

On the Job Training

Various passages

April 23, 2017

Introduction:

The summer after I graduated from high school and before I went off to college down in Savannah, GA, I got a job for a small company that illustrated instruction manuals and promotional material for various kinds of industrial hardware. The father of one of the students I had graduated with was aware of my interest in art and knew I was going to be studying to be an illustrator so he kindly offered me a job for the summer at his company in order to get me a “foot in the door” as they say. Unfortunately, the job I was hired for, while putting me in contact with the illustrators who worked there, didn’t actually involve any drawing at all. Instead, I was basically the delivery guy who was to drive around to pick up and drop off orders.

Now I guess that sounds easy enough, but they assumed far more of me than I was ready to live up to. I was mostly thrown into it and not given any instructions about how to handle these deliveries, or where I was to go precisely to drop them off, or especially what level of responsibility I had in the upkeep and maintenance of the vehicle. In short, I really didn’t know what I was doing and frankly I was a bit slow to catch on. I frequently dropped the ball and got people annoyed with me before anyone spelled out for me what exactly they expected me to do. Needless to say, both I and they were relieved when September came and I finally left for college.

Perhaps some of you have had those situations when you had a job that didn’t do much to train you and instead just threw you right into it and left you stunned like a deer looking at the on-coming headlights. Maybe that’s how some of you feel when it comes to the job we’ve been given as Christians to go and proclaim the gospel. You don’t deny that the biblical job description of being a follower of Christ involves telling other about the good news of the gospel, but as for how you actually do that, you feel inadequate at best or utterly incompetent as worse.

So that means if you’re a Christian, then we need to do a little on the job training to help you do your job well. Your job is to proclaim the gospel but sometimes we don’t feel we understand the gospel well enough to adequately explain it to others. As a result, we fall back into using clichés and snippets of words and phrases we’ve vaguely heard before but really don’t understand all that well. So today I’ve going to provide on the job training for you in regards to the gospel. Primarily I want to review for you what the gospel is and secondarily remind you to whom you are to proclaim it to. So let’s begin by answering the first question...

What is the gospel?

When thinking of the gospel, I find one can break in down into four main components: God, sin, Christ, and faith. If you can remember these four words, they will help you to have a simple outline of what needs to be communicated in order for you to correctly

proclaim the gospel. I like to think of them as pegs that you hang other ideas on, much like one can hang coats on wall pegs or on a coat rack at home. So the first thing you need to have down is those four words: God, sin, Christ, faith. I don't think memorizing these four words are beyond the abilities of anyone here, so let's make sure we have that first. If you can simply remember - God, sin, Christ, faith - you'll be well on your way to properly explaining the gospel to someone.

Of course, those four words are just an outline of the gospel. Each of those words needs to be unpacked. So to that end, let's spend some time together unpacking what each of those mean. So let's begin first with...

1. God

When proclaiming the gospel, people must first have an accurate understanding of God. There are many people who have a faulty understanding of God. Too often, he is viewed only through the lens of his love, such that God is seen as loving and accepting everyone, no matter what they do. So you can't assume people have a correct view of God. People in our culture today tend to emphasize the parts they like and either minimize or reject the part they don't. So whenever you witness to people you need to begin with God, and there are two aspects of God's character you need to highlight that are essential to any gospel presentation, but many not be part of their cultural misunderstanding of him.

First, it needs to be communicated that God is holy. This means God is without sin. Everything about God is righteous and pure in every way. God does not sin and furthermore he cannot stand to have sin in his presence. As a result, if we're to be in a right relationship with God, then we also need to be holy. In Lev. 19:2, God demands of his people, "*You shall be holy, for I am holy.*" God's holiness sets the standard that we, his creation, are to follow.

But not only is God holy, he's also just. God will judge everyone against his standard of holiness. Romans 14:10 says "*we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.*" To those who obeyed him, he will reward with eternal life. To those who disobeyed, he will justly judge and punish. God is a just judge who will rightly reward and punish all those whom he has created.

