



## **DEFINING GOSPEL**

### **Ephesians 2:1-10**

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open it to Ephesians 2. Words matter and definitions of words matter.

Years ago, I was in Germany. I was with a group of missionaries and some of them asked me one day, “Do you want to play football with us this afternoon?” I like football. I like watching it and playing it. I was never a big guy, but in high school and college, my friends and I would spend weekends throwing the ball outside; playing pick-up games. So I said, “Sure, I will go play.”

To my surprise, though, when I got down to the field, I didn’t find a tall goal post and a brown ball waiting for me. Instead, I saw two goals with nets in them and a round, black and white ball and that’s when I remembered football in Europe and most of the rest of the world for that matter is a lot different than my understanding of football so, I call that soccer. “Football”—same term, different definition.

Definitions and terms are important. They affect decisions we make. I might have been a little more hesitant to go play soccer with a bunch of guys who play all the time in Europe and my lack of ability showed on the “soccer” field. Not the “football” field. Same term, different definition. This is a relatively inconsequential example because it’s obviously just a game, but there are other far more significant, far more consequential examples in so many different ways.

We think about this in American culture right now. How do you define the term marriage, for example? The way we define marriage has a huge affect on how we view marriage and there are all different kinds of definitions people have for marriage.

Here’s the deal. When I think about missions—missions in general across the church and then missions from my perspective as the leader of an international missions organization—I realize that there are some significant terms for which people in churches and in missions have very different definitions.

Jesus has told us to make disciples of all the nations. That leads to some automatic questions: What is a disciple? How do you make one? What is a missionary? How is a missionary different from a disciple? Or a missionary team? Missionaries plant churches, so what is a church? Or, maybe, on a more fundamental level, what is the gospel that disciples believe and missionaries proclaim?

These are extremely significant terms, but there are many different definitions in the missions world and in the church when it comes to those terms. I’m concerned. I had these concerns when I was

pastoring a local church, but all the more as president of an international mission organization. I am concerned about the way I see some of these terms diluted or even misdefined.

At points I see mission agencies that are constantly tempted to dilute or dumb-down the gospel and conversion. The church often times, in order to report higher numbers to potential donors, says, “This many people raised their hands at the end of a service so, that many people now are Christians.” Really, that many people were converted; have become followers of Jesus? Are we sure just because they raised their hands?

Or, “This many people are now meeting in groups and, whenever two or three are gathered, that means Jesus is with them (Matthew 18) so that’s a church. So this many churches have been planted.” Is that really what a church is? If you just have two or three people, does that make a church?

We’ve got all kinds of different definitions that we use when people are talking about these different terms and it’s not just in the missions world over-seas. It’s right here in the church in our culture because the temptations that missionaries face to dilute and dumb-down the gospel come from churches that are tempted to do the exact same thing to dilute and dumb-down the gospel.

There’s a reason why there are some mission organizations and much that’s done in missions today that is gospel-less and gospel-light. It’s because many churches that are gospel-less and gospel-light have sent out those missionaries and support those missionary organizations. The last thing the nations need in the world is the exportation of nominal Christianity. We need to be clear on what the gospel is; what it means to be a follower of Christ; what it means to be a disciple of Jesus; what it means to gather together in a church; what it means to be on mission in the world.

These terms and their definitions are not just important for those who are involved in international missions. They are important for all of us as followers of Christ. We need to understand these terms.

Think about the term “disciple-making.” If I were to ask the average Christian sitting in church on Sunday morning, “What does it mean to make disciples?” I would probably get a variety of jumbled thoughts, some ambiguous answers, maybe even blank stares and that’s not healthy. This is the command Jesus gave us before He left the earth, “*Go and make disciples of all nations*” (Matthew 28:19 NIV). If we need to know how to do anything with crystal clarity, we need to know how to make disciples.

