

## **Class 2: The Gospel**

**Cheer up,  
you're worse than you think!**

*God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*

*-2 Corinthians 5:21*

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

*-Ephesians 2:8-9*

*The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.*

*-C.S. Lewis*

- I. **Becoming a Christian** - When you hear the word 'Christian,' what comes to mind?
- A. A Christian is a person who follows and trusts JESUS. Not just trusted Him one day in the past but currently trusts Him, currently follows Him.
- B. Last week, you heard the Bible presented as a rescue story. Often when we hear stories, we like to imagine ourselves as the hero (I like to imagine that I'm James Bond or Superman or Jack Bauer), but to do this with the Bible is detrimental. God is always the hero and we are always the ones being rescued, redeemed, renewed, and then sent out on point, on mission for Him. You will hear much more about this in a few weeks but if you do not believe that you need to be rescued, then you have not yet even begun your journey with God. If you do not see yourself as in need of God's ultimate rescue mission through Jesus Christ, then you have not yet gotten the Gospel. In that case you are worshipping something else.

**You were made for worship**—To worship is to give yourself wholeheartedly to something or someone. If you don't worship God, you will worship something else (which will introduce all sorts of distortions into your life, b/c you were made to worship Him!)

**Augustine**—You have made us for Yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.

**John Calvin**—"The human heart is an idol factory!"

**If you think "God owes me something for all my efforts,"** you are still on the outside. You are not yet a Christian.

1. This means you are sinful, prone to seek false gods
  2. You are **Wounded** because of the sin in your life.
  3. You are in **Bondage**.
- C. The Rescuer has Come!—Jesus Christ, God in the flesh.
1. Long awaited Messiah
    - (a) Gen. 3.15 (Crush the Serpent's head)
    - (b) Gen. 12.1-3 (Bless all the nations)
    - (c) 2 Sam. 7.12-14 (Son and a King)
    - (d) Dan. 7.13-14 (Ruler of Justice and Mercy)

"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight" -O Little Town of Bethlehem

2. God in the **flesh**—John 1:14, Hebrews 1:1-3

3. **Completion** of the story—The Jewish Scriptures are continually pointing beyond themselves to a further reality which they do not themselves contain, i.e. a great act of salvation and dealing w/ sin.
4. **Atoner** of sins: The great exchange. God does not treat **us** as our sins deserve because he treats **Jesus** as our sins deserve! Instead of requiring our blood, he offers His own.

D. Two Big Mistakes here

1. Kick back and take it easy—Jesus paid it all
2. Get done with the Gospel, roll up your sleeves, and get busy working for God.

**Gospel Growth**—We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience, but the gospel is *the* way we grow (Gal.3:1-3) and are renewed (Col.1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Rom.1:16-17). It is very common in the church to think as follows. "The gospel is for non-Christians. One needs it to be saved. But once saved, you grow through hard work and obedience." But Col.1:6 shows that this is a mistake. Both confession and "hard work" that is not arising from and "in line" with the gospel will not sanctify you--it will strangle you. All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Thus when Paul left the Ephesians he committed them "*to the word of his grace, which can build you up*" (Acts 20:32).

**Gospel Principle**—In Galatians 2:14, Paul lays down a powerful principle. He deals with Peter's racial pride and cowardice by declaring that he was not living "*in line with the truth of the gospel*". From this we see that the Christian life is a process of renewing every dimension of our life-- spiritual, psychological, corporate, social--by thinking, hoping, and living out the "lines" or ramifications of the gospel. The gospel is to be applied to every area of thinking, feeling, relating, working, and behaving. The implications and applications of Galatians 2:14 are vast.

