

Gospel-Centred Living

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[0 : 00] While you remain standing, I pray. Father, we do pray that you would speak to us from your word this morning and that you'd be at work in our hearts to transform us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, please sit down, friends. Now, just in case some of you didn't get inserts when you came in with the Bible reading in them, well, that's just a slightly different translation to the one we have here.

And so if you're looking for it in your Bibles, it's Ephesians chapter 4, and you can find it on page 951. Now, is our sound working? Is that all right?

No, yes. Is the volume all right, friends? Just someone up the back there, tell us. Yes, it is okay. Good. Now, friends, I want to do something a little unusual this morning.

I want to introduce you to some elements of my wardrobe. It's all right. You'll be safe. Let me show you these elements.

[1 : 03] This is the first one. This is the cap that I carry around in my backpack. It's got my Bible. It's got the logo of my Bible software on the front of it.

So that's cap number one. Exhibit number one, you might say. Exhibit number two, somewhere here, is my great, very bright Papua New Guinean cap that I bought two years ago.

I don't wear it very often because it's a bit bright for me, you know. But nevertheless, it hangs just beside the door so that if I need a cap when I go out, I can grab this one. Exhibit number three.

This one is kept in the car. This one's advertising for Nike, really, but I don't know where I got it. But it's the cap I use for walking the dogs.

It sits in the back of the car. I just grab it along with the leads and so on. This is my classier hat. This is my Kubra, complete with feather I found in the outback somewhere.

[2 : 06] And that's, you know, I don't know, for better occasions, I suppose. It's been around most of the country in one shape. Now, this is the other one. This is when I go on holidays later on this week.

This is the one I'll take, especially when I go to hot climates, because if I'm travelling, I go to hot climates, it can be scrunched up into about that small and can expand to being, you know, your normal hat that looks vaguely respectable.

So there are all my hats. Now, let me tell you a little bit about these. The wearing of hats for me goes back about 25 to 30 years.

Now, you see, 25 to 30 years ago, a number of things happened. First, I began to lose hair.

Second, like many others in society, I became increasingly aware of the link that there is between sun and skin cancer.

Do you remember the 1981 campaign of slip, slop, slap and all of that, that has continued on? And then, in 1994, we moved to the land of sunshine, Western Australia.

[3 : 17] And daily, even in winter, you can feel the heat of the Western Australian sun on your head. And with decreasing amounts of hair, it was very important that I wore a hat.

So I got into the habit of carrying hats everywhere. Now, the reason I've done this is to explain to you that the most crucial thing in my hat wearing is what caused me to start wearing hats.

You see, deep underneath all of that, there was a change of mind. Somewhere, somehow, something changed my mind.

And it convinced me that there was a link between sun and cancer. And from that time on, I have scattered hats through my existence. Hats are the end result of a change of mind for me.

My change of mind began to be reflected in my actions. Friends, it is very hard to change behavior without changing minds.

[4 : 18] Change of mind breeds an attitude which, in turn, breeds action, which, in turn, breeds a change of behavior. Now, friends, the Apostle Paul knew this.

He knew that the people he lived and ministered to lived in a world deeply affected by sin. They lived in a world shaped by the framework of their culture and of their upbringing. They lived in a world which he says in Ephesians 2 was under the power of the devil and formed by the devil's rule. But then they heard the gospel.

And the gospel told them, look, you can escape the power of the devil and you can escape his rule and you can escape the consequences of his rule, that is, death.

And the gospel says God acted in Christ and you could be saved by grace through faith in what Christ had done on the cross. And so what these Christians in Ephesus did is they accepted the gospel.

[5 : 22] And as a result, they were raised up with Christ. And Paul says they were seated in the heavenly places with Christ. But then he knew that their minds and their actions needed to be reshaped by the very same thing.

It wasn't just salvation that had happened. It needed to have impact on lives. And you can see that this is what Paul is doing in the book of Ephesians. In chapters 1 to 3, he lets them into the mind of God.

He shows them this is God's gospel-centered plan. He works on changing, then he works on changing their behavior. He's changed their mind and their perspective in chapters 1 to 3.

