

God's Gospel-Centred Church

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[0 : 0 0] Well, friends, I want to begin my Bible talk tonight by showing you some elements of my wardrobe. Sorry, David. They are hats. This one, I don't know where I got this hat, but it is my dog walking hat.

It's old, it's scrappy, it does anything. It just gets thrown in with the dogs, probably. So that's exhibit number one. Exhibit number two is I carry this one in my backpack.

This one has my Bible software's name on it, and it's for emergency use. This one is my bush walking come hiking hat. It is great because it scrunches up into absolutely nothing and expands into a really nice wide brimmed hat, so if you're going to get lots of sun exposure, this one's brilliant.

And this one's the latest edition. This I bought in Malaysia. I quite like this one. Now, friends, let me tell you a bit about the history of my wardrobe.

They all go back to about 25 or 30 years ago, strangely enough, although the Malaysian one doesn't, and they weren't actually bought at that time. But about 25 or 30 years ago, there was a sort of synchrony of things that happened.

[1 : 2 3] First, I began to lose hair. Second, like many others in our society, I became increasingly aware of the link between sun and skin cancer.

And that was successfully reinforced by that great advertising campaign called Slip, Slop, Slap. Okay? And then we moved to the land of sunshine, Western Australia, where the sun beats down increasingly, particularly on people with increasingly sparsely populated heads.

Anyway, all of those things were, for me, they formed something in my brain and convinced me that there was a link between sun and cancer.

And I didn't want cancers. And so I started wearing hats. And from that time on, I have hats scattered through my existence, and I rarely go anywhere without two things.

A pen, because I need to write things down, and a hat, just in case there's some sunshine somewhere that I need to avoid. So, the reason I've said this is because it is hard to change actions without changing minds.

[2 : 3 5] I changed my actions because my mind had been changed. Change of mind breeds change of attitude, which in turn breeds change of action and change of behavior.

Friends, the Apostle Paul knew this. He knew that the people he ministered to lived in a world that were deeply affected by sin. They lived in a world that had shaped their very existence.

All of their actions had been shaped by that world. They lived in a world, said he, that is under the power of the devil and formed by the devil's rule. And then they heard the gospel, and the gospel changed their mind.

The gospel told them, you cannot, you could escape the hold of death and the devil. The gospel told them, God's acted in Jesus Christ.

You could be saved by grace through faith in Jesus and what he'd done on the cross. And what these people did is that they accepted that. They said, all right, we're going to take that on board.

[3 : 37] We're going to take it that we are saved. And as a result, Paul says, they were raised up with Christ. They became citizens of heaven. And their minds and their actions, though, needed to be shaped by that one fact.

Their minds and their actions needed to be shaped by the gospel. And you can see Paul doing this in the letter of Ephesians. In Ephesians 1 to 3, he lets them into the mind of God.

He says, this is what is going on in God's mind, in God's plans for his world. He says, here is God's gospel-centered plan. Take it on board.

Understand what God is doing. And he works on changing their mind and their perspective. Then in chapters 4 to 6, he goes on to show them, and this is the impact of your gospel-centered mind, gospel-centered perspective on life.

And he moves in chapter 4 into their actions. Their old perspective had shaped their lives and their behavior. So their new perspective must shape their lives and their behavior.

[4 : 44] Friends, let me just make myself clear. We live in a world that is shaped by the evil one. We live in a world shaped by evil itself.

And this has and is deeply shaping us. But if we are Christians, we are not of that world. And yet, and we have heard the gospel.

We've been saved through faith. The gospel has given us a new God-centered, gospel-centered perspective. And it's expected by God that that perspective will shape us and change us.

It should saturate every aspect of our being and our thinking and our actions. And that's what Ephesians is saying. So Ephesians 1 to 3 tells us of the gospel.

And Ephesians 4 to 6 tells us about the impact of the gospel on both being the people of God and living as the people of God. So with that in mind, I want you to open your Bibles at chapter 4 of Ephesians.