Here’s what I want to do. I want to take a series of messages and walk through ten key terms when it comes to mission and our understanding of mission in the world. Let’s not just think about missionaries around the world, but as also about followers of Christ wherever we live. We need to know what is the gospel? What is evangelism? What is conversion? How does someone become a disciple of Jesus and what does it mean to make disciples of Jesus? What is a missionary and how is that different from a disciple? How do you know if God’s calling you to be a missionary?

These are the kinds of terms that I want to dive into through a variety of messages and, in the process, I hope that we might not just have clarity according to how God defines these terms in His Word, but we might also have far greater clarity about the purpose of our lives in this world.

The first term, the most obvious term that we need to make sure we have a crystal-clear definition of is “the gospel,” so that’s why I have you in Ephesians 2. The first ten verses in Ephesians 2 maybe more than any other text in all of Scripture really sums up the essence of the gospel. The only other passage that comes to my mind that would be close to this is Romans 3:21- 26. It’s one of the greatest paragraphs in all the Bible, but I think even this text we are about to look at right here more fully encapsulates a variety of truths contained in the gospel.

I want us to read Ephesians 2:1-10 together and think about six core truths at the center of the gospel. I want to give you an acrostic to help you remember these truths.

John Meador is a friend of mine and a fellow pastor. He and I had talked about how we could help folks better understand the gospel. Thinking about different truths and threads of the gospel, he took that conversation and some of the stuff we had done and turned it into an acrostic using the word G-O-S-P-E-L. He has used this to help several churches think through how to have a clear understanding of the gospel so that we might be able to share it clearly with others.

What I want to do is walk through Ephesians 2 to show you six truths using G-O-S-P-E-L as an acrostic. Hopefully this will help you to remember what the gospel is.

Let’s start by reading the text. Ephesians 2:1-10, this is the Word of God. Paul writes:

*2:1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Look at the beauty of the gospel here. The core-truths of the gospel starting with “G” in gospel:

## **G — God’s Character**

The gospel begins and the gospel ends with God. The gospel is God-centered from start to finish. It all centers around Who He is. See it in Ephesians 2. For three verses Paul talks about the sinfulness of

man which we'll get to in a minute, but the hinge-verse—the verse where everything changes—is verse four when Paul writes, “*But God, being rich in mercy...*” Then notice all the things God does in this text. Because of His great love He, “*...made us alive together with Christ...*” (2:5). In verse six He, “*raised us up with Him...*” Also in verse six He, “*...seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace...*”

Do you see Who's doing all of this action? It's God Who's the One Who's active and you'll notice all the references to “us” in this part of the chapter are in the passive voice. Verse five says, “*...you have been saved...*” Not you saved yourself, but you were saved. This happened to from the outside. Again, verse eight, “*...by grace you have been saved...*” This has been done to you through faith, which we'll talk about in a minute, but just in case we're not getting it, Paul makes it clear. This is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. God did this. God is the One Who does this, and He does all of this based upon His character.

His holiness, justice, wrath, mercy and His love are all over this text, which creates tension when you think about it. You can feel it here in Ephesians 2. You see God's wrath mentioned in verse three, but then in the very next verse you see His mercy and His great love. Wrath and love; justice and mercy. Both are here and we mustn't minimize any of these characteristics in God. If we're going to understand the gospel, we've got to exalt the entire character of God. We've got to understand His love and wrath; His mercy and justice. In all of that, His absolute unadulterated holiness. This is key to understanding the gospel.

If we have a small view of God, we will have a small view of the gospel, but if we have glorious view of God, we will have a glorious view of the gospel. We've got to be careful to see God for Who He is and in the gospel, not to see God as a means to an end.

There is so much today in this culture and cultures around the world that is being sold as the gospel that prostitutes God as merely a means to more worldly pleasure: “Put your faith in God and you can have everything you want. You can have health and you can have wealth and you can have prosperity.” That kind of gospel is not really the gospel, but is rampant across America, Africa, Asia and we've got to counter it everywhere we can because it is not true. It's not the gospel. We don't say, “Come to God and get stuff.” We say, “Come to God and get God.” He's the One we want. He's the One we need. He is the beginning and the end of the gospel. The gospel starts with the character of God. God's character. That's the “G” in G-O-S-P-E-L.