**The Main Problem**—"The main problem, then, in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, we have not "used" the gospel in and on all parts of our life. All of us, to some degree live around the truth of the gospel but do not "get" it. So the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is the *continual re-discovery of the gospel.*"

**G.K. Chesterton:** The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.

- II. Living as a Christian—We typically think there are only two ways to live: God's way and man's way. While this is generally true, Biblically speaking, there are actually three ways to live (Luke 15). You can be a moral person or an immoral person, but the Gospel says that our morality can get us into just as much trouble as our immorality. The Gospel tells us that our root sin is not just *failing* in our obedience to God but *relying* on our obedience to save us. Therefore, the Gospel is a "third way," neither religion nor irreligion. The religious person may say, "I'm doing the right things that God commands" and the irreligious person

may say, “I decide what is right and wrong for myself.” But *both* ways reject Jesus as Savior, though they may revere him as an example or helper. Both ways are strategies of self-salvation—both actually keep control of their own lives. The true Gospel keeps us from legalism and moralism on the one hand, and from hedonism and relativism on the other.

**Flannery O’Connor:** Inside him, there was a deep, black, wordless conviction that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin.

III. Defining the Gospel—What do you think of when you hear the word ‘Gospel’? Many think of ‘good news,’ forgiveness, love, Jesus’ message, the Bible, etc. All these are true in their own respects, but for our purposes, we need an all-encompassing, concise, and workable definition. We need an easy definition that describes our hopeless state apart from Christ and our glorious state in knowing Christ. In one sentence it must capture the essence of ‘good news,’ God’s forgiving grace, love, and the Bible’s message of radical grace. As we will see below, our definition will also demonstrate the means of our growth or sanctification.

**GOSPEL =** We are more wicked, depraved, and sinful than we could ever dare to imagine, BUT in Christ, we are more loved, cherished, and accepted than we could ever dare to hope.

- A. Religious (Moralist)—I obey, therefore I’m accepted.
- B. Irreligious (Relativist)—I obey my own standards and accept myself.
- C. Gospel-driven: I’m accepted, therefore I obey. The Gospel brings 3 new realities that spur sanctification
  - 1. You are completely forgiven and have nothing to HIDE
    - (a) Honest before God (Luke 18:9-17)
    - (b) Honest before Others
  - 2. You are blameless and have nothing to PROVE
    - (a) Free to relax about appearances (II Cor. 5:21)
    - (b) Free to deal with sin in a process and in community (Rom. 5:20, I Cor. 10:1-17)

**Most Christians struggle with “besetting sins”**—These are sins that take us a long time, even a lifetime, to get past them. For some it is lust. For others it is a quick temper. For others it is the love of money. For others it is a foul tongue.

**Romans 5:20**—Where sin abounds, *grace abounds all the more!* (Irony...sometimes the Xians sweetest seasons with God can be in the context of repenting over sin...b/c our sin always reminds us of how much we need Jesus, and how He is always there to cover us!)

**Because of this truth**—At Greentree we view ourselves & each other with “Gospel eyes.” We don’t condemn but rather walk alongside each other, in light of the Gospel, to help one another move away from sin and toward holiness.

Type of

Treatment of

Result

Assessment

Church “besetting sins”			
<b>Legalistic</b>	Your sins make you unacceptable. If you cannot shape up, then you need to ship out!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pride (if you think you’ve succeeded)</li> <li>▪ Despair (if you fail)</li> <li>▪ Resentment (because you feel oppressed, unloved)</li> </ul>	Unbiblical—No room for the grace of the Gospel (Jesus lived and died for you—you are completely loved!).
<b>Liberal</b>	Don’t worry about your sins. They’re not a big deal—You are OK no matter what because God forgives you regardless.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Christianity” that is no different than “non-Christianity.”</li> <li>▪ A social club rather than a redeemed community.</li> </ul>	Unbiblical—No room for the truth of the Gospel (sin will ruin you, you need rescue from Jesus!).
<b>Gospel</b>	Rejoice in the love of God for you, and respond with repentance!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Motivation to change because you are so deeply loved. You long to please the one who gave Himself for you!</li> <li>▪ Healing from sin—and an increased awareness that God’s commands are <i>good</i> for you!</li> </ul>	Biblical and life giving. (Cheer up! You are worse than you think. But God’s love for you is infinitely greater than you ever dared to hope!).

