

THE GOSPEL *and* RELATIONSHIPS

Lesson One Introduction

WHAT WE'RE DOING

Relationships are one of God's primary "test cases" for applying the gospel to our lives. We were created by a God who is eternally in a Trinitarian relationship with himself and we were created to be in relationship with him and with others.

Notice the following biblical themes:

Love of God

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." **Matthew 22:35-40**

Love your Neighbor (spouse, fellow Christian) as You Love Yourself

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. **John 15:9**

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **John 15:12**

These things I command you, so that you will love one another. **John 15:17**

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **Galatians 5:13-14**

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **Ephesians 5:25**

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **Ephesians 5:28**

Our identity as Christians is to be Defined by our Loving Relationships

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34-35

Love of God is Shown in Love for Others

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3:16-18

One purpose of the gospel, of redemption, is to again restore our relationships to their perfect, unmarred condition.

Our goal for this class is to take the truth of the gospel and see how it specifically applies to the area of relationships in our lives. How is it that the gospel seeks to restore us to our “original state” with regard to relationships?

Relationships are where the gospel either stands or falls in our lives because they reveal who we really are, what God really does for us, and how he really desires us to live.

We are going to intentionally try to keep the material broad in presentation, but specific in application. It's up to you to keep seeking out your growth edge when it comes to application.

OUR THREE FUNDAMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS: GOD, SELF, OTHERS

We all have three fundamental relationships:

- Our relationship with God
- Our relationship with Ourselves
- Our relationship with Others

The gospel speaks to each of the fundamental relationships we have. Sin damages all of them, the cross restores all of them and redemption transforms all of them.

The significance for thinking about this is that often we will blunt the conviction or joy of the gospel by only looking at relationships where we can make things work.

“At some point in my life God, it’s better if I do things by my own human strength because your work on the cross for me just isn’t good enough. It isn’t strong enough to really bring transformation to ingrained relational pattern. Or it isn’t able to pay for “these particular” sins. Or it isn’t really applicable because I’m not that bad or the situation is that bad.”

THE GOSPEL AND RELATIONSHIPS

Sin: How Does Being a Sinner Damage My Relationships?

There are (at least!) three classic “sin languages”:

- Idols
- Orphan Tendencies
- Legalism

The Sin Language of Idolatry

O u t e r L i f e / S u r f a c e T h i n g s

Surface
Idols

Our Career Our Ministry Our House Our Car Our Spouse Our Family
Our Hobbies Our Goals in Life Our Relationships Our Time Our Money
Our Leisure Our Bodies Our Reputations Our Health Our Freedom (etc.)

Near idols are more concrete and specific objects in our lives, which are generally very good and very basic things, but which our far idols are using to elevate them to ultimate things. As good and basic things, they will need to remain in our lives but they will need to be "put in their place" by detaching them from our far idols.

Deep
Idols

COMFORT

CONTROL

SECURITY

SUCCESS

APPROVAL

Far idols are our most subtle and basic idols. They are near the "roots" or our lives and thus "father" from our surface life. They often exist at the level of a motivational drive, and often work through many near idols. Our far idols may bear fruit in a number of places in our lives.

The sin language of idolatry damages our relationship by elevating our own wants to improper desires (idols). Our desire for our idols then, make others either obstacles to obtaining them or means to use in order to obtain them. We have no sense of dying to self in order to serve someone else.

The Sin Language of Being a Spiritual Orphan

The Orphan	The Son/Daughter
Feels alone; lacks a vital daily intimacy with God; a vacuum of self concern	Has a growing assurance that "God is <i>really</i> my loving Heavenly Father." (1 John 4:16)
Anxious over "felt needs": friends, money, etc; "I'm all alone and nobody cares"; "I'm not a happy camper."	Trusts the Father and has a growing confidence in His loving care; is being freed up from worry. (Matt. 6:25ff).
Lives on a success/fail basis; needs to "look good"; performance oriented.	Learning to live in <i>daily self-conscious partnership with God</i> ; not fearful.
Feels condemned, guilty and unworthy before God and others.	<i>Feels</i> loved, forgiven, and totally accepted because Christ's merit really clothes him/her.
Labors under a sense of unlimited obligation; tries hard to please; burn out.	Prayer is the first resort: "I'm going to ask my Daddy first." <i>Daddy, Father!</i> "
Is defensive; can't listen well; bristles at the charge of being self-righteous (virtually proving it).	Is open to criticism since he/she <i>consciously</i> stands in Christ's perfection, not his/her own; is able to examine his/her deeper motives.
Needs to be right, safe, secure; unwilling to fail; unable to tolerate criticism; can only handle praise.	Is able to take risks—even fail; since his/her righteousness is in Christ, he/she needs no "record" to boast in, protect or defend.
Tends toward "I can do it"; strong willed; driven.	"I can do all things through <i>Christ</i> who give me strength!" (Phil. 4:13)
"Tries harder"; self-effort; relies on his/her "gift package" to get by in ministry.	Is trusting <i>less</i> in self and in the Holy Spirit more (with a self-conscious, daily reliance).
Tends to be ungrateful, complaining; bitter; critical spirit. Tears down others.	Relies on the Holy Spirit to guide the tongue for use in praise, edification, thanksgiving and encouragement. (Eph. 4:29, etc.)

