

## II. Being Ambassadors of Reconciliation

Faithful witness to Christ and His gospel begins with a commitment to “become all things to all men.” Unless the Christian is willing to enter the world of his hearers so as to communicate with them at the point of their own worldview, perspective and understanding, it is pointless to even speak to them of Christ. Jesus’ witnesses must meet people where they are, but they must also convey to them the true gospel; communicating clearly becomes destructive when the message communicated is false or misleading.

Thus, as important as it is to become all things to all men, it is equally important to understand and communicate the true message of the gospel. Tragically, this message is often compromised, missed or even falsified – if not through ignorance or bad doctrine, then through constriction or over-simplification.

- Perhaps the majority of Christians believe the gospel pertains only to the *unsaved*.
- Even among those who hold a broader view, the gospel is generally thought of as pertaining to the *human race*.
- Few recognize that the gospel has *cosmic* significance – *itself a powerful testimony to the biblical ignorance that predominates in the Church*.

There are arguably many reasons for this narrow perspective, but some of the primary ones are as follows:

- the contemporary obsession with personal issues and concerns, which results in the cultural demand for a personal “gospel”;
- biblical ignorance and a “tract mentality”;
- Both of the above are grounded in the most important reason: *the self-centered frame of reference of the “natural mind” that causes people to write God into their story*.

The gospel is concerned with and addresses personal issues and needs, but from the vantage point of a broader perspective and a comprehensive concern.

### A. The Gospel’s Concern is *Creational*

1. The gospel’s foundational premise is God’s eternal, unchanging purpose for His creation.
  - a. The gospel begins, not at Calvary, or with the Incarnation, but with God Himself.
  - b. From there, the creational fiat began to reveal the gospel – not by the mere description of the events and process of creation, but *by the way the description of God’s creative work disclosed His purpose for His creation*.

2. The creation account emphasizes two fundamental features of God's purpose for it – *both of which are central to the gospel message and its concern*:
  - a. The first is that the created order was to be a *kingdom* (the principle of *dominion*).
  - b. The second is that the creational kingdom is a matter of Creator-creature relationship (the principle of *communion*).
3. What the creation account suggested, the Old Testament salvation history makes explicit: *The gospel concerns an all-comprehending divine purpose for the creation.*

## **B. The Gospel's Concern is *Relational***

The Old Testament – as it illumines and prepares for Christ's coming and redemptive work – explicitly indicates that the gospel concerns the entire creation, *but in a particular sense*.

1. Again, most Christians – and non-Christians – think of the gospel in terms of God's remedy for the problem of sin and guilt:

*That is, the gospel explains how people can be delivered from their guilt and condemnation and receive forgiveness from God.*

2. The gospel does speak to these matters, but in a certain way and within the framework of a larger concern.
  - a. First of all, *its message of satisfaction and forgiveness must be interpreted within a proper understanding of sin.*

- At bottom, sin isn't a matter of immorality or bad behavior.

- But neither is it a matter of mere violation of commandment.

***The substance of sin is the violation of relational definition and demands:***

1) *sin* as deviation from a proper path or quality;

2) *iniquity* as an inward bent toward corruption – away from our true selves.

3) *transgression* as relational violation, especially within a covenant structure (hence the Old Testament idea of breaking a law or commandment).

- b. *Sin is a relational concept precisely because man was created to be image-son:* man related to God and His creation and the creation related to God through man.

- Righteousness is “rightness,” and for man this means relational fidelity: *the obligation of a son to a Father and of brethren to one another.*

- Sin, then, is “lawlessness” in the sense that divine law specifies and demands “righteousness” – *human beings living in perfect conformity to their created design and function* (cf. Matthew 5:43-48 with 7:21-23).
  - So the Law of Moses articulated Israel’s obligation of love (Matthew 22:35-40; cf. Romans 13:8-10), and Israel’s failure under it was a matter of *spiritual adultery* (cf. Ezekiel 16:1-59, 23:1-49; Hosea 1-2; 5:1-4, etc.).
3. Thus Christ’s work of satisfaction must be understood in *relational* rather than merely legal terms. It addresses, not the issue of rule-breaking, but **breach of relationship**.
- a. Indeed, this must be the case if Christ’s work pertains to the whole creation, for *the non-human created order isn’t guilty of breaking commandments*.
- Rather, it was “subjected to futility”*** – to the emptiness and desperation of *alienation* from its Creator, and this is what Christ has addressed by His cross (Col. 1:19-20).
- b. In the same way, Christ’s satisfaction pertains to human futility – though in the case of man, a futility to which he subjected himself.
- The creation has suffered the consequences of man’s disobedience because it’s related to God through man* (cf. Genesis 1:26-30 with 3:17-18).

### C. The Gospel’s Concern is *Christological*

The gospel is christological precisely because it is creational and relational:

- 1) The gospel concerns God’s remedy for the creation’s problem → the problem is *estrangement* and *desolation* and the remedy is *restoration* and *reconciliation*.
- 2) The created order doesn’t need to be *forgiven*, but it needs to be *reconciled* to God.
- 3) The human creature, on the other hand, does need forgiveness, but ***forgiveness is only a necessary step toward reconciliation***, which is the ultimate human need.

