about Osama bin Laden. These are all people created in the image of God. As a result it certainly changes the way we talk about each other. Gossip undercuts the gospel, undercuts the gospel, because we are creatures made in the image of God.

Look Intentionally for Opportunities to Encourage Others

Not only speaking respectfully to and about people but speaking, looking intentionally for opportunities to encourage others. Look intentionally for opportunities to encourage others. We know we live in a world where everything is about advancing yourself. What happens when you begin to speak like you're living to advance others, like you're living to build up others? This is the picture of the gospel that sticks out in our culture.

Talking About Our Rebellion...

We're each created by God but we are all corrupted by sin. So how do you talk about this other facet? How do you talk about rebellion? Well, I want to encourage you, just some things to think about. Speak humbly about the seriousness of sin. Here's what I mean by that. I want to encourage you not to joke about sin. Don't joke about sin in your life. Don't joke about sin in others' lives. Don't finish a big meal and say, "Well that was just gluttonous, ha, ha, ha." When we make light of sin, then we communicate to those around us that sin is to be taken lightly, that sin is to be handled causally, and we live in a world, in a culture that handles sin extremely lightly, extremely casually.

As we are salt and light according to Matthew 5, there is a seriousness that should pervade every single one of our conversations about any type of sin. Speak humbly about the seriousness of sin. Don't joke about temptations and speak honestly about our propensity to sin. Say to your kids, when you do something wrong, this is just an example, say to your kids, "Son, daddy did something wrong. He is prone to do wrong and your daddy needs a savior." When your kid does something wrong, "Son you are prone to do wrong and you need a savior." You see how the gospel is a reality in our everyday conversations? When someone at work is caught for doing something wrong, you go to them and you say, "I too have a propensity to sin."

These are pictures, gospel threads that can be sewn on a day-by-day basis. Speak honestly about our propensity to sin. The way we speak about evil, the way we speak about wrong, the way we speak about sin in our daily lives will have a huge effect on helping other people to understand the depth of rebellion against God.

Talking About Our Separation...

Talking about our separation, I would encourage you in the way you speak, acknowledge the root of sin in and around you. Let's avoid buying into this pattern in the world that when something goes wrong and we're trying to fix it, we go to the branch. We try to put Band-Aids on broken limbs. It's like we talked a few weeks ago with homosexuality. It's a picture of talking about behavior misses the point. Go back to desire, to thinking, to heart issues. We saw in Romans 1 a disordered heart leads to disordered thinking, leads to disordered desire, which leads to disordered behavior. There is a root back here. When we talk about

difficulties, when we talk about sin in our lives, wrong in the lives of people around us, then we look at the root not the branches out here.

Look at the root of sin and acknowledge the consequences of sin in and around you. We don't minimize the consequences of sin. We highlight the consequences of sin. Remind ourselves to communicate to others that yes, there are consequences to sin. We don't pretend like pain and suffering from sin is not there in the way we talk about it. We talk about it like its real because we're looking forward to the day when there will be no more sin, no more sorrow, and no more sadness and no more pain. We long to be delivered from sin. We use those opportunities to talk about the ultimate consequences of sin and Christ's ultimate victory of sin which we'll dive into next week, which leads to the ultimate picture of deadness.

Talking About Our Deadness...

How do you talk about spiritual deadness? I want to encourage us, let's be a people who constantly point to our dependence on God. We live in a self-sufficient, self-sustaining world where we live like we can do it all on our own. You believe to live and talk like you need God for every breath you breathe, for every word you say, for every decision you make, that is radically different in our culture. Now don't miss this. You start talking like you need God, you start using phrases like, "I need God to do this, I need God to do this," people in this culture will say, "You are weak." We begin to think these things.

I remember the first day we flew into that city in Kazakhstan, when we were with our translator when we were adopting Caleb and as I shared with her what I did and she looked back at me after I shared I believed in God, she said, "I don't believe in God and people who do believe in God are weak." I said, "I get the hint." She said, "I don't need God." Over the next four weeks we had meals with her almost on a daily basis where we talked about how God had provided, how God had done this, how God had led us in this way, and we get to that last night where we're flying out of that city and she looked at us and she's saying, "I'm trusting in your God because I need Him." This is the picture. Live, talk like you need God in your family and you need God in your work, and you need God in your life. Talk, constantly and point to your dependence on God and point to our desperation for God. The reality is we don't walk out of this room tonight with breath if God doesn't give us breath. That changes the way we talk when we leave this room tonight.

The Challenge ...

So here's the challenge. You've got some ideas that are out there. Here's the challenge. I left some blank space there for you to write this challenge down and it's twofold. A twofold challenge and there will be a quiz next week. So, twofold challenge, right, you ready? First part of the challenge, I want to challenge you, and you can take this and do it however you want, but I want to challenge you to memorize these first two threads in the gospel and here's what I mean by that. Those first two threads, God is the just and gracious Creator of all things. We are each created by God and we are all corrupted by sin. If you want, you feel free to change that around however you like. Just make sure it's biblical. You can take those words, memorize those and memorize a verse from Romans for each of those. We've talked about all kinds of different verses in Romans. Memorize a verse from Romans for each of those and maybe even if you're really ambitious, extra credit maybe, then memorize some of those accompanying truths. He's our Creator and we need Him. He's our judge and we're accountable to Him. He's our Savior. I said it wrong. He's our Creator and we belong to

Him, anyway. I failed the quiz. I want to challenge you let these gospel threads be in your mind and in your hearts. They're sewn there, the fabric of who you are. So that's the first part of the challenge.

The second part of the challenge is this. I want to challenge you every single day this week, without exception, every single day to look intentionally for an opportunity to sew both of those threads, one of each. Now you may not have many opportunities. You see how simple this picture is. I want to challenge you to get up in the morning, tomorrow morning, and say, "God, I want to speak about your character today."

Now this could be before your kids or your family or before your neighbors. I would say preferably before somebody you don't know if they don't know Christ or maybe you know they don't know Christ. Speak about the character of God. These are just ideas to kind of jog your thinking. How can you speak about the character of God and point people to the character of God as Creator, as Judge, as Savior tomorrow and then how can you speak about the sinfulness of man in some way? These are just ideas there. Ask God, God give me an opportunity to sew these threads today and look intentionally and what I want to ask you to do is anything interesting happens, let me know. Shoot me an email or know, anything interesting comes from that.

But again, it's just a simple picture. Don't miss it. This is the church. This is what we were talking about last week. You see what's going on here? We have gathered together in this room. We have celebrated the glory of God. We have praised His name, worshipped His name, and now the picture is we're going to leave this place and we're going to go, 4,000 people that are here today are going to go and all week long we're going to sew gospel threads and we're going to proclaim the gospel, share the gospel wherever we go. This is the church in action. This is the picture of what it's about and we're going to see what happens when the gospel is being sewn all across the city this week. So let's pray toward that end.

God we pray that you would take our lives, our relationships, our conversations this week, and you would saturate them with the gospel. God we pray that this week you would open up a plethora of opportunities for us to talk about your character, what you are doing as our Creator and as our judge and as our savior, to talk about our need for you, even in the core of our sinfulness and our rebellion. God we pray that you would use us to sew gospel threads all week long. God we pray that you would empower your people leaving from here with your Holy Spirit and we pray the result would be colors, shades, threads of the gospel being sewn all across the city and we pray that you would draw people to the beauty of the gospel and the glory of Jesus Christ. God, make us a people who are passionate about the gospel and are passionate about sharing the gospel with others. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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