

## That's Gospel!

### Study 3: The Power of the Gospel to Change Us<sup>1</sup>

*The Gospel is not just what we preach to unbelievers in order to get them "saved" from the penalty of sin. The Gospel is much more than that! The Good News is that Christ not only saves us from sin's guilt but also delivers us from its slavery. The Gospel is the principal energizing and driving force for living the whole Christian life. The Gospel is not just for non-Christians. It is also for Christians. –Jon Fonville*

Often we mistakenly believe that the way to change is simply to try harder. There is no doubt that effort is required in order to change, but true, lasting change does not begin by working harder. It begins by believing better. We are saved and we are changed by the same essential process: faith in the gospel. We are saved when we turn to the truth of the gospel and believe it. We are changed as we continually turn to the truth of the gospel and believe it. The reason that many Christians remain stuck in patterns of sin is because they focus on behavior without addressing the underlying unbelief. They try really hard to change, but all of their effort goes into *behaving* better rather than *believing* better. They try to change their behavior to no avail because they never address the underlying *unbelief* that is driving their behavior.

**Behind every sin is a lie about God.** It has been that way since the Garden of Eden. As long as Adam and Eve trusted that God was good, they obeyed his warning not to eat from

the tree that would kill them (Gen. 2:17). The way that the serpent got them to disobey God was by getting them to believe a lie about God rather than the truth. The serpent came to Eve and said, "You will not die. For God surely knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 2:4-5). The serpent convinces Eve that God is not really good. He is keeping her from what is good. As soon as Eve believes the lie about God, rather than the truth, her desires shift. Rather than wanting to avoid the tree, she desires it and she eats from it: "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Gen 2:6). They didn't believe God so they disobeyed, and the result was death.

The key to transformation is to turn from the lies and remember and rejoice in the truth about God in the gospel. One of the important roles of the Holy Spirit is to reveal to us of the truth about God. Jesus calls Him the Spirit of truth (Jn 15:15), and promises that He will remind us of the truth (Jn 15:25). The Holy Spirit's job is to point us to the truth, and our job is to turn to that truth and trust it. This is called repentance and faith. True repentance is first, a shift in mind, *turning from* the lies about God and the sin that results from them. Faith is *turning to* the truth about God and the godly behavior that results from believing that truth. So many Christians focus on turning from, and stop there, failing to actively turn to truth! We are saved by our initial repentance and faith in the gospel, but we are *changed* by our *continual repentance and faith* in the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> This study has been adapted from, Steve Hart. *GospelBasics*. Soma Communities, 2014.

Let's consider four truths about God, all beginning with the letter 'G' that we can turn to when we are tempted: God is Gracious, Good, Great, and Glorious. If I don't believe the truth that God is Gracious, then I will believe that I need to prove myself to God, others, and myself. The result will be many of the sinful behaviors we looked at last week: blaming, faking, criticizing, judging, demeaning. But if in the moment of temptation, I turn to the truth that I am saved by grace, I won't feel the need to prove myself to others in sinful ways. Believing that God is gracious is essential for transformation, and we see his grace most clearly in the gospel--that God freely restores us to a right relationship with himself through Jesus. If I don't believe the truth that God is Good, then I will insatiably search for what is good in things that will never satisfy: food, sex, entertainment, relationships. But if I believe that God is good, I will find my satisfaction in Him and enjoy His material gifts without obsessively pursuing them. Believing that God is good is essential for transformation, and we see His goodness most clearly in the gospel--that He sought our good even at the cost of Jesus' own life.

If I don't believe that God is Great, I will be filled with anxiety when life seems out of control. When I am anxious, worried, it is difficult to love others well because I am consumed with my own struggles. I may even try to take control of people and situations through emotional manipulation or intimidation. But when I believe that God is great, I can be at peace in all situations and care for others well because I know my Father in heaven is caring for me. I don't need to be in control, God is greater than me, cares for me, is working for my good, and can get the job done better than I can in my own strength. Believing that God is great is essential

for transformation, and we see his greatness most clearly in the gospel--that he triumphed over the enemies of sin, death, and Satan through Jesus' resurrection. Lastly, when I don't believe that God is Glorious and the One whose opinions are weightier than anyone else, I will end up listening to others, living for what others think of me, people-pleasing, performance, and will often follow ungodly counsel. I will give into peer pressure and live a life that looks just like everyone else in the culture. But if I believe that God is glorious, I will listen to him and walk in his ways. Believing God is glorious is essential for transformation, and we see his glory most clearly in the gospel--that Jesus is Lord over all and worthy of our love and devotion. As you can see, the gospel is for both salvation and transformation. Therefore, it is essential that someone who wants to experience increasing freedom from the power of sin be immersed continually in the good news of the gospel!

### **Scripture Reading: Romans 3, ESV**

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? <sup>2</sup>Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup>What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? <sup>4</sup>By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

"That you may be justified in your words,  
and prevail when you are judged."

<sup>5</sup>But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to

inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) <sup>6</sup>By no means! For then how could God judge the world? <sup>7</sup>But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? <sup>8</sup>And why not do evil that good may come? — as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just. <sup>9</sup>What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup>as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

<sup>11</sup> no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

<sup>12</sup>All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one.”

<sup>13</sup>“Their throat is an open grave;

they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

<sup>14</sup> “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

<sup>15</sup>“Their feet are swift to shed blood;

<sup>16</sup> in their paths are ruin and misery,

<sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they have not known.”

