

BUILD

series

week two:

The City of God (Gatherings and Community)

Pre-reading:

1. Paragraph on the Kingdom of God
2. Excerpt from "Gospel and Culture" by Tim Keller
3. Page 1-15 of "Integrative Ministry" by Tim Keller

QUESTIONS:

1. Initial review of reading material:

- What did you enjoy about the reading material? What was new or stood out to you?

2. The Church as the Kingdom / City of God:

- How does the view of the church as the outpost of the Kingdom affect the way that you see the purpose of:
 - i. Your life
 - ii. RHC

3. Gatherings (worship services and other church meetings)

- In terms of our 'gatherings' (worship services and other church meetings) Keller focuses a lot on making them accessible to skeptical people. How do you think RHC is doing in this area, and what could we do differently?

- Keller's article does give a lot of time to the 'unbelievers' view of the service. What are the other aims of our worship services?

4. Community:

- Keller shows that Christian community is a key part of what the church is, not just something that some of its members do. How does this change our view of our roles as individuals in RHC?
- The gospel is shown to bring down our walls and deal with our self love - both of which are hindrances to community. Has the gospel done this work in your life?
- What do you find hardest about community in Singapore?
- How can we go about fostering this kind of community here?
- What other aspects of community are there which we want to see worked out at RHC?

The Kingdom and the Church

Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:35)

The Kingdom of God is the presence of the future—a foretaste of heaven. It is a foretaste—an advance sample—of what life will be like when dwelling in God's exquisite presence in heaven. The kingdom is the inbreaking of heaven: the dynamic rule and reign of God has come and presently is touching the earth. All that heaven will be—freedom from sickness, deliverance from oppression, joy in forgiveness, etc.—experienced now in Christ Jesus. The Kingdom has come in Christ and is advancing throughout the world and the Kingdom will be fully established upon the return of Christ.

Presently, the kingdom of God spiritually reigns in the hearts of those who have made Christ Lord of their lives and is manifested in and through them by the Holy Spirit's presence, preaching of the Gospel, healing of the sick, and release from demonic bondage, etc. (Luke 4:16-20, 43). The Kingdom of God advances by conquering men and women's hearts through the power of the Cross: the Holy Spirit changes us from self-centered slobs to Christ-centered servants (John 3:3; 2 Cor. 5:14-15).

What is the relationship of the church to the kingdom? On the one hand, the church is a "pilot plant" of the kingdom of God. It is not simply a collection of individuals who are forgiven. It is a "royal nation" (1 Peter 2:9), in other words, a counterculture. The church is to be a new society in which the world can see what family dynamics, business practices, race relations, and all of life can be under the kingship of Jesus Christ. God is out to heal all the effects of sin: psychological, social, and physical.

On the other hand, the church is to be an agent of the kingdom. It is not only to model the healing of God's rule but it is to spread it. "You are . . . a royal priesthood, a holy nation . . . that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Christians go into the world as witnesses of the kingdom (Acts 1:6-8). To spread the kingdom of God is more than simply winning people to Christ. It is also working for the healing of persons, families, relationships, and nations; it is doing deeds of mercy and seeking justice. It is ordering lives and relationships and institutions and communities according to God's authority to bring in the blessedness of the kingdom.

Gospel and Culture

1. Light - gracious, radical service In Matthew 5:14-16- Jesus tells his disciples they are to be a *'city on a hill'* whose *'good deeds'* are a light that will lead non-believers to praise the Father in heaven. To be a 'city' means to be a community. You can't be a city on your own! But why does Jesus call us a 'city' rather than just a fellowship? Christians are called to be an *alternate* city within every earthly city, an alternate human *culture* within every human culture, to show how sex, money, and power can be used in non-destructive ways, re-shaped by the gospel.

Regarding sex, the alternate city must avoid both the secular society's idolization of sex and traditional society's fear of it. It is a community which so loves and cares practically for its members that chastity makes sense. It teaches its members to conform their bodily being to the shape of the gospel—abstinence outside of marriage and fidelity within. Regarding money, the Christian counter-culture should encourage a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the immigrant, and the economically and physically weak. Regarding power, Christian community should be visibly committed to power-sharing and relationship-building between races and classes that are alienated outside of the Body of Christ. The practical evidence of this is that our churches are increasingly multi-ethnic, both in the congregations at large and in its leadership.

