

The Gospel

INTRO

Excitement About the Equip Series. An answer to prayer.

Reasons for the equip series (Information is not truth, Pastoral Imperatives, Deconstruction, Need for Spirit-led Leaders with well formed convictions).

The Equip series is a collection of courses designed to make known the beliefs and values of Awaken Church in such a way that they inform our practices and our culture.

It is the culture, within the church, that will ultimately win the day. We can talk. We can do the work to believe the right things, and we should. But my prayer is that we possess a culture within our community of devotion to Christ. That we spur each other on to run hard after Him.

When I say our beliefs inform our practices I do mean that. But it might be better to say our true beliefs inform our practices. Maybe our practices reveal our beliefs. Do I believe that God hears my prayers, but I don't pray. Well I may believe in a sense, but there is likely disbelief lurking under the surface. Our prayer ought to be that our true beliefs would be true beliefs. And those true beliefs will point us to the Lord.

Through the equip series you should be able to answer more clearly the what and why of those beliefs. You should understand and appreciate how we relate to the wider body of Christ. Confidence in our convictions with respect for all the children of God. This is our aim. Conviction and Humility.

There's a quote from a relatively unknown seventeenth century German theologian, aside from this one quote, **"In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity."** The quote comes from a tract written during the 30 years war, a devastating war fought in part due to theological disagreement. This quote ought to represent our heart as we pursue greater depth and unity.

I'd also like to reference an analogy made famous by CS Lewis in Mere Christianity. In this analogy CS Lewis describes a great house with many rooms. The halls of the house represent Mere Christianity. This is what the book was all about. The bottom line essentials to which all Christians must agree. But one cannot make a home in the halls.

We must, trusting the leading of God, enter a room. We must by the very nature of things come to convictions that go beyond the bottom lines essentials of Christian doctrine. I hope that this series will help us take ownership of our room and live gladly within it, while loving and respecting all those in the household of faith.

Next month we're going to spend our time on the topic, "Handling the word of truth." This will be a multi-month course unlike today where we're powering thought the whole course in one session. What is the Bible and how should one approach it? This is the primary question.

Lastly we've provided some note pages with a basic outline of where we're going today. To complete the Equip Series you'll need to answer some basic questions online. I'd recommend doing this on a computer at awakencolumbus.com/equip. But if you prefer writing just let Brandon know and he'll get you hard copies of the questions. Also you'll find the very first document at awakencolumbus.com/equip called "gospel word study" a helpful reference. Please take a moment and bring up that document before we continue.

This morning we are beginning with first things first. The gospel. Why start with the gospel? The gospel is the beginning and end of our beliefs and values.

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

1 Timothy 1:8-11

Any idea that is in opposition to sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel is listed alongside of kidnapping, murder, sexual immorality, etc. The same word translated here "sound" is often translated healthy. Sound is correct but it goes beyond correct. Life giving, healthy doctrine conforms to the gospel that God entrusted to Paul. Bad and destructive doctrine opposes the gospel. The end of bad doctrine is a confusion of the person and work of Christ.

Gospel Overview

When we talk about the gospel we're referencing the greek noun εὐαγγέλιον or its verb counterpart εὐαγγελίζω. The word simply means, "good news," or in the case of verb form, "to preach the good news."

This word used in the theological sense, as we're using it today, has become synonymous with a clearly defined set of truths and historical events expressed in the New Testament. You can take a moment to look through the gospel word study. This list contains every instance in the New Testament where these words are used. Just to go through these, even in the individual verse forms, I think can help us get a sense of how the word is used.

Like any attempt to understand the meaning of a biblical or word or phrase, we must make a good faith effort to hear the word or phrase from the perspective of the first audience. These words of scripture were God breathed with a fixed intent and meaning. We cannot change the fixed, first-century meaning of the Holy Spirit-inspired words of scripture. This is true even as those words penetrate the hearts of individuals to produce a unique effect.

Background: Let's get some background information so that we can begin to hear this word as it would have been heard in the first century.

Roughly 4,000 years ago a man named Abraham was born into a world dominated by superstition and pagan, religious ritual. God revealed himself to Abraham and promised to make his descendants into a great nation. This nation would be so great that, "all peoples on earth would be blessed through [Abraham]" (Genesis 12:3b). Abraham believed God. And according to Genesis 15:6, "his faith was credited to him as righteousness."

Long past the age of child bearing, Abraham and his wife Sarah conceived a child and named him Isaac. This was the beginning of the Abrahamic nation God promised. That promise appeared to be in jeopardy when God commanded Abraham to present Isaac as a sacrificial offering. According to Hebrews 11:9, "Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead." As Abraham began to follow through on God's command, believing that, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8), God intervened, stopped Abraham from harming Isaac, and provided a ram for the burnt offering.

