

**GOSPEL 101**  
NOVEMBER 12, 2023  
GOSPEL THIEVES – PART 1

**WELCOME**

**PREVIEW**

Gospel Thieves (Nov 12, Nov 19)

Today: Religion and Irreligion. Next week: idols

Gospel Themes (Nov 26, Dec 3, Dec 10, Dec 17)

Adoption, known, covenant, kingdom

**REVIEW** - The Gospel is objective (head) and subjective (heart).

**Objective Justification**

Justification – By the death and resurrection of Christ, I am declared completely righteous in God’s sight. This is a gift from God, who gave me faith to trust and receive him as Savior.

**Two Gospel terms**

1. Christ as our vicar.

In my place, Jesus kept the law of God that I am unable to keep (vicariously obeying for me). As my substitute, He atoned for my sin upon the cross when he died in my place to receive the wrath of Father that I deserve for my rebellion against the one, true, holy God (vicariously suffering for me).

*Three Powerful Words: “I forgive you”*

*Matthew 9, Jesus “I desire mercy not sacrifice” Mercy never comes without sacrifice*

*In order for you to forgive, you have to bear someone’s burden. When you forgive, you’re participating (vicariously?) in the suffering of Jesus.*

2. Christ as our victor.

Jesus conquered the curse of sin (death) and rose from the grave to be the first fruits of all who trust in him. He will return to defeat death and the Devil once and for all. At his return, he will renew all of creation and inaugurate a new era of salvation history in new heavens and the new earth. (all of creation). He will raise our bodies from the ground and give us an imperishable body.

*Easter, All Saints, Funerals*

**Subjective Justification**

Sanctification – Now that I am converted, by the work of the Holy Spirit, God renews me each day. I also have a part to play in my regeneration (through my repentance, my own rhythms of worship, receiving the sacrament, time in the word, and prayer). Sanctification is justification lived out.

Philippians 2:12-13

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the **results of your salvation**, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For **God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power** to do what pleases him. (NLT)

Richard Lovelace – “All our problems with sanctification are problems with justification.

“We start each day with our personal security resting not on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in the Christian life. Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved either to discouragement and apathy or to a self-righteousness which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace. But the faith that is able to warm itself at the fire of God’s love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of peace.

“Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives... In their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for justification... Few know enough to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon Luther’s platform: you are accepted, looking outward in faith and claiming the wholly alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance, relaxing in that quality of trust which will produce increasing sanctification as faith is active in love and gratitude.”<sup>1</sup>

### **BOTTOM LINE**

My disobedience and my obedience rob me of the Gospel’s joy in everyday life.

### **SHARE**

When you grew up – were you more of a rule-keeper or a rule-breaker?

### **GOSPEL THIEVES: TWO WAYS TO LIVE<sup>2</sup>**

Tertullian: “Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors.”

THIEF 1 - \_\_\_\_\_ / Religion - we must obey in order to be saved/blessed.

Motivation: Obedience for the wrong reason.

\_\_\_\_\_ without grace. Legalism.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, IVP, 1979, p. 101-102. In the opinion of the leader of this Bible class, the observation of Lovelace, “only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians...” may be a pessimistic overstatement..

<sup>2</sup> See “Two Thieves, Three Things in Common” below for a deep dive on these two “thieves” and the similarity and differences in the view of self, sin and God.

PROFILE:

Can be Rule-oriented

High view of God's Word and authority

High view of God's holiness and justice

On the outside, appear to have it all together

On the inside: vacillates between two poles

Low view of self & despair (can't live up to God's standards)

High view of self-inflation (because you think you have lived up to the standards)

SUMMARY: "I've been good, therefore God owes me."

THIEF 2 - \_\_\_\_\_ / Irreligion - we are all accepted by God, and we decide what is true for us.

Motivation: Disobedience for your own reasons

Lens: \_\_\_\_\_ without truth. Antinomianism (against law)

PROFILE:

On the outside, appear very tolerant and welcoming

May talk a great deal about God's love, but do not think of themselves as sinners.

Low view of God's holiness and justice - Not convinced He is just and must punish sinners

May have low view of God's word & authority

High view of self - resulting in a freedom to determine what is right/wrong

SUMMARY: "God's definition of what is good/true/ bad doesn't matter, I determine what's good for me. He'll accept everyone no matter how they lived or what they believed" (which is a god on my terms not His).

**CASE STUDY - LUKE 15:1-10, 11-32**

With which "thief" does the younger brother resonate? The elder brother?

Which brother are you most like today?

This is **not** simply a matter of **historic phase** of our lives when we were rebellious (or not). This is a **present reality** for us every day.

**THE GOSPEL AND MY...**

Tim Keller: The main problem, then, in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, we have not "used" the gospel in and on all parts of our life... All of us, to some degree live around the truth of the gospel but do not "get" it. So the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is the continual re-discovery of the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from Tim Keller's article "The Centrality of the Gospel". Available in pdf by request. Send me an email at nperegoy@oflc.net.

## The “Gospel Wheel”

Consider the following situations on the left and the behaviors and attitudes that are formed by various approaches in columns 2-4.