[5 : 44] That link between chapters 1 to 3 and chapter 4 starts with the little word, therefore. I, therefore. In other words, given everything that I've said, here are the implications.

And then in chapter 4 verses 1 to 16, he says, Here are the implications for you, the people of God, a new humanity, God's new humanity. You are one in Christ, so act like it.

Keep the unity in the bond of peace. You're bound in Christ, so grow together into Christ. You should press one another on, growing into maturity.

Then in verses 17 to 24, he turns to the daily life of Christian people. And I want you to look at what he says. So this is chapter 4 verse 17. He says, look, Gentiles live in futility.

They are darkened in their understanding. They're ignorant and hard of heart. And promiscuity in every kind of impurity is the result. Now look at verse 20. Paul says, Christians are different from this.

[6 : 47] We, you see, have come to know Jesus, the truth in Jesus. And we have taken off our former way of life. It's like clothing that we have sort of put aside. We are being renewed in the spirit of our minds.

We have put on new clothes, which are the new clothes of a new self and a new humanity. And this new humanity, this new self is being created in God's likeness. This is who we are.

God's people. And because of this, because this is who we are, our whole being and way of life is to change. Look at chapter 4 of Ephesians verse 25 to chapter 5 verse 2.

Paul actually gives some specific examples of how Christians should now live. You see, Christians don't lie anymore, verse 25. They speak the truth.

And if they are angry, Christians don't let their anger be dominated by the devil whose kingdom they no longer belong to, verses 26 and 27. Christians don't steal any longer.

[7 : 52] Instead, they work to support themselves and share with others and to be generous. Christians don't have foul mouths, verse 29. Instead, Christians speak to build others up. Christians have received grace from God and so they reflect God's grace in their speech. Christians are now God's people. They've been sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption.

And God is the agent not of slander but of reconciliation and of unity. Chapter 2 verse 18. Chapter 2 verse 22. And chapter 4 verses 3 to 4.

And so any foul speech, any speech against a brother or a sister grieves him. Friends, I wonder if you realize that. Because I hear Christians just mouthing off about each other all the time. But it grieves God.

Christians remove bitterness, anger, wrath, shouting, slander and malice from their mouths. Chapter 4 verse 31. That's what it says. And that's what Christians are like.

[8 : 53] Because they are like their God. These are the things, you see, those old ways of acting and speaking belong to the world of the evil one. And Christians replace them with the things that belong to the dominion of God.

They replace them with the things that reflect God. What are the sorts of things that reflect God? Well, look at them. 32 through to 5 verse 2.

Kindness. Compassion. Forgiveness. Love. Do you notice the underlying threads here? First, Paul is clear.

We are no longer pagans. We are no longer non-Christians. We are Christians. And Christians reflect God's character. Christians reflect God's actions in their own actions.

Second, did you notice the language Paul uses? He talks about putting off or putting away. And he talks about putting on and imitating and walking.

[9 : 55] That's all the language of decision making. You see, the Christian life is all about decision making in the end. It's not just about osmosis, as it were. It's about decision making.

It's about deciding, I am today going to be Christian. I am deciding to do something. I am deciding that I am going to be something. I am going to choose a godly life over an ungodly life.

I am going to put on these clothes, not those clothes. The Christian life is not a passive way of life where you sort of sit there and hope that, you know, vaguely something's going to happen without you deciding anything.

No, it's about deciding. It's an active way of life. It's about deciding and choosing. And it's done every day. We have to choose to be Christian every day.

Let's move on to chapter 5 and verse 3. Friends, remember what I said. Remember what Paul has said. Our world, this contemporary world, is under the spell of the evil one. And the contemporary world under the spell of the evil one is no different from an ancient world under the spell of the evil one.

[10 : 59] It looks exactly the same. It's a world of sexual immorality, as it was in the first century, impurity, greed. But we don't belong to that world. Therefore, we are to shun its practices.

Christians are to have nothing to do, Paul says, with sexual immorality. Nothing to do with impurity. Nothing to do with greed. Nothing to do with the language that goes on in that world.

