

Center Church Unpacked - Session 2

Gospel: Parts 1 & 2 Gospel Theology and Gospel Renewal

A. Introduction: A recap on Theological Vision

Center Church is a book about Theological Vision and its place in shaping the practices of City to City.

1. What is theological vision?

If doctrine is the what we believe and ministry expressions are what we do, theological vision sits somewhere in between it is how we see.

2. Why do we need to consider theological vision?

It helps us consider what it means to be faithful and fruitful by asking and answering the question 'what does it mean to be a church in our time and place?'

Or

'A Theological Vision helps you determine what you are going to do with what you believe within your cultural setting. . . with a Theological Vision in place, leaders and churches can make **better choices** about ministry expression that are **faithful to the Gospel** while at the same time are **meaningful to their ministry context**. That means a greater impact in Worship, Discipleship, Evangelism, Service, and Cultural Engagement.' Michael Felker

3. Isn't theological vision just contextualisation by another name?

Theological vision includes questions of contextualisation but is more significant than that. It is more theologically driven and flows out of the gospel itself.

4. The three-axes of Theological Vision

Part 1: *Gospel* flows from how you read the Bible

Part 2: *City* flows from your reflections on culture

Part 3: *Movement* flows from your understanding of tradition

Part 1: Gospel Theology

What is the gospel, and how do we bring it to bear on the hearts of people today?

Many churches subscribe to gospel doctrines but do not have a ministry that is shaped by, centered on, and empowered through the gospel

Gospel-centered ministry is more theologically driven than program driven.

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The gospel is not everything2. The gospel is not a simple thing3. The gospel affects everything |
|--|

Chapter 1. The Gospel is not everything

a. The Gospel is the good news of what God has done.

Jim Packer's definition: 'God saves sinners'

The gospel itself is a story about God and his redeeming, reconciling, and restoring work in Christ.
Horton

b. The Gospel is not the results of the gospel

There is a danger of confusing the gospel and its results

The gospel is not about something we do but about what has been done for us, and yet the gospel results in a whole new way of life. This grace and the good deeds that result must be both distinguished and connected.

*The gospel, its results and its implications must be **carefully** related to each other neither confused nor separated.*

Evangelicals have an unhealthy tendency to make everything "the gospel." It can lead us to confuse the gospel with other things — many of them good and even biblical — that are not the gospel.

Michael Horton

c. The gospel has two equal and opposite enemies

A very clear and sharp distinction between legalism, antinomianism, and the gospel is often crucial for the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit to work.

*In other words, we must **not** just preach the Bible in general; we must preach the gospel.*

d. Explaining the gospel

There are two ways to explain what the good news of Christianity is.

What must I do to be saved?

What hope is there for the world?

The explicit gospel holds the gospel on the ground and the gospel in the air as complementary, two views of the same redemptive plan God has for the world in the work of his Son. By holding these perspectives together, we do the most justice to the Bible's multifaceted way of proclaiming the good news. When we don't hold them together, either by over-affirming one or dismissing (or outright rejecting) the other, we create an imbalance that leads to all sorts of biblical error. Matt Chandler

Four principles from DeYoung and Gilbert

a. There is only one gospel, not two

b. The gospel of the kingdom necessarily includes the gospel of the cross

To proclaim the inauguration of the kingdom and all the other blessings of God without telling people how they may become partakers of those blessings is to preach a nongospel.

c. It is wrong to say that the declaration of all the blessings of the kingdom is a dilution of the true gospel.

d. It is wrong to say that the message of forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus is a reduction of the true gospel.

e. The right relationship of the gospel to all of ministry

Because the gospel is endlessly rich, it can handle the burden of being the one 'main thing' of a church.

Chapter 2. The Gospel is not a simple thing

a) The Bible doesn't give one standard gospel outline

The gospel cannot be packaged in a single standard form (e.g. '2 ways to live' or '4 spiritual laws')

It's interesting to note that the gospel as set out in Acts 17 does not even mention the atonement!

b) The gospel must be tied to the Bible's themes (rather than bolted on to the end of a sermon)

- *The exile and our homecoming*
- *The covenant and its fulfilment*
- *The kingdom is coming*

Don Carson has posited that there may be twenty or so intercanonical themes that hold the Bible together. The gospel unifies and gives meaning to these many threads.

c) The gospel must be contextualised

The gospel is able to address the particular hopes, fears, and idols of every culture and every person.

Chapter 3. The Gospel affects everything

The gospel is not everything, but the gospel affects virtually everything.

Every form of ministry is empowered by the gospel, based on the gospel, and is a result of the gospel.

a) The richness of the gospel

- Upside-down: Jesus was a King who became a servant
- Inside-out: God has accepted me and loves me freely by grace, I can begin to obey
- Forward-backward: Christians now live in the light of a future reality

Very few churches, denominations, or movements integrate all of these ministries and emphases. Yet I believe that a comprehensive view of the biblical gospel – one that grasps the gospel's inside-out, upside-down, and forward-back aspects – will champion and cultivate them all. This is what we mean by a Center Church.

b) The gospel changes everything

The gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of the Christian life.