Let's keep going down the word, the acrostic. God's character then, “O”:

## **O — Offense of Sin**

Offense of sin is our response to Who God is. We rebel against Him. Look at the way we're described in Ephesians 2 and you'll see that it's humbling. Verse one says, "*...you were dead in the trespasses and sins...following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air [a reference to the devil].*"

In verse two there's a spirit of disobedience at work within us. Verse three says, "*...we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath.*"

Then, he says it again in verse five, "*...we were dead in our trespasses...*"

Now, in that phrase notice two key words. First, "*trespasses.*" To trespass is to break the law, which is something we've all done. Ever since Genesis 3, each one of us is just like Adam and Eve. Even if God said, "Don't eat from that tree," we're going to eat from the tree anyway. We think, "He's not Lord over us. We can do whatever we want." So we spurn God's authority as our Creator.

This is the God Who beckons storm clouds and they come. This is the God Who tells the wind and the rain to blow and fall here and there and they do it immediately. This is the God Who says to the mountains, "You go here," and to the oceans, "you stop right there." Everything in all creation responds in obedience to the Creator until He gets to you and me. We have the audacity to look at Him in the face and say, "No. No, we want to do things our own way." We rebel. We trespass against Him and as a result, we are dead in our sin.

Paul uses that word twice. "Dead in our trespasses." Dead in your trespasses now and if nothing changes you will be dead in your trespasses forever. This is our problem, so understanding and communicating the gospel requires that we must be clear about our problem. Our problem, man's problem, is not just that life's not going right or that we messed up here or there, done some wrong things, made some bad decisions. That's not the ultimate problem of sin. The problem with sin is at the core of our being we have rebelled against God and we are dead without Him. Dead. Not kind of dead. Not sort of dead. Dead.

Erwin Lutzer is a preaching professor who used to take his students to a cemetery every semester, and, one-by-one, he would ask his students to speak over the cemetery and call the dead people to life. Of course, it was kind of embarrassing and awkward. One-by-one they would stand up and they would speak out over the graves and say, "Come to life." But nothing would happen. Then he would remind his students that when they preach to people who don't know Christ, that's exactly what they're doing. No matter how eloquent a sermon might be, how passionate an invitation might be, they're speaking to people who are spiritually dead until God brings them to life.

This is so important. It's so important for our understanding of the gospel and the way we share the gospel with others.

Francis Schaeffer was once asked the question, “What would you do if you met a modern man on a train and you had just one hour to talk with him about the gospel?” This was Schaeffer’s response: “I would spend forty-five to fifty minutes on the negative to really show him his dilemma: That he is morally dead. Then, I’d take ten to fifteen minutes to preach the gospel. I believe that much of our evangelistic and personal work today is not clear simply because we are too anxious to get to the answer without having a man realize the real cause of his sickness which is true moral guilt and not just psychological guilt feelings in the presence of God.”

We’ve got to get this right in our understanding of the gospel and our efforts to reach people with the gospel. We need to realize that we share the gospel with people who don’t think that sin is a big deal. People think, “I’m not that bad.” Or, “Surely God wouldn’t punish me in that way for that little sin.” But look in the Scripture and you will see the severity of sin on page after page after page.

I think about Genesis 15 where God said to Lot, “Don’t turn around when you’re fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah.” But Lot’s wife turned around and what happened to her? Immediately, she fell over dead. She died because she just glanced backward. That’s all she did.

In Numbers 15 we see a man who’s caught picking up sticks on the Sabbath Day. They bring him before the Lord and they say, “What shall we do to this man?” What does God say in Numbers 15? He says, “Stone him for picking up sticks on the Sabbath.”

In 2 Samuel 6 they were transporting the Ark of the Covenant and it started to fall over so Uzzah reached out to grab it to keep it from falling and as soon as he touched the Ark, what happened to him? He fell over dead. Just for touching the Ark to keep it from falling.