And friends, let me tell you, in our world, it is pushed upon us in a way that perhaps was never pushed upon the first century world. We are pushed with greed, with impurity, with sexual immorality, with the things that do not belong to God.

And they are shoved on us by every possible means. And Paul says, nothing to do with those things. Nothing to do with the language that goes on in that world.

Nothing to do with coarse, crude, foolish talk. Now, I listen to Christians. And I hear it all the time. But Paul says, no, nothing to do with that. Look at verses 5 to 7.

[12 : 01] God hates these things. God is bringing 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 all who line up with it. It is a world of idolatry and not of God and his Messiah. And if you line up to it, then you recognize your inheritance is not with God and his Messiah.

And the results will be exclusion from God's kingdom, experiencing God's wrath. Friends, this is very clear statements that Paul is making. He is arguing very strongly for a changed life.

Now, we Christians think we can become Christians and be no different to our neighbor. But it is not true. We must be different to the rest of the world.

Look at Paul urging the Ephesians in verses 8 to 14 of chapter 5. He says, you're not in darkness any longer. You're now in light. And light results in goodness, righteousness and truth.

[13 : 03] It shows itself in discerning what pleases God and acting like it. So we must not participate in the things we left behind. For the day is coming when God will expose such deeds.

Let's turn to the next section. Chapter 5 verse 15 through to 6 verse 9. And we'll look at just 15 to 21. Now, the next section of our passage runs all the way through, as I said, to chapter 6.

And what it does is it... Well, look at verse 15. It has a heading to it. Paul says, pay careful attention. You see, the Christian life is something that demands careful attention.

He's saying, so give some focus to this. It's something that's done accurately, importantly and urgently. And it requires focus and attention. He says, pay close attention. And then the things he says need attention can be summarized under three headings.

First, Christian living is wise living rather than unwise living. Verse 15. Wise rather than unwise. Second, Christian living is not foolish living, but a lifestyle that fully understands what God's will is.

[14 : 11] In other words, it's a lifestyle that understands and reflects God's will demonstrated in the gospel. And third, Christian living is not a lifestyle which is full of alcohol, but full of God's spirit.

It works even better in English. One of those few times that it works better than it did in the original. Not full of spirit, but full of spirit, if you understand what I mean. It's a wonderful turn of phrase.

The Christian life is a life that is spirit-led. It is spirit-led, which leads to godliness, rather than being led by alcohol, that leads you to do, well, what sort of things does alcohol lead you to do?

Well, it leads to all the sorts of things that we see in our society every day. It leads to footballers doing stupid things, and it leads to ordinary people doing stupid things, throwing away their life for nothing.

An alcohol-saturated life is a reckless life in the end. And that is what Paul is saying here. Notice the connotations of recklessness. Friends, I wonder if I could show you something extra about these verses.

[15 : 17] Here are a couple of extra things to notice. Look at verse 18 again. Paul urges Christians to live this spirit-filled life. Then he tells them what a spirit-filled life looks like. Now, most of you don't think that this is what a spirit-filled life looks like, but this is it.

It is filled with speaking to one another, verse 19. It is filled with singing. The musicians, I'm sure, would agree with it. It is a life filled with making music from your heart to the Lord.

It is a life filled of giving thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it's a life filled with submitting yourself to others. Now, when I hear people talking about what a spirit-filled life looks like, I don't hear them saying those things.

But it's about speaking, singing, making music, giving thanks, and submitting. These are the sorts of things that the spirit causes people to do. Notice the two-fold direction.

Did you notice it? In all of those things, it's directed two ways. Some of them are directed to other people. Many of them, though, are directed to God. You see, singing, of course, is the brilliant one.

[16 : 22] Singing is so, so good. It's a wonderful thing because it's directed every which way. Singing is directed to God in praise and thanksgiving. It's directed to each other in teaching and encouragement.

And it works on us by engaging us with spiritual truth as well, lifting our emotional being. Singing is just brilliant in every way. Now, by the way, I want to tell you a little story.