Isaac had multiple sons, but the heir through whom God's promises would be fulfilled was Jacob, whom God later renamed Israel. Israel had 12 sons. Joseph, the second from the youngest, was abused and sold into slavery by his brothers. After years of suffering in slavery followed by false imprisonment in Egypt, God intervened and brought Joseph out of prison. He saved Egypt and the surrounding regions from famine through Joseph's dreams and wisdom, and he elevated Joseph to a place of honor and influence second only to Pharaoh.

Due to severe famine Joseph's brothers came to Egypt, were reconciled to Joseph, and remained in Egypt under the blessing of Pharaoh. Each of the twelve brothers and their wives bore children and grew in number. They became a nation while in Egypt. But a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph came to power and began to mistreat the 12 families that had now become tribes of Israel. For four hundred years the Israelites were brutally enslaved by the Egyptians. Until, through Moses, God brought them out of Egypt as a nation. He provided for them, disciplined them, revealed Himself to them. He gave them a constitution. He led them in practices that would separate them from the godless people by whom they were surrounded. Along with a constitution he revealed to them, through Moses, his moral commandments by which all people must live.

The people continued to reject God, experience his discipline, return to God, experience his blessing, and reject God yet again. This became an endless cycle. Discontent to live with God as the king, the Israelites clamored for a national leader to rule over them. They wanted to be like the neighboring kingdoms. God warned them where this would lead, but ultimately he relented to their request and allowed for an earthly Israelite king.

After the first king proved himself to be unfaithful to God, King David, a man after God's own heart was anointed to rule Israel. Even David faltered in his devotion to God, but he led Israel and the kingdom grew. Through David's son, Solomon, the kingdom of Israel powerfully occupied the land God had promised Abraham. God's blessing flowed to and through Israel.

Subsequent kings divided the kingdom into north and south, and the cycle of disobedience, discipline, repentance, and blessing continued but with a clear trajectory towards greater discipline and disobedience. Despite countless warnings given through God's prophets, the northern kingdom of Israel's disobedience gave way to discipline and destruction. The northern kingdom was conquered and destroyed by the dreaded Assyrian military in 722 BC, and the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom are lost to this day.

The southern kingdom, with Jerusalem as the capital city, came to a similar point of judgment in 586 BC. The Babylonian military destroyed the temple. This was the center of society and the unique dwelling place of God among the people. The Babylonians tore down the city walls, rampaged the kingdom, and carried numerous people far away from Jerusalem into exile.

God's promised kingdom to Abraham seemed to now be out of reach. There was a remnant of Abraham's descendants that remained in the ruined and poverty stricken city of Jerusalem. It's to these ruined people of Jerusalem that the poem of Isaiah 52 is written.

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
"Your God reigns!"
Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices;
together they shout for joy.
When the Lord returns to Zion,
they will see it with their own eyes.
Burst into songs of joy together,
you ruins of Jerusalem,
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The Lord will lay bare his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth will see
the salvation of our God.
Isaiah 52:7-10

Good news. The phrase is used in a generic sense through the Old Testament. But in Isaiah we see it beginning to take shape as a theological concept. The poem speaks of a ruined people with watchmen watching on ruined walls. From a distance the watchmen see a messenger and this messenger is bringing good news. Even their feet are beautiful due to the news they bring. Peace. Good tidings. Salvation. The God of Israel still reigns even though the city has been broken down. The Lord will return to Jerusalem. The Israelites will see him with their own eyes. All nations and all the earth will see His salvation when this happens. When the Lord returns to Jerusalem.

It's important to note that this passage is quoted in Romans 10:15. It's also closely mirrored in Nahum 1:15. The word used here is the Hebrew equivalent to εὐαγγέλιον or gospel. Isaiah 61 continues the good news theme.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
Isaiah 61:1a.

These poor are the ruined inhabitants of Jerusalem. The heirs of a broken down kingdom, desperate for a future and a return to God's promised glory.

Shadows of victory followed through the subsequent centuries. Jerusalem's walls were rebuilt and its system of temple worship was restored. Yet the inhabitants of Jerusalem were an occupied people. First they were occupied by the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks. Finally Jerusalem was occupied by the most powerful and ruthless empire the world had ever seen. The Romans.

The Israelites despised the Roman occupation. They were a puppet state, allowed to live with some appearance of self-rule, but they were dominated and taxed by the Romans. They did not have the kingdom Abraham was promised. They wanted the kind of kingdom power of the Romans. It was their birthright.

There was through this occupation an expectation of messiah.

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty

will accomplish this.

Isaiah 9:6-7

This was the cultural backdrop into which Jesus was born. Jesus was born to little fanfare in an occupied country. The people longed to see the Lord enter Jerusalem and consummate this kingdom promised to Abraham and David. They longed for victory. Even the Pharisees asked Jesus repeatedly, “when the kingdom of God would come” (Luke 17:20).

