

The Gospel as The Operating System

First in Webinar Series: The Gospel As The Operating System in the Church and in the Home

By Dr. Ben Taylor

It was not one of my prouder moments as a father... One of my sons had intentionally disobeyed me and, well, my initial reaction was like a scene out of the movie, "The French Connection". I was intensely angry and deeply disappointed. I raked him over the coals like a BBQ master grills brisket at a summer picnic. No sooner had I grilled my son then I was overcome with the intense guilt that comes when we know we've blown it—big time.

I told my son to go sit in the basement while I tried to order my emotions and attitude. Now, how was I to do this? Did I just need to talk a good game to myself? How was I going to deal with my own sin and then be able to have any shred of confidence that God could use me to be an instrument of mercy to my son?

Life Will Always be Messy

The events that shape our lives at home and at church are made up often of unplanned moments including regrettable moments like this. More is accomplished—or lost—in moments where our hearts are exposed for what is really in them than in the carefully orchestrated moments that belie the true and shadowy motives of our hearts. These moments represent the plowing, seeding, watering, and weeding of the soil in the garden of our spiritual growth in Christlikeness.

So, how are we doing as church leaders as husbands, wives, fathers and mothers in moments like these? How are we dealing with the inevitable choice points that confront us every day? Whose kingdom are we building? How well are we equipping our people to seize these inevitable moments for the building of God's Kingdom?

Brothers: how confident are we that what we are teaching our people through our ministries is really making a positive difference in their lives? Do we believe our own message or deep down do we wonder if we have missed something ourselves?

The answer to this question strikes at the heart of what Jesus came to accomplish. Jesus did not come to make salvation (justification, sanctification, and glorification) possible. Jesus came to fully accomplish it.

Possibility or Certainty?

As Jesus left the wilderness to begin His public ministry, He returned to Galilee and began ministering in the power of the Spirit. News about Him began to spread. He traveled around teaching in various synagogues. He eventually came to Nazareth where He grew up. He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read a passage from the prophet Isaiah. These are the words which He read from that chapter:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovered of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.*

After reading those words, Jesus closed the book and gave it back to the synagogue attendant. He sat down to begin to teach. They were mesmerized; breathless with anticipation. What would He say? All He said was: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." As He was reading, it was being fulfilled.

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Jesus Really Did Do It All

Jesus was quite concerned with doing all that the Father had given Him to do, for He said that doing God's will was His meat and drink. Jesus was very dedicated to fulfilling what the Scriptures said and predicted. He had a pointed and particular mission, message, and method for accomplishing His calling, which was captured in His very name, Jesus: "for it is He who shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Jesus did not come simply to make something possible. Jesus did not come simply to make salvation available or even possible. NO! He came to accomplish salvation. He came to set captives free. He came to give sight to the blind. He came to set free the downtrodden. He accomplished it. It is done. It is sealed. It is fulfilled. It is finished!

Now, let's stop for a moment and consider once again if our own people who are faithful attenders of our programs are living life confidently out of a clear understanding of Jesus' full accomplishment. Do they know how to do that?

He is no small Savior that we worship! It is no small gospel that we offer. It is no tiny cross that we proclaim. Jesus has set the captives free through His perfect life, death, and resurrection. All who come to Him will find relentless rest, peace, forgiveness, and eternal life. He has saved His people. Not one whom the Father has given to the Son shall be lost.

This reality was certainly not lost on the "Prince of preachers," C. Haddon Spurgeon:

*Ah! What a mercy it is that it is not your hold of Christ that saves you, but his hold of you!
What a sweet fact that it is not how you grasp his hand, but his grasp of yours, that saves you.*

In Romans 5: 10-11, the Apostle Paul goes so far as to say that we are saved by the life of Jesus:

*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,
much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (emphasis mine).
More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

We Are Saved By His Life

I have preached on this passage many times. Each time I went away feeling like I had failed to sufficiently communicate the radical and glorious truth contained in these verses. But I'll never forget one experience after I had preached on this passage. As I was on my way to the back of the church building I heard a dear lady say over and over again, "I am saved by Jesus' life...I am saved by Jesus' life." She just kept repeating this over and over again, like a mantra. She understood and could not get over it. Thank you Holy Spirit for working in spite of myself.

In Romans 5, Paul contrasts the work and results of two men: Adam, the first Adam, and Jesus, the last Adam. The first Adam disobeyed God and brought judgment, condemnation, and death upon the human race. However, there is a second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, who perfectly obeyed the Father for a new humanity: his sheep, given to Him before the foundation of the world. So, His actions resulted in justification, abundance of grace, and righteousness for many. Jesus perfectly fulfilled His calling and covenant.

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We Are Made Righteous By His Obedience

Paul goes on to say in Romans 5 that not only are we saved by Jesus' life, but we are made righteous through His obedience. So, rather than assessing how well we are behaving and living (as if our righteousness were rooted in our actions and works), we should ask ourselves, "Where is my righteousness?" Well, according to Paul, my righteousness is seated at the right hand of God. This is the basis of my being right with God, RIGHT NOW! This is why I can obey God with joy and confidence.