I started a congregation once that had no singing. We started it because we wanted to reach outsiders who were between the ages of 25 and 35.

And we thought they don't ever sing corporately. And singing in church just alienates them. So we won't sing. We had played music, performed music, sung music, but we never sang corporately.

And after two years, the congregation members came to me and said, Andrew, we've changed our mind. We've got to have some singing. I said, why?

[17 : 23] They said, because we've got no place within a church service to express our emotional response back to God. And they said, we need to do that. We can pray, but we need also to be emotionally engaged.

You see, that's just a little aside, but let's get back to where we were. Paul's words here direct us towards God. Well, they direct us toward each other. And this is what the Spirit wants us to do.

Next thing I want you to notice about these five things is this. Do you remember what they were? Five things. Speaking, singing, making music, giving thanks, submitting.

All five responses belong together. Being filled with the Spirit is doing those five things. And that in turn means that verses 5, 22, all the way through to 6, verse 9, are specific instances of how Christians are to act in relationship where there's authority and submission.

And then Paul gives three particular household circumstances. Wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters. Now, I take it that's not an exhaustive list.

[18 : 35] It's just the normal things that existed in an ancient first century household. These are the relationships you had. You had slaves. You had masters. You had husbands and wives.

You had children. They're all there. And so, you know, these are the ones that Paul gives you instructions about. Now, and I want you to notice something. In each of these relationships, there's a person who has a stronger position of authority and a person who has a weaker position of authority.

Does that make sense? So a parent, a father, has a stronger position of authority than a child who has a weaker position of authority. And God appears to be indicating there is order within society, both with husbands and wives, children and parents, and also slaves and masters.

Now, the overall thrust of the passage, I think, is clear. God has ordained orders within family and society. Such ordering implies some have strong positions, some have weak.

And that happens in society. It happens in family. It happens within the church. And if I can summarize what I think Paul is saying, both here and elsewhere, it is this.

[19 : 46] If you have been placed by God in a strong position of authority, then you are to be the slave of the best interests of the person in the weaker position of authority. Does that make sense?

So if you're speaking about a husband, you are to love your wife. That is, you are to lay down your life for your wife. If you're a father, well, you are to not provoke your children but train them in godliness.

That's the best thing for them, so devote yourself to that. If you're a master, you're to stop using your power to denigrate, threaten or abuse. You're to be good to your slaves, not wicked.

If you're in a weaker position of authority, then you're to try not to usurp or overcome that authority. So be enthusiastic in your acceptance of their authority.

So don't manipulate, but submit and obey, just as you would submit to God. By the way, I wonder if I could just make a personal observation here. I wonder if you notice that in Ephesians, everything that Paul says is world-transforming.

[20 : 45] In Ephesians 1-3, Paul has said to us, The gospel of Jesus Christ totally overturns your world.

The gospel-centered plan of God changes everything. It even changes what the heavenly powers do and say, or see and do.

Everything that Paul has said up until this point has been counter-cultural. It runs against the ways of the world. Paul is saying the world has been overturned by the gospel.

The gospel about Jesus Christ makes a Christian totally different to the world. Different in status before God. Different in relationship within the church.

Different in the breakdown of barriers between culture and nationalities. That could not be reconciled in any other way. Different in the use of the tongue. Different in sexuality. In every aspect of being, the gospel has turned the world upside down.

[21 : 48] Many people then turn around and say, But in chapter 5, verse 22, all the way through to chapter 6, Paul has reverted to cultural norms. I don't think that's the case. I think what Paul is doing here is counter-cultural.

This too is gospel living. But let's now turn to the final section of Ephesians. Chapter 6. And I want to look particularly at verses 10 through to 20. I wonder if you remember back to chapter 2.

Paul made clear that the gospel creates the church. The gospel proclaims God's manifold wisdom to the heavenly places. The gospel shapes the church.

The gospel threatens spiritual powers. Friends, this passage reminds us of these things. I don't think that chapter 6 is neatly cut off from everything that's gone before. I think it flows from it.