I could go on with story after story like this in the Old Testament. People say, “Well, maybe that’s Old Testament stuff.” But it’s not just Old Testament stuff. Think about the New Testament. In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira lie about their offering and each one of them, at separate times, as soon as they lie, they fall over dead in the church gathering.

We’re seeing this in Scripture. Let’s just be honest. We read stories like this in the Old Testament and the New Testament and we are tempted to think that extreme, right? “Like, all she did was look back. Did she really need to die for looking back? I mean, he was picking up sticks on the Sabbath. Should he really be stoned for that? He kept the Ark from falling. Why would he die? Yes, they lied about their offering, but to fall over dead immediately?” We almost think that’s a little extreme and the reason we think that’s extreme is because we have a man-centered perspective of sin.

Follow this; this is so important. When we read these stories, we think these punishments are extreme because we have a man-centered perspective of sin. We think, “Well, if somebody lies to me, yes, I’d be upset with them, but I wouldn’t kill them. They shouldn’t die for lying.” Or, “Okay, somebody did something that they weren’t supposed to do, but if they did that against me, should they die for it?”

That's when we begin to realize the severity of sin is not determined by how big or small we think it might be. The severity of sin is actually determined by the One Who is sinned against.

If you sin against a rock, you're not very guilty. You sin against a man, you're guilty. If you sin against an infinitely holy God, you are infinitely guilty. This is the truth of Scripture. No matter how small we might classify it, one sin against an infinitely holy God is infinitely serious before God causing infinite separation from God.

We see this in Scripture. What does Romans 5 teach about Genesis 3? They sinned once at the very beginning of the world and from that one sin came condemnation for all men and all the effects of sin in the world, all the murder, world wars and horrifying violence that we see. I opened my app this morning for news and I saw another suicide bomb here and suicide bomb there. I saw stories about hurricanes and tsunamis and tornadoes. All the evil and injustice and sin and natural disasters we see in the world came from one sin and you and I have committed thousands of those sins.

We've got to see the infinite severity of sin before God. We're dead in it and as a result, we cannot save ourselves. We're dead in sin. We need someone to give us life. That's the core of the gospel when it comes to the offense of sin. We can't give ourselves life. We're dead in our trespasses and our rebellion against God.

All of that then leads to the third truth of the gospel. The good news of Who Jesus is; what He's done.

God's character. Offense of sin.

## **S — Sufficiency of Christ**

In Ephesians 2, I want you to see the sufficiency of Christ. That word "sufficiency" is so important because we've got to realize that Jesus is totally unique in Who He is and what He is able to do by reconciling dead sinners and bringing them to life before a holy God.

Think about all that we've just talked about and put it together: God is holy and we have offended Him. We have sinned against Him. God is just and He will, by His justice, punish sinners. At the same time, He is merciful. He's loving. He desires to save sinners. So feel the tension here. If we want to get to the heart of the gospel, we need to feel this tension. How can God be just and merciful toward sinners at the exact same time? That's the ultimate question of the Bible. How can a just God save rebellious sinners who are rightly due His wrath?

Most people don't think that's the question of the Bible. In fact, most people don't think that's an important question at all. Not many people are losing sleep tonight because God is being so kind to sinners. On the contrary, we have this tendency to point the finger to God and say, "Well, how can You punish sinners? How can You be loving and let good people go to hell?"

The question in the Bible is just the opposite. The question in the Bible is, “God, how can You be just and let rebels into heaven?” If a judge today were to look at a criminal guilty of treason and say, “You’re innocent. You can go free.” We would want that judge off the bench in a heartbeat. Why? Because that judge is not just. Justice demands that the judge says to the guilty, “Guilty” and to the innocent, “Innocent.” So, how can God Who is totally just look at us who are totally guilty in our sin and say, “Innocent”?