In chapters 4 to 6, he moves to show them the impact that that perspective will have on their daily gospel-centered existence. He moves to their actions.

And he says that thing that God has done must shape your life and your behavior. I need to really make myself clear here. You see, we live in a world, says the Scriptures, that is under the grip of the evil one.

[6 : 30] We live in a world shaped by the devil and by evil. And this has deeply shaped us. But if we are Christians, then at the same time we are not of that world.

We have received the gospel. We have been saved by grace through faith. We stand under the influence of one greater than the evil one, of the God of all the earth.

The gospel has given us a God-centered, gospel-centered perspective. And it is expected by God that this will change our conduct in the midst of this evil world. It will saturate every aspect of our being, every part of our actions.

This is what Ephesians is saying. 1 to 3, the gospel. 4, 1 to 6 says, this is the impact of the gospel for God's people together, the church. Verses 17 of chapter 4 to 6, verse 24, this is the impact that the gospel has for your living day by day.

So with that in mind, let me take you for a quick scan through chapters 4 through to 6. So you'll need your Bibles open at this point, so either that outline or your Bibles. And let me refresh you where we were a couple of weeks ago.

[7 : 44] Do you remember back to Ephesians 4, verse 1? Paul starts with the word, therefore. In other words, he's saying, therefore, in the light of God's great gospel-centered plan from chapters 1 to 3, in the light of what God has done for you in Christ, walk worthily of the calling you have received.

In Ephesians 2, verse 15, Paul talked about Christians being a new humanity. In chapter 4, verse 1 to 16, he says, well, be that new humanity. You are one in Christ.

Keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. You are so bound together in Christ that you should be growing together into Christ. Press on together in one body, growing into one mature person in Christ.

And then, Paul turns to daily life in verses 17. So have a look at what he says. He says, the Gentiles walk in futility.

That is, Gentiles, he says, well, they're darkened in their understanding. Gentiles are ignorant and hard of heart and promiscuity of every kind and every kind of impurity is the result.

[8 : 54] Now look at verse 20 in chapter 4. Paul says that Christians are different. You see, we Christians have come to know truth in Jesus. We have taken off the former way of life and we are being renewed in the spirit of our minds and we have put on the new self, a new humanity and this new self is created in God's likeness.

This is who we are. And because this is who we are, our whole being, our way of life is to change. Look at Ephesians 4, verse 25 through to chapter 5, verse 2. Paul gives some specific examples of how Christians should now live.

Verse 20 or verse 25. Christians don't lie. Now you may not have experienced that, but that's what Paul says Christians ought to be like. Christians don't lie. Instead, Christians speak the truth.

If Christians are angry, well, they don't let it be dominated by the devil whose kingdom they no longer belong to. No, they allow it to be dominated by God whose kingdom they belong to.

Christians don't steal.

Instead, Christians work to support themselves and share with others. Christians don't have foul mouths. Verse 29. Instead, Christians work toward others to build them up.

[10:05] Christians have received grace from God, so they reflect grace even in their language, in their speaking. They, you see, have been sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption.

And that Holy Spirit is the agent of reconciliation and unity. Chapter 2, verse 18 and 22. And so any foul speech, any speech against a brother or a sister grieves God's Holy Spirit.

I wonder if you think that every time you speak against a brother, a sister, you gossip against them, you speak behind their back, that God's Holy Spirit is grieved because of your actions.

See, Christians are not like that. They are not like the world. They remove bitterness and anger and wrath and shouting and slander and malice from their midst. Chapter 4, verse 31. You see, these are the things that don't belong to us.

They belong to the evil world and the world of that evil one. Christians replace such things with things that reflect God.

[11:11] What are the sorts of things that reflect God? Well, you see them there in chapter 4, verse 32 to 5 too. They are things like kindness and compassion and forgiveness and love.

Friends, do you notice the underlying threads in what Paul is saying here? Paul is clear. We are no longer pagans. We are Christians and Christians reflect the character of their Lord and God and they reflect those actions right down into their day-to-day activities.

Second, did you notice the language that Paul uses? He talks of putting on and putting off. He talks of putting away. He talks about imitating.