For those of us who have gone to church for many years, this may seem obvious to us we cannot assume people have this same understanding of God. So we have to be certain those whom we're speaking with are clear that God isn't indifferent about what we do but rather he is a holy, righteous God who demands we be holy. And should we fall short of that expectation, God will judge us for our sins. If we don't start with the righteous character of God, the rest of the elements of the gospel won't make much sense, so when proclaiming the gospel, don't assume the person you are speaking with views God the same way you do. Perhaps at one time we could have made that assumption with the general populous, but no longer. You need to be explicit in explaining God's holiness and his righteous judgment against sin.

So we begin with **God**, but then we next turn our attention to ourselves and our **sin**.

2. Sin

We've all sinned, each and every one of us. Take just the Ten Commandment and we are guilty of breaking all ten. Sometime we break them in a spectacular fashion and other times we may break them subtly, but no matter how you slice it, we've fallen short of the standard God laid out for us, that we're to be holy as he's holy. None of us come even remotely close to obeying God perfectly. Even the deeds we think are good really aren't because they're tainted with sinful self-centered desires and motivations. As a result, the prophet Isaiah said, "*All our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.*" Our sins of pride and self-centeredness so taint all we do that even in our finest moments, we still fall short of God's holy standard. As a result, Scripture says that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

When explaining the gospel, you need to make sure people understand this. People need to recognize that they are sinners. This is especially important because many people operate on the assumption that either their sin isn't all that bad or is at least mitigated by the good things they've done. You probably won't run across too many people who think they are always good, all the time. The vast majority of people are honest enough to recognize they can be selfish and prideful and tell lies and do other things that they know isn't right.

But the challenge comes in when they believe the good things they do off-set the bad. I like the use a school analogy at this point because we've all went to school and know how it works. In school you don't need a perfect grade to pass. Rare is the person who gets every problem right all semester in Algebra class. You may get the exceptional Brainiac who gets 100% in class, but most of us common mortals will end up with a 90% or and 80% or even squeak on by with a 70%. But provided that over all we get more right than wrong, we pass the class.

That's how many people look at their sin today. "Sure, I'm not perfect, but 90% of the things I do are good. I may have my occasional moments of anger or selfishness or say some things that I probably shouldn't have said, but I'm still a good guy. I'm not going out setting up Ponzi schemes to rob elderly people out of their life savings or shooting random people at a shopping mall, so on a whole, I'm not too bad."

But the problem with that thinking is God doesn't operate on school standards. His grading scale is summed up in the passage in Lev. 19 that I read before, "*Be holy as I am holy.*" To be holy is to be without sin. None. Not once, at any time for any reason. So living a life that's 80% or 90% or even 99% good is not good enough. In order to pass the test of life, as it were, God says we need to be 100% righteous all of the time without any sin whatsoever. Unfortunately, none of us have made the grade. As a result, every human being deserves eternal death in hell. We all stand under the righteous verdict of God as guilty of sin and therefore under judgment.

So we have to start here, with God's holiness and our sin and what God must justly do about it. I'll remind you that this is exactly what the apostle Paul is doing in the book of Romans. We've spent quite a few weeks now unpacking the fact that the wrath of God is being revealed against man's unrighteousness. Paul spends the first three chapters of Romans addressing our sin and the threat of God's holy wrath against it. It does Paul no good to talk about Christ as their Savior unless they recognize there is something they need to be saved from. Just as nobody is going to worry about failing a class if they think an 80% is fine, so also will nobody see their need for Christ if they think they're acceptable to God by being a generally good person. Until those you proclaim the gospel to understand the gravity of their sin and recognize the impending wrath of a holy God, they won't seek a savior because they won't believe they're in any danger. As a result, the good news of the gospel must begin with the bad news that we are sinners in thought, word, and deed who have offended a holy, righteous God who will judge and punish us for our sin.

But now let's get to the good news. While God is a holy God who demands we also be holy and while we have all fallen short of that standard and deserve hell because of our sins, God has sent us his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. So the third peg we need to unpack in every gospel message concerns **Christ**.

3. Christ

Jesus is the solution to our problem. God sent his Son to become a one of us in order to save us from the consequences of our sin. How does Jesus do this? Well, he does two things for us that we could not do for ourselves. First, Jesus lived the perfect, sinless life we should have lived. We owe God a sinless life, a life of righteousness. Jesus lived that life. He provided the perfect obedience we owe.

