

**Series: Gospel-Centered Paradigm**  
**#3: How Does the Gospel Change Us?**  
**Galatians 2:14**  
**New City Church of Los Angeles**  
**July 6, 2008**  
**By Kevin Haah**

I. Introduction to the Series

We're in the middle of a series called "Gospel-Centered Paradigm." Some of you are here wondering what New City is about, and if that's you, you are going to hear some pure DNA stuff of New City today. This is what makes us unique as a church. Our vision statement says we are an inclusive gospel-centered community and we have been talking about what it means to be gospel-centered.

In the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the religious leaders confronted Jesus about hanging out with sinners. At the end of the response, Jesus said in Mark 2:27-28:

"And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

New wine creates air and if it goes into an old brittle wineskin, it will burst. You have to put new wine into new wineskin, Jesus said. He was saying that his teachings, the gospel, did not fit into their existing paradigms. If you put Jesus into your existing paradigm, it's not going to work.

I just read an article in LA Times about Thomas Jefferson's Bible. He cut and pasted the NT into 46 pages. He took out all of the accounts of miracles, including the resurrection. He called his Bible: "Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth." He essentially wanted to put Jesus into his pre-existing world view. And made Jesus into a great moral teacher, and nothing more. If Jesus is just your moral teacher, then you are not a Christian. Jesus came to be your savior and Lord! He came to give you a new life and paradigm.

What we are going to do in this series is to take the old paradigms that we have, dissect it, see its weaknesses, get rid of it, and then replace it with the new paradigm that Jesus gave us, the gospel-centered paradigm.

## II. Introduction to the talk

When I say the word gospel, I know some of us are confused. The essence of it is that God loves you so much that he came to this world in the person of Jesus Christ and gave his life for you and died for you.

He lived a life you have lived and died a death that you should have died. The gospel is the reality that we are all screwed up and we can't save ourselves, and that God loved us so much that he gave himself for us to save us from our pit.

If you have never taken the step to receive the forgiveness that comes from putting your faith in him, I pray that you do so.

That's how we become Christians. We say, "God, I've screwed up. I need you to come and rescue me and save me and forgive me."

Like we talked about last week, as the father is in the prodigal son's story, when you come to God, you will realize that he's been waiting for you, he will run to you, embrace you, kiss you, and throw a feast to celebrate your return. He will restore you and give you a place in His Kingdom.

But, after we become a Christian through the gospel, we toss the gospel out the window except to tell non-Christians and go on trying hard to live a good Christian life. We go on to so-called more advanced stuff: God's laws and principles.

That was my problem. I grew up in the church and I thought Christianity was about being a good person and obeying all the commandments. If we do something wrong, we ask for forgiveness, but basically, we try really hard to be good. But, I had issues. I tried to stop doing something I didn't want to do; but, I couldn't do it. I tried and tried but I couldn't do it. I didn't want other people to know what I did, so I hid it. Later, my Christian fellowship was a façade.

I was just talking to a friend over the weekend, and he told me that he was a part of a church plant for about 5 years. They struggled and ultimately shut down. But, he said everyone who used to go to that church didn't go to a church for a long time. I asked him what happened. He said they were so gung ho about being righteous, living a pure life, living according to the biblical principles, that people started to fake it. Most people wanted to live up to the standard, but they couldn't and they struggled on their own because they couldn't share their weaknesses with each other. And one by one, it became

revealed that people were kind of screwed up, including himself who ended up getting a divorce, and the church could not sustain itself anymore.

What happened was that all of these people became a Christian through the gospel, after realizing that God loves them and forgives them for their sins. BUT, after they became a Christian, they left the gospel behind and just focused on moral living! Trying to be the best person possible. Trying to live by God's commands. And when the focus shifted to the righteous living: the result was dismal: If you end up living up to the standard, you end up becoming smug and prideful. You just pushed yourself to do something. There was no real love in your heart. There's no real softness of the heart. You conformed your behavior to some external code, but your heart is very far away. In fact, you feel pretty angry that you have to live like this. You have a slight internal jealousy towards more relativistic people who seem to do whatever they want. You can't really show the real self to others, but somewhere in the line, when you mess up, you're first tendency is to hide it from others and even deny it to yourself. It becomes a pretty pathetic life. If this is what Christianity is all about, why would I want to be one? Maybe I'll become one right before I die.

