

# There are Some Things You Cannot Not Know

*Various passages*

September 20, 2015

## **Introduction:**

Our world has experienced an explosion of knowledge over the past few hundred years. Through science and technology, medicine and mechanics, arts and the humanities, we learn more and more about our world and how it works. And as our knowledge expands, so does our specialization in knowledge. It's rare these days to be a generalist in any chosen field. Medical students often specialize in a specific area, such as optometry or gynecology or pediatrics. You don't major in history in general but rather you pick a time period like the Middle-Ages or a culture like the Romans or even a particular person or event to like Abraham Lincoln or the Civil War to focus your studies upon. Carpenters may be skilled at building homes, but rarely do they have the expertise to install the electrical wiring or the plumbing without contracting that work out to those who do.

So one cannot be faulted for not knowing everything there is to know. I'm not expecting my dentist to give me advice on my eyesight. I don't expect my auto mechanic to help me parse Latin verbs. I wouldn't expect the world-renowned physicist Steven Hawkins to lecture effectively on the Peloponnesian War. But there are some things I do expect them to know, things that they simply cannot not know and do what they do. My dentist ought to know how to fill a cavity; he cannot not know that and be a dentist. My auto mechanic ought to know how to change the oil in my car; there's no way he cannot know that and do his job effectively. A school bus driver must know how to drive; you cannot not know how to drive and be a bus driver. That knowledge is essential to the job you are doing.

Well, the same thing holds true if you're a follower of Christ. There are some things you cannot not know as a Christian. It's not an issue if you don't know any Greek or Hebrew. You'll get by just fine if you cannot tell me what supralapsarianism means or if you can't articulate Anslem's ontological argument for the existence of God. But you must know and be able to articulate the gospel. Knowing and communicating the gospel is to a Christian what knowing how to change the oil is to auto mechanic. It is essential to your task. You cannot not know the gospel as a Christian. The gospel is what you believe in order to be saved, it's what you cling to as you follow Christ, and it's what you proclaim to others as you seek to fulfill the Great Commission.

Over the years I have frequently found that Christians do not know how to proclaim the gospel because they themselves don't understand it. When asked to explain it, they resort to clichés they've heard, or get some elements of it right but leave out the rest, or sometimes say things that are flat out wrong. This will not do. We cannot not know the gospel as Christians. Last week we heard Jesus call his disciples to go into all nations and make disciples and the very first and fundamental step to that call is understanding the gospel. You will not make any disciples to which you can then baptize and teach if you aren't clear on the gospel in your own head and can communicate it clearly with your own lips. We must understand clearly what the gospel is.

So the purpose of this message is a simple one: to help you know what the gospel is and to help you more effectively communicate it. Twice a year I preach on what the gospel is and I will continue to do so because I find that we cannot be reminded of it enough. What we're going to discuss this morning you need to know. You cannot not know this. So do not check out on me this morning. Be mentally engaged. Work hard at getting this into your head. I say this without a hint of overstatement that knowing the gospel is one of the single most important things you need to understand and communicate to others.

To that end, I want to talk about the gospel using four words. There's more to the gospel than just these four words, but these four words serve as easy memorable pegs for you to hang the other thoughts on. Those four words are as follows: **God, Sin, Christ, and Faith**. If you can remember these four words, these four gospel pegs, you'll go a long way in your ability to properly share the gospel with others. I want everyone here to burn those four words into your memory. What are they? **God, Sin, Christ, Faith**.

## 1. God

So let's begin with the first peg of the gospel and that's God. Whenever you're talking about the gospel you need to establish the foundation of the whole discussion by making sure you're clear on who God is. Now if the person you are witnessing to doesn't believe in God, then you obviously have a much more difficult hill to climb, because if someone doesn't believe there's a God, then talking about sin and Christ and the need for faith isn't going to make much sense. Unfortunately I don't have the time to get into how to deal with such a situation and instead assume you're speaking with a person who believes God exists. Even in our society still today, many people will acknowledge the existence of God, although they don't often agree on what he is like. Since there is so much misunderstanding about God, we cannot assume that when others speak of God they mean quite the same things we do.

If anything I've learned from the unbelievers I know on Facebook or those who post in the comments sections on blogs is that numerous people today have an exceptionally mushy view of God. God's character can be reduced to being a God of love who accepts everyone, who wants for their happiness no matter how they pursue it, and has really only one command, "Do not judge," which is readily applied to anyone who dares to call another person's personal pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment a sin. Or to use the phrase coined by the sociologist Christian Smith, when it comes to God, most people are Moralistic Therapeutic Deists, which says in effect that God exists to make you happy, to fulfill your needs, expects you live a half-way decent life, and is content to stay in the background and not interfere with your daily living.