Hear Mark 1:1 with this perspective:

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,

Mark 1:1

This is the story about how God would bring about his kingdom rule and promise. Hear this from the perspective of a first century Jew, living under occupation. Take a moment and scroll again through through the word study page. Try and feel what they would have felt hearing this announcement of good news, particularly in the gospels.

There is good news. The kingdom is coming and has come. There is hope. There is victory. There is a way forward. The Abrahamic promises will once and for all time come to fruition. This was truly good news for which Jews in occupation would have been desperate.

So here’s what is crucial to understand in reading the gospels: When Jesus speaks of the kingdom, when he speaks of the good news of the kingdom, the people are predisposed to think of this in one way. Military conquest. Even Jesus’ hand-picked disciples could not get past this preconceived notion.

“Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51b). Remember the promise that the Lord would enter into Jerusalem and bring with him victory for all the nations to see. This is the building expectation of the book of Luke. From 9:51 on Jesus is moving towards Jerusalem. Along the way he’s teaching his disciples that his kingdom principles are much different from what they’ve understood. In order to be greatest in the kingdom one must be a servant. Jesus taught that citizens of His kingdom would love their enemies, wash others feet, care for the poor, and recognize their utter dependance on God. It was to be an upside down kingdom where the greatest was the least.

This passage might illustrate what I'm speaking to as much as any other:

Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

-Matthew 20:17-28

Keep in mind the anticipation as Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem. There is an expectation that Jesus is about to consummate the kingdom. This is the good news. But there's this parallel narrative that Jesus is sharing about his own suffering and death. This seems to confuse his disciples. Even his closest companions did not understand how this related to the good news of the kingdom of which Jesus was the Messiah and King. So on the heels of Jesus speaking of his impending suffering, the mother of James and John asks for them to be granted seats on his left and right in his kingdom. She believed strongly in Jesus. But she believed he was entering into Jerusalem as a military conqueror who would overthrow the Roman Occupiers and reign as the political leader of a glorified Jerusalem. She's essentially asking for cabinet positions for her sons. Don't think of her as an obtuse fool or an unbeliever. Her expectation was in line with nearly everyone else.

This is why what happened next was so shocking. Jesus did indeed enter Jerusalem to bring about his kingdom rule. He would do this by subjecting himself to the hateful, legalistic political and religious leaders in Jerusalem, and by allowing himself to be murdered by way of torture and crucifixion at the hands of the Roman occupiers.

This was not the plan. Even the disciples who had heard Jesus' own testimony about his death were shocked and dejected. In their eyes, it was inconceivable that the kingdom of God could be installed through the death of Messiah. Until Sunday. The tomb in which Jesus body was laid was found open and empty. He risen from the dead, alive, and glorious.

Now his disciples, and all people, could finally understand the gospel that Jesus had been preaching all along. The kingdom would come not by military conquest and political victory but by death and resurrection. And we see this gospel articulated numerous times throughout the rest of the scriptures. It is the foundation for all theology and Christian belief. Good doctrine leads to it. False teaching creates a pathway that departs from the gospel. However far off it is, the inevitable destination of false teaching is something other than the gospel.

Definition: So let's get at a definition of the gospel. Like other theological words there's not a precise definition given in the scriptures, but we can synthesize the teaching of scripture into a succinct definition that is not in itself infallible, but hopefully it can be helpful.

In order to arrive at a definition I've used two passages. Mark 1:1 and 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5.

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,
Mark 1:1

The gospel is about Jesus
It involves Jesus' Identity as Messiah and the Son of God
The gospel is recorded in the first four books of the New Testament.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3b-5

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.
1 Corinthians 15:3b-5

15:3b-5 is the earliest Christian creed that we have. A creed being a formal statement of beliefs. Paul would have received this formulaic creed during his trip to Jerusalem just 5 years after the resurrection. Information about that trip is found in Galatians 1.

The content of the creed.

1. Christ died for our sins.
2. This happened to fulfill the OT scriptures
3. He was buried
4. He was raised
5. His Appearances. His appearances validate both the reality and the physicality of the resurrection as well as the authoritative teaching of the Apostles who were directly commissioned by Jesus.

Here is a working gospel definition that takes all of these points into account.

The Gospel is the true story of Jesus' identity as Messiah and Lord, his death on a cross as the sacrificial offering for the sins of mankind, and his bodily resurrection from the dead.

This is a gospel definition that is consistent with the scriptures, the historic teaching of the church rooted in the early church councils, and it reflects the protestant, evangelical tradition of which Awaken Church is a part.