He talks about walking. You see, all of this is language of what? You see, where I have to take my coat off at the moment, it's a decision that I make, isn't it? And the Christian life is decision-making. All those things, putting off, putting on, imitating, they're all decisions you make. You say, I am not going to imitate the evil one and his cohorts and his servants.

[12:19] I am going to imitate God and his son and how they, and how he wants us to live in this world. That's what I'm going to do. I'm no longer there.

I am here. The Christian life is about decision-making. It's about deciding to be something. It's about deciding to do something. It's about choosing a godly way of life.

And it is not a passive way of life. It is an active way of life. It is about deciding and choosing and it's done every minute of every day. You get up and you say, I'm going to decide to be Christian today. You know, even when you're arguing with your spouse, you're to decide to be Christian. That is what it means. It filters down to every aspect of your life.

But let's move on to chapter 5, verse 3. Friends, our contemporary world, remember, is under the spell of the evil one. The contemporary world is under the spell of the evil one thoroughly.

[13:20] And it's no different to the ancient world. You see, the ancient world, too, was under the spell of the evil one. So you might expect that the things we see in our contemporary world might look exactly like they were in the ancient world, and they are.

You see, the ancient world was a world of sexual immorality. It was a world of impurity. It was a world of greed. It wasn't that different from us. We've got some more potent weapons to use with it, such as the internet and so on.

But it was the same underneath. It was a world of sexual immorality, impurity, and greed. We do not belong to that world. Therefore, we are to shun its practices.

Christians are to have nothing to do with sexual immorality. Let me say it again. Christians are to have nothing to do with sexual immorality. Nothing to do with impurity.

Nothing to do with greed. Christians are to have nothing to do with these things. Nothing to do with the language that goes with that world. Nothing to do with crude, coarse, foolish talk.

[14 : 23] Friends, look at verses five to seven. God hates these things. God is going to bring judgment and wrath on these sorts of activities. Do not line yourself up with the old world, the old devil-inspired world, for God is coming to judge that world and everyone who lines up with it.

It is a world of idolatry. It is not a world of God and His Messiah. Well, it is in the overarching sense, but the world we meet every day is not like that. It is a world saturated with evil.

And if you line up with it, you demonstrate that your inheritance is not with God and His Messiah. And the end result is that when that God's kingdom comes in all its force and is consummated, you will be excluded from it.

That's what Paul says here. Friends, mark these words. They are serious ones. You will end up experiencing God's wrath. Now, look at what Paul is urging the Ephesians to do in verses eight to 14.

He says, you're not in darkness. You're now in light. Light results in goodness, righteousness and truth. It shows itself in discerning what pleases God and acting like it.

[15 : 32] So we don't participate in the things we left behind. For the day is coming when God's going to expose such deeds. But now let's turn to verses 15 to 21.

This next section of our passage runs, I think, all the way through to chapter six. And it has a heading. Look at the heading in verse 15. Paul says, pay careful attention.

And that means exactly what it says. That is, the Christian life is something that demands your attention. It's something you've got to do accurately, importantly and urgently. It requires focus and attention. That is, he's saying, look, give some attention to this.

Now, what he says can be summarized under three headings. He says, Christian living is wise living rather than unwise living. Second, Christian living is not foolish living, but a lifestyle which fully understands what the Lord's will is.

Verse 17. In other words, Christian living is a lifestyle which understands and reflects God's will as demonstrated in his gospel-centered plan for his world. Third, Christian living is not a lifestyle full of alcohol, but full of God's spirit.

[16 : 42] It's a wonderful turn of phrase, isn't it? Perhaps it has a little bit more meaning for us for whom the word spirit means something else as well. Can you see what he's saying? He's saying it is spirit-led which leads to godliness rather than being led by alcohol which leads to what sorts of things?

Well, the things we see people who imbibe too much alcohol do in our society. They are reckless. Friends, I wonder if I can show you something extra about these verses. A couple of extra things to notice.

Look at verse 18. Again, Paul says, live this spirit-filled life. Then he says, this is what a spirit-filled life looks like. Verse 19. It's full of speaking to one another.

It's a life full of singing. It's a life full of making music from your hearts to the Lord. It is a life full of giving thanks to God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a life full of submitting yourself to one another. Can you hear those words? A speaking, singing, making music, giving thanks, submitting.