But, that's not what the Bible teaches us.

**The thesis today is that the gospel is not just the ABCs of Christianity; it is the A-Z of Christianity. That the gospel is not just for becoming a Christian (justification), but is also the foundation for growing as a Christian (sanctification). I am going to try to explain how the gospel changes our heart and character. Without the gospel, sanctification does not work.**

### **III. Galatians 2:11-14**

READ

I talked a briefly about this in the first sermon of the series, but I am going to go much deeper today.

This passage tells us the wrong way to change and the right way to change.

### **IV. The wrong way to change.**

Here, we have one of the apostles, Paul, challenging the behavior of another apostle, Peter. Peter used to be exclusive. He never associated or ate with non-Jews. But, the Holy Spirit showed him that God accepts non-Jews (Gentiles) just as much as Jews, and they were commanded to fellowship together with gentiles. Essentially, God told him to make the church multi-ethnic and bring people of all races together, loving one another. But, later on, his racism and hypocrisy and the sense of superiority creped in, and he started to disassociate himself from non-Jews.

The way Apostle Paul argues with Peter is extremely important! He could have said to Peter: you broke the no racism rule, but instead, he said, you are not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.

So, the wrong way to change is through laying down the rules and demanding compliance from yourself via moral striving or trying harder. But, this is the way we all try to change. I am not saying that we shouldn't try to be good or try harder, but if our focus in Christian living comes from moral striving or just trying harder to keep the rules, it's not going to work in the long run.

Let's take some time to look at why we change our behavior.

We change because of fear or pride.

- Fear that if we do this we are going to get arrested, or it's not good for business or our spouse is going to leave us, we are going to get hurt, etc. There's the lawyer's model: if you don't do this, we are going to sue you. If you don't do this, you're going to make less money. You're going to get a bad grade. It's going to make you sick. If you don't do this, you are not going to be accepted, you are not going to be loved, you are not going to be included.
- Or we change because of pride. I'm better than them. You don't want to be like those people. Your identity as a person is based on thinking of yourself better than other people; so, you have to live up to it. That's your motivation for being good.
- Now, the world would be a horrible place if there weren't moral compliance due to fear or pride. It's very useful. But, if you are moral out of fear or pride, you have not done anything to root out the self-centeredness of the heart. You've actually appealed to it. Ultimately, moral people who are moral do it for

themselves. They don't do good for others or in it of itself. The morality is actually nurturing the self-centeredness. When you nurture for example, honesty, out of fear or pride, it is a house of cards because sometimes it is not worth telling the truth—because of it was done for yourself in the first place. When morality does not pay for it, you don't do it. You might be shocked by your behavior (I can't believe I actually did that, stole that, lied to him), but you WERE nurtured to do it.

Charles Spurgeon story:

- Once upon a time, a gardener grew a great garden. He grew the best and the greatest carrot and gave it to the prince, and said, "I want to express my esteem and affection for you." The prince discerning his heart that he just wants to express his love and admiration, thanked the gardener and said, "I happened to own the garden next to you and I want you to have it so that you can go out there and be twice the gardener." And the gardener went home rejoicing.
- A Nobleman heard about this. And he thought if gardener gives a carrot and he gets 3 acres, what might he give if I give him something much more valuable. So, he went to the prince and said, I raise horses and this is the best and the greatest horse that I own. I want to express my esteem and affection to you and gave the prince the horse. The prince discerning the nobleman's heart, said, thank you and walked away. The nobleman said, wait a minute, did you hear what I said. The prince said, "Yes I did. The gardener gave me the carrot but you gave yourself the horse." Spurgeon said: unless you understand the gospel, all of your virtues are a sham and it won't last and in the heart of your morality, you are nurturing self-centeredness.

Some of you have asked me this question: if we are saved and accepted by God through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by works, what incentive do we have to be a good person. Why not just go on sinning? This gospel of love does not change us, you imply. It actually gives us an excuse for continuing to live in sin. If that's your question, here's my answer. If the punishment is taken away and you said you lost your motivation to be

good, then the only reason you were good is because of fear. And what I am saying is that moral compliance based on fear is essentially selfish, leading us to darkness in our hearts and ultimately depravity in society.