Notice this is all about Jesus and his work. The gospel is about Jesus. It's not about us. It's not about any periphery thing, or action, or service, or fruit of the gospel. The gospel is about Jesus Christ, who he is, and what he's done. This is the good news of the kingdom.

Break for Discussion. Any thoughts or questions thus far?

Now in addition to answering the question, “what do we believe?” It can also be helpful to answer the question, “what do we not believe?” The answers to this question can bring a greater level of clarity. That is what we’ll do next. Are there other traditions that would define the gospel differently? Now I don’t mean different in nuance or the specific words or order that I’ve put forward for us. Those differences are to be expected when we’re looking at something systematic. I’d like to look at some differences that are more substantive.

How does this gospel definition differ others outside and even inside the body of Christ?

Cults: First let’s provide a definition as to what a cult is.

“Theologically speaking, a cult is a religious group that derives from a parent religion (such as Christianity), but in fact departs from that parent religion by denying (either explicitly or implicitly) one or more of the essential doctrines of that religion.”

— The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations by Ron Rhodes
<http://a.co/9o8tq1e>

There is something that is uniquely challenging with cultic religious beliefs. You may find that a Mormon or a Jehovah’s Witness would agree with the points laid out in our gospel definition. And this is why it is important to define our terms. For example. The foundation of our definition is Jesus identity as Messiah and Lord. Now the question is what do we mean by the word Lord. We’re using it in a particular sense. The sense of the New Testament writers.

“...The New Testament writers faced a very thorny problem. Since the word “God” (ho theos) refers to the Father, how could it be said that Jesus Christ is God without implicitly saying that Jesus Christ is the Father which the New Testament writers did not want to say? They wanted to affirm that Jesus is God, but they knew that Jesus was not the Father, he was distinct from the Father. So how could they say that Jesus is God without saying that Jesus is the Father? This was the difficult issue that the New Testament writers faced. What you find as you read the New Testament is that they exhibited an incredible ingenuity in finding every other possible way to affirm the deity of Christ without coming out and simply saying blanketly “Jesus is ho theos,” “Jesus is God....”

That is why you don't find very many statements in the scriptures that say in a sort of straight forward way, "Jesus Christ is God." Because that would be to confuse the Father and the Son. Therefore, rather than say that, the New testament writers tried to find every other way they could to express the deity of Christ without saying that Jesus was ho theos.

For example, they used the title "kurios" and applied this to Jesus Christ. Kurios is the Greek word for the Old Testament name of God. We translate it as "LORD" but in the Old Testament this is the name of Yahweh, God's name, sometimes mistransliterated as "Jehovah," Yahweh, the Great I AM. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint, Yahweh is rendered by the Greek word kurios which is our English word "Lord." What the New Testament writers did was they picked up this word for Jesus Christ. So rather than calling Jesus ho theos ("God"), they chose the Old Testament word for Yahweh – Lord – and called Jesus Christ "Lord." Then they applied to Jesus Christ Old Testament proof texts about Yahweh and said that these were actually referring to Jesus Christ."

Defenders Podcast: Series, The Doctrine of the Trinity (Part 1) William Lane Craig
<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-1/s1-the-doctrine-of-the-trinity/the-doctrine-of-the-trinity-part-1/>

This last point is really the proof that the New Testament is not referring to Jesus as Lord in any other sense. Romans 10:9 and 13 are a key example of this.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9

...for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Romans 10:13

In Romans 10:13, Paul is quoting Joel 2:32, which refers to Yahweh. Yahweh is translated Kurios in Greek. Jesus is clearly the Lord to which Paul is referring in Romans 10:9 and 10:13. Therefore to say Jesus is Lord is to say Jesus is Yahweh. To say Jesus is Yahweh is to say that he is divine, uncreated, possessing all of the divine attributes.

This definition differs so significantly from the way that Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, or any number of pseudo-Christian cults would define the term "Lord," that it renders those groups wholly outside of the church and non-Christian by nature. Let's look at these two groups as an example.

The following are two quotes from authoritative sources on Mormon Theology (Or the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints).

"God himself, was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!...it is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how He came to be so; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 305)"

"Among the spirit children of Elohim the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ to whom all others are juniors There is no impropriety, therefore, in speaking of Jesus Christ as the elder brother of the rest of humankind.... Let it not be forgotten, however, that He is essentially greater than any and all others by reason (1) of His seniority as the oldest or firstborn; (2) of His unique status in the flesh as the offspring of a mortal mother and of an immortal, or resurrected and glorified, Father; (3) of His selection and foreordination as the one and only Redeemer and Savior of the race; and (4) of His transcendent sinlessness. (*Improvement Era*, vol. 19, pp. 941-942, June 30, 1916)"

The following is a quote from an authoritative source on Jehovah's Witness Theology.