<b>View of<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Moralism</b>	<b>Irreligion</b>	<b>Gospel</b>
<b>Obedience</b>	I obey, therefore God accepts me.	I have no need to obey, because I am not so bad and God is so welcoming.	Christ obeyed, therefore God accepts me.
<b>Money</b>			
<b>Suffering</b>			
<b>Choose your own</b> (work, family, prayer, criticism, etc.)			

### WRAP UP

How does this change happen in us? Only by the \_\_\_\_\_ – True Elder Brother

### QUESTIONS?

### WRAP UP

Gospel Thieves - Next week: idols (Nov 19)  
 Gospel Themes (Nov 26, Dec 3, Dec 10, Dec 17)  
 Adoption, known, covenant, kingdom

**BOTTOM LINE** - My disobedience and my obedience rob me of the Gospel’s joy in everyday life.

<sup>4</sup> See last page of this handout for a comparison of the moralistic and the Gospel based view of these situations and many more. Shoot me an email to request a color version. nperegoy@oflc.net

## **TWO THIEVES, THREE THINGS IN COMMON<sup>5</sup>**

1. VIEW OF SELF: They are both ways to avoid Jesus as Savior and keep control of our lives through self-salvation.

Irreligious people seek to be their own savior and lord through “individual” pride.

“No one tells me how to live or what to do; I determine what is right and wrong for me!”

Moral/religious people seek to be their own savior and lord through “religious” pride.

“I am more moral and spiritual than other people, so God owes it to me to listen to my prayers and take me to heaven. God cannot let just anything happen to me—he owes me a happy life. I’ve earned it!”

Note: Ironically, **moralists**, despite all the emphasis on traditional standards inherited from one’s family, religion and culture, are in the end self-centered and **individualistic** because they have set themselves up as their own savior. On the other hand, **relativists**, despite all their emphasis on individual freedom and acceptance, are in the end **moralistic**, because they still must live up to their own standards or become desperate. And often they take great pride in their own open-mindedness and judge others who are not.

These are two different ways to do the same thing—control (*save*) one’s own life.

2. VIEW OF GOD: They are both based on distorted views of God.

The irreligious relativist loses sight of the law and holiness of God,

The religious moralist loses sight of the love and grace of God;

What about Jesus?

The irreligious person has no need for Jesus. God accepts us because he is so welcoming and because we are not so bad.

The religious person uses Jesus as an example and helper and teacher—but not as a Savior.

Only the gospel—that we are so sinful that we need to be saved utterly by grace— allows us to see God as he really is. The gospel shows us a God far **more holy** than even the most obedient legalist can bear (He had to die because we could not satisfy his holy demands), and yet far **more merciful** than an antinomian can conceive (he was moved to die because of his great love for us).

3. VIEW OF SIN: Both deny our sin – and therefore lose the joy and power of grace.

The irreligious person: has such a high view of themselves that they deny the depth of sin, and thus the message “God loves you” has no power for them.

The religious person: may be extremely penitent and sorry for their sins, they see sins as simply a failure to live up to standards by which they are saving themselves. They see it only as rule-breaking, not as rebellion and self-salvation.

EXAMPLE: “I know God loves me & forgives me, but I just can’t forgive myself”

WHY?: I haven’t lived up to my standards for myself. It is imperative that I think of myself as a certain type of person, who would never do X. Now that I’ve done X, I’m that person. I only see the grace of God as a means to cover the gaps and flaws of my imperfections. I don’t receive the grace of God out of need for my rebellion to live as my own Savior.

---

<sup>5</sup> Excerpts adapted from Tim Keller’s home study on the book of Galatians. Available in pdf by request. Send me an email at [nperegoy@oflc.net](mailto:nperegoy@oflc.net)

# Religion vs. The Gospel Tim Keller

## Religion

I obey—therefore I'm accepted.

Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.

I obey God in order to get things from God.

When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or my self, since I believe, like Job's friends that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.

When I am criticized I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a 'good person'. Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.

My prayer life consists largely of petition and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.

My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel insecure and inadequate. I'm not confident. I feel like a failure.

My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work. Or how moral I am, and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to 'the other.'

Since I look to my own pedigree or performance for my spiritual acceptability, my heart manufactures idols. It may be my talents, my moral record; my personal discipline, my social status, etc. I absolutely have to have them so they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, whatever I may say I believe about God.

## The Gospel

I'm accepted—therefore I obey.

Motivation is based on grateful joy.

I obey God to get to God—to delight and resemble Him.

When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while he may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial.

When I am criticized I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a 'good person.' My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ. I can take criticism.

My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with Him.

My self-view is not based on a view of my self as a moral achiever. In Christ I am "simul iustus et peccator"—simultaneously sinful and yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he had to die for me and I am so loved he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swaggering nor sniveling.

My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for His enemies, who was excluded from the city for me. I am saved by sheer grace. So I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace I am what I am. I've no inner need to win arguments.

I have many good things in my life—family, work, spiritual disciplines, etc. But none of these good things are ultimate things to me. None of them are things I absolutely have to have, so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despondency they can inflict on me when they are threatened and lost.