Yet Jesus' call is not simply to be an enclave off to ourselves. It is the *'good deeds'* of this city that will win non-believers to respect and praise of God. The Greek words for 'good deeds' usually means not moral behavior in general but deeds of compassion and service. Here is where the relevant and the counter-culturalists are surely right. Jonathan Edwards wrote that there is no ethical demand made in the Bible more clearly or more emphatically than that we love, give to, and care for the poor. The early church was known to be more committed to and effective in help for the poor than was the Roman government or other cultural institutions. Unless that is true for us today as well, we should not expect cultural impact. The time must come when it is widely known that secularism tends to make people selfish, and religion and morality makes people tribal, but that the Christian gospel turns people away from both their selfishness and their self-righteousness to serve other in the way Jesus gave himself for his enemies.

Just as Israel was told to 'seek the peace and prosperity' of the great pagan city of Babylon (Jer 29:4-7) so Christians should be well know as people who seek to serve people whether they believe Christianity or not. We are called to be a beautiful *city of light* inside every city. And the citizens of the city of God should be the very *best* citizens of their earthly city as well. Until this is the case, the 'cultural impact' that the Bible speaks of in Mt 5:13-16 and 1 Pet 2:11-12 will not happen.

The world will rightly distrust any claim by the church to a voice in public affairs, remembering that past abuses when the church had more power. We have no right to speak to our culture until we can show that we have learned our lesson: that we understand the difference between bearing witness to the truth and arrogant oppression in the name of truth. We must show that we understand that witness "*marturia*" means not dominance and control but suffering.

2. Salt - faithful, cultural presence

In Matthew 5:13 Jesus also calls believers to be '*salt of the earth*'. Before refrigeration salt was a preservative. It kept meat 'renewed' so that it did not go bad. It was also used as a way to keep wounds from festering. Salt, however, cannot do its work unless it is distributed. Jesus is saying that individual Christians can influence and keep society from deteriorating, socially and culturally.

This metaphor is therefore a counter-point to that of light. The light metaphor is grander in its promise. Blind people can come to see! The salt metaphor, however, is more modest in what it holds out for us. Christian living (like salt in the meat) is quite important to keep culture from degrading, but here we are being warned not to necessarily expect fundamental social transformation. Salt is a more negative metaphor as well. Salt in a wound kept it from festering, but it was also painful. This means that Christians are to stand for truth and guard orthodox belief and practice, but there will inevitably be opposition. (cf. 1 Peter 2:12.) The salt metaphor is different in another way as well. Salt must spread out and penetrate to be effective. Christians then do not only effect the world as a counter-cultural community ('light') but also as dispersed individuals who take the Christian message and world view into every circle and sector of society.

The salt metaphor leads me to borrow a phrase from James Hunter that I think strikes the right balance in our relationship with culture. Hunter speaks of Christians' *faithful presence*. Unlike the pietists and counter-culturalists, we are not to be culturally absent. But unlike the conservatives and the relevantists, we should be more chastened than to talk about cultural redemption. We should avoid that kind of triumphalism. We should not be as pessimistic about cultural change as the counter-culturalists or as optimistic as the political activists.

A reading of Randall Collins' *The Sociology of Philosophies* shows that the most powerful cultural- changing ideas do not usually arise so much from the grassroots and the masses or from the elites at the very center of politics and power. Usually, cultural change comes from the 'outer elites'—the artists, academics, businesspeople, and others who are newer, younger, well- networked but who are less established in traditional centers of power.

Neither a grassroots-popular movement nor a political movement, then, is likely to see any cultural change. Cultural change can occur if Christians stop being too eager to gain influence or too cynical to use power at all. It can occur if Christians are more eager to serve the common good than rule it, and yet who are not so self-righteous about our society that they refuse to do the hard work of inhabiting every room in our cultural house.

Within and between these two metaphors, of salt and light, we discern this balance which we name 'cultural presence' rather than cultural absence, cultural indifference, or cultural redemption. The salt image means we are to have Christian influence on the broader culture and 'renew' it—invigorating and shaping it in some fashion. Yet the city and light images stress the importance of the church itself as a very distinct and beautiful mini-society. These metaphors hold out the possibility of bringing *some* significant Christian influence into a society but they do not seem to hold out the prospect of any kind of 'take over' or Christianizing of society as a whole.