"He was a spirit person, just as "God is a Spirit"; he was a mighty one, although not almighty as Jehovah God is; also he was before all others of God's creatures, for he was the first son that Jehovah God brought forth. Hence he is called "the only begotten Son" of God, for God had no partner in bringing forth his first-begotten Son. He was the first of Jehovah God's creations."

http://www.kingdomherald.org/biblical_truths/7/what-do-you-say-respecting-the-messiah-.html

So cults, in this sense, may affirm every word of our gospel definition, yet they would differ so radically in their meaning of those words as to render them outside of the Christian religion.

Progressive Theology and the Social Gospel:

Progressive Theology hits a bit closer to home, and to be honest its ideal are constantly pushing up against us whether we recognize them or not. I'd like to start us here with a quote.

"Miracles, it is true, do not happen; but of the marvellous and the inexplicable there is plenty. In our present state of knowledge we have become more careful, more

hesitating in our judgment, in regard to the stories of the miraculous which we have received from antiquity. That the earth in its course stood still; that a she-ass spoke; that a storm was quieted by a word, we do not believe, and we shall never again believe; but that the lame walked, the blind saw, and the deaf heard, will not be so summarily dismissed as an illusion."

-Adolf Von Harnack. Essays on the Social Gospel. What is Christianity?

Here is a quote from Adolf Von Harnack who was a leading voice in German liberal theology. There is, still today, no greater influence on secular, religious teaching than 19th century, German Liberal Theology. I hear Von Harnack's ideology, and even older German liberal theological constructs, when Ohio State students share with me what they're learning in their New Testament classes.

The bottom line is that Von Harnack rejected Jesus as a divine, miracle worker. He emphasized the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite worth of the soul. It's possible, in his view, that some of the healing events in the New Testament occurred and we simply don't understand the natural mechanism by which they occurred. But there are no miracles. This is what he's communicating in this quote. And Jesus is certainly not divine."His thesis was that Christian dogma in its conception and development is a work of the Hellenistic Greek spirit based on the Gospel of Jesus in the New Testament." <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Adolf-von-Harnack>

In other words, Von Harnack believed that the original teachings and spirit of Jesus were hijacked by Paul and by other other Greek thinkers that made a myth out of the man and turned him into something and someone he did not purport to be. Another closely associated strain of thought is that Paul and Peter were ideological opponents in the early church. Peter represented Jesus and Jewish Christianity, while Paul represented the Greek version of Christianity that made Jesus into a myth. Paul's version eventually one out and that's what we're left with today: A version of Christianity that is different than the Christianity of Jesus. It's Paul's Christianity as opposed to Jesus's and Peter's. Now this view has been discredited. The ideas of those who began to teach this, again in 19th century Germany, have been shown to be demonstrably false by New Testament scholars. These ideas have been rejected by even irreligious academics. Yet Ohio State students taking a New Testament class today are being introduced to these ideas as if they are novel. What few students know is that they are often hearing outdated, demonstrably false theories, that have been largely rejected.

Years ago this was my experience at the renowned Columbus State Community College. My History of Western Civilization professor taught the same theory. Paul vs Peter/Jesus. She played up Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians and told a story of the origin of the church that is not consistent with reality. She was taking a page out of the books of the 19th century German liberals.

Now I'd like to share a modern day quote from Greg Carey, a New Testament professor at Lancaster Theological Seminary, and a member of the United Church of Christ, an unequivocally liberal denomination.

"Today Jesus' followers stand two millennia removed from Jesus' direct gospel proclamation. But our own gospel need not veer far from the one Mark summarizes at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Christians believe that in Jesus Christ God's kingdom has drawn near — and it does draw near. That is the gospel. God's work, revealed in Jesus, continues through those who follow him. Where community is built and healing occurs, the gospel breaks out. Where mercy is offered and justice breaks through, God's kingdom is on the loose. Where people encounter the blessing of God and reconciliation with one another, gospel happens....The time is here. God's kingdom is afoot. Get ready, and believe this gospel."

-Quoted from Greg Carey, Professor of New Testament, Lancaster Theological Seminary in the Huffington Post.

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-is-the-gospel_b_1292241

This quote contains some nice sentiment, but as an heir of the old-school, liberal theologians, Carey separates the gospel from the identity of Jesus, from his death for the forgiveness of sins, and from his resurrection. According to Carey, the gospel is about healing (without the supranational intervention of God I might add) and community building. Community building and healing are wonderful things, but I hope we've clearly seen that they are not the gospel.

There is a trap here. Within the framework of what might be considered progressive theology, there is a tendency to take what may be secondary and place it as primary. In other words progressives want the The fruit of Christianity without the real Christ of Christianity. In reality everything begins and ends with Jesus, his true identity, according to the scriptures, his death for our sins on a cross, and his resurrection from the dead.

