

Small Group Preparation:: Week Four

Remember

- It is about you experiencing the gospel first. So take time to walk through this stuff ahead of time, spending time thinking through it, answering the questions for your life, being gut level honest.
- After that, pray for the group members that you and they will be transformed by the gospel.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you through the material and listen as you go.
- It is not about getting through the material or about having the right answers. Groups work best when you facilitate discussion and people feel free to participate and learn from each other. Think through questions that will facilitate discussion.
- As we are experiencing more and more of the transforming power of the gospel, our hearts will want to share it. Being on mission will be a natural overflow of the work of the gospel.

Read this before you meet

- ***Read and think on the Bible passages:*** Luke 18:9-14. Before reading, ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Stop and make note of anything that stands out to you: a question, a word, a phrase, a thought, a reaction. This is usually evidence of the Spirit trying to speak. Then think more on these questions: what does the passage say?; what does the passage mean?; what does the passages mean to you (how does it apply to your life)?
- ***Read the article*** and make note of any reactions you have or questions you have that you could use to spur on group discussion.
- ***Complete the Right and Wrong Exercise.***
- ***Big idea of the material:*** The topic of conversation this week is dishonesty, which is another way we shrink the gospel, minimizing our sinfulness so that we may gain a sense of righteousness apart from Christ. Whereas performance was about making God out to be less than he is, self-righteousness is about making ourselves out to be better than we really are. Self-righteousness refers to gaining a right relationship with God through our self-effort. Christ-righteousness on the other hand means to gain a right relationship with God through trusting in what Christ has already done.
- ***Needs of the group:*** Most of us are walking around trying to earn a relationship with God through our self-effort. It means I want to look good and be right with God and earn others' approval through my performance. I usually use Christ to help me be enough, be together, get it right. Christ on the other hand wants that "self" or "flesh" to die and for me to rely on what He has done in order to be enough. ***One of the goals of this lesson is for group members to become more honest in admitting what they are relying on apart from Christ. Another goal is that God would break us of our self-righteousness and make us humble and dependent on Christ.***

Thrive Small Group:: Week Four

Connect

1. Take time to relationally connect with your group member.
2. Review and ask these questions:
 - What did you **learn** last week about the gospel?
 - How did you **experience** the gospel this week?
 - What opportunities did you have to **live** the gospel with or **give** the gospel to someone this week?
 - Make sure you as a leader also share.
 - Follow-up on last week's assignment: If group members haven't already touched on this answer, ask "How have you seen yourself living like an orphan or like a son/daughter this week?"

Pray

Take a moment and have the group pray (if they feel comfortable), bringing the need for the gospel before God and asking the Holy Spirit to speak through His Word and this study to make the gospel real in everyone's hearts.

Transition

The topic of conversation this week is dishonesty, which is another way we shrink the gospel, minimizing our sinfulness so that we may gain a sense of righteousness apart from Christ. Whereas performance was about making God out to be less than he is, self-righteousness is about making ourselves out to be better than we really are. Self-righteousness refers to gaining a right relationship with God through our self-effort. Christ-righteousness on the other hand means to gain a right relationship with God through trusting in what Christ has already done.

Scripture

Have different members of the group read Luke 18:9-14.

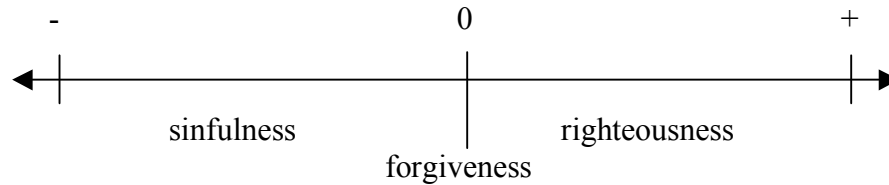
- In summary, what does the passage say? What does the passage mean?
- What stood out to group members as they read?
- Other questions:
 - Compare the Pharisee and the tax collector.
 - Who is the "good" character in the story? Who is the "bad" character? Why?
 - Which character do group members most identify with? Why?
 - How have you been acting like a Pharisee lately? What do we not like about being the Pharisee?
 - What about the good things the Pharisee was doing? They aren't the bad things, so why is he the bad guy in the story?

Read the Article

- Discussion Questions:
 - How is it that we shrink the gospel through dishonesty?
 - In plain English, what is passive righteousness?

- Agree or disagree: you are far worse than you think you are.
- Can you identify with Larry's experience of changing a behavior only to discover that the underlying root hasn't changed? Share an example of how you've seen this in your own life.
- Looking at the types of righteousness, which one do you most identify with? Why? What effect has this had on people in your life?
- Are there other types of righteousness you have exhibited this week? I.e. clean room righteousness, grade righteousness, ministry righteousness, exercise righteousness?