3. You are cherished and have nothing to FEAR

- (a) Gospel is the measure of how much we are valued by God (Zeph. 3:17)
- (b) God’s Commands are not oppressive, but the means by which we live a healthy and beautiful life (Deut. 8:1, John 10:10)
- (c) Gospel shows that God is involved in all the circumstances of our lives, even when we suffer (Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 12:7-10, Hebrews 12:3-17)

IV. Discipleship: How?—Sanctification or Christian growth is better described as “growth in grace.” We often think that we are saved by grace and we grow by works or by our own effort. But actually, God’s grace is just as operative in our sanctification as it is in our justification. Therefore, we must be driven by preaching the gospel to ourselves daily. Only the gospel will transform us. The Gospel is not just the A-B-Cs of the Christian life but the A-to-Z of the Christian life. The Gospel is not just the way to enter the Kingdom; it is the way to address every problem and grow at every step. Paul shows us this constantly. In II Cor. 8:9, Paul is asking for the Corinthians to give money to the church. He doesn’t guilt them into it (moralism) nor does he say do whatever you want (relativism). Instead he retells the Gospel in terms of wealth: Jesus was a wealthy man who became poor so that you, a poor people, could become wealthy. Therefore, share that wealth with the rest of God’s people. In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul is telling husbands to love their wives sacrificially and faithfully. He doesn’t say, do it and God will like you (moralism) nor does he say, it’s up to you if you want to love her or leave her (relativism). He retells the Gospel in terms of Christ’s fidelity: He is the one who should have divorced His bride (the church) but loved her and remained faithful even unto death. This is the same attitude we must apply in our own lives, remembering that we are saved apart from our works and that salvation compels us to obedience. Therefore, the Gospel is more than the “first step” in a “staircase” of truths. Rather, it is better likened to the hub of a wheel, the central reality around which all of life is arranged. It is not a “basic truth” from which we “move on” to deeper truths, but is the *central* truth from which all other truth flows.

**George MacDonald:** But we who would be born again indeed, must wake our souls unnumbered times a day.

**Bob Dylan:** Jesus tapped me on the shoulder and said, Bob, why are you resisting me? I said, I'm not resisting you! He said, You gonna follow me? I said, I've never thought about that before! He said, When you're not following me, you're resisting me.

## V. Discipleship—Why?

- A. Gospel vs. Guilt—Very often, Christians find motivation to obey from guilt, i.e. God will not like me if I don't do \_\_\_\_\_. Or others will look down on me if I don't do \_\_\_\_\_. In Romans 12:1, Paul says, "I appeal to you therefore brothers, *by the mercies of God*, to present you bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." In other words, we offer our lives to the Lord because we are compelled to by the amazing love and grace given to us by God, not because we think God will "get us" if we don't. It is moralism that tells us we're accepted because we obey. But the Gospel says that we obey and are therefore accepted.
- B. Gospel vs. Tolerance
1. Does not cheapen sin—The true Gospel does not minimize sin with ideas like, "we all make mistakes" or "nobody's perfect." Our age's attempt to rid the world of sin has removed all moral judgments but left us wondering why we still possess the guilt. The Gospel recognizes sin as slavery for us and grave offense toward God. Such travesties must be set right, and that can only be done by God Himself.
  2. Living by Repentance—We don't only repent to become Christians, but we repent daily, confessing our sins (I John 1:8-2:2) and living by the grace offered to us by the Gospel. Only by seeing our sin for what it really is do we become fully aware of the power and efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. The growing enormity of Christ's work on our behalf will lead to a growing faith and obedience.
- C. Gospel vs. Life—We live our lives in the midst of marketing campaigns seeking our attention and asking us to emulate those we admire, be they actors, sports stars, national heroes, etc. When I was growing up, one of my heroes was Sterling Sharpe, former All-American wide receiver for the South Carolina Gamecocks and NFL pro-bowler from the Green Bay Packers. I tried to be like him in everything I did in football because I was enamored by his skills and captured by his play. One day, I met Sterling Sharpe and my impressions came crashing down. There were several of us who wanted his attention (and maybe a couple autographs), but he simply had his people cordon us off while he tried not to make eye contact. That was the end of my fascination with Sterling Sharpe. Still, the illustration shows us that we attempt to be like those whom we admire. It is the same in our relationship with God. The more we are captured by the beauty and glory of our Creator and Redeemer who gives us significance and purpose, the more we will love Him, honor Him, and obey Him. There is a term for this in the Bible, "glory." The reason we exist is to glorify God and enjoy him forever (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 1). To glorify God is to "weigh him heavily" (Hebrew, *kavod*). To weigh something heavily is to take it seriously—to make it a "big deal." The opposite of