INTEGRATIVE MINISTRY

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Introductory note: By rights, each of the four ministry fronts should have its own paper devoted to it. But that might obscure perhaps the main point—that these ministries must all be present and inter-dependent. So we cram all this into one paper—the longest of the series.

I. The Balance

Churches that thrive in cities should be characterized by ***an integrative balance of four ministry*** areas: evangelism, community formation, justice and mercy, and the integration of faith and work. Christians should seek personal conversion, deep Christian community, social justice, and cultural renewal in the city.

This is one of the most striking things to observers about churches with the ‘Gospel DNA.’ Many churches are committed to evangelism, preaching, and church planting, others to significant involvement with the poor. Some churches put great stress on fellowship and cell groups. There are also churches (usually called ‘artsy’ by others) that are concerned about cultural engagement. But it is rare for a church to combine several of these emphases in ministry, and extremely rare to have them all. One of the reasons is that the leaders of these ministries often resist and resent the others. The leaders of evangelism see the emphasis on the poor as a distraction. The advocates for the poor sometimes resist emphasis on conversion and repentance. Those stressing community, discipleship, and holiness often think those emphasizing church growth are producing spiritual shallowness. Those working with the poor think ‘integrating faith and work’ is basically elitist.

However, there is no reason to pit them against each other. The ministry of evangelism connects people to God, while community formation connects people to each other. The ministry of justice and mercy connects Christians to the needs of the whole city. Finally, the integration of faith and work connects Christians to the public life of the culture. When viewed this way, we see they do not contradict, but rather supplement each other.

But we can go further. They not only supplement each other, they are inter-dependent.

- Evangelism is supported by wholistic ministry, in two ways: a) first, some people being given practical help find their way into the church and come to faith. but b) secondly, the entire city is more likely to listen to the preached Word when they see Christians working sacrificially for the common good, not just their own community. If the world sees us only evangelizing and not serving, they will conclude we are simply out to increase our own tribe and its power. Justice and mercy, are a necessary context for any convincing evangelistic call to believe in Jesus.
- On the other hand, wholistic ministry is dependent on evangelism. Evangelism creates the vital, new lives in Christ that are necessary if the church is to serve others. The irony of the mainline churches is that, though they want to help the poor, they do not produce converted people, renewed and empowered by the spirit to sacrificially serve others.
- Christian community and evangelism are also symbiotically related. On the one hand, converted individuals form deep Christian fellowship. But it is also true that strong, loving fellowship attracts people, gives the gospel credibility and brings about converted individuals.

- There are hundreds of other ways in which the ministries stimulate and support each other. Vocational fellowships (see below) of Christians in a particular field (e.g. medicine, finance, the arts) often has great evangelistic potential, drawing non-believers. Projects of service to the poor are also great ways to include and meet non-believers in your neighborhood. Ministries Christians in business, law, medicine, and other professions naturally ‘plug in’ to programs that work with the poor, where they can offer their expertise *pro bono*.
- Only if we do all of these ministries at once will any of them be effective. They are inter-dependent and inter-locking.

If and only if we produce *thousands* of new church-communities which regularly win secular people to Christ, which seek the common good of the whole city especially the poor, and produce thousands of Christians who write plays, make movies, do creative journalism, begin effective and productive new businesses, use their money for others, and produce cutting-edge scholarship and literature--will we actually be doing all the things the Bible tells us that Christians should be doing! And it is the only way to see our cities comprehensively influenced for Christ.

Two important introductory notes:

1. See the ‘Church and Culture’ paper on *the difference between the ‘institutional church’ and the ‘organic church.’* The ‘institutional’ is the local church under its officers, gathered mainly to evangelize and disciple. The ‘organic’ refers to Christians united in a host of formal and informal associations, seeking to renew the city and the culture. Since the local church’s main calling is evangelism and discipling, the four ministry fronts are given commensurate and inter-dependent emphasis, but are not carried out all in the same way. **a)** The local church does Evangelism and community formation/discipleship very directly. **b)** It does some diaconal (justice and service) work directly as a part of community formation. There is no way to love the brethren without the sharing of practical resources. **c)** But much of Christian renewal of the city is carried out through various associations not directly under the church, though all Christians within them are being disciplined by the church. **d)** This is also true of ‘cultural renewal.’ The local church should disciple Christians in film-making to integrate their faith with their work, but it should not start a film company.