If I'm in a charitable mood, I'd say this is a significantly deficient view of God. If I'm in a less charitable mood, I would say this is rank idolatry: it's a god of your own making. To say God is love is true, but it is to say far too little. So then there are three aspects of God that need to be clearly acknowledged if anyone is going to understand the rest of the gospel. So going with the peg metaphor, consider these as three coats you need to hang on this peg when talking about God.

The first is that *God is the Creator*. Now this isn't an invitation to get into a discussion about the days of creation or evolution or anything like this. In fact, it's best to avoid such discussion when you can: they are bunny trails and not the main issue. The point of this is much the same point the apostle Paul was making in Acts 17 when proclaiming the gospel to the men of Athens. He established God as the creator of all men and drew from it the fact that we are therefore accountable to him. If God created us, then we're not independent; we're nor lords of our private little universe. It means we owe God our allegiance. We live in his world that he created and are drawing breath because he gave us life.

Second, we need to understand that *God is holy*. That means God is without sin. He is pure and good and righteous in every way. There's neither evil nor wickedness with God. He is absolutely majestic and without moral stain. And as his creatures, we are to reflect his holiness in our lives. God repeatedly says in his Word, "Be holy as I am holy." In all we do, we are to be righteous, loving, kind, pure, and perfectly obedient. Since we were created in his image, we are to bear his image in our moral obedience to him as we reflect his purity in our lives.

Then third, we need to communicate that *God is just*. He will deal justly with evil and disobedience. He's not just going to let wickedness and sin go unpunished. Perfect justice will be done: all wrongs will be punished and righteousness will be rewarded. He cannot overlook evil and pretend it didn't happen. Nor will God forget wicked deeds and neither will he accidentally miss noticing them, such as if someone got away with sin when God wasn't looking. Any violation of the moral law of God will be dealt with in a just manner. God will not let anything just slide. He will righteously and justly deal with all sin and rebellion done against him.

So we have to begin the gospel by focusing upon God and in particular, hanging three very important coats on that peg: first we need to see him as our Creator to whom we are obligated to obey. Second we need to see that he is holy, without sin, and expects the same of us his creatures. And third that he is just, that he will rightly deal with all sin and wickedness and not forget about it or let anyone get away with violating his holy Word. There are of course many more things you could say about the attributes and perfections of God, but these three characteristic above all must be established at the outset in order to make sure people understand God as truly he is and not the false caricature of him made so often in our culture today.

So we begin with God but next we have to shift our attention to ourselves and our own condition before him, and so that brings us to the second peg of the gospel...

## **2. Sin**

Since God is our creator and is holy, we who are created in his image are commanded to be holy as he is holy. What that means is that we're to live in perfect obedience to him. Take the Ten Commandments as an example: Do not lie, do not steal, do not murder, do not covet, honor your father and mother. Those are all things God expects us to avoid because they are sinful. Furthermore, Jesus summed up the entire OT

Law by saying we are to first love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and second that we're to love our neighbors as ourselves. We have actions we're commanded to avoid and others that we need to do and we're to live our entire lives obeying those commands flawlessly. Just as God is without sin, so must we be.

So how are you doing with that? Can any of you say you've never sinned? Never told a lie? Never took something that wasn't yours? Never said a word in anger? Or on the positive side, have you loved God with all your heart? Have you consistently loved people with the same loving self-concern you have for yourself? Truth be told, it's not too difficult to get people to recognize they're far from perfect. It'll be a rare individual who claims to be without sin. On one level, it's easy to get people to admit they have at times lied and cursed and took God's name in vain and treated people in a less-than-loving manner. The vast majority of people recognize they do not live up to the moral standard of God perfectly. So getting people to acknowledge their sin is easy, but getting them to see the serious problem their sin causes is quite another.

Because of our wishy-washy view of God, we imagine him to look at sin in much the same way we do. We say, "Yeah, I'm not perfect, but I'm only human. As long as I don't do anything really, really bad and try to live a good life on a whole, I'll be okay." For most people, their sin doesn't seem all that bad. They figure as long as the good outweighs the bad, and their bad isn't *too* bad, God will say, "Well, boys will be boys" and will be forgiving of most things we do. They don't see their sin as causing a serious problem between them and God.