glorifying God is *taking him lightly*, making little of him instead of making much of him. When we “weigh him heavily,” we will honor him with our lives.

**John Calvin:** “Besides, this mind restrains itself from sinning, not out of dread of punishment alone; but, because it loves and reveres God as Father, it worships and adores Him as Lord. *Even if there were no hell, it would still shudder at offending Him alone.*”

- D. Gospel vs. Self-help—Walk through any bookstore and you’ll see that the shelves are full of self-help gurus and books, calling you to new resolutions, showing you how to better your life, and promising that all the answers are inside of you. The Bible promises you just the opposite, namely that the problem is you and the solution is outside of you.
1. Holy Spirit—The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, who comes to take what is Christ’s and make it ours (John 16:14). Self-help says that we improve ourselves, but the Gospel says that only God can save us and only God can grow us.
  2. Spiritual Disciplines—What are the spiritual disciplines of which you are aware or that you practice? Spiritual disciplines are a *means*, not an *end*, in our process of sanctification. They are a vehicle that carries us into closer fellowship with God and more passionate service in His Kingdom. We should never feel that we’ve “arrived” in the Christian life, or that our disciplines somehow make us more acceptable to God. This is a form of pride, which the spiritual disciplines are there to prevent. As we will see below, our spiritual disciplines actually drive us to further our dependence on our Creator and Redeemer. We always recognize that God has much more work to do in our lives, so that although we’re always *secure* in His love, we are never *satisfied* in our success.

Disciplines are an important means of growth in the Christian life, but as we think about our growth, we must ask ourselves how we are to approach these disciplines. Ultimately, we are seeking to become more and more like Christ (Romans 8:29). We typically think of Christian growth as a linear progression from good to pretty good to great. See Figure 1.1 Below (the curvy line represents the growth of the Christian). There are some ups and downs, but generally the converted person moves more and more toward God’s perfection (represented by the top line).

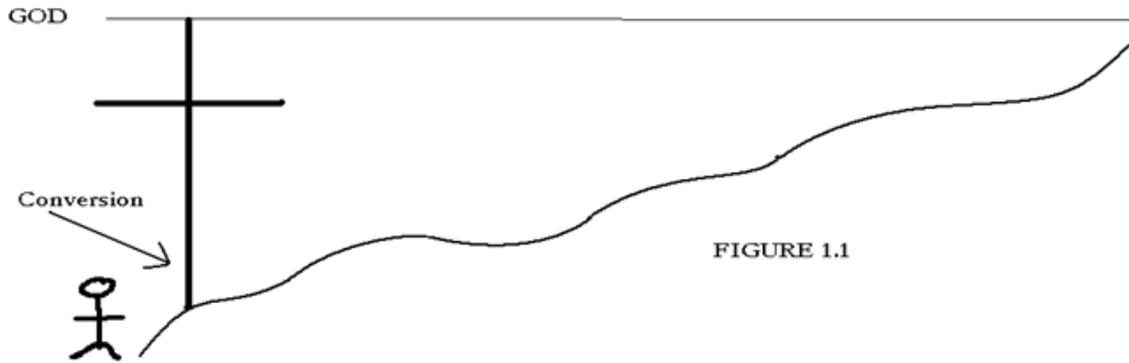


FIGURE 1.1

At salvation, he is a sinner, needing a large cross to connect him to God, and seeing how desperately lost he is without the Lord, but what happens to the cross of Christ when we think of growth in these terms? See Figure 1.2