Second, because he lived a perfect, sinless life, he didn't need to suffer the wrath of God for sin. But he could suffer as an innocent sacrifice for someone else. He dies, though he is innocent, while we go free, though we are guilty. And since Jesus is not only a man but also God, his death is of infinite value so that he can die and atone not just for the sin of one man but for the sins of infinite men.

So Jesus saves us both by his life and by his death. First, he lives the perfect holy life we ought to have lived and he dies the death we ought to have died. As a result, God's justice against our sin is satisfied by Christ because his wrath was poured out upon Jesus on the cross, and Christ satisfies the righteous requirement of God's Law by obeying it perfectly for us though his sinless life.

So then, when proclaiming the gospel, we absolutely have to tell people about who Christ is and what he did for us because he is the solution to the problem posed by the effect of our sin on a holy, righteous God. The fact that Jesus is God, that he lived a life without sin, died on the cross in our place, incurring God's wrath for us, are all essential elements to the message of the gospel. Jesus is our Savior and we need to communicate how Jesus was able to save us from God's wrath for our sins. Simply saying, "Jesus died for you," while true, doesn't explain much. Why

did Jesus have to die? What did his death accomplish? Being clear that Jesus died to suffer God's wrath for our sins in our place should be part and parcel of every explanation of the gospel.

But there is one more element of the gospel we need to cover. Although Jesus died to satisfy God's wrath against sin, the only way to receive that gracious sacrificial gift of God is through faith. So the last peg of the gospel we need to understand and communicate to others is that of **faith**.

4. Faith

This is the part of the gospel message that I find frequently gets left out when I ask people to explain the gospel to me. Usually Christians can articulate the idea of Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross, but then never mention what a person must do as a result of it. To talk about Jesus' death on the cross without indicating how someone must respond in order to gain the benefits of Christ's redeeming work is to imply that Jesus saves everyone, regardless of what they do. Jesus' redemptive work on the cross is not automatically applied: it has to be received by faith.

Now it's important we talk about faith and not muddy it up with Christian jargon like, "You need to ask Jesus into your heart" or "Pray to receive Christ." Nowhere does the Bible talk about responding to the gospel in such a manner. We need to stop using vague and unbiblical lingo and use biblical terminology. What we need to call people to do is to respond to Christ in faith, or another way of saying it is they need to believe in Jesus. The call to believe or to put one's faith in Christ is used hundreds of times throughout Scripture and should be used by us when we proclaim the gospel. The Bible doesn't say, "Ask Jesus into your heart" and you will be saved; it says, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.*" Paul says in Ephesians 2, "For by grace you have been saved, through *faith*" not because you prayed the "sinner's prayer." A call to faith and belief in Christ is the final, necessary element to the gospel proclamation.

Now the terms "faith" and "believe" are essentially synonymous and are used interchangeably throughout Scripture. But rather than simply assuming we all know what it is to "believe" in something, it's would also be wise to make sure we elaborate on what this means when talking with people so as to avoid any misunderstanding. Often times we use the word "believe" in the sense of "giving mental assent to some factual truth." For example, I like to explain it like this (feel free to use this illustration if it helps you): You might say, "I believe Abraham Lincoln was the sixteenth President of the United States." When you say you "believe" that, you're saying you recognize that fact to be true. You are giving mental acceptance to a fact. But "believing" or "having faith" in Scripture means far more than that. Lots of people will say they "believe" in God much the same way they believe in Abraham Lincoln as a historical reality. But even demons have that kind of belief. James 2:19 says even demons believe certain factual truths about God, but that doesn't help them.

Real biblical belief is closer to the idea of trust. For example, every time you get on an airplane, you're demonstrating that you trust the pilot. It's easy to say you believe the pilot can fly a plane while you're on the ground, looking out at the runway. But you don't move to having faith until you get on the plane and let him fly you to your destination. Only then have you begun to trust the pilot because it is only then that you have truly entrusted to him someone of value, namely your life!

So when God calls people through the gospel to believe in Christ, he's not merely asking for people to give mental assent to facts about Jesus, although recognizing certain facts about Jesus are important. He's calling them to entrust themselves to him with their lives. It's a call to stop trusting in their own works or the false idols of the world to provide salvation and entrust their lives to Christ by turning away from those things and living instead for him. To use the airplane analogy, it means trusting Jesus to be the pilot of your life by putting your life in his hands.