My friends, sin wouldn't be an issue by itself: the real problem with sin is what God thinks about it and more importantly, what he intends to do about it. The apostle Paul explains the gospel in his letter to the Romans and he begins by saying this, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..." Here's the problem when it comes to sin: God in his wrath will punish it. God's righteous judgment is the penalty we face for our sin. While we have a sin problem, it's the consequence of that sin that's the real danger. God's wrath is coming for those who disobey him. There is no looking the other way with God. There are no good deeds outweighing the bad deed with God. There's no sweeping it under the rug and saying "Oh well, they're only human." The wrath of God is coming to judge every word, every thought, every action that has failed to live up to his holy standard, no matter how small or great the transgression might be.

So can you see how the character of God from the first peg and our sinful behavior in the second peg goes together? We are obligated to our holy creator to obey him perfectly. But since we don't, God is also just to punish our sin in his wrath. Unless the people we're sharing the gospel with understand both that they are sinners and that God's will judge them for their sin, the gospel won't make much sense to them. You need to help them see that they need to be saved from something, and that something is the wrath of God. The number one problem we all have is that God's righteous wrath stands against us for our sin. We've all sinned and fallen short of God's holy standard and we are under the threat of God's wrath, which should we face it after death will result in eternal punishment in hell.

So then, the first two pegs – **God** and **Sin** – set up the problem. You have to start out with the bad news in order to get to the good news. Talking about a Savior is pointless until a person can see there is something they need to be saved from. So as you reach out to people on your *Salt & Light* list, you've got to begin with making sure they understand who God is correctly and that they see themselves as sinners who aren't in a right relationship with God because God's wrath is against them for their sin. But once that's clear, you're ready to talk about the way God's wrath can be appeased and that brings us then to the third gospel peg, which concerns...

### 3. Christ

We cannot not talk about Christ when proclaiming the gospel. Who Christ is and what he's done for us on the cross is at the heart and soul of the gospel message. We must be careful not to talk about our faith in vague ways that only refer to God in a generic manner, such that we tell people they need to believe in God. Yes, they do, but what in particular do they need to believe about God? Muslims believe in God. Jews believe in God. But in neither case would we say they are saved. Why? What is it that makes Christianity different from Judaism or Islam?

The answer is Christ. The person and work of Jesus Christ is the heart of the gospel and the heart of Christianity. He is the definitive solution to our sin problem. So we have to be able to explain to others who Christ is and what he did for us otherwise we will have completely missed the central message of our faith.

So if we can hang a couple of coats on this peg, the first coat concerns who Christ is and that means we have to help people understand that while Jesus was a great moral teacher and a miracle-worker, he was far more than that. The Bible repeatedly tells us, whether in Jesus' own words or in the words of his disciples, that Jesus was God made man. We're told that God is a Triune God, who exists as three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father sent his Son to become one of us, to be born a baby to Joseph and Mary, and to live a life of perfect obedience, which he did. Jesus perfectly obeyed God. He's the only one who lived up to God's command to "Be holy as I am holy." So Jesus lived a sinless life and in so doing showed us what God is like and what it means to be holy.

Now that's all fine and well as an example, but we need to hang another coat on the peg and that concerns what he did. Jesus died in our place on the cross. Jesus lived the sinless life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. He was innocent of sin, yet the Bible tells us God counted our sin as his sin on the cross. Jesus didn't have to die for his own sin – he was sinless – but God allowed him to take our punishment instead. As a result, the wrath of God was satisfied in Christ's death. In Christ, our sin has been punished. Justice has been served. God justly punishes sin as Christ takes our punishment for us. And then, three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, proving that he was vindicated by God and demonstrating what he promises to all who follow him: that they will be resurrected to new life where they will be with God for all eternity.

One easy way to think about what Christ did is thinking of it as an exchange. We give something to Christ we don't want and he gives to us something we desperately need. We give to Christ the guilt of our sin and Jesus in turn dies for that sin in order to satisfy the wrath of God that was against us. But in turn Jesus gives to us his righteousness. We owe God a sinless life which we didn't live, but Jesus did that for us. So Jesus takes our sin and gives us his righteousness. As a result, God is perfectly satisfied with us because of Christ. God's wrath is justly poured out against our sin and we in turn stand perfectly righteous in God's sight because we're clothed in Christ' righteousness.