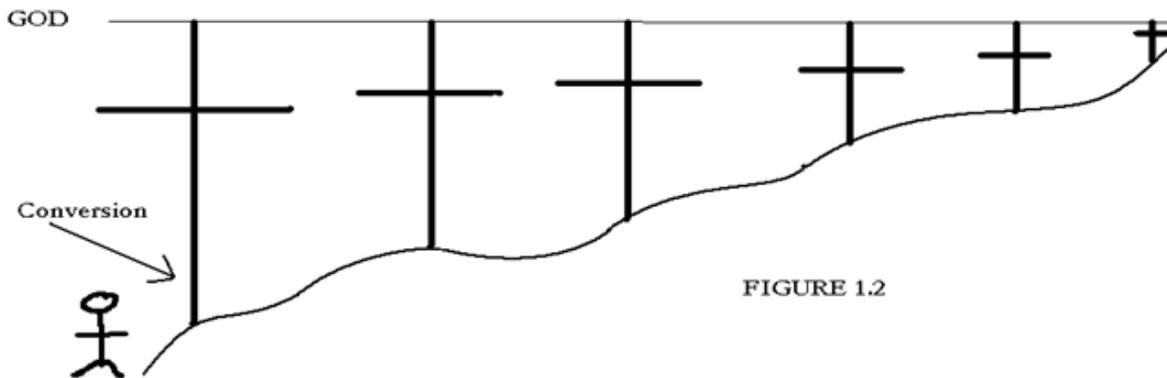
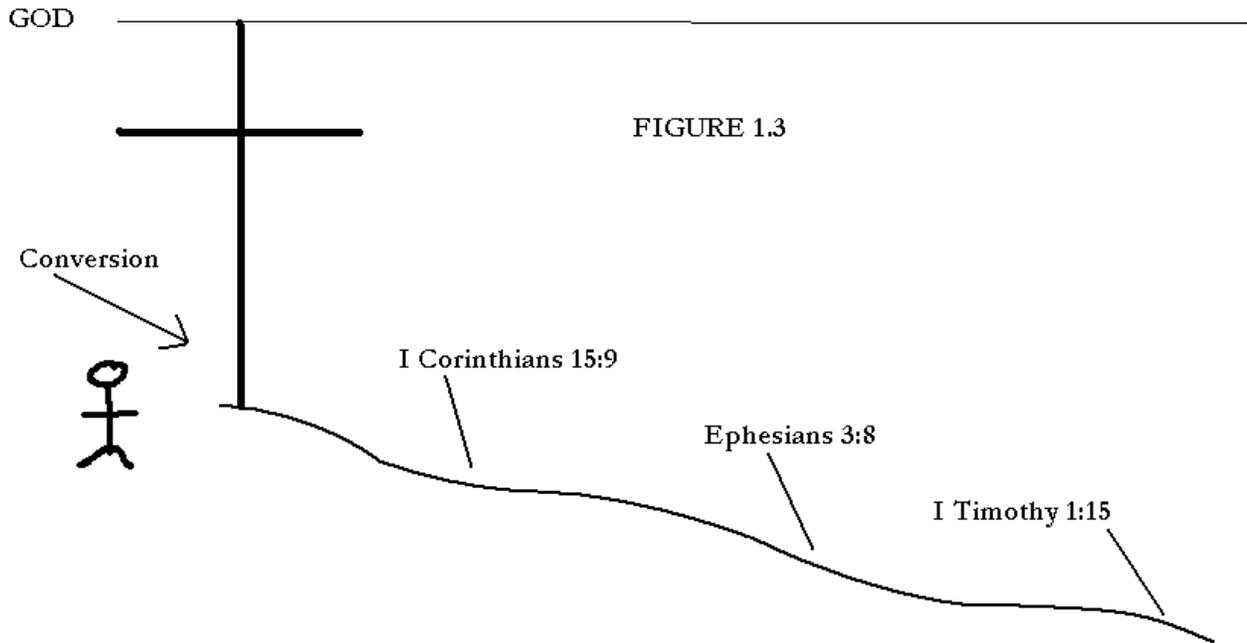