<sup>18</sup> “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

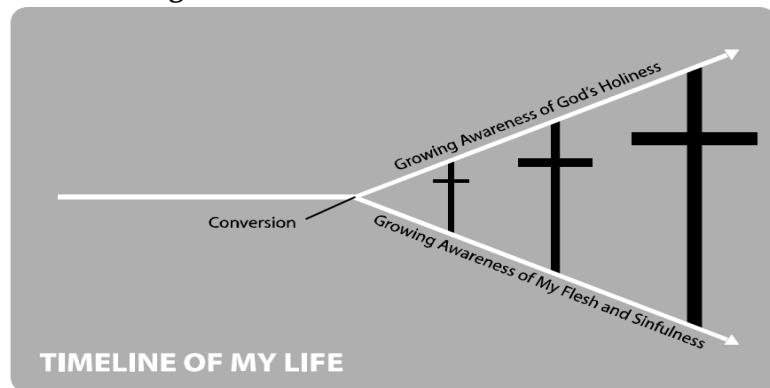
<sup>19</sup>Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup>For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup>But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — <sup>22</sup>the righteousness of

God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup>It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup>Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since God is one — who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. <sup>31</sup>Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

### **Scripture Meditation: Romans 3:23-24, 28**

*“<sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...<sup>28</sup>For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”*

### Partner Assignment:



The chart below illustrates how a growing understanding of the gospel leads to a transformed life. As we mature in the Christian life, we become more aware of God's holiness and our sinfulness. But this growing awareness of the gap between God's holiness and our sinfulness does not lead to fear or despair. Instead, it shows us just how gracious He is. The growing cross in the chart represents a growing understanding of the immensity of God's grace--of the gospel.

Discuss with your prayer partner this week the following questions:

1. In what ways are you growing in your awareness of who God is and His attributes this semester? Which of the four G's discussed in our lesson this past week, did you struggle to understand about God and why?
2. What scriptures from Romans 1-3 thus far have helped you to grow in your awareness of your flesh and sin? What have you learned so far from Romans 1-3 about sin, its nature, its power, how God views it?
3. How has growing in your gospel understanding given

you hope in your battle against sin? Describe in your own words how the gospel changes us, and the role of the Holy Spirit in our life to help us with sin?  
(Scriptures to add to discussion: Romans 8:9-11, 2 Peter 1:3, 2 Tim 1:7, John 16:7, Ephesians 1:19-21, Galatians 5 16:24)

### Questions for Discussion Study 3: The Power of the Gospel to Change Us

#### Pre-Article Questions:

1. Was anyone able to meet with his or her prayer partner this past week? Anything God show you that you would like to share?
2. Describe a time when you tried to change. Maybe you were trying to end a bad habit or start a good habit. What was your motivation to change in that circumstance?
3. In what ways does our belief in someone or something impact the way we desire, act, and live?

#### Post-Article Questions:

1. What was really sticking out to you about the article this week?
2. In what ways did this statement impact you? "We are saved by our initial repentance and faith in the gospel, but we are *changed* by our *continual repentance and faith* in the gospel."
3. Which of the four G's of God do you need to grow more in your understanding of and why?

#### Post-Scripture Questions:

1. From Deuteronomy 12:1-7, Amos 3:2, Romans 3:1-4, and Romans 9:4, list some of the advantages the Jews

have/had over Gentiles in experiencing the salvation of God?

2. How have you seen that advantages and disadvantages don't always bring buy in, belief, or change in someone's life emotionally, academically, physically, or spiritually?
3. In verses 3-8, Paul addresses two arguments people make about God: Is God faithful when man is unfaithful with what God gives? Is God fair, when we are held accountable for sin, which juxtaposed to Him, makes Him all the more glorious? If we don't believe God is faithful or fair to hold us accountable for sin, what thoughts, behaviors, or actions could we become prey too?
4. Paul stresses no one gets a head start in the race of salvation because we are all guilty of sin and under its power. From verses 3-18 what are the effects of sin, and what sins appear to underlie the sins of verses 13-17? (v.18)
5. What is the fear of the Lord and how does it make a difference in our struggle against sin? Any scripture come to mind on this?
6. Describe what God is teaching you this semester, or in past semesters, about identifying and getting freedom from the root sins in your life?
7. From verses 19-20, what is the conclusion Paul makes on the reason for the law? (Romans 5:13, 20, Romans 7:7, Hebrews 10:1) Have you ever lived in a city, country, or state where there was no law on something important to you? What was that like?
8. How is righteousness obtained according to Romans 3:21-23? How do we see this played out in the Old

Testament through these scriptures: Genesis 15:6, Jeremiah 31:33-34, and Ezekiel 36:26-27?

In Closing:

Spend some time discussing with your prayer partner for this week Romans 24-26, 28, justification. Paul develops his teaching on salvation around three themes: justification, an image from the court of law, redemption, an image from the slave market, and propitiation, and image from the world of religion, appeasing God through sacrifice. Justification solves the problem of man's guilt before a righteous judge. In the Bible, it is a legal term, a forensic term, and a term from the courtroom. In the Greek, to justify means to declare righteous. You justify someone when you declare him or her not guilty and innocent and righteous in the eyes of the law. According to our key verses above in Romans, how or by what are we justified? Who justifies? How does being justified before God help us when the enemy tries to condemn us, discourage us, or cause us to fear in our battle against sin?