You see, it's following the same track. He's saying the gospel will throw us into spiritual conflict. It did this in the ministry of Jesus. It did this in the ministry of the apostles. It does it with all gospel ministry.

[22 : 52] And let me tell you, friends, it does it here in our church. Whenever and wherever the gospel is preached, it threatens spiritual powers. The Chinese staff here in our congregation tell me that whenever a new congregation is planted here, for the six months beforehand, they have a terrible time.

They say everything goes wrong. All sorts of things happen. From illness to accidents to threats upon their leaders to temptations to stop and so on. They say it has happened every time.

We have planted three congregations here at Holy Trinity. Every time we have done it, this has happened. Why? Because a church plant is where the gospel is going to be preached and where people are going to become Christians.

And the devil does not like it. He threatens his power. It diminishes his influence. It takes his people. He is therefore under threat.

That's why we need to take the advice of Ephesians 6. Can you see what it says there? See if you can see what it says. Its overall advice is stand firm. And then it says, Be clad with the things of the gospel.

[24 : 04] You know, stand firm in the gospel. Pray for those who proclaim the gospel. And friends, I think we modern Christians have failed to believe that this sort of world of God and the devil, we no longer think of the devil.

We think of God because that's a nice comfortable feeling. But the world of the devil, no. And a personal devil, no. But it's a real and true world. It is a world we need to take notice of.

And it's the reason we need to turn to prayer constantly. That is why we need to put on the armor that Paul describes here. Look, things on your head. Things on your chest.

Gird yourself with this and gird yourself with that. Protect yourself. Take up the offensive armor of God. And look at verses 18. Pray in the spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert. Always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Why? Because they're under danger. They're at risk. Paul, pray also for me, he says, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains.

[25 : 12] Pray that I might declare it boldly as I must speak. Friends, do you pray for me and for Andrew Price and for David Ruan and for Ben and for Esther and for all the others that teach and train within our congregations and speak the word of God to people?

Do you pray for them? Do you pray that the devil might not have a foothold in their lives? Friends, that's the context we are in. Are we praying for gospel ministry and for the protection of those who preach it?

Are you praying for us as we go through the transition here at 6pm in the next three or four months? Are you praying for our two new congregations that have started in the last three weeks as the devil sets his eyes on them and wants to overturn their good work?

Are you praying for all these things? Are you praying for us as a congregation? You see, if we are for the gospel and for gospel living and for gospel proclamation then we are under the threat of the evil one and we continue to be while we continue to be for God's great purposes in Jesus.

Now let me close by just reminding you of where we've been. Remember Romans 1, 1-6 This is what the gospel is. Remember Romans 1, 16-17 The gospel is powerful to save.

[26 : 31] Remember Ephesians 1-4 God has this great gospel-centered plan for His world and it is being worked out. Then we looked at Ephesians 4, 1-16 This is how it affects the church and now we've seen that the gospel makes a difference to every aspect of our lives.

Our grasp on the gospel is to filter down to every part of our being find its way even to our fingertips and our relationships and everyone we meet every day find its way critically to that element of our existence our tongues and how it is used even the way we handle anger even the way we live with outsiders friends we are gospel people the gospel of Jesus Christ is the center of God's purposes for His world and if you are Christians then it is at the center of His purposes for you that challenge challenges everyone and everything that is Christian and God's urgent word for us here is this live as gospel-centered people let the gospel change your daily life let it affect your tongue your sexuality your mind your choices your actions your internet viewing your attitudes your family life your everything your life decisions it is to filter down into everything let me tell you that entering the Christian life is not entering a place of comfort well it is because you are eternally secure and that is great comfort but it is a place of conflict so be equipped for it friends

Christians are different often they are not different in our world I think but they should be they are to be different they belong to a new culture a new humanity a new world they are transformed be what you are if you are Christian be what you are in every corner of your existence this is what you have been called to be God's people a Christian be it that's what God wants let's pray Father please help us to live as your people both here with each other and in the world outside and we pray this in Jesus name Amenham thank you and and

Thank you.

Thank you.