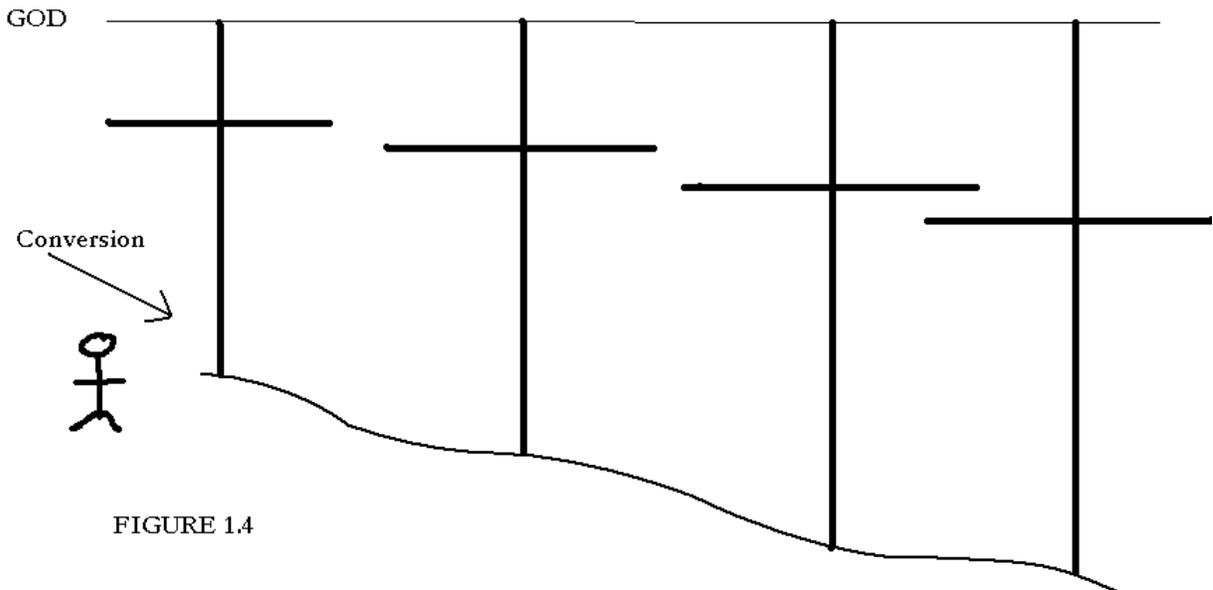
FIGURE 1.2

Clearly, the cross of Christ, and thus the work of Christ, begins to shrink, needing less and less of Christ and relying more and more on self. In this model, we eventually ‘arrive’ as the good Christian man or woman, but has this type of growth led to a humble dependence on God and an awe-inspiring view of salvation?

This is why we must think of our growth in terms of the Gospel definition above. What does this mean? Let’s look at the life of the apostle Paul for an example. Read I Corinthians 15:9, Ephesians 3:8, and I Timothy 1:15. Paul, writing in about 52 AD, says to the Corinthians that he is “least of all the apostles.” About 5 years later, Paul is now the “least of all the saints.” Again, after another 5 years passes, Paul is not going up; he’s now the “chief of all sinners.” Let’s see how that looks on our chart. See figure 1.3



Is Paul actually getting worse? No, Paul is becoming more aware of the first part of the Gospel, that he is more wicked, depraved, and sinful than he could imagine. And notice with the final illustration, figure 1.4, how he is also made aware of the second part of the Gospel, that he is more loved, cherished, and accepted in Christ than he could ever dare to hope.