So when proclaiming the gospel, you need to call people to faith in Christ. They need to turn from their selfish sin and entrust themselves to him, relying on Christ to be the way God's wrath against their sin is justly satisfied, so that when they face God's righteous judgment, they believe God will count Christ's life and death as if it was their own. Telling people about Christ without inviting them to respond in faith to Christ falls short of a true gospel presentation. In order for the benefits of Christ's life and death to be reckoned to us, we need to receive it by faith.

So then, those are the four pegs of the gospel and some examples of how to go about unpacking them. Obviously, you should tailor things according to the situation and the person you are addressing, but nevertheless, those four elements need to be present: God, sin, Christ, and faith. But now for our last few minutes together, I want to answer the second question we need to be clear on in today's on-the-job training and that is...

Who do we proclaim the gospel to?

I have three answers to that question and the first one is the most obvious: **proclaim the gospel to unbelievers**. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. Do you have friends and family who don't know Christ? You need to tell them the gospel. It's all fine and well that you do good deeds for them and treat them kindly and say nice things to them, but people won't be saved by your example. The gospel is good news that needs to be explained and proclaimed.

So let me first encourage you to do your job. Evangelism is your responsibility. The Great Commission is not a special assignment given only to the apostles and pastors and missionaries: it's for all of us. I can understand that sometimes you feel like I did at that job I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon where I felt clueless at times, but that doesn't excuse you. I preach on "What is the Gospel?" twice a year so that at minimum you can get the basics of the gospel down in your mind. I don't want any of you to neglect evangelism because you feel inadequate so this sermon is meant to help you. Work at committing in your mind what the four main elements of the gospel are.

But then go out and do it. Let me remind you what our evangelism plan is here at GFC: we aren't about creating huge events that you invite your friends to where I or a guest speaker preaches. No, our goal is for each of you to be *Salt & Light* wherever is it God has placed you: with your family, in your neighborhood, at your school or workplace. You are to look at the opportunities God has uniquely given to you and do four things: identification, invitation, conversation, and proclamation. Identify three unbelievers you have regular contact with and begin to pray for them. The look for ways to invite them over to your home out to coffee. Enter in conversations with them: get to know them. Then when the time is right, proclaim the gospel to them. That's what we are all supposed to be doing.

But secondly, I add to this that we should also **proclaim the gospel to believers**. We need to interact with each other in gospel-focused ways. People who are struggling with sin need to be reminded of the gospel, that in Christ their sins are forgiven and so there is no condemnation awaiting them. We need to be encouraged by the gospel truth that while we were once slaves to sin, the Holy Spirit gives us power to say "no" to sin and "yes" to righteousness. The gospel is something we need for others to remind us of so that we don't fall back into the trap of thinking God loves us because of what we've done or is angry with us for what we've failed to do. The gospel helps us to keep our feet on the path of righteous by reminding us to truth the in righteousness of Christ and now our own.

Then third and finally, **proclaim the gospel to yourself**. You need to tell yourself every day that while you are a sinner and deserve God's wrath, through faith you've been forgiven in Christ. God loves and accepts you not on the basis of anything within you but solely because of what Christ has done for you. There is no better cure for anxiety, self-doubt and discouragement than the good news of the gospel. So then, preach it to yourself. Remind yourself daily what it is God has done for you in Christ. The gospel is necessary to receive salvation and necessary to faithfully continue in that salvation. We all need the gospel: unbelievers, fellow believers, and you, so preach it to yourself as well as to others.

Conclusion

So then, I hope this on the job training in the gospel has been helpful to you. I hope as a result of this message the basic of the gospel have been made clear to you and that you have greater confidence in explaining them to others. But now, we have a job to do. As you leave the sanctuary this morning and head off into another week or work and friendship, of school and family, go and proclaim the gospel. Be *Salt & Light* to those God has placed into your life. Christ has given us the job to proclaim the greatest news in all the world to those we know, so Grace Fellowship, let's get to work!

Please bow your heads with me now as I pray...

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