So, behavioral compliance, while it seems good on the surface, is superficial and ultimately does not work to change us at our core.

## **V. Then, what is the right way to change?**

You have to get to your heart. Your heart has to change. That's what God is after. And the passage says that right way to change is to act in line with the truth of the gospel. Why? Because the gospel works to change our heart, and therefore, our character. It's an inside-out transformation.

The only way to change your heart is to be smitten by the beauty of God and the gospel of grace and truth. John 1:14 tells us that Jesus is full of grace and truth. We must fully grasp grace and truth, which is the gospel.

The truth of how messed up we are has to click in our heart: that I have been running away from him. I have been selfish even in my goodness. That I've been out of control or trying to control too much. That my life is messed up. That I am more sinful than I can ever imagine. My heart is deeply selfish and prideful even in the things I was doing right. If we truly understand this about ourselves, humility sets in and pride is destroyed. If you know how messed up you are, you are humble.

But, truth without grace is not truth at all. It's only self-condemnation. Or some people might say, bad self-esteem!

You see, God's grace has to click in your heart as well: that he loved you so much that he left the glory of heaven, came down to this dusty place, forsook his riches, lived in poverty, was stripped naked on the cross, was whipped, spat upon, humiliated, and ultimately suffered separation from his father—he was so much in agony that he cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” He was forsaken, so that we can be accepted, so that the price of justice can be paid. He became our substitutionary atonement, or put another way, someone who paid the debt that we could not ever pay. He paid it with his life. Because of that, we are unconditionally accepted by God not based on my performance, but because of his grace and unconditional love. So, we are

not motivated by fear. We are motivated by deep love and gratitude. Romans 5 says, we love him because he first loved us.

The gospel destroys pride and fear, and changes our heart to gratitude and love. Because we experienced an undeserving acceptance, our hearts are transformed, and so, we obey.

Let me give you some examples from the Bible:

- 2 Corin 8:9. In most churches, when we try to get people to give money: you do it this way: pride—you want to be one of the persons that gives away a lot. This is God's command: You put pressure on the will. He says he is not commanding them. Paul says: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty you might become rich." He is bringing Jesus salvation into the realm of money. Think of what Jesus has done for you and it should move you. The solution of stinginess is the reorientation to Christ's generosity. The gospel goes after the root cause of stinginess.
- Eph 5:25: Paul is speaking to husbands, who often came up from pagan society. Marriage was a business relationship but Paul wanted them to cherish, honor, and love their wives. Paul does not appeal to morals. Paul shows them the salvation of Jesus. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself to us. Again, it is motivated by the gospel.
- Faith in the gospel restructures your heart. Behavior compliance is superficial and fleeting.

Let me give you a couple of example of how this might work practically in our lives.

Suffering:

- If we have been trying change the wrong way: through moral striving: you either hate God or hate yourself. You either say: "I must be bad to be suffering" or you

say, “what did I do to deserve this?” If you feel like you’ve done pretty well living up to God’s standards and obeying God, you are going to be angry at God if suffering happens. You feel entitled to God’s blessings in the form of less suffering. (this is essentially the elder brother’s approach to suffering)

- Another wrong way to approach suffering is to try to avoid suffering at all costs-- lying, cheating, and broken promises are OK (this is the younger brother’s approach to suffering). But when suffering does come, you blame God, claiming that he’s either unjust or impotent.
- Gospel: on the one hand, the gospel humbles us out of being mad at God. Jesus suffered terribly but he died in suffering. This demolishes the idea that good people live good lives and bad people live bad lives. What makes us exempt if Jesus suffered?

Whatever the reason for suffering, it can’t be he does not care. It might be a wakeup call. Whatever problem it is it can’t be punishment. Retribution fell into the heart of Jesus. There may be millions of reasons, but it can’t be for your sins.

When you focus on the gospel, your heart changes to something like this: “Jesus suffered not that we might not suffer but when we suffer, we might become like thee.”