Do you realize in this sense that God’s forgiveness of our sin is actually a threat to His character? God cannot be just and yet acquit us in our sin and rebellion, all the while belittling His glory. He can’t just pass over that, so the question is: How can God be just and yet merciful to us as sinners. That’s the ultimate question in all the universe. That’s the ultimate problem for every person in the world. How can God express His holy justice without condemning us in our sin? How can God express His holy love without condoning us in our sin? How can God give us salvation when His justice necessitates our condemnation?

The answer is the sufficiency of Christ. God has looked upon dead sinners and what has He done? He sent His Son, God in the Flesh. We do not shrink back from saying that Jesus is the Son of God. This is a very significant issue in missions, particularly among Muslim people where many Christians and missionaries say, “Well, we shouldn’t refer to Jesus as the Son of God because that’s offensive to Muslims.” No, here’s the deal. We do not have the option of dumbing-down and diluting the gospel in order to make it more palatable to certain people. Palatability in the gospel is not our priority. Fidelity—faithfulness to the gospel—is our priority. Especially among Muslims. Among all the peoples of the world. We proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God and we say what that means: Jesus is God in the Flesh come to us. We don’t want to dilute this in any way. This is gloriously good news.

I was sitting one night with a group of Muslim men during a Middle Eastern Ramadan. I told them that God has come to us in the Person of Jesus and one of the men immediately stopped me and said, “That is not true. God would never debase Himself by becoming like us. His character is too great for that.”

I said, “I agree that God’s character is great, which is precisely why He came to the earth as a man.”

This guy said, “I don’t understand.”

I replied, “Let me tell you a story and ask you a question.”

The guy said, “Okay.”

“The story is about me and a girl I loved . I wanted to marry her, so when it came time for me to tell her how much I loved her and ask her to marry me, do you think I sent one of my friends to relay that message to her for me?”



The guy said, “Well, no, of course not. You need to be the one who goes to tell her you love her and want to marry her.”

I said, “Exactly. I need to go and tell her myself. Why? Because when you love somebody, you go and tell them yourself.”

He said, “Yes, that’s right.”

I said, “This is how I know God’s character is great and He is infinitely loving. He loves us so much that He didn’t just send this person or that person, this prophet or that prophet. He came to us Himself to show us that He loves us and desires a relationship with us.”

This reminds me of another similar conversation I was having in Southeast Asia with two men from different religions. Together they were trying to convince me that each of our religions is fundamentally the same and just superficially different, that we’re all basically believing the same things. We use different terms and even call God different things, but we all believe the same things.

I was listening and listening and then I got to a point where I said, “It’s almost like you guys picture God (or whatever you want to call Him) at the top of a mountain and we’re all at the bottom. You may take one path up to the top and I may take another path to the top, but in the end, we all find ourselves in the same place.”

They smiled and said, “Exactly. You understand.”

I said, “Well, what if I told you that the God at the top of the mountain didn’t wait for you to try to find a way up, but He actually came down to you where you are and brought you to Himself?”

They said, “That would be great.”

I said, “This is what is different about what we believe. Jesus is God come down the mountain to us. He has pursued us. He brought us to relationship with us, which is totally unlike any other teaching, religion or anything else in the history of the world.”

So, yes, we proclaim Who Jesus is—the Son of God in the Flesh and we proclaim what He has done.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus has lived the life we could not live—a life of perfect, sinless obedience to the Father. He was fully tempted by sin, yet fully triumphant over sin and then, though He had no sin for which to pay, He died.

He died for what reason? He died the death you and I deserved to die in our place as a Substitute for us. He died for your sin and for my sin.

The beauty of the cross of Christ, in light of all that we’re talking about, is that God in the flesh was experiencing the full judgment due sin and in the process enabling salvation for sinners, satisfying His justice and wrath, through His mercy and love.

Is God just toward sin? Absolutely. Look at the cross. Is God merciful and loving toward sinners? Absolutely. Look at the cross. Jesus has lived the life we could not live and He died the death we deserve to die. He conquered the enemy we could not conquer—sin and death itself. He rose from the dead and Jesus is alive, which makes salvation possible for all.

