

The Importance of Gospel Clarity for Baptism

Baptism and the Gospel

- Baptism is not itself the gospel. It points to the gospel. It reenacts in a dramatic way what took place in your heart the day you were brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Baptism is very important. The gospel is absolutely critical.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,...” (1 Cor 15:3)

“For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” (1 Cor 1:17)

- A wrong understanding of the gospel always distorts one’s view of baptism. But a wrong understanding of the gospel may do something far worse – create “Christians” in name only, who have no genuine relationship with God.

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.... For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. (Gal 1:6-8, 11)

Simple to Understand, Impossible to Accept

- What are the vital truths that make the gospel good news – what is the saving message of Christian faith (Rom 1:16)?
- The gospel is clear and simple. The challenge is this: it is so out-of-step with the culture that the Church in every generation faces powerful temptations to take things out of the gospel that are offensive or to add things to the gospel that make it more palatable to the listener.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Rom 1:16)

- The message God has given us to believe and then proclaim is designed by God to explode human pride.

1 Cor 1:18-24, 27-29

Gospel Proclamation in the New Testament**God**

- In order to come to faith, we need to be informed of the reality of God.

Rom 1:18-23

“But far from owning that they hate God, the vast majority of men will not only vehemently deny it, but affirm that they respect and love Him. Yet if their supposed love is analyzed, it is found to cover only their own interests. While a man concludes that God is favorable and lenient with him, he entertains no hard thoughts against Him. So long as he considers God to be prospering him, he carries no grudge against Him. He hates God not as One who confers benefits, but as a Sovereign, Lawgiver, Judge. He will not yield to His government or take His law as the rule of his life.... The only God against whom the natural man is not at enmity is one of his own imagination.”

-A.W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Human Depravity*, p. 114

- The NT gospel forces us to come to terms with the God Who Is, over against the god we want – the god we’ve imagined.

Man

- Since God made us we are accountable to Him.

“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.... 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.” (Rom 3:9, 19)

- Before the gospel can be felt and experienced as good news it has to deliver the bad news – we are sinners and we need a Savior. The New Testament gospel confronts our culture’s greatest idol: human autonomy.
- The gospel certainly has subjective effects on us. But first and foremost, the gospel addresses our greatest problem – the objective problem of being sinners who have offended a holy God.

“Once the gospel starts being presented primarily as that which brings such and such benefits, be they freedom from alcohol abuse or just emotional highs every once in a while, the distinctive particularity of Christianity is lost.... Self-help programs have brought many back from the brink of self-destruction to decent lives; and, while Christianity gives me a sense of meaning and worth, so, I believe, does ferret-breeding for some people. So what have I to say to the perfectly content ferret-breeder? Not a lot, if Christianity is primarily about feelings, whether of satisfaction, happiness or otherwise. I have Jesus; the breed ferrets. Result in both cases: happiness. So what’s the difference? The difference, of course, lies not in the experienced effect but in the cosmic bottom line: Christ is God acting to save for all eternity; ferrets are good only as temporary distraction from the deeper realities and concerns of life.”

-**Carl Trueman**, *The Wages of Spin*, p. 73

Christ

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, ithrough the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” (Rom 3:21-25a)

- Jesus is the One Mediator between God and man.
- Because of what Jesus did on the cross, anyone who responds to this good news, receives His perfect record of righteousness (which He earned through His life of perfect obedience to the Father) and has their debts cancelled by His Substitutionary death.

Response (Repentance and Faith)

- How does this great story of redemption find *me* in *my* sin and save *me*?
- Jesus’ redemptive work is applied to our hearts when, upon hearing the gospel, the Spirit draws us to repentance and faith.

“...correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,” (2 Tim 2:25; also Acts 11:18)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Eph 2:8-9)

“For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,” (1 Thess 1:9)

Gospel-Powered Conversion & the Celebration of Baptism

- Your baptism points to what happened in your heart in that glorious moment of conversion.
- Conversion is more than just a choice you made, an aisle you walked, or a feeling you had. It is a miracle of God and it bears fruit in our lives.

Homework:

- Read article “A Healthy Church Member Is Genuinely Converted”. Take notes, write down questions, and we can interact more next week.
- Look at the “Understanding Gospel Conversion” page and use it to write out your testimony. Send that to me sometime before 2 weeks from now.