2. Despite the insistence that these ministries should be carried out as an integrative balance, we should recognize that no church can be equally effective at all four. Pastors and leaders will have different gift-mixes, and the context of the local neighborhood will have an impact as well. If your church is in a poor area, or a wealthy area, or an area filled with artists—it will have to have influence on the relative strength of your ministries. Nevertheless, a balance is to be strived for.

II. The Four Ministry ‘Fronts’

A. Connecting people to God – Worship and Evangelism

Introduction – Center-city churches must be highly effective with skeptical people. Rather than simply confront contemptuously those who disbelieve, we sympathetically find ways to address baseline cultural hopes and aspirations with Christ and his saving work. In the paper ‘Missional and Contextual’ we have already covered much that has to do with evangelism. A missional church is in every aspect open to inquirers and doubters and adapted to the culture around it. In that paper there is more about evangelism. In addition to that material—we offer the following.

In a missional church, even corporate worship is *evangelistic* worship. Many churches see the Sunday gatherings as mainly times of edification and teaching for Christian believers. And of course it is. Sunday corporate worship does develop Christian community and edify believers. But it is a missed opportunity to see corporate worship as strictly a matter of edification. We can do both deep edification of believers *and* effective evangelism in worship at the same time because the gospel of grace is always the main thing that everyone needs. Christians grow through the application of the gospel to every area of life. But that is main thing non-believers need as well. Below is a way to see corporate worship as a way to connect every present—believer and un-believer—to God. Therefore, it is ‘evangelistic worship.’

I. A widespread premise

The ‘Seeker-Sensitive’ church model developed by Willow-Creek of Chicago rests on the assumption that you cannot reach both Christians and non-Christians in the same gathering or service. They therefore designed weekend ‘Seeker Services’ which are not Christian worship but are instead outreach events. Christians worship instead during the week.

There have been many severe critics of the seeker-driven or seeker-sensitive model. Yet, ironically, most of those critics share the same premise, namely that you cannot reach both Christians and non-Christians in the same gathering or service. They frame the debate like this--“Who is the Sunday service *for*--non-believers or God?” Their answer, of course, is that the Sunday worship service is purely for God. The main problem with the two models, however, is *theological*. They both assume that worship cannot be highly evangelistic. I want to show that this is a false premise.

My thesis, in a nutshell, is that the weekly worship service can be very effective in evangelism of non-Christians *and* in edification of Christians if it does not actually aim at either alone but at *worship* which is gospel-centered and ‘in the vernacular.’ On the one side, there will be a need for more intense experiences of learning, prayer, and community in addition to worship for Christians to grow into maturity. And, on the other side, there will be a need for more specifically evangelistic venues and experiences in addition to worship that for non-Christians to get questions answered and issues fully addressed. But the key and the core of both evangelism and edification can be the weekly worship service itself.

2. Biblical-theological basis for evangelistic worship God commanded Israel to invite the nations to join in declaring his glory. Zion is to be the center of world-winning worship (Isaiah 2:2-4; 56:6-8.) *"Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord...so the name of the Lord will be declared in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the Lord"* (Psalm 102:18.) Psalm 105 is a direct command to believers engage in evangelistic worship. The Psalmist challenges them to *"make known among the nations what he has done"* (v.1.) How? *"Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of his wonderful acts"* (v.2) Thus believers are continually told to sing and praise God before the unbelieving nations. (See also Psalm 47:1; 100:1-5.) God is to be praised *before all the nations*, and as he is praised by his people, the nations are summoned and called to join in song.

Peter tells a Gentile church, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* (1 Peter 2:9.) This shows us that the church is challenged to the same witness that Israel was called to--evangelistic worship. A key difference: in the Old Testament, the center of world-winning worship was Mt. Zion, but now, wherever we worship Jesus in spirit and in truth (John 4:21-26) we have come to the heavenly Zion (Heb. 12:18-24.) In other words, the risen Lord now sends his people out singing his praises in mission, calling the nations to join both saints and angels in heavenly

doxology. Jesus himself stands in the midst of the redeemed and leads us in the singing of God's praises (Hebrews 2:12), even as God stands over his redeemed and sings over us in joy (Zeph. 2:17.)

a. 1 Corinthians 14:24-25.