So then when you share the gospel, make absolutely certain you talk about Jesus. There is no Christianity without Christ, no salvation without a Savior, no redemption without a Redeemer. We cannot not talk about Jesus and claim in any way that we've proclaimed the gospel. Personal testimonies are nice but the gospel isn't about you: it's about what Christ has done for you. When we proclaim the gospel, we must always talk about our Lord Jesus Christ.

But there's one more gospel peg we need to discuss. We've talked about **God**, about **Sin**, and about **Christ**, but fourth and finally it is necessary we tell people that they need to respond to what Christ has done with **faith**. So our fourth point...

#### 4. Faith

Salvation is not an automatic thing such that Jesus died for everyone and therefore now everyone is automatically going to go to heaven when they die. When you go out and tell people about Christ, you aren't done until you call them to respond by placing their faith in Christ. Now faith contains a couple of elements that you need to be clear on lest you and your listener get the wrong idea. Going once again with the analogy of coats hanging on a peg, think of two coats hanging on this peg of faith: the first is *repentance* and the second is *belief*.

*Repentance* is the turning away from sin. It's the recognizing of sin for what it is - an affront to a holy God - and saying, "I want to stop doing it." The Bible knows of no such thing as a person who has faith but shows no repentance. In fact, Scripture is clear that if a person continues in unrepentant, on-going sin while claiming at the same time that he's a believer, then he's a liar and the truth is not in him. The entire book of 1 John is all about making just that point! True faith always turns away from sin in repentance and begins to strive to live a life of righteousness that is pleasing to God. So when you proclaim the gospel, you need to be clear that repentance is an essential part of faith. If a person is to follow Christ, then he or she must turn away from their sin and disobedience and turn to Christ in humble obedience.

And second, they need to *believe*. That means not only must they believe certain facts to be true - such that Jesus was sent by God, lived a perfect sinless life, that he suffered on our behalf on the cross, that he rose from the dead three days later, and he ascended into heaven from whence he will come again to judge the earth -

not only must we believe those fact to be intellectually true, but we must also entrust ourselves to them. It means if we say we believe these facts about Jesus, then we need to respond to him personally and submit ourselves to him, to love him and obey him and treasure him and delight ourselves in him and seek of bring in pleasure and joy in how we live our lives.

I've often used this simple illustration to help explain it. Biblical faith is like flying on an airplane. You can say you believe the pilot can fly the plane intellectually while your feet are planted firmly on the ground, but you don't really have faith in the pilot until you hop on board the airplane. You only demonstrate faith when you entrust the person with something you value, and in this case, it's your life. Anyone can say, "I believe there is a God" but it's an entirely different thing to entrust yourself to him, to strive to obey him, to seek him so you can know him, and to love and treasure him above all else.

Since many people think that believing in Christ is nothing more than simply saying they believe he existed, you need to unpack what faith really means. Biblical faith is more than intellectual assent to propositional statements of truth: it is a personal reliance upon the person of Jesus Christ, to whom you call not just Savior but also Lord, who changes you when you turn to him, as sin loses its luster and you begin to desire him and his will for you in ever-increasing measure.

## Conclusion

So let's review as we close. What the four pegs of the gospel? **God, Sin, Christ,** and **Faith.** My fellow brothers and sisters in Christ here at Grace Fellowship, you must know the gospel and be able to explain it to others. You cannot not know this. Our Purpose Statement is that *Grace Fellowship exists to glorify God through worship, discipleship, service, and mission* and while the gospel is an important part of all the ways we glorify God, it is especially important when it comes to mission. Jesus has called us to go and make disciples and the way disciples are made begins with the proclamation of the gospel to the lost. We cannot fulfill the Great Commission individually or corporately as a church if we cannot explain the gospel clearly to others.

So as we enter into the fall, let me encourage you to redouble your efforts as reaching the lost. Be *Salt & Light* to our community. Use the card in your bulletin and identify unbelievers you can pray for, you can invite over or out to coffee, who you can have conversations with, and who you can proclaim the gospel to. Currently, we have too few people come to faith here. We need to change this. We can't keep priding ourselves on how we support global missions and yet see no fruit in our local missions. We need to go in obedience to our Lord and we need to be equipped to move beyond clichés and proclaim the gospel in its fullness, unpacking our four pegs of **God, Sin, Christ,** and **Faith.** We cannot not know the gospel and furthermore we cannot not go and seek out the lost. Our Lord commanded it of us and so we must do it, each of us. Let's pray.

**This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2013.**