

What is the Gospel? (Part 6)

The gospel must be culturally current (relevant) and deal with the questions that people are actually asking in order for it to gain a foothold or a hearing in society. But there is a fine line between a culturally current gospel and a culturally captive gospel. Every culture has ways of living and being that are assumed to be “normal” or “just the way things are.” But some of these cultural assumptions are actually wrong, so the foolishness of the gospel must also confront and challenge the host culture. It is a difficult task to maintain the balance between being current but not captive. We must continually reevaluate our understanding of the gospel and purge it of all the cultural baggage that has accrued over time (it is like removing the barnacles from underneath the hull of a ship).

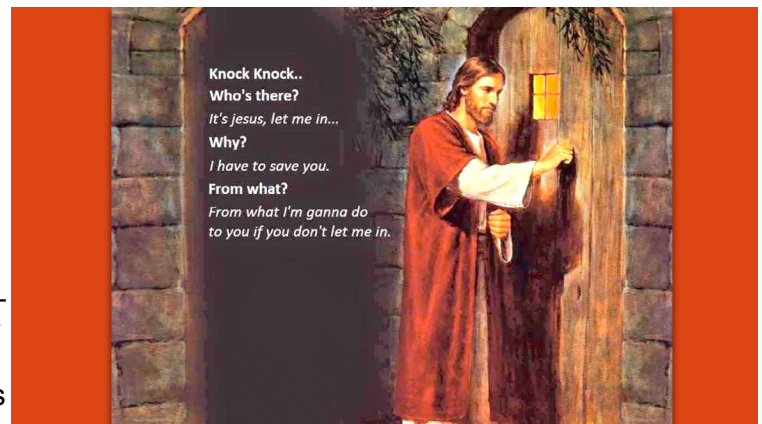
One way to ensure that the gospel remains rooted in the biblical revelation and the ancient tradition of the church is to regularly consider it in light of what Jesus actually proclaimed. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15). This forces us to start in the right place — not just with individuals and their souls being saved, but with an historic event that holds universal significance — the invading kingdom of God.

Jesus’ message was “the gospel of the kingdom of God.” He inaugurated the rule of God in and through his life, ministry, teaching, and healing. Jesus established God’s realm on earth through his death, burial, and resurrection; and now as the ascended Lord, sitting at the right hand of the Father, he executes and operates his reign. All things in heaven and on earth are being brought under his gracious direction. This movement will progress until that climatic moment when the King returns to complete his project. The universal and historical reality of God’s “divine conspiracy” (“the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand”) is the foundation for the individual call to repentance and faith (“repent and believe the good news”).

The problem that God’s solution solves is greater than just our own personal sin and alienation from God. Our dilemma is not simply that we (as individuals) have offended God’s holiness by breaking his law, thus causing separation from God because of our personal sin. Our predicament is death and how it incites sin in us. Sin then warps and distorts our relationship with God, self, others, and the whole of the created order. We don’t know the heart of God, so we create religion as a place to hide. We don’t know who we are, so we try to re-create ourselves (false self). Our re-creations are usually disasters. Since we don’t know who we are, there is no freedom to come out from our hiding and play with others (fellowship). And all this takes place in the context of a

groaning creation that has been held captive (and that remains unable to reach its full potential) due to sin’s effect. Death creates a context where we experience alienation from God, self, others, the world that we inhabit. All of these components must be addressed if we are to experience God’s salvation, healing, and wholeness.

This is what the kingdom of God does. Through Jesus, the last Adam, all humanity is restored to reconciliation with God, self, and others. As the head of humanity, Jesus is also restoring and renewing the whole of the cosmos under his rule and reign. Christ was not just an instrument that God used to fix things, rather Christ is himself our salvation! Christ is humanity made new — the place where human nature now resides — the new Adam who includes all humanity within himself — the oldest brother of many adopted siblings. We are all “participants of the divine nature.” We share by grace in everything that belongs to Christ by nature! We are adopted, yet God treats us with all the privileges of natural sons and daughters. We eat at the same table with Christ. We exercise the same freedoms that we see in Christ. We address God with the same words: “Abba, Father.” We are drawn into Christ’s relationship with his Father through the Holy Spirit.



Fourfold Harmony in Life

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|--------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| ▪ God/man | ▪ Adam hides from God | ▪ Reconciliation |
| ▪ man/man | ▪ Adam & Eve blame shift | ▪ Healing |
| ▪ man/nature | ▪ Thorns & thistles | ▪ Renewal & recreation |
| ▪ man/self | ▪ Adam & Eve experience shame | ▪ Wholeness |

For Reflection:

- What would you say are some characteristics of a gospel message that is culturally captive? What are some of the downfalls of a culturally captive gospel? What might be some of the characteristics of a culturally current message? How might you be able to help someone see the difference?
- Sin brings separation from God, self, others, and creation. The gospel is a message of reconciliation, healing, renewal and recreation, and ultimate wholeness. What could be some of the specific implications of each of these states of separation? How does the story of Jesus address each of those forms of separation?
- Athanasius stated that without God we are “headed for non-being.” How would you restate or expand on that to someone in a personal conversation? How does the end and goal of the gospel lead us from potential non-being into ultimate wholeness and fullness of life?