The sin language of being a spiritual orphan damages our relationships by causing us to always focus on our selves and our needs. We remain insecure in our relationship with God and carry this over to all of our relationships with others. Because we feel we need to take care of ourselves first and foremost, we are never able to truly engage anyone else.

The Sin Language of Legalism and Performance

Misuse of the Law to Justify Us

- Looking for credit for our good deeds.
- Being defensive when someone criticizes or challenges our record of law keeping.
- Comparing our selves with others to show how good we are.
- Being fixated by and loving our own reputations.

Misuse of the Law to Transform Us

- Giving the Law power it was never meant to have, namely the power to change us.
- Using it as a way of exercising power and control over others or our own lives.
- Forgetting that God's real target in spiritual transformation is our heart/whole person.
- Becoming fixated on the consequences of "getting caught" rather than the sinfulness of our actions.

The sin language of legalism and performance makes all of our relationships into "tit for tat" type encounters where we are constantly seeking to only give to others what they "deserve" and insisting that others treat us as we "deserve."

Cross: How Does Having Christ Pay for My Sins Restore My Relationships?

The cross is what secures our justification (payment for our sins, the giving of Christ's righteousness to us), enables our repentance, and invokes our status as sons and daughters.

Christ's work on the cross is the basic difference between most human and genuine gospel transformation in our lives.

Because Christ has paid for my sins and I am justified I no longer need to justify myself through legalism/expectations. Because Christ has forgiven me I am now commanded and enabled to begin to forgive others, etc.

We will regularly be asking how does Christ's work on the cross specifically translate into how I handle my relationship with God, self and others.

Redemption: How Does Being a Son or Daughter Transform My Relationships?

It is because we now live as redeemed people that we have both new possibilities and new responsibilities for relating to God, self, others.

As a son or daughter we now have Spirit's enabling power dwelling in us. As a son or daughter we now understand that grace is also a means to:

- lifestyle change through the spiritual disciplines and intimacy building habits,
- a lifestyle of joyful repentance,
- the new way we are able to think about relationship and relate to theirs.

Because Christ has paid for my sins and I am justified I no longer need to justify myself through legalism/expectations. Because Christ has forgiven me I am now commanded and enabled to begin to forgive others.

Our time together should help us recognize how we act like idolaters, orphans, and Pharisees and instead live more like sons and daughters.

SHOE LEATHER SEMINAR

Spend a few minutes around your tables talking about your experience with the Responding to the Gospel—Time and Talents part of our stewardship program which started it's next stage last Sunday (Heart Beat Sunday).

Sample Questions (if you're stumped)

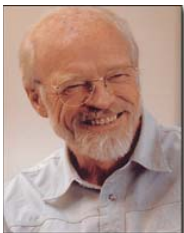
What is God calling you to as a result of the Purpose Driven Life and Good and Faithful Servants and materials?

What did you put down on your commitment card?

How have you seen God working in your life or the life of someone you are close to?

Where do you have a sense of excitement for what God is bringing your way?

Food for Thought



Two convictions under girded my pastoral work. The first conviction was that everything in the gospel is livable and that my pastoral task was to get it lived. It was not enough that I announce the gospel, explain it or whip up enthusiasm for it. I wanted it lived—lived in detail, lived on the streets and on the job, lived in the bedrooms and kitchens, lived through cancer and divorces, lived with children and in marriage. Along the way I found that this also meant living it myself, which turned out to be a far more formidable assignment. I realized that this was going to take some time. I settled in for the long haul. That when the phrase (from Nietzsche) “a long obedience in the same direction” embedded itself in my imagination....

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*