

Sermon Series: GOSPEL 101: Mastering the Basics for Life and Godliness

Sermon Title: First Things First

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Scripture Text: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-8

We are starting a new series this morning entitled, **Gospel 101**. In this series, which we will teach through this fall, we will teach what the Gospel is that we believe and preach here at TCC. *I can think of nothing more important for a local church than for its leaders to teach through Scripture regarding the Gospel.* In an age where the Gospel is becoming increasingly unpopular it becomes even more important. How would you answer the following question, *“What is the most important thing about any local church?”*

Some would say it is how it does children’s ministry or missions or its style of worship or how it handles the gifts of the Spirit. We think these things because we are more focused on what a church *does* rather than what a church *believes*. We assume (fatally) that we all agree on what the Gospel is and now we have to get people busy *doing* certain things. What we do is important, but I do not believe that it is the most important thing for a local church. Rather, it is first what a church *believes* about the Gospel and how she *stewards* it that is the most important thing about any local church. So in this series, we are going to very patiently explain the main contours of the Gospel as we understand it in Scripture.

We are really seeking to answer the question, *“What is the Gospel?”* You might be thinking, “Isn’t that the most elementary question we could ask? We all know what the Gospel is. Do we? Think about what comes to mind when people hear the word “Gospel”:

- *A type of music, especially in the Southeastern USA*
- *One of the first four books of the New Testament*
- *The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man*
- *The ethical teachings of Jesus*
- *“That God wants to show you incredible favor” (this is what Joel and Victoria Osteen say the Gospel is).*

Joel Osteen writes:

“To experience this immeasurable favor you must rid yourself of that small-minded thinking and start expecting God's blessings, start anticipating promotion and supernatural increase. You must conceive it in your heart before you can receive it. In other words, you must make increase in your own thinking, then God will bring those things to pass.”

God does want to show you favor, but notice there is no mention in that message of atonement, no need for good news, no repentance, no need for anything Paul writes of in these verses. It’s not the biblical Gospel (don’t listen to these people). Man is not the center of the Gospel, God is! (Victoria Osteen recently said we are the center).

There is a practical reason a sermon series like this is so important. I call it the **‘Unsettled State of God’s People.’** It is the fact that so many of God’s people are tossed about by condemnation and guilt, knowing little of the peace and power of the Gospel. They may mouth the right words and phrases (we are saved by grace through the faith), but the way they live is not in keeping with what the Gospel promises. That’s because they have grown up with an idea of Christianity which is not biblical (performance

based Christianity). *That was my experience growing up in the Church.* I was saved by the grace of the Gospel, but I soon learned that believing the Gospel was what just got me *in*. Then I learned all the things I had to do to keep myself saved. My Christian life was only as good as my present performance level at any given time. And at the end of each week I realized that I had not performed my best so I rushed the altar and rededicated myself to work harder. I now believe Satan loved those altar calls. He delights in anything than in people believing and applying the biblical Gospel to their lives. *There is only one cure for the Unsettled State of God's People and that is to preach and teach the biblical Gospel so that people are learning that in the Gospel is everything they will ever need for life and godliness.* The Gospel is utterly sufficient!

First Importance (15:3) "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received" That's why Paul calls it of '*first importance*'. I found this definition of the word *importance*: "*the state or fact of being of great significance or value*". Do we treasure the Gospel as being of great value to us? The Gospel trumps everything (not just the message that gets us in but that keeps us and guarantees our acceptance with God).

The fact remains; we have made other things more important (our experiences, favorite pet doctrine, etc.). I find a lot of people are more excited about the latest prophecy on line or the Four Blood Moons than Jesus and the Gospel. I want everyone throughout this series to ask the question "*Is the Gospel of first importance to me? Am I seeking above everything else to know and understand and grow in my understanding of the Gospel?*" If you don't make it of first importance you won't just drift into it. In today's world you can be sure you won't just drift into it because the culture and the world are opposed to the Gospel. That is why the early church so persecuted the early Christians because they stuck to the Gospel and wouldn't move off from it.

Paul feels the need to remind them of the Gospel he preached. Why does he feel he has to remind them? I found at least seven reasons he wants the Corinthians (and us as well) to be reminded of the Gospel:

1) We tend to forget the Gospel.

The Gospel is alien to us and we tend to drift from it. Paul will therefore constantly remind them of what the Gospel is. Do you see how we so easily drift from the Gospel? Say you confess some sin before God to receive his forgiveness. Suddenly, you feel like you really need to work hard before you can be restored to God. So we spend weeks sometimes months or years working to secure our forgiveness. Or we say things like, "*I know God has forgiven me but I just can't forgive myself*" The problem is not that we haven't learn how to forgive ourselves; the problem is, we have failed to believe the Gospel. Jerry Bridges wisely instructs us that we need to "*preach the Gospel to ourselves*".

We forget what God did for us in Christ and begin to focus on what we must do to make it The writer of Hebrews says, "*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it*" (Heb. 2:1). He uses a nautical term of a boat that is not anchored down and begins to drift away. We have to make sure we are therefore focusing on the Gospel at all times.

2) The Gospel is good news not good advice and therefore must be preached.