Notice, that the work of Christ is getting larger and larger, showing that as we recognize our sinfulness and repent, we are brought deeper into the grace and mercy of God. Then we are raised (or resurrected) to new, Gospel-obedient lives (Galatians 2:20). The more we see our sin, the more certain we are that we were saved by sheer grace and the more precious and electrifying that grace is to us. So, the Gospel gives us enormous freedom to admit our flaws. The knowledge of our acceptance in Christ, in spite of our sin, causes us to delight in the One who has saved us so powerfully, instead of using it to get His attention or win His favor. Therefore, the Gospel changes everything. It brings down racial barriers by melting away racial pride OR inferiority. It brings down psychological problems by melting away self-inflation OR self-hatred. It brings down personal facades by freeing us to admit who we really are.

This is why, as we said above, the Gospel is not just the A-B-C's of the Christian life but the A-Z of the Christian Life. It is also why we noted that Paul constantly retells the Gospel for the issue at hand, always showing us that our life in Christ, or better, His life in us, flows out into our actions. This changes our entire paradigm so that now we are motivated by the One who has been obedient for and before us, we are comforted by the One who has suffered, we are delightful with the One who first delighted in us. In essence, we are changed by further recognition of our sin and further identifying with Christ, who paid a great price for that sin. It is with this in mind that we offer our whole lives in obedience, work, service, and worship.

### ***Implications for our church and our lives***

- A. **Churches with this growth model begin with the indicative and move to the imperative.** The indicative or the “who we are in Christ” leads to the imperative or the command. Obedience, action, worship, thanksgiving, and love flow from a response to God’s grace (Romans 12:1-2) Non-Gospel obedience says that the imperative leads to the indicative, i.e. If I do the right thing(s) then I am right with or loved by God. The Gospel says I obey b/c I’m accepted, not I’m accepted b/c I obey.
- B. **Churches with this growth model live in humility and reliance on the Holy Spirit.** We recognize Christ has already given us all we stand in need of, completely apart from our ability, and that our continued growth (sanctification) is dependent on Him, not just on us. Therefore, we seek Him in prayer, not bragging like the Pharisee (Luke 18) but calling out to Him in our helplessness. Growth comes through the power of the Holy Spirit, working by and with the Word, rooting idols out of our lives. Obedience comes from the knowledge of God’s majesty, beauty, and glory, and from the gratefulness for His grace.
- C. **Churches with this growth model follow God rather than simply following rules.** Rules are no longer our God. We seek God relationally and dynamically, not just from external actions. We seek not just to do the right things, but to do the right things for the *right reasons*.
- D. **Churches with this growth model seek Gospel obedience, not moralism/legalism.** We grow by believing the Gospel, recognizing more and more our sin and falling in love more and more with the God who loved us in spite of that sin. When our acceptance and love by Christ is more important than anything else, we won’t sin to get those other things, whether its approval, money, status, sex, etc.

- E. **Churches with this growth model produce longer lasting, more passionate servants of God.** This model of growth motivates from love and grace, not fear and intimidation, meaning that burn-out is less likely and that people serve and obey from a foundation of their love for God, not their fear of him.

**GREAT NEWS:  
QUESTIONS**

2-1. What do you think it really means to be a Christian? Give some personal examples about how following Christ has changed your life and continues.

2-2. Are you still awed by the love, mercy, generosity, and beauty of the Gospel of Christ? Does it inspire and motivate you or do? How?

2-3. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, we nearly always focus on the first, sinful brother who repents and comes home? But what about the second brother? Why had his heart become so hard and distant from the Father? Which brother do you identify more with, the younger or the older? Why?

2-4. In which areas of your life are you likely to become most judgmental? What do you think the remedy for this is?

2-5. What are your “besetting sins?” Have you ever admitted it/them to anyone? How were you treated? How does the Gospel address Christians in their sin? How do you plan to live out the Gospel in this way with others here at Greentree?

2-6. Spend some time charting yourself on the “Paul Graph.” What were your preconceptions about spiritual growth before looking at it? Now? What difference will this make in your life?