In this passage, Paul is addressing the misuse of the gift of tongues. He complains that if unbelievers enter a worship service and hear tongues-speaking they will think the Christians are out of their minds (v.23.) He insists that the Christians should change their behavior in order that the worship service be comprehensible to the non-believers. If, however, an unbeliever "*or unlearned one*" (an uninitiated inquirer) comes in, and worship is being done "*unto edification*", then the unbeliever "*will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all*" (v.24.) Of what does this conviction consist? "*The secrets of his heart will be laid bare*" (v.25.) It may mean he realizes that the worshippers around him are finding in God what his heart had been secretly searching for, but in the wrong ways. It may mean the worship shows him how his heart works. The result: "*so falling on his face, he will worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you'*" (v.25.)

This is quite a remarkable passage. We saw last week that in v.15-17 Paul insists that worship of God (*praise*) be done in such a way that it leads to *edification*. Now here he tells us worship must also be done in such a way that it leads to *evangelism*. Most readers today get distracted from this fact because of Paul's discussion both of tongues and prophecy. It is natural to study this passage in order to figure out what tongues and prophecy consisted of and whether they continue today, etc. etc. etc. This is all debatable--but there is one thing very unmistakable.

Virtually every major commentary (e.g. Thiselton, Fee, Morris, Bruce, Barnett) says that the gist of v.20-25 is to tell the Corinthians to stress prophecy over tongues for two reasons: 1) 1st because it edifies believers, and 2) because it convicts and converts unbelievers. Surely the argument of v.24-25 is that the reason to use more prophecy than tongues in worship is because it converts people. (I think he is saying that tongues only makes non-believers feel 'alien' and judged--but that kind of judgment does not lead to conversion.) So you can't avoid the conclusion that Paul is telling the Corinthians to alter their worship in such a way that it both edifies Christians and convicts non-Christians. Why else would he go through a fairly elaborate description of how a non-Christian comes to conviction in worship?

Paul Barnett-- writes about 1 Cor 14:24-25. "*Despite all efforts to devise 'programs' for evangelism and outreach, the gathered congregation, in its life and ministry, remains a potent force for gathering in the 'outsider.' Churches and their ministers, however, must ensure that the word of the Lord is intelligible and powerfully taught so that the visitor will indeed say, 'God is with you.'*" Obviously, Paul Barnett is interpreting 'prophecy' as a form of preaching--and I don't know what your interpretation of that is. Nevertheless, Barnett is concluding what I think is inescapable. Paul urges Corinthians to worship in such a way that edifies them and still convicts the outsider.

b. Acts 2

When the Spirit falls on those in the upper room, a crowd gathers (v.5) because a) they are hearing the disciples praising God ("*we hear them declaring the wonders of God*" v.11), and b) and also because this worship is "*in our own tongues*" (v.11.) As a result, they are first made very interested ("*amazed and perplexed they asked one another, 'what does this mean'*" v.11), and later they are convicted deeply ("*they were cut to the heart and said... 'Brethren, what shall we do?'*" v.37.)

c. There are obvious differences between the two situations. 1 Cor 14 pictures conversion happening on the spot (which is certainly possible.) In Acts 2 the non-believers are shaken out of their indifference (v.12), but the actual conversions (v.37-41) occurred at the end of an "after

meeting" in which Peter explained the gospel (v.14-36) and showed them how to individually receive Christ (v.38-39.) It is often pointed out that the tongues in the two situations are different. But students usually are looking so carefully at what the two passages teach about tongues and prophecy that they fail to note what they teach about worship and evangelism. From our survey, we conclude:

1) Non-believers are expected to be present in Christian worship. Paul in 14:23 expects both "unbelievers" and "the unlearned" (literally "a seeker"-- "one who does not understand") to be present in worship.

2) Non-believers must find the praise of Christians to be comprehensible. It should not be missed that Paul tells a local congregation to adapt its worship because of the presence of unbelievers. It is a false dichotomy to insist that if we are seeking to please God we must not ask what the unchurched feel or think about our worship.