Those who come to believe in the biblical gospel will experience transformation, and they will likely bring transformation to the world around them, but transformation is secondary. The gospel is primary, which means Jesus is primary.

Let me explain to you why I believe this is so paramount. A number of years ago I was speaking with a close friend. This friend was at one of our services and the service closed with a fairly strong call to action. She was stirred up, but the call to action was centered around the proclamation of the gospel. She protested to this. "I want to do something," she said. "You stirred me to action, but gave me nothing to do." In my friend's mind, the proclamation of the gospel was nothing. Or at least nothing of significance. She was correctly seeing the brokenness in our world and she was looking for an avenue to enact social change. And I would celebrate this. But she failed to see the enormous opportunity that is gospel proclamation. The identity, death, and resurrection of Jesus is so glorious, that its simple proclamation is changing lives all around the world.

My friend was not a progressive Christian, yet she was unwittingly influenced by progressive Christian teaching that deemphasizes at the least or even goes as far as to deny Jesus as Lord and his work on the cross and through the resurrection. Again it's important to define terms, and there is no authoritative theology for progressive Christians. But for those progressives who adhere to the social gospel of Von Harnack, their religion is something other than authentic Christianity.

Full Gospel Theology

Next let's look at another perspective on our gospel definition that is of a different variety. Cults of course are outside of the body of Christ. Progressive Theology is more nebulous, but to the extent one believes the teachings of 19th century German, liberal theologians, they would find themselves rejecting the Christian gospel.

Full Gospel theology comes squarely from within the church. From brothers and sisters who confess genuinely to our gospel definition and the Lordship of Jesus. Yet there are differences. The concept of the full gospel may be the most foundational theological concept within pentecostalism, which is the fastest growing strain of the church today. Assemblies of God are the largest Pentecostal denomination and serve as the standard bearers. Churches like Hillsong, which was formerly in the Assemblies of God, are Pentecostal in nature, but perhaps a touch closer to the middle than others. Bethel Church in Redding, also formerly in the Assemblies of God, represents a church that is Pentecostal in nature but a bit closer to the extremes. Also much of what you see on Christian television and many faith healers are Pentecostal.

Here is the foundational scripture:

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

Romans 15:18-20

In this verse. Paul speaks of God accomplished, through his ministry, leading the Gentiles to obey God. This happened by what Paul said and by what he did - by the power of signs and wonders. Pentecostals right perceive that God performed signs and wonders through Paul and that those signs and wonders were part of what brought about such fruit through his ministry.

This is where we agree. We also agree that signs and wonders are possible today, and that God is still working miracles around the world. We should not hesitate to ask God for anything. He is caring and He is mighty.

The difference is the way that Pentacostals borrow the “full gospel” terminology from these verses. God performed signs and miracles through Paul, and he used those to convict Gentiles of the gospel truths. Paul proclaimed the full gospel. Therefore the full gospel includes signs and wonders. This is not a logical conclusion to draw from this verse.

“Power must be displayed for this gospel to be revealed for what it is. To touch the hearts of people...Without power it's not good news.”

-Bill Johnson, Bethel Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HrRkH9MKJY>

The outflowing of this conclusion is obvious. An overemphasis on signs and wonders. It dismisses the many times throughout the New Testament that the gospel was proclaimed without signs and wonders, and it puts an unreasonable and unbiblical expectation on every individual believer as they seek to proclaim the gospel. It is inadequate without signs and wonders. It is only part of the gospel. It is not the full gospel.

And we would say no. The full gospel is the identity of Jesus, his death for our sins, and his resurrection. Authentic signs and wonders, as glorious as they are, have nothing to do with what the gospel is. And frankly, I believe that this ideology can lead to an overemphasis on signs and wonders that produces counterfeits.

There's another feature within pentecostalism. And you could hear this communicated by non pentecostal charismatics. There's an underlying idea that's even common to progressive Christians, although it is worked out differently. Here's the idea.

The gospel of the kingdom (Jesus)

The gospel of salvation (Paul)

Strong progressives believe Paul and Jesus preached two entirely different gospels, and essentially Paul's is a counterfeit. Some Pentecostal or charismatic Christians would affirm that Jesus and Paul preached two different gospels, yet they would believe both are valid. We need the gospel of salvation to be born again. But have you heard about the gospel of the kingdom. This is the gospel that Jesus preached. Through it we can see God's rule and reign come to the earth by day of signs and wonders. Jesus promises healing here and now. And this gospel of the kingdom proclaims the good news that Jesus will definitely heal your ailments now. If you believe. The subtext is that any lack of healing is due to unbelief.

We differ on this point. The gospel of the kingdom is the gospel of salvation. And the gospel of salvation is the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel of Paul is the gospel of Peter is the gospel of Jesus is the gospel of James, and so on and so forth. There is one gospel by which we are saved.