Over 30 years of ministry, I have observed that far too many professing believers lack joy and confident hope in their faith because they treat their faith as if it were "helicopter theology," as something hovering over their heads but unreachable and beyond every day experience. It is as if the gospel were a mere story rather than the message of a victory that has taken place and is sealed and finished. So, they live as if their growth in Christ-likeness were solely based upon their personal obedience and self-righteousness.

We are saved and are being saved by the life of Jesus. Salvation, biblically speaking, encompasses more than just coming to Christ. It encompasses everything from regeneration (being born again) to glorification in heaven. So, all that we call sanctification is included in the salvation won for us and applied to our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

The Frankenstinian Gospel

In light of this glorious truth, why are so many professing believers living without joy and confidence? I suggest that, quite tragically, they do not believe in what Jesus fully accomplished for them. Too many professing believers are living with a truncated, Frankenstinian gospel. THE Gospel is truncated when we apply faith only to the process of coming to Christ. While many speak of being saved by grace, they live like they are sanctified through works. Also, like Dr. Frankenstein's monster, too much of the modern gospel borrows from many other false theologies, philosophies, and even psychologies rendering it a freakish but impotent monster that cannot save or empower for life.

The Gospel is not only about coming to Christ; the Gospel is also the power for growing in Christ. It is the means, the motivation, and the methodology. While we grow in the Gospel we never outgrow our need for the Gospel.

Does The Gospel of Jesus Christ Apply to Parenting?

As an example let us consider parenting. We do not tend to consider how the gospel enables us to parent. Rather, we tend to focus on psychological theories, traditions handed down by our parents, or advice from experts. Now, there certainly might be some good and helpful thoughts provided for us from these sources. However, they have no power in enabling us to overcome our propensity to depend upon our own thoughts and methods in order to bring about change in our children's behavior. They might help us produce some short-term change through guilt manipulation, emotional manipulation, or intimidation, but these tactics cannot bring about long-term transformation.

We cannot change our children. Authentic change happens in the heart and then is reflected in behavior. If we only focus on behavior we have left the foundation of the Gospel and are behaving as if we have taken B.F. Skinner into our hearts. Would a professing Christian parent actually admit, "I don't care about my child's spiritual growth in Christlikeness; I only want them to do what I say." Yet, this is what they are doing when they are content with mere behavioral change.

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Back to My Son

As I close, let's go back to the story I was telling you at the beginning about me and my son. Providentially, I was working on a Sunday school lesson at the time and it was on the subject of forgiveness and the role of mercy. As I thought about this I realized that I needed to confess and repent of my sinful anger. Scripture teaches us that we can be angry without sinning; however, I knew that my anger was not motivated by righteousness or injustice. I was ticked off! So, as I felt God's hand heavy upon me I confessed my selfishness, pride, and specific forms of unbelief to him. It felt like pus coming out of my darkened heart. I then prayed for love and wisdom toward my son.

As I walked downstairs my son was understandably nervous. First, I sincerely asked for forgiveness for my intense anger and the way that I acted toward him. His reaction was amazing as this was unexpected. We then calmly talked about his behavior and the nature of the discipline that I, after consultation with my wife, felt should be applied. My son received this discipline almost with a sense of glee because it was levied through the lenses of love and care and not condemnation. Does not our Heavenly Father discipline those whom He LOVES?

What I needed in that situation as the parent was power and wisdom that the Gospel led me to take. It was a process of truth and grace. The grace of my own forgiveness spilled over and motivated me to bring discipline out of love and concern rather than anger. I was enabled to love my son for his sake.

Saved by Jesus' Life... as a Parent

I was able to confess my sin freely to the Father because I knew that he would not condemn me. I also knew that this was the safest place in the world to deal honestly with my sin. I was reminded that even as I confessed my sin I did so as a justified, forgiven, and fully accepted son of God. Why was I able to do this? Because I knew I was saved by Jesus' life. I knew that I stood before God as righteous because of His obedience. I knew that I was thinking and acting very inconsistently with who I truly was.

This is power. This is hope. This is a confidence borne in the love of Christ displayed on the cross for me and the results of His work applied to my sin-sick heart by the Holy Spirit.

Is THIS the well out of which we are drinking? Is THIS the well from which we are feeding our flocks?

QUESTIONS FOR WEBINAR DISCUSSION

1. What principles and tools has God given to enable us to move from actual sin to repentance, a softened heart, and faith? How do we move from actual sin to repentance, belief, and obedience?
2. What insights did you gain that help you to see the Gospel as the "operating system" for the Christian life and not just some esoteric message?

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3. How do you appropriate Jesus' completed mission/redemption/salvation to your daily life of sanctification?

4. Where is your righteousness? What types of false righteousness can we adopt (reputation, financial, family, health, etc.)? How do you discern if you are operating under a false righteousness?

5. When dealing with a particular sin, why is it helpful to first "check your record" in Christ?

6. How forgiven are you in Christ? Do you live like a forgiven child of God?