3) Non-believers can fall under conviction and be converted through comprehensible worship. In 1 Cor 14 it happens during the service, but in Acts 2 it is supplemented by "after meetings" and follow-up evangelism. God wants the world to overhear us worshipping him. God directs his people not to simply worship, but to sing his praises "before the nations." We are not to simply communicate the gospel to them, but celebrate the gospel before them.

3. Three practical tasks for evangelistic worship

(2.) Getting unbelievers into worship. The numbering is not a mistake. This task actually comes second, but nearly everyone thinks it come first! It is natural to believe that they must get non-Christians into worship before they can begin "doxological evangelism". But the reverse is the case. Non-Christians do not get invited into worship unless the worship is already evangelistic. The only way they will have non-Christians in attendance is through personal invitation by Christians. Just as in the Psalms, the "nations" must be directly asked to come. But the main stimulus to building bridges and invitation is the comprehensibility and quality of the worship experience.

Christians will instantly sense if a worship experience will be attractive to their non-Christian friends. They may find a particular service wonderfully edifying for *them*, and yet know that their non-believing neighbors would react negatively. Therefore, a vicious cycle persists. Pastors see only Christians present, so they lack incentive to make their worship comprehensible to outsiders. But since they fail to make the adaptations, Christians who are there (though perhaps edified themselves) do not think to bring their skeptical and non-Christian friends to church. They do not think they will be impressed. So no outsiders come. And so the pastors respond only to the Christian audience. And so on and on. Therefore, the best way to get Christians to bring non-Christians is to worship as if there are dozens and hundreds of skeptical onlookers. And if you worship as if, eventually they will be there in reality.

(1). Making worship comprehensible to unbelievers. Our purpose is not to make the unbeliever "comfortable". (In 1 Cor. 14:24-25 or Acts 2:12 and 37--they are cut to the heart!) We aim to be *intelligible* to them. We must address their "*heart secrets*" (1 Cor 14:25.) That means we must remember what it is like to not believe; we must remember what an unbelieving heart is like. How do we do that?

a) *Worship and preaching in the "vernacular".* It is hard to overstate how ghetto-ized our preaching is. It is normal to make all kinds of statements that appear persuasive to us but are based upon all sorts of premises that the secular person does not hold. It is normal to make all sorts of

references using terms and phrases that mean nothing outside of our Christian sub-group. So avoid unnecessary theological or evangelical sub-culture "jargon", and explain carefully the basic theological concepts, such as confession of sin, praise, thanksgiving, and so on. In the preaching, showing continual willingness to address the questions that the unbelieving heart will ask. Speak respectfully and sympathetically to people who have difficulty with Christianity. As you write the sermon, imagine an particular skeptical non-Christian in the chair listening to you. Add the asides, the qualifiers, the extra explanations necessary. Listen to everything said in the worship service with the ears of someone who has doubts or troubles with belief.

A brief checklist if you want to preach and worship-lead in the 'vernacular'

- Take great pains to explain theological terms in ways that are readily understandable to those without theological background. Especially avoid citing the Bible or making explanations with tone 'Everyone intelligent knows this!' Watch how you cite authorities.
- Never talk as if non-believing people are not present. We always, always expect to be overheard by members of the non-believing press. Imagine reporters in the audience.
- Avoids 'tribal' language--unnecessarily stylized evangelical pious jargon and archaic language that seeks to set a 'spiritual tone.' (e.g. typical 'prayer language')
- Avoids 'we-them' language--disdainful jokes that mock people of different politics and beliefs, and dismissive, disrespectful comments about those who differ with us. Constantly anticipate and address the concerns, objections, and reservations of the skeptical or of 'spiritual pilgrims' with the greatest respect and sympathy.
- Avoids sentimental, pompous, emotionally manipulative 'inspirational' talk. Instead we engage the culture with gentle, self-deprecating but joyful irony the gospel creates.

b) *Explain the service as you go along.* Though there is danger of pastoral verbosity, learn to give 1 or 2 sentence, non-jargony explanations of each new part of the service. "When we confess our sins, we are not groveling in guilt, but dealing with our guilt. If you deny your sins you will never get free from them." It is good to begin worship services as the Black church often does, with a "devotional"--a brief talk that explains the meaning of worship. This way you continually instruct newcomers in worship.