Four different times here in Ephesians 2, we see the phrase, “*with Christ*” or “*in Christ*.”

- Ephesians 2:5: “...*made us alive together with Christ*.” Alive with Him. He’s alive; we come to life in Him.
- Ephesians 2:6: “...*seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*,” where He’s ascended on high.
- Ephesians 2:7: “...*the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*.”

The gospel is the good news that anyone anywhere can be saved from all sin in and through and with Christ. In a world full of religions, Jesus Christ stands alone. He alone is sufficient to save us from our sins and reconcile us to a holy God; to bring us from death to life.

Which leads to the question: How does that happen? How do you come from death to life? That’s the next letter in G-O-S-P-E-L.

“G” — God’s character. “O” — Offense of sin. “S” — Sufficiency of Christ.

## **P — Personal response**

“What do we do? Ephesians 2:8, “*By grace you have been saved through faith*.” Grace is the ground here and faith is the means by which God saves people in the gospel.

Why faith? Why is faith the means of salvation? Why not love? Or humility? Or joy? Or peace? Or wisdom? Why has God designed faith as the only means of salvation?

Here’s the answer: Because faith is the anti-work. Faith is the realization that there’s nothing you can do. No amount of love you can show, kindness you can give, joy you can have, obedience you can accomplish. Faith is the acknowledgement there is nothing you can do but trust in what has been done for you. Faith is the one attitude of the heart that is the exact opposite of depending on ourselves which is why Paul said, “...*this is not your own doing; it is the gift from God*” (Ephesians 2:8b).

Not long ago I was tucking my eight-year-old son into bed and he said, “Dad, I don’t get it. It just seems too easy. After all my sin against God, all I have to do is ask Him to forgive me? Put my trust in Jesus?”

I said, “Son, salvation is a gift we receive. It’s not a prize that we earn. We receive it by faith.”

In this, we begin to realize that the gospel is not just information. It's an invitation that demands a decision; a response. The gospel is not just a statement of details of what Christ has done. It's a summons that describes what we must do. We must trust in Him.

As a result, to share the gospel is to call people to trust in Him. It's not just to give information. It's to give invitation to trust in Christ, which we'll talk about more in the next message when we talk about evangelism and conversion. The gospel demands personal response, the "P" in G-O-S-P-E-L.

## **E — Eternal Urgency**

All of that then leads to the "E" in G-O-S-P-E-L: Eternal urgency. You see it in Ephesians 2:7 when Paul speaks about the riches of Christ in the coming ages. All Scripture teaches is that how we respond to the gospel has ramifications for all of eternity for each of us. The Bible clearly teaches there are riches in the coming age. Heaven is a glorious reality for all who trust in Christ.

At the same time, hell is a dreadful reality for all who do not trust in Christ; for all who die as children of wrath, spiritually and eternally dead in trespasses and sin. So this is not a doctrine we talk a lot about today. We hardly speak much at all in the church about hell as the destination toward which men and women are headed in their sin, which is strange in light of how much Jesus spoke about hell.

J. I. Packer wrote, "More than any others, it's from Jesus Christ that we learn the doctrine of eternal punishment. All the language strikes terror into our hearts: weeping and gnashing of teeth, outer darkness, the worm, the fire, Gahenna, the great gulf fixed. It's all directly taken from our Lord's teaching."

It's here in Ephesians 2. It's all over Scripture. God's wrath rests upon sinners and if something doesn't change before they die, they will enter into what the Bible describes as an eternity of:

- conscience torment (Luke 16:23, 28)
- "*outer darkness*" (Matthew 22:13)
- divine destruction — "*away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His might*" (2 Thessalonians 1:9)
- Jesus tells us Himself the fate of sinners is an everlasting future filled with fiery agony (Mark 9:43-48)

We must not be indifferent or ignorant when it comes to the doctrine of hell. There is real, eternal wrath awaiting sinners before a holy God. They need to hear this good news and respond to this good news. There is an eternal urgency that accompanies this message.

