

# The Gospel in Terms of Sanctification

How the Gospel Changes Us

# Introduction

- Our behavior is always rooted in something deep in our hearts
- 2 Cor 9 is about stewardship or giving—your giving should flow from your “confession of the gospel” (2 Cor 9:13)
- <sup>12</sup> This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. <sup>13</sup> Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else (2 Cor 9:12-13)

# Introduction

- What does the “confession of the gospel” mean?
- Does it mean to believe in the gospel?
- Does it mean to try very hard to live like Jesus?
- It means to “hold fast” to something (gospel)
- What Paul is saying is that the degree to which the gospel changes the heart in a deep and profound way, generosity is a result of that transformation
- The spiritual barriers that keep us from being generous are taken away
- I will offer three key principles on how the gospel changes our hearts in deep and profound ways

# The Gospel Gives Us Freedom to Live in Christ

- <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin (Rom 7:25)
- <sup>1</sup> Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1-2)
- In other words, we are **evil** but there is **no condemnation**
- The gospel is key to knowing yourself—we are sinners, but we are also accepted by God (sinner and saint)
- What is the basis of your Christian identity?
- D Martyn Lloyd-Jones asked a member in his church— "Are you a Christian?"

# The Gospel Gives Us Freedom to Live in Christ

- Many people would say, “I’m trying to be a Christian”
- They base their standing with God on the frequency of their **big** sins, but they don’t really believe they are sinners
- The gospel is that we are saved by God’s grace through faith
- If you don’t know the gospel, your heart will continually try to do something to save yourself by denying how evil you really are, or exaggerating how evil you are (low self-esteem)
- On the psychological level, there are people who are self-righteous because they have an overly positive view of self
- They don’t really believe that they are sinner, and react when criticized

# The Gospel Gives Us Freedom to Live in Christ

- Other people base their standing with God on their performance or self-flagellation
- They fall apart when they fail, because they have an overly negative view of self
- Being a Christian is a standing—it means we have been forgiven by God, and are accepted by him based upon Jesus' righteousness, not by our good works
- We need the gospel to know who we really are—to free ourselves from self-righteousness and works salvation

# The Gospel Exposes the Idols of Our Hearts

- The key to change is not just changing our behavioral bad habits, but to identify the deep-rooted sins beneath all our behaviors
- <sup>12</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the **flesh**, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the **flesh**, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live (Rom 8:12-13)
- Many Christians believe our struggle with sin resides in the flesh—the physical body (e.g., anger, drunkenness, sexual immorality)
- Paul is not talking about the body, but the spiritual problem driving all our behaviors

# The Gospel Exposes the Idols of Our Hearts

- <sup>28</sup> Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup> They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; <sup>31</sup> they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. <sup>32</sup> Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (Rom 1:28-32)



# The Gospel Exposes the Idols of Our Hearts

- The term “flesh” refers to “sinful nature”—the spiritual problem driving all our **desires**, both bad and good
- St Augustine writes: “Our problem is not just wanting the bad things, but we turn even good things into ultimate things” (*Confessions*)
- There are deep sins beneath our behavioral sins—good things turned into ultimate things
- Martin Luther writes regarding the first commandment: “We never break commandments two to ten, unless we have broken the first one” (*Larger Confession*)
- <sup>3</sup>“You shall have no other gods before me (Ex 20:3)

# The Gospel Exposes the Idols of Our Hearts

- We don't sin unless we have something more important to us than Jesus Christ operating as your functional salvation project
- We want something we think will make us happy if we have it, something that give us meaning or significance in life
- We're trying to get that thing for ourselves, so we don't have to rely on God alone
- What are some examples of idols that are more important than Jesus Christ? (approval, security, power, control)

# The Gospel Replaces Our Idols

- If we want to deal with the idols of our hearts, we must do expulsive replacement, rejoicing in Jesus Christ in the face of the idols
- <sup>17</sup> The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” <sup>18</sup> He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. <sup>19</sup> I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. <sup>20</sup> However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lu 10:17-20)
- In other words, the only way to expel the idols in our hearts is to replace them with Jesus Christ and to rejoice in our salvation
- It doesn't mean we love the good things less, but it means we love Jesus more than anything in this world

# The Gospel Replaces Our Idols

- Paul talks about “boasting” in the NT
- <sup>14</sup> May I never **boast** except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal 6:14)
- <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who **boasts boast** in the Lord (1 Cor 1:31)
- <sup>17</sup> But, “Let the one who **boasts boast** in the Lord” (2 Cor 10:17)
- So how does the cross transform us?
- Paul says we’ve got to boast in it

# The Gospel Replaces Our Idols

- Originally, a boast was a part of warfare in the OT
- How would a general or a king get his people to charge into almost certain death? (Ex 15; 1 Kgs 20; 1 Sam 2)
- A boast was how you build up people's confidence to charge
- Now Paul is saying everyone has to boast in something
- "Let not a wise man **boast** of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man **boast** of his riches; but let him who **boasts boast** of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth" (Jer 9:24-24)

# The Gospel Replaces Our Idols

- A boast, at a theological and psychological level, is your identity
- It's what validates and strengthens you, or gives you confidence
- You may say, "I'm a good father, a good mother, a hard worker or a smart student"
- But when that becomes your identity, Satan will accuse us and have a field day with us
- Paul takes this idea of "boasting" and applies it to Christ and the cross
- What does it mean to boast in the cross?
- It means you are seeking the applause of God as the sole basis of your identity and confidence

# Discussion Questions

- Given the three principles, can you identify your areas of victory and struggle?
- What are some ways for you to address those struggles?