

LOVING THE BRIDE OF CHRIST: What is a Healthy Church Member?

Mark #3 – Understands the Good News

I. Are You an “Evangelical”?

A. Sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone) vs. Sola Cultura (by the culture alone)

“Where once a raft of doctrines were assumed, now evangelicalism is defined almost by institutions and ethos rather than by theological confession. If it is taught at a seminary calling itself evangelical, for example, or published by a press which has evangelical roots, then it is within the range of evangelical thought, even if it involves a low view of scripture, rejection of penal substitution, or even a question mark over the Trinity.”

– Dr. Carl Trueman, “Knowing the Times: Recent Controversies in Context”

B. Ground Zero: “Evangel” = Gospel or Good News

“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.” (Gal 1:8-9)

II. Me-Centered Gospels

“Without realizing it, we have during the past century bartered that gospel for a substitute product which, though it looks similar enough in points of detail, is as a whole a decidedly different thing... It fails to make men God-centered in their thoughts and God-fearing in their hearts because this is not primarily what it is trying to do... Whereas the chief aim of the old was to teach people to worship God, the concern of the new seems limited to making them feel better. The subject of the old gospel was God and his ways with men; the subject of the new is man and the help God gives him. There is a world of difference. The whole perspective and emphasis of gospel preaching has changed.”

– J. I. Packer's introduction to a 1958 reprint of John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*

A. “I’ve Fallen, So Help Me Get Up!”

1. Many people think our biggest problem is a lack of love, help, and fulfillment. What we need is forgiveness for a few sins. God is impotent to the sinner’s will.
2. The assumption behind this view of humanity is unbiblical.
3. The “help-me-up gospel” answers the question of the human problem differently than the Bible answers it.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jer 17:9)

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Eph 2:1,3)

None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. (Rom 3:10-12)

B. “God is Love”

1. “God is love” is commonly misinterpreted and therefore misused.
2. To reduce God to love is to caricature the King of Kings into an image of our making.
3. It would not be good news to learn that the only attribute out of which God acts towards His created people is love.

C. “Jesus Wants to be Your Friend”

1. But this is TRUE! We *are* adopted (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7), Christ is our Brother (Heb 2:11-12) and we are part of God’s family (Mark 3:31-35)!
2. Christianity is not just a casual friendship with Jesus but involves God’s holiness, our sin, the payment of ransom, our acquittal, the winning of a war, and the glory of God for His grace, mercy, kindness, faithfulness, justice, and love.

D. “Straighten Up and Fly Right!”

1. Making the Gospel simply about changed behavior is called “moralism.”
2. Moralistic preaching/teaching implies that God merely wants outward renovation without spiritual transformation.

III. The Essential Elements of the Gospel: GOD, LAW, SIN, CHRIST, RESPONSE**A. God is our loving Creator, Owner, and perfect Judge.**

“You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.” (Neh 9:6)

“Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together⁹ before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.” (Ps 98:8-9)

B. God’s Law reflects His perfection and is the infinite standard we must keep to enjoy a God-centered life.

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt 5:48)

“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.” (James 2:10)

C. Sin refers to the selfish rebellion that consumes each person and trashes their identity as the image of God.

“They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!” (Rom 1:25)

D. Jesus Christ lovingly and voluntarily bore the wrath we deserved and grants us His perfect record of obedience.

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.” (Luke 15:4-5)

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor 5:21)

E. Our Response to God’s gracious work is to repent (hate and turn) from sin and place our faith (trust) in Christ alone for salvation.

“...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21)