A.W. Pink summed it up best several years ago, but it is even more applicable today: "What is most needed today is a wide proclamation of those truths which are the least acceptable to the flesh. What is needed today is a Scriptural setting for the character of God: His absolute sovereignty, His ineffable

holiness, His inflexible justice, His unchanging voracity. What is needed today is a Scriptural setting for the condition of the natural man: his total depravity, his spiritual insensibility, his inveterate hostility to God. The fact that he's condemned already and that the wrath of a sin-hating God is even now abiding upon him. What is needed today is a Scriptural setting for the alarming danger in which sinners are; the indescribably awful doom which awaits them. The fact that if they follow only a little further their present course, they shall most certainly suffer the due reward of their iniquities. What is needed today is a Scriptural setting forth of the nature of that punishment which awaits the lost, the awfulness of it, the hopelessness of it, the un-endurableness of it, the endlessness of it."

The gospel contains eternal urgency. Help us to believe it and help us to proclaim it. Even when it is not popular.

People say, "Well, isn't it offensive to talk about hell and fire and torment and damnation. Can we even use those words in a culture of political correct-ness? Isn't it cruel, even, to talk like that about people."

I say, "Absolutely. It would be cruel, unless it's true. The Bible is true so the most cruel thing you or I could do is stay silent about this in our lives."

All that leads to the last letter in G-O-S-P-E-L. The sixth truth to the core of the gospel: Life transformation.

- G — God's character
- O — Offense of sin
- S — Sufficiency of Christ
- P — Personal response
- E — Eternal urgency
- L — Life transformation

## **L — Life transformation**

It's clear in Ephesians 2, the gospel doesn't just change our life in eternity, the gospel changes our lives on earth.

<sup>10</sup> *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

The whole picture is that the gospel leads to radically new life. Scripture describes salvation as a "new birth." It describes crucifixion with Christ in such a way that we become an entirely new creation with Christ. Salvation is not just a casual association or superficial declaration. We don't just say some words, raise hands, move on with life as we knew it before and call ourselves Christians now. We've got to be careful—in mission, in the church here and around the world—to communicate a gospel that calls people to die to sin, to die to themselves and to live in Christ a Savior and King. And in that we need to be careful in numbers we report. God has not just called us to count decisions; He's called us to make

disciples of Jesus. We'll get to that term a few messages from now, but in the mean-time, let's be faithful to this gospel in our lives. Let's believe it.

If you're listening to this and you've never put your faith in Jesus as the sufficient One Who alone is able to save you from your sins, I urge you to turn from your sin and yourself and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord now. This is what the gospel beckons you to do, knowing that eternity hangs in the balance for you based upon how you respond to this gospel.

For all who have put your faith in Christ—who know this gospel—I urge you to proclaim this gospel. There is nothing more important you can do today with people around you than proclaim this good news. Their eternity hangs in the balance based on hearing this news and believing it. Let's be faithful to proclaim it. If you're a missionary on the other side of the world, may you be faithful to proclaim this gospel today. If you are living in the same place you grew up and have never moved out of that place, you're surrounded by people God has put there so they might know the gospel through you. Would you be faithful to proclaim it today wherever you live, wherever you work, wherever you play?

Let's pray.

God help us to believe and proclaim the gospel that is summarized by the glory of God's character. The offense of our sin against You and the sufficiency of Christ—His life, His death, His resurrection. This calls for a personal response that leads to eternal change and life transformation here on earth.

Father, we praise You for this gospel. We praise You for the good news of the way your justice and mercy, wrath and love come together in the cross of Christ and salvation for our souls. Thank You for this good news. We pray that You would help us proclaim it. And for anyone who has never believed it may they believe it today. For all who have believed it, may we proclaim it faithfully and hold fast to this gospel, not diluting it or dumbing it down in any way. Help us believe it and proclaim it with all our hearts. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

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