[17 : 48] These are the sorts of things that spirit-filled people do. Notice the two-fold direction. Did you notice it? Some of them are directed toward God, aren't they? But many of them are directed toward each other.

Singing is the wonderful thing because singing is directed every way. It's directed up to God in thanks and praise. It's directed out to each other in teaching and encouragement. It works in so many different ways.

It also works on us by engaging us with spiritual truth emotionally as well. I once dropped, well, I once had a congregation that said, we'd like to have an evangelistic congregation for 25 to 35-year-olds.

And they said, look, Andrew, I think the best way to do this would be we'll drop singing. We'll drop corporate singing from our services because it's a bit alienating for people because they never sing corporately any longer.

So we'll drop it. And it worked really well for outsiders, but after two years, the insiders came to me and said, Andrew, we need to sing.

[18 : 55] I said, why? They said, well, because we need to express how we are thankful to God for what he's done to us. We need to emotionally engage and we've lost that place where we can do it,

which singing allows us to do.

So it's very interesting here, isn't it, that singing allows us to not only teach and encourage each other, but to respond emotionally. So that's just a little aside. Next thing I want you to notice is, well, as I observed before, it's either directed towards God or directed towards each other.

Next thing I want you to notice, all five responses belong together, don't they? Can you see that? So notice all the five responses, speaking, singing, making music, giving thanks, submitting, they are all one, they all flow from the same thing.

Be filled with the Spirit and do these five things. And that means that chapter 5, verse 22, all the way through to chapter 6, verse 9, we speak about what you do in your household, that is, wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters, all out workings of being filled with the Spirit.

I take it that the list of things there, the father, wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, masters, that's not an exhaustive list, but it's sort of, the sort of people that were in households in the ancient world.

[20 : 16] Now, I've given a sermon on the men and women part of this, that's available on the internet if you want to look it up at some point, but I want to make some general observations. First, of the three pairs listed here, can you see them there?

Husbands, wives, fathers, children, masters, slaves, only two of those still exist. Well, slavery does exist in parts of the world, it's coming back into its own in many ways, but generally in our households it doesn't exist.

Some of you might think it does, but it doesn't really. But what is going on here? What is Paul doing? He's saying, look, these are principles for how you live when there is an order within society. This is how you live. I might say there's no hint that the instructions for Christian households here in relation to husbands and wives and fathers and children still don't apply.

Next thing to say is the overall thrust of the passage is clear, isn't it? God has ordained orders within families and society. Such ordering implies that some have strong positions of authority, that is, they're in leadership or authority of some sort, and some have weaker positions of authority, that is, they're in submission of some sort.

[21 : 35] That appears to me to be clear from the passage. This is true in family, it's true in society, it's true in the church. And we can learn from this list and other lists and basically the advice that Paul is giving can be boiled down to two instructions.

It's this, if you are in a strong position of authority, then you are actually to be the slave of the best interests over those, for those over whom you have authority.

So don't denigrate or abuse them, serve them. You are their slave, you are the slave of their best interests. If you're in a weaker position of authority, that is, in submission, well, don't try and usurp that authority and leadership.

Don't manipulate, but submit. By the way, sorry, this is a little divergence, but I think I should make it. I wonder if I might make one other observation about these passages from five through to six.

I want you to notice that everything in Ephesians has been world transforming. In Ephesians one to three, Paul has said this gospel of Jesus Christ totally overturns the world.

[22 : 48] This gospel centered plan that God has changes everything, even the heavenly, what the heavenly powers see and do. everything that Paul has said up to this point has been counter-cultural.

Paul is saying the world has been overturned by the gospel. The gospel makes a Christian totally different. In status before God, in relationship in church, in breakdown of social divisions between Jew and Gentile, in sexuality, in the use of the tongue, in all your, every aspect of your being, the gospel has turned the world upside down.

But many people then say, but when he gets to verse 22 of chapter 5, it's cultural. There's no indication of that in the text. This is counter-cultural.

This too is gospel living. Paul has grounded everything else up until this point in God and Jesus and the gospel and if you look at the end of chapter, of this chapter, he does exactly the same thing here.