*Adam’s fallen race could be cleansed and forgiven, but the fundamental alienation of Eden – and so the creational curse of death – would yet continue.*

- 4) From the point of the fall, the Scripture uniformly portrays God’s remedy for His creation in terms of restoration and reconciliation – the recovery of the “righteousness” that is the creation’s right relationship with God and itself as an organic, harmonious whole.
- This is evident in the sequence of biblical covenants, especially the Noahic, Abrahamic, Sinaitic and Davidic covenants (ref. Genesis 8:13-9:7, 17:1ff; also Exodus 4:22 with 15:17 and 19:1-20:26; 2 Samuel 7:1-29 with Isaiah 9:1-7, 11:1-12:6; Jeremiah 23:1-8, 30:1-33:26; Ezekiel 34:1-31, 37:1-28; Hosea 3:1-5; etc.).

- This intention is also evident in the circumstances and features associated with the captivities of Israel and Judah. As the Scripture treats the exile from Canaan as a new Edenic banishment from the Lord's presence (cf. Genesis 3:22-24; Numbers 33:51-56; Deuteronomy 28:58-65), so it presents the recovery of the Judean exiles as a matter of reconciliation. When Yahweh had fully executed and appeased His righteous wrath, He restored the remnant of the people to His sanctuary land and directed them to rebuild His dwelling place (Jeremiah 40:1-42:12; Ezekiel 5:1-17; cf. Isaiah 44:24-28; Haggai 1-2).
- So also it is found in God's promise of everlasting, perfect restoration in the overthrow of the curse. As it pertains to human beings, the Scripture treats this liberation as a "second Exodus" attended with a global ingathering (Isaiah 11:1ff, 51:9-11; 54:1-55:13); as it pertains to the sub-human creation, it is expressed in terms of the making of a "new heavens and new earth" (Isaiah 65:17-66:22).

### 1. The Gospel is *Christocentric* – Christ as the One Who Brought Reconciliation

The creature man has an innate and righteous obligation to fulfill his created nature and role as *image-son* → dominion in the context of communion.

Adam shunned that obligation in the pursuit of autonomous equality with God and sealed humanity – and the created order – in a state of alienation and death.

- a. In the divine-human relationship, *man* must fulfill man's obligation, and so God's remedy called for a *new Adam* → So the Seed Promise.

That initial promise continued to enlarge and differentiate, but *always in connection with a man to come* → son of Abraham and David, prophet like Moses, priest like Melchizedek, Servant of the Lord like Israel.

- b. But given the universally powerless state of Adam's race, this new Man must somehow transcend the Adamic curse; He must be free of the principle of death.
  - The OT describes this person as One who stands in flawless relationship with Yahweh as *son, servant, disciple* and *witness*.
  - Moreover, His coming and work are described as those of Yahweh Himself.
- c. Although indirectly, and with a certain amount of mystery, the Scriptures promised a man so closely linked with God that He would represent God's tangible presence.
  - as the *Man of the Spirit* (Isaiah 11:1-3, 61:1-3);
  - as the *Redeemer* (Isaiah 51:9-16, 59:15-21);
  - as the *Judge* (Psalm 2; Isaiah 11:1ff; Ezekiel 34:1-24).

## 2. The Gospel is *Christotelic* – Christ as the One Who Himself is Reconciliation

The gospel concerns Jesus Christ because He is the One promised and described in all the Scriptures. *The gospel concerns God's work of creational renewal and reconciliation, and that work converges on and terminates with Jesus Christ.*

- a. The OT promised and portrayed a man in whom God would redeem, renew and reconcile His estranged creation; the NT reveals a man who **in Himself** is the reconciliation – the full and everlasting conjunction – of Creator and creature.
  - Christ is *True Man*, and therefore the true point of *relational union* between Creator and creature only prefigured in the First Adam.
  - But He is also *True God*, and so the *ontological union* of Creator and creature.

***With the first Adam, God imparted aspects of His own nature to the human creature; in the Last Adam, God took to Himself the whole nature of the human creature.***

- b. Christ **reflects** the Father's intention in His own person, but **accomplished** that intention through His substitutionary self-giving.
  - He *fulfilled human righteousness* through His life as the Last Adam.
  - He *satisfied God's justice* against Adam's race by taking Adam's humanity to Himself and bearing the punishment of Adam's (and our) violation.
  - He *expiated* human guilt and so *propitiated* divine indignation.
  - This enabled *forgiveness* and the *reconciliation* of God and man – reconciliation as *spiritual union* – in the formation of a new humanity in the Last Adam.

**In Jesus Christ, the human race has obtained its eternal destiny**, which means that there is no authentic humanness outside of Him.

- He is the *origin* of man, first in the fact that He, as the second Person of the Godhead, is the source of the created order (Colossians 1:15-16). But Christ is also the origin of man in the sense that man's creation reflected and served the accomplishment of the triune God's eternal purpose respecting the created order and its relationship to Him. God determined that His creation should be related to Him through man, the image-son, and this design was to be realized – and has now been realized – through the Man who is the Incarnate Son. Thus man's existence, identity, and nature have their origin in the eternal Son.
- Jesus is the revelation as well as the definition of man as truly and consummately *man*. So also, He is the source of that authentic humanness for Adam's race. In Him alone is *life* (shalomic existence), not only for mankind, but for the whole creation.