- Key point to make: Have everyone draw a timeline on their paper:



Most of us believe that when we accept Christ and become Christians, Jesus forgives our sins and pays our debt, bringing our account to zero. We then work our way to become more and more like Christ, trying to accrue righteousness in our account. What we fail to realize is that, according to 2 Corinthians 5:21, at the point of believing in Christ, we are not only forgiven, but all of Christ's righteousness is added to our account as well. That means that I am not only forgiven of my sin, but when God looks at me He sees me as perfectly righteous in Christ. If we really believed this to be true, how would our lives be different?

Exercise

- Hand out the exercise.
- Read the paragraph at the top and give people a few minutes to answer the questions.
- Discuss the answers to the questions. What practical difference would it make to get your sense of righteousness from Jesus instead of your rules?

Wrap-up

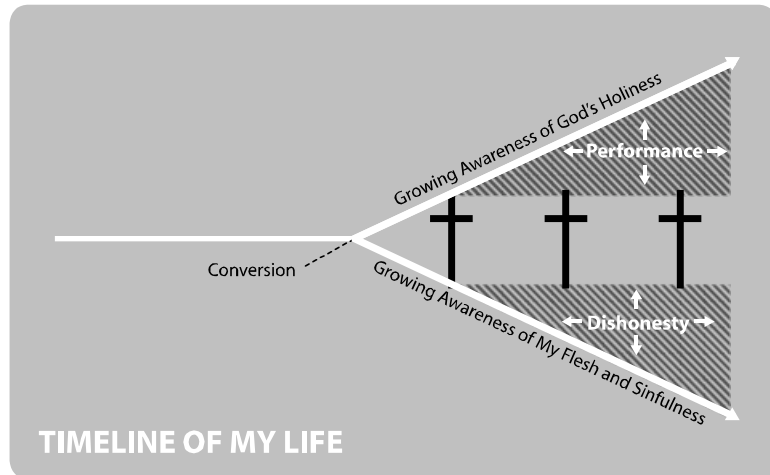
- Does anyone have any additional questions about what we learned today?
- How has what you learned impacted you?
- Are there any final comments?
- Have a group member close in prayer.

Shrinking the Cross Through Dishonesty

WEEK THREE ARTICLE

In the last two weeks we have used a visual illustration to better understand the gospel and how it functions in our lives. Last week we considered how forgetting our identity in Christ causes us to minimize the gospel through performance. This week, we want to look at another way we shrink the cross and reduce its impact in our lives.

Notice that the bottom line of the diagram is labeled “Increasing Awareness of My Flesh and Sinfulness.” This does not mean that I am becoming more sinful. (Actually, if I’m growing in Christ, I’ll be starting to see victory over sin in my life!) Rather, this line shows that when the gospel is functioning correctly in our lives, our *awareness* of our own sinfulness is consistently growing. We are realizing more and more fully “how deep the rabbit hole goes.” We are seeing that we are more deeply sinful than we first imagined.



Let’s use an example to make this practical. When Larry first trusted in Jesus, his most obvious sin was a foul and perverse mouth. He would lash out in profanity at anyone who irritated him. As he grew in Christ, he began to control his tongue and “clean up his language.” Now Larry rarely uses profanity and is actually very self-controlled in his language. But the gospel has also shown Larry that his foul mouth was only a symptom of a deeper problem, for “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). Though Larry has begun to control the external expression of his sin, he is just tapping into the deep well of anger and selfishness in his heart that can only be rooted out by the deep work of the gospel. Furthermore, he is realizing that Scripture not only commands the control of negative speech, but also the positive and uplifting use of our tongues (Eph. 4:29). Larry is seeing that he is more sinful than he knew. And he is seeing that true spiritual change requires not just behavior modification, but heart transformation.

One of the most beautiful truths of the gospel is the doctrine of passive righteousness. That is, Jesus has not just forgiven us of our sin, canceling our debt before God, but he has also credited to us his positive righteousness. Romans 3 speaks of a righteousness *from* God which comes to us *through* faith: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...” (Romans 3:21-22). Of this *passive* righteousness, Martin Luther writes:

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It is called 'passive righteousness' because we do not have to labor for it... It is not righteousness that we work for, but righteousness we receive by faith. This passive righteousness is a mystery that someone who does not know Jesus cannot understand. In fact, Christians do not completely understand it and rarely take advantage of it in their daily lives... When there is any fear or our conscience is bothered, it is a sign that our 'passive' righteousness is out of sight and Christ is hidden.

The person who wanders away from 'passive' righteousness has no other choice but to live by 'works' righteousness. If he does not depend on the work of Christ, he must depend on his own work. So we must teach and continually repeat the truth of this 'passive' or 'Christian' righteousness so that Christians continue to hold to it and never confuse it with 'works' righteousness.

