

Jesus, the very "Word" of God (John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3). Humans communicate because we are made in the image of the communicating God. This is the basis for the Christian conviction that God has graciously condescended to use human language in written form, the Bible, to sufficiently and accurately communicate his mind and will to us. The Bible is God's Word revealed in human language.

Knowing the truth matters. The Bible is a unique book; there is no other like it. It is capable of being read, understood and used as a guide for life transformation. It is inspired (or "breathed out") by God (2 Timothy 3:16), and it is accessible to humans because it was written in real human languages, not abstract or mystical codes. It is clear and straightforward enough to be understood by the simplest of minds, and yet deep and complex enough to challenge the most brilliant. Accessible, transcendent.

The Bible is primarily concerned with transforming people into new creatures, fully reconciled to God and to others. It is not exhaustive in what it proclaims. There is much more that could be said on practically any topic the Bible discusses. But what it does proclaim is sufficient to accomplish its purposes (John 20:30-31; 21:25). The Bible tells us everything we need to know in order to respond to God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Living the truth matters. The gospel goes beyond rational arguments, beyond mere orthodoxy. "Knowing the truth" engenders "living the truth," as demonstrated in the life of Jesus, who is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). The good news extends an invitation. Will we trust and follow the person of Jesus Christ? The gospel story must become our story.

The gospel is the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ. It encompasses all that God did in preparing for the first coming of Jesus Christ, as well as everything he will do in the restoration of all creation in a new heaven and a new earth after his second coming. The first section of the Bible (the Old Testament) is all about the promise of a coming King who would rescue God's people from their most serious problem: sin and its consequences. The second section of the Bible (the New Testament) is all about the coming of that King into our world and all he accomplished to fulfill the promise of God to save us.

A. The Old Covenant:

Creation, fall, reconciliation... preparation

God created all things at the beginning, and it was all "very good." But the first man and first woman (Adam and Eve) did not trust God enough to obey him. Despite living in the paradise-like garden in which God had placed them, they were not satisfied. Believing they knew a better way, they rebelled against God by defiantly disobeying his command. Their sin brought alienation in their relationship with God, each other and the created realm. Their sin introduced the penalty of death.

God worked to repair sin's damage through promises and relationships he established with humanity. Early on, God chose one man (Abraham) through whom he promised to bless all the peoples of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3).

Hundreds of years later

provided them with guidelines for how to live in right relationship with God (Genesis 26:5; Exodus 24:7-8).

Faith is more than mere

The gospel transforms culture. The gospel transforms our beliefs, values and behaviors and results in a new, shared culture that is an imperfect reflection of the coming kingdom of God. The gospel also compels us to impact lives and communities with the transforming power of Christ's love and truth (Matthew 5:1-16).

Cultural discernment is crucial for our ministries. We need to be clear on the core essentials of the gospel. This understanding has been passed down through the centuries by faithful followers of Christ, and it comes to each of us from our knowledge of the Word of God as guided by the Holy Spirit. At the same time we must acknowledge the influence of culture on our understanding of the gospel, in the historical development of our theology and in our comfort with varied expressions of the gospel. Such awareness helps us embrace the good and confront the evil in our lives and communities. Ultimately we must attempt to communicate and demonstrate the gospel in humble and culturally informed ways without sacrificing its essential truths.

B. The gospel changes individuals

Our goal as Christ-followers is the functional centrality of the gospel in our lives. Like the New Testament writers, the truth of the gospel shapes our thinking and conduct in a way that produces Christ-like love and holiness

E. The gospel is to be proclaimed joyously to all peoples

The gospel is not just for us and those around us. God also wants us - commands us! - to share it with people across cultural and geographical boundaries. God stated that through Abraham all nations and peoples of the earth would receive blessing, which was a command to him and his descendants to be a blessing on others. And Jesus made it even clearer: "I will send you out to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

F. The gospel shapes our ministry priorities and practices

We incarnate the gospel

We move out of our safe places to incarnate the gospel in our own neighborhoods (locally) while cultivating relationships with people in other cultures (globally).

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