Some have failed to understand an appropriate answer to this question: Why does the gospel seem so much more clear in Paul's preaching than in Jesus' preaching?

Discussion.

Paul was simply preaching a summary of any one of the four gospels. The four gospels all follow the same pattern: Jesus identity as divine, the way he slowly revealed himself and taught people through his words and actions, and then His sacrificial offering up of his own life on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead. Jesus did what Jesus did. And Paul preached what Jesus did. It is impossible that Jesus testimony throughout the gospels about what had not yet happened would be as clear as Paul's proclamations looking back on what had already happened.

Many have failed to understand this simple truth and have made way for false assertions about multiple gospels or rivalry between the Jesus camp and the Paul camp.

We've talked about Gospel definitions. I'd like to talk about gospel implications.

Justification By Faith

Individuals are justified before God and reconciled to God, by grace, through faith alone in the gospel.

Now I can say faith in the gospel or I can say faith in Jesus, because of our gospel definition. If the gospel is some ethereal ideal regarding societal change, faith in the gospel could never bring salvation. If the gospel is about Jesus' identity, his atoning sacrifice for sinners on a cross, and his resurrection, faith in the gospel is faith in Jesus.

This may be the most important doctrine of the reformation. Sola Fide. Faith alone. The individual must believe the gospel in order to be reconciled to God.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Now there are varying perspectives on what exactly this faith is. In some evangelical churches you may hear faith described as believing that the gospel is true and expressing that belief. These kind of churches might talk about a "second decision" to submit your life to Jesus.

Other evangelicals would not differentiate between faith that Jesus is Lord and faith in Jesus as Lord (which would indicate a surrender of one's life to his Lordship). We don't have any official view on this as a church. Personally I tend to lean towards this view and see Peter's call to repentance in Acts 2 and 3 to be synonymous with New Testament faith or "confessing that Jesus is Lord."

Protestants tend to share our view on this gospel implication. This was one of the hallmarks of the reformation, and praise God for that. The consequences of our divergent views are significant. We ought not think that protestants and Roman

Catholics are essentially the same albeit minor differences or differences in modes of worship. We're not saying that faithful Catholics are outside of the body, but the differences run deep. They matter. And I'm concerned that some have been drawn to the Catholic Church and failed to see the inconsistencies between the New Testament and Roman Catholic dogma.

The council of Trent was the Roman Catholic church's official response to the Protestant Reformation beginning in 1545. Its' proclamations are still binding and believed by faithful Catholics. This is no less authoritative for Roman Catholics than the scriptures themselves.

Good works cause the increase of Justification

"If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema."

-Council of Trent. Session 6: Cannons.

The Church Can Administer Justification

"ALL SINS COMMITTED AFTER BAPTISM

It being necessary, therefore, that a power of forgiving sins, distinct from that of Baptism, should exist in the Church, to her were entrusted the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, by which each one, if penitent, may obtain the remission of his sins, even though he were a sinner to the last day of his life."

"But if we look to its ministers, or to the manner in which it is to be exercised, the extent of this divine power will not appear so great; for Our Lord gave not the power of so sacred a ministry to all, but to Bishops and priests only. The same must be said regarding the manner in which this power is to be exercised; for sins can be forgiven only through the Sacraments, when duly administered. The Church has received no power otherwise to remit sin. Hence it follows that in the forgiveness of sins both priests and Sacraments are, so to speak, the instruments which Christ Our Lord, the author and giver of salvation, makes use of, to accomplish in us the pardon of sin and the grace of justification."

— The Catechism of the Council of Trent (with Supplemental Reading: Catholic Prayers) [Illustrated] by Anonymous

Purgatory Is a Means of Purification

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines purgatory as a “purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven,” which is experienced by those “who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified” (CCC 1030). It notes that “this final purification of the elect . . . is entirely different from the punishment of the damned” (CCC 1031).

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1030-1031 as quoted by [catholic.com](https://www.catholic.com/tract/purgatory)
<https://www.catholic.com/tract/purgatory>

Conversionism

Lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience. Historian David Bebbington summarize Conversionism as one of four primary characteristics of evangelicalism.

Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a life long process of following Jesus

We believe this is what Jesus was teaching Nicodemus in John 3:

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

John 3:5-8

John 1:12

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

So this means that one is not saved by way of their proximity to the church. This also means that one cannot be justified over time. And this is an idea that many of us have heard often. There is a difference between the ability to identify our conversion and the actual conversion itself.

I'm not sure of the timing my conversion, but I am assured that it did happen at one, distinct moment in time. That I was born again at one, distinct moment in time. That I received the Holy Spirit as a deposit at one, distinct moment in time.