The power of the gospel comes in two movements, it first says, 'I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe,' but then quickly follows with, 'I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared hope.' The former outflanks antinomianism, while the latter staves off legalism.

- Discouragement and depression

- Love and relationships
- Sexuality
- Family
- Race and culture
- Witness
- Human authority
- Guilt and self-image
- Joy and Humor
- Attitudes towards class

For Keller, the key to our sanctification is a deeper understanding of and greater joy in our justification.

What do you make of Keller's idea that *most of our problems in life come from a lack of proper orientation to the gospel?*

Section Summary questions:

1. How would you recognise a church that is gospel-centered and gospel-driven?
2. Do we know how to integrate the gospel with the rest of Scripture?
3. Do we see and understand how the gospel changes everything?

The gospel is regularly presented not only as truth to be received and believed, but the very power of God to transform . . . One of the most urgently needed things today is a careful treatment of how the gospel, biblically and richly understood, ought to shape everything we do in the local church, all of our ethics, all of our priorities. Don Carson

Part 2: Gospel Renewal

Chapter 4. The need for Gospel Renewal - The why of gospel renewal

Gospel renewal is a life-changing recovery of the gospel. Personal gospel renewal means the gospel doctrines of sin and grace are actually experienced.

Corporate gospel renewal – what has sometimes been called ‘revival’ – is a season in which a whole body of believers experience personal gospel renewal together.

Over time, all churches, no matter how sound their theology, tend to lose sight of the uniqueness of the gospel . . . the leaders of the church must always be bringing the gospel to bear on people's minds and hearts so that they see it as not just a set of beliefs but as a power that changes us profoundly and continually.

Gospel renewal focuses on the heart

Revivals and renewals are necessary because the default mode of the human heart is works-righteousness . . . we don't really believe the gospel deep down – because we are living as if we save ourselves.

If it were natural or even possible for our hearts to operate consistently from the truth and in the life-giving power of the gospel, we wouldn't need to have it beat into heads continually. We wouldn't need a persistent, balanced, revivalist ministry of gospel renewal. But of course it isn't possible, and so we do.

5. The Essence of Gospel Renewal – The how of gospel renewal

What does the gospel do that actually changes people in a congregation?

a) Three ways of responding to God

Irreligion, religion, and the gospel.

Religion is the default mode of the human heart.

The only way into a ministry that sees people's lives change, that brings joy and power, is through reaching the gospel to deconstruct but legalism and relativism.

b) Moralistic Behavior Change

Moralistic behaviour change simply manipulates and leverages radical selfishness against itself by appealing to fear and pride. But while this may have some success in restraining the heart's self-centredness, it does absolutely nothing to change it. Indeed, it only confirms its power.

c) Gospel behaviour change

Paul and 2 Corinthians 8

He [Paul] moves their hearts through a spiritual recollection of the gospel.

You must let the gospel sink down deeply until it changes your views and the structures of your motivation. You must be trained and disciplined by the gospel.

The truths of the gospel, brought home by the Spirit, slowly but surely help us grasp in a new way how safe and secure, how loved and accepted, we are in Christ. Through the gospel, we come to base our identity not on what we have achieved but on what has been achieved for us in Christ. . .this eats away at sinborn neediness, it destroys the inner engines that drive sinful behavior.

The gospel destroys both the pride and the fearfulness that fuel moralistic behaviour change. The gospel destroys pride, because it tells us we are so lost that Jesus had to die for us. And it also destroys fearfulness, because it tells us that nothing we can do will exhaust his love for us. When we deeply embrace these truths, our hearts are not merely restrained but changed.

Application:

Behavioural compliance to rules without heart change will be superficial and fleeting. The purpose of preaching, pastoring, counseling, instructing, and discipling is, therefore, to show people these practical implications of faith in the gospel.

d) The importance of idolatry

Those who preach and counsel for gospel renewal should constantly speak about underlying idols, which show us our hearts' particular, characteristic ways of failing to believe the gospel.

Our failure in actual righteousness, the, generally come from a failure to rejoice in our legal righteousness in Christ. Our failures in sanctification (living Christlike, godly lives) come mainly from a lack of orientation to our justification.

6. The Work of Gospel Renewal – the work of gospel renewal

a) Extraordinary Prayer

b) Gospel rediscovery

How do we bring the gospel home to people, so they see its power and implications?

1. Preaching
2. Training of lay leaders
3. Small group ministry
4. Conversation
5. Pastoral Counselling

c) Gospel innovation

1. Preach to distinguish between religion and the gospel
2. Preach both the holiness and the love of God to convey the richness of grace
3. Preach not only to make the truth clear but also to make it real
4. Preach Christ from every text
5. Preach to both Christians and non-Christians

d) The signs of Renewal

Revival occurs as a group of people who, on the whole, think they already know the gospel discover they do not really or fully know it . . . when this happens in an extensive way, an enormous release of energy occurs.