The ordering of the family is a reflection of God and the gospel. It is grounded in the gospel and it remains standing for gospel people.

[24 : 07] But let's turn now to the last 10 verses or so. Chapter 6, verses 10 to 20. You might remember back from chapters 2 and 3 that Paul has said that the gospel creates the church.

That the church proclaims God's manifold wisdom to the heavenly places. That the gospel shapes the church.

That the gospel threatens the spiritual forces. Friends, we need to be aware and this passage reminds us of this. I don't think chapter 6, verses 10 to 20 is sort of neatly cut out from everything else in Ephesians.

It is following the same track. Be aware that the gospel brings us into spiritual conflict. It did this in the ministry of Jesus.

It did this in the ministry of the apostles. It does this with gospel ministry. And let me tell you, it does it here in our church. Wherever the gospel is preached, the devil is worried.

[25 : 19] The Chinese congregations tell me that whenever they are about to plant a new congregation, things keep going wrong. they say all sorts of things happen from illness to accidents to threats upon their leaders and so on.

Why? Because a church plant is a place where people are going to be converted. And the devil doesn't like that. And so he's under threat.

So at that point we need to take the advice from Ephesians 6. In fact, in all of life, stand firm. Be clad with the things of the gospel. Stand firm in the gospel.

You see, that's the world we live in. Now, we've ceased to believe in that world, but it is a real and true world. There's a world we need to take notice of. It's a reason why we need to turn to prayer constantly.

We need to do the sorts of things that Paul says here. Look at the armor he says you ought to put on. Now, put things on your head, put things on your chest, gird yourself with this and that and pray in the spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.

[26 : 31] To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray for me also that when I speak a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I'm an ambassador in chains.

Pray that I may declare it boldly as I must speak. That's the context we are in. Friends, are we praying for gospel ministry and for the protection of those who preach it? Are you praying for this church plant?

For the new congregation at four in the afternoon? For the new congregation that will come with the Chinese in the mornings? Are you praying for it? Are you praying for us? Because we are under threat from the evil one and will be where the gospel is being proclaimed.

So let me remind you of where we've been this four or five weeks of this series. Do you remember we started off with Romans 1 verses 1 to 6, the content of the gospel? Do you remember we then moved to 1, 16 to 17 that the gospel is powerful to save?

Do you remember then we did that great survey of Ephesians 1 to 3 seeing here is God's gospel-centered plan? And then last time we looked at Ephesians 4, 1 to 16, here is what difference it makes for the church.

[27 : 41] And now we've said, well actually it makes a difference for everyday living. That that understanding of the gospel is to filter down even to our fingertips, even to our arguments in our families, even to the way that we live with outsiders.

Friends, we are gospel people. The gospel of Jesus Christ is at the center of God's purposes for his world and if you are Christian it is at the center of God's purposes for you.

This challenges everything and everyone. And Paul's urgent words for us here is live as gospel people.

Let the gospel change your daily life. Let it affect the way you use your tongue, your sexuality, your mind, your choices, your actions, your attitudes, your family life, your brains.

Let it saturate down into everything and enter into the Christian life knowing it is a place of conflict. So be equipped for it. Friends, Christians are different.

[28 : 56] They are counter-cultural. They belong to a new world and a new humanity. They are transformed. Be what you are if you are Christian.

Be what you are. That is what you are called to be in every corner of your existence and what we are called to be here together. So let me pray. Father, we do pray thanking you for the gospel of your son, Jesus Christ.

And Father, we pray that you would help us, be at work in us by your spirit, that we might be spirit-filled people, that we might let the things of the gospel affect every part of our existence, that we would put in effort to make sure these things change in our lives according to the gospel.

And Father, we pray that as we grasp these things and seek to live these things, you would protect us from the evil one, and that you would help us to stand firm.

And Father, we pray that you would help us to continue to take up the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, and that you would cause us to be prayerful at all times in every prayer and supplication, that we pray for all the saints, and we pray for the gospel preachers that we are aware of, that when they speak, they might make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, that they might declare it boldly as you have urged them to speak.

[30 : 45] And Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.