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GOSPEL-CENTERED EVERYTHING

I. Introduction

- The recent resurgence in gospel prominence among evangelicals
- Gospel as “slogan”: it’s possible to discuss & feature & celebrate the gospel, and yet fail to allow the gospel to genuinely shape our lives, our homes, & our ministries.
- The burden of this seminar is that the gospel would not merely be conceptually central, but functionally operational, in our lives and in the churches we serve.

II. Essentials of Gospel-Centrality

A. Gospel Priority

- The apostle Paul’s perspective: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5
 - Both Paul’s life and his ministry were governed by the same, glorious reality: *the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified*.
1. *Specificity*: “Christ and Him crucified”
 2. *Determination*: “I resolved . . .”
 3. *Exclusivity*: “I resolved to know nothing among you except . . .”
- This doesn’t mean Paul addressed no other topics, but he addressed no topic unrelated to or in isolation from the gospel.

B. Gospel Clarity

1. The substance of Paul’s gospel: 1 Corinthians 15:1-6
 - Only this was of *first* importance
 - Compare with the gospels, which demonstrate that *the* gospel is the story about Jesus; i.e., the saving acts of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - Paul’s “shorthand” for the gospel emphasizes the most important part of Jesus’ work: his death & resurrection.
2. The pastorally critical point: the gospel is *objective*. It stands accomplished & ever true, and does not depend upon us, our feelings, our perceptions, or our performance.

“But one day as I was passing into the field, with some dashes on my conscience, fearing yet that all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell

upon my soul, “Your righteousness is in heaven.” I thought I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God’s right hand. There was my righteousness. Wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me that I lacked His righteousness, for that was ever before Him. Moreover, I saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, “the same yesterday, today, and for ever”.

“Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons, my temptations also fled away. From that time those dreadful Scriptures of God quit troubling me; now I went home rejoicing for the grace and love of God.”

John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*

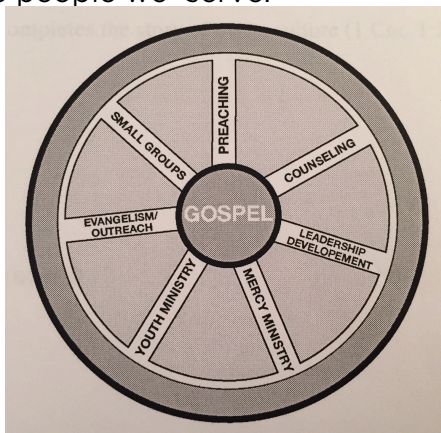
C. Gospel Consistency

1. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

- The unchanging foundation of the church is Jesus Christ.
- The building erected upon it—the work of ministry & its results—must conform to the pattern of the foundation. It must be based upon, derived from, and consistent with the gospel.
- It is “gospel consistency” which determines whether the “building materials” we use (our ministry motives & methods) will withstand the fire of God’s searching assessment.
- This both a fearful and a freeing reality: the qualifications for gospel ministry don’t include world-class gifting, awareness of social media, adherence to current trends in ministry, but *faithfulness* to our master (1 Cor 4:2).

III. Intentionally Pursuing Gospel-Centrality

- A. A priority to be aware of and cultivate: the ability to bring the gospel to bear upon the lives of the people we serve.



1. Be alert: the various ministries of a church and aspects of church life can have a tendency to take on a life of their own.
2. Our goal at SGCL: that all ministries of our church, in all their variety, to share the same values and exhibit a doctrinal unity, so that all church contexts are, in their various and appropriate ways, clarifying, cultivating, & celebrating the gospel.
3. “Theological ministry”: ensuring that all methodology arises from and is informed by theology—particularly the gospel.

B. Ministry examples

1. Preaching: Do my sermons, week after week, bring my congregation to reflect upon the gospel and to be encouraged by its good news?
 - Is the gospel shaping the church’s self-understanding?
 - Are my exhortations based upon and informed by the gospel, which alone provides the motivation and power to obey?
 - A key assumption: All of Scripture, in its various genres and parts and intentions, ultimately points to the person and work of Christ. Because Scripture is *redemptive revelation*, and the person & work of Christ is the culmination & climax of God’s redemptive activity in history, all that precedes it prepares for the gospel, & all that follows flows from the gospel.

“True Christian preaching must center on the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross is the central doctrine of the holy scriptures. All other revealed truths either find their fulfillment in the cross or are necessarily founded upon it. Therefore, no doctrine of Scripture may faithfully be set before men unless it is displayed in its relationship to the cross. The one who is called to preach, therefore, must preach Christ because there is no other message from God.”
Thomas F. Jones
2. Sunday planning: we want every aspect of the Sunday meeting to reflect, in some way, the gospel.
 - We should never assume that people are making connections between their lives & the realities of the gospel.
3. Other teaching and instruction in the church
 - 1 Timothy 1:10:11: “sound doctrine that is in accordance with the glorious gospel . . .”
 - In the New Testament, there is an organic connection between the truths of the gospel and other doctrines that are taught. It is our role as pastors to be alert to those and to allow those to inform our teaching.

4. Small groups: an area of church life that is particularly vulnerable from veering from a gospel focus.
5. Counseling: is our counseling informed by the gospel, or do we depart from it in search of other forms of “wisdom”? Are people being pointed to Jesus and what he’s done? Are they finding their hope in that?
6. Children’s Ministry

IV. Final Application

- Are we keeping the gospel central *personally*?
- I will not effectively apply the gospel in my church if I’m not applying it consistently to my own heart.
- What are you most effected by? What are you most excited about?
- The most important thing we can do for the people we serve is to keep the gospel central in our own lives. If we are, then making the gospel central in our ministry will be our greatest desire.