Because of the pervasiveness of sin, however, we commonly "wander away from passive righteousness." Instead of relying on Jesus' righteousness, we rely on our own. We adjust the record, making ourselves out to be better than we actually are.

How does this happen? Look again at the bottom line of the chart. Growing in our awareness of our sinfulness is not fun! It means admitting – to ourselves and others – that we are not as good as we think we are. It means confronting the complex web of "compulsive attitudes, beliefs, and behavior" (Richard Lovelace) that sin has created in us. If we are not resting in Jesus' righteousness, this growing awareness of our sin becomes a crushing weight. We buckle under its load and fall into dishonesty ("I'm not *that* bad"), comparison ("I'm not as bad as *those* people"), and self-righteousness ("Here are all the *good* things I've done"). Because we don't want to see how sinful we really are, we spin the truth in our favor.

Of the Jewish people in his own day, Paul writes: "[T]hey did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own" (Romans 10:3). When we do not rest in the righteousness that comes from God in the gospel, we will make *something* our functional source of righteousness. We will trust that thing, rather than Jesus, to build our reputation and give us a sense of worth and value. Here are some examples:

- **Job Righteousness:** God helps those who help themselves. If I work hard, God will reward me.
- **Family Righteousness:** If I just do things right as a parent, I will be accepted by God/others/myself.
- **Theological Righteousness:** I have good theology. Of course God is pleased with me!
- **Intellectual Righteousness:** I am better read, more articulate, and more culturally savvy than others, which obviously makes me superior.
- **Schedule Righteousness:** I am self-disciplined and rigorous in my time management. God is pleased with my stewardship of time.
- **Flexibility Righteousness:** In a world that's busy, I'm flexible and relaxed. I always have time for others. God appreciates my laid-back demeanor.

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- **Mercy Righteousness:** I care more about the poor and disadvantaged than other people, and this makes me better in the eyes of God.
- **Legalistic Righteousness:** I don't drink, smoke, or chew, or date girls who do. God is pleased by my moral convictions.
- **Financial Righteousness:** I manage money wisely and stay out of debt, so God must think highly of me.
- **Political Righteousness:** If you really love God, you'll vote for *my* candidate.
- **Tolerance Righteousness:** I am open-minded and charitable toward those who don't agree with me. In fact, I'm a lot like Jesus that way!

These are just a few examples; perhaps you can think of many more (think of anything that gives you a sense of being “good enough” or better than others). These sources of functional righteousness disconnect us from the power of the gospel. They allow us to find righteousness in what we do instead of honestly confronting the depth of our sin and brokenness. Furthermore, each of these sources of righteousness is also a way of judging and excluding others! When we rely on them, we implicitly elevate ourselves and condemn those who aren't as “righteous” as we are. In other words, finding righteousness in these things leads us into more sin, not less.

To fight back against our tendency to shrink the gospel through dishonesty, we must reject false sources of righteousness and once again preach the gospel to ourselves – especially the truth of passive righteousness. We must repent of our self-righteousness. And we must cling to the gospel promise that all of our righteousness is in Christ. God is pleased with us because he is pleased with Jesus. We can do nothing to earn his favor, because we already have it. Seeing our sin is not scary or embarrassing. It's actually worshipful because Jesus has died for all of it, and liberating because we are no longer defined by it! Our righteousness is in him. The good news of the gospel is not that God makes much of us, but that God frees us to make much of Jesus.

We never outgrow the gospel. As we realize our tendencies toward dishonesty and self-righteousness, we must repent of sin and believe anew in the promises of the gospel. This is the consistent pattern of the Christian life – repentance and faith, repentance and faith, repentance and faith. As we walk this way, the gospel will take root more deeply in our souls and the cross will become “bigger” in the day-to-day reality of our actual lives.

This material was designed for Coram Deo Church Community small groups. Much of the content has been adapted from Sonship (© World Harvest Mission, 2006). Questions? Contact Will Walker (will@cdomaha.com) or Bob Thune (bob@cdomaha.com).

Right and Wrong

WEEK THREE EXERCISE

We often come up with certain rules or laws, believing that if we keep them, we are more “right” before God. It is then only a small step before we start judging other people based on their keeping (or breaking) of these rules or laws. The rules that we make for ourselves are often good things. However, we often abuse them. For example, as we struggle with the desire to be in control of our lives, we erect laws that try to maintain that control. These laws could be as simple as “Don’t cut me off the road”, or “The house has to be kept tidy.” When people break these laws, we feel that we are losing control, and that people do not respect us. Moreover, we feel that we are right and they are wrong. We end up using our rules and laws to condemn others and to prove just how “right” we are.

Application Questions:

1. Give an example of a rule that you have made for yourself and others that makes you feel good when kept, but irritated or depressed when broken.

2. How has your rule-keeping given you a sense of self-righteousness?

3. How does being mastered by this rule keep you from genuinely loving other people? Be specific.

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