How can one be justified, by grace, through faith, over time? To say that this happens gradually would be like saying that someone is partially justified, which I believe is practically consistent with Roman Catholic theology. We believe that at the moment of justification all of our sins are forgiven. This is not something that one goes in and out of based on their heart condition on a particular day. Our sins are forgiven once and for all. When

he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
Psalm 103:10-12

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Atonement

I want to talk about atonement, or reconciliation, or the forgiveness of our sins and how exactly that was accomplished through the cross. The idea is that Jesus bore the wrath of God for Sinners.

This may seem very straight forward to you, and I hope that it does. Yet this view is disputed by a number of popular atonement theories. An atonement theory is meant to describe how exactly our reconciliation with God is achieved. What is it that Jesus achieved on the cross?

Ransom Theory. I'm not aware of ones who intentionally subscribe to this theory, but you will still hear from time to time. The theory holds the cross is essentially a ransom paid to Satan in order to set one's free from his reign. The problem is that it puts Satan as the one who is owed a debt and requires payment.

Moral Influence Theory is another atonement theory that has become widely popular. You'll particularly hear this kind of theory from progressive theologians. The cross was a demonstration of God's love that will cause man's heart to soften. The purpose was to demonstrate God's love. This view denies that God requires a payment for sin. It rightly speaks to his love, but wrongly misses his judgement and holiness.

Christus Victor is another popular atonement theory. It proposes that Christ liberates us from Satan and from bondage to sin and decay, which is true. But the Christus Victor atonement theory fails to show how Jesus liberates from bondage and decay, so it's not really an atonement theory. I may not even share this view, but it is commonly held by those who oppose the next and last view that I'll share.

Penal Substitutionary Atonement or Satisfaction Theory says that Christ suffered on our behalf, became guilty of our sins, and bore the wrath and punishment from God for those sins. Therefore the necessary punishment our past, present, and future sins has been satisfied by Jesus.

This is consistent with 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. It's consistent with the messiah passages in Isaiah 52-53, and It's also consistent with the Old Covenant temple worship system in which the sins of God's people would be punished through the sacrifice of an animal. We believe this system points forward to the cross. Jesus was punished vicariously and willingly for our sins. He took our guilt, and he also took God's wrath. This satisfies God's justice and shows the horrific consequences of sin, while it proves the inconceivable riches of God's grace.

You may hear ones refer to this atonement theory as divine child abuse. How is it just that God punished his innocent son? This criticism fails to recognize 2 things. First it fails to appreciate the triune nature of God. The cross was no less and no more difficult for the Father than it was for the Son than it was for the Holy Spirit. The Father to

subject his son to his wrath and judgment upon the cross was excruciating. And we cannot overemphasize how radical this was.

Secondly this view fails to appreciate Jesus' own decision to take up the cross.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."
John 10:18

It may seem insignificant to you, but I've heard this divine child abuse criticism of satisfaction theory bouncing around for a number of years. You may hear it on a podcast or in a conversation and I want you to prepared.

Resurrection Climax

The Resurrection is the Climax of the Gospel. At times ones can speak on what Christ accomplished through his death to the exclusion of the resurrection. Make no mistake. Without the resurrection there is no good news. Without the resurrection there would be no verification of Christ's identity or his atoning work. The disciples were struggling with this notion of Jesus as a failed Messianic figure before the resurrection. Without the resurrection there would be no hope in death.

The future resurrection is the hope of our salvation. This is the fruit of the gospel for us that Jesus will bring about at his return. He will raise the dead. He will fix everything and recreate a new earth. We will be raised from the dead and see him and live with him at the center of our lives forever. Without Jesus' resurrection there is no such hope and certainly no such confidence. Jesus was first. We're next. This our amazing hope because of the gospel. When we think of the Jesus cross. We must also think of his empty tomb. When we proclaim his cross. We must also proclaim his empty tomb.

An Obligation to preach.

Finally as far as implications, we have an obligation and an opportunity to preach the gospel

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might
2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

If not us, then who? Are we not God's people and his children? If not then who?

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Romans 10:14-15

Pray.

awakencolumbus.com/thegospel

Next steps.

We'd like for you to take some time to review and reflect on all of this, particularly the scriptures that were shared this morning.

In order to complete the Equip Series Gospel Course, you'll need to answer a few questions and submit those through the Gospel Survey form located awakencolumbus.com/equip

1. What are some key scriptures that help define the gospel?
2. Define the gospel.
3. Describe how others inside and/or outside the Christian Church may differ in giving a gospel definition.
4. What are some important gospel implications?
5. In what ways do you feel Awaken Church can grow in gospel understanding and practices? How do you believe that you can play a part in that growth?
6. Do you have any other significant comments or takeaways from this Equip Course?