Paul reminds them that the Gospel was first preached to them. Why was it preached? **The Gospel is good news not good advice.** Look at what churches dish out as a steady diet (4 steps to a happy life, 6

steps to a better life, how to be happy, get more money, get more sex). It's all advice and amounts to legalism is rooted in legalism (here's what you must do to be different). *The gospel isn't advice; it's news.*

That's what Doctor Martyn Lloyd Jones said. "*The gospel, he would say, is good news, not good advice. 'Advice is counsel about something to do and it hasn't happened yet, but you can do it.' He says, 'News is a report about something that has happened—you can't do anything about it—it's been done for you and all you can do is respond to it.'*"

Now think this out: here is a king and he goes into a battle against an invading army to defend his land. If the king defeats the invading army he sends back to the capital city messengers, very happy envoy. He sends back, "good news-ers" with his report. They come back and they say, "It has been defeated! It's all been done! Therefore respond with joy and now go about your lives. Conduct your lives in this peace which has been achieved for you."

But if the invading army breaks through, the king sends back military advisers and says, "Swordsmen over here and marksmen over here and the horsemen over here. We're going to have to fight for our lives. Every other religion sends military advisers to people. Every other religion says, "You know, if you want your salvation, you're going to have to fight for your life."

Every other religion is sending advice, saying, "Here are the rights, here are the rituals, and here are the laws and regulations. Earthen works over here, marksmen over here. Fight for your life." We send heralds; we send messengers, not military advisers. Isn't that clarifying? It doesn't mean there's nothing to do about it—my goodness—both messengers and military advisers get an enormous response. However, one is a response of joy, and one is a response of fear. All other religions give advice, and they drive everything you're doing on fear.

3) The Gospel must be received (past).

"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received". It is not enough to admire the gospel—you have to *receive* it. Paul refers to their having received it in the past. It is historical and theological but it must become *personal*. I have to repent and receive the Gospel and put my trust in it. There has to be a moment when you surrender to the Gospel. Have you received the Gospel? Are you trusting in it *alone* to save you?

You may believe in it but do you believe in it *alone* to save you. Example: Solas of the Reformation that the Reformers created to distinguish what they believed the Gospel was from what the Catholic Church believed. They coined the phrase 'Sola Scriptura' (Scripture alone) Sola Fide (faith alone) Sola Christus (Christ alone) Sola Gratia (grace alone) Sola Dei Gloria (to God be the glory *alone*).

4) Believers must stand in the Gospel in the present

Rom. 5:2: "*obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand*". Our entire standing before God is based on the Gospel. Therefore, I have to fight for the Gospel to be the resting place of my heart. When I forget the Gospel I begin to seek from people and position what can only be found in the Gospel (heart idols).

Rachel in the Old Testament says to Jacob, "*Give me children or else I die*". She is saying that I can't live unless I have children (so she is saying that God is not enough; only children can make me happy). "Standing in the Gospel" means that I am constantly applying it to my life. One of the ways that we do that is by not listening to ourselves but by talking to ourselves.

Lloyd Jones says again, “The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul, “Why are you cast down—what business do you have to be disquieted? You must turn to yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: ‘Hope in God’—instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way.” I have to learn how to rest in the Gospel. If I forget the Gospel I will begin to seek from people, positions, and situation what I have been already given in Christ (security, well-being, and meaning).

5) Believers must stand in the Gospel in the future. “in which you stand”

I am in the process of working out my own sanctification. That means that I am not yet free from sin and its attendant dangers. So I have to trust the power of the Gospel to empower me to live a holy life. My future (not just eternity) but the days ahead here are secure and hopeful only because of the Gospel. From this we learn the Gospel initially saved us (past), keeps us (present) and guarantees our being saved in the future (by which you are being saved).

6) The Gospel is about the cross “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures”

Without the cross, there is no Gospel. Paul says that He died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*. Redemption, through Jesus, is the focus of the entire Bible. I love this quote by David Prior: “*We never move on from the cross, only into a more profound understanding of the cross*”. I think George Orwell can be quoted at this juncture: “*Sometimes the first duty of intelligent men is the restatement of the obvious*”. If you think that your life is already cross-centered and you’ve already understood it fully here are some symptoms that arise from *not* being cross-centered:

- you often lack joy
- you’re not consistently growing in spiritual maturity
- your love for God lacks passion
- your always looking for some new technique, some “new truth” or new experience to put all the pieces of your faith together

Is the truth of Jesus’ love more real to you than ever before? One man said this: “*I am amazed by the power of the Gospel over and over and have increased in my love for the Savior. I can’t believe that I have been saved from what I deserve.*” Spurgeon once said that the subject of the cross “is worthy of an angel’s tongue. And this also is true: it needs Christ himself completely to expound it.” I pray that Jesus through this series, expounds it to our hearts.

7) The Gospel is about the fact that Jesus is alive

“that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (15:4-8). The power of the Gospel in the first century was in the announcement that Jesus was alive! That was the message. Paul will defend this doctrine with all his powers in this chapter. There were some who said, there was no resurrection. Paul says, “if

there is no resurrection than Christ is not raised and if Christ is not raised then you are still in your sins.” That’s how important this is.

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The questions below are for House Church Group Discussion.

1. What is the most important thing about any local church?
2. What are some of the common misconceptions of what the Gospel is?
3. As believers, what should be our greatest priority?
4. What is a natural consequence of not keeping the Gospel before us? (Hebrews 2:1)
5. What does “Standing in the Gospel” mean? Are you?
6. What does it mean to preach the Gospel to yourself? Why is this important (See Psalm 42).
7. What are the symptoms of believers who are not cross-centered?