c) *Directly address and welcome them.* Talk regularly to "those of you who aren't sure you believe this, or who aren't sure just what you believe." Give them many asides, even expressing the language of their hearts. Articulate their objections to Christian living and belief better than they can do it themselves. Express sincere sympathy for their difficulties, even when challenging them severely for their selfishness and unbelief. Admonish with tears (literally or figuratively.) Always grant whatever degree of merit their objections have. It is extremely important that the unbeliever feel you understand them. "I've tried it before and it did not work." "I don't see how my life could be the result of the plan of a loving God." "Christianity is a straightjacket." "It can't be wrong if it feels so right." "I could never keep it up." "I don't feel worthy; I am too bad." "I just can't believe."

d) *Highly skilled art.* The power of art draws people to behold it. Good art and its message enters the soul through the imagination and begins to appeal to the reason, for art makes ideas plausible. The quality of music and speech in worship will have a major impact on its evangelistic power. In many churches, the quality of the music is mediocre or poor, but it does not disturb the faithful. Why? Their faith makes the words of the hymn or the song meaningful despite its artistically poor expression, and further, they usually have a personal relationship with the music-presenter. But any outsider who comes in, who is not convinced of the truth and who does not have any relationship to the presenter, will be bored or irritated by the poor offering.

In other words, excellent aesthetics *includes* outsiders, while mediocre or poor aesthetics *exclude*. The low level of artistic quality in many churches guarantees that only insiders will continue to come. For the non-Christian, the attraction of good art will have a major part in drawing them in.

e) *Celebrate deeds of mercy and justice.* We live in a time when public esteem of the church is plummeting. For many outsiders or inquirers, the deeds of the church will be far more important than words in gaining plausibility. The leaders of most towns see "word-only" churches as costs to their community, not a value. Effective churches will be so involved in deeds of mercy and justice that outsiders will say, "we cannot do without churches like this. This church is channeling so much value into our community through its services to people that if it went out of business, we'd have to raise everybody's taxes." Mercy deeds give the gospel *words* plausibility (Acts 4:32 followed by v.33.) Therefore, evangelistic worship services should highlight *offerings* for deed ministry and should celebrate through reports and testimonies and prayer what is being done. It is best that offerings for mercy ministry be separate, attached (as traditional) to the Lord's Supper. This brings before the non-Christian the impact of the gospel on people's hearts (it makes us generous) and the impact of lives poured out for the world.

f) *Present the sacraments so as to make the gospel clear.* Baptism, and especially adult baptism, should be made a much more significant event if worship is to be evangelistic. There may need to be opportunity for the baptized to offer personal testimony as well as assent to questions. The meaning of baptism should be made clear. A moving, joyous, personal charge to the baptized (and to all baptized Christians present) should be made. In addition, the Lord's Supper can become a converting ordinance. If it is explained properly, the unbeliever will have a very specific and visible way to see the difference between walking with Christ and living for oneself. The Lord's Supper will confront every individual with the question: "are you right with God *today? now?*" There is no more effective way to help a person to do a spiritual inventory. Many seekers in U.S. churches will only realize they are not Christians during the fencing of the table after an effective sermon on the meaning of the gospel. (See below for more on addressing unbelievers during communion.)

g) *Preach grace.* The one message that both believers and unbelievers need to hear is that salvation and adoption are by grace alone. A worship service that focuses too much and too often on educating Christians in the details of theology will simply bore or confuse the unbelievers present. For example, a sermon on abortion will generally assume the listener believes in the authority of the word and the authority of Jesus, and does not believe in individual moral autonomy. In other words, abortion is "doctrine D", and it is based on "doctrines A, B, and C." Therefore, people who don't believe or understand doctrines ABC will find such a sermon un-convicting and even alienating. This does not mean we should not preach the whole counsel of God, but we must *major* on the "ABC's" of the Christian faith.

If the response to this is "then Christians will be bored", it shows an misunderstanding of the gospel. The gospel of free, gracious justification and adoption is not just the way we enter the kingdom, but also the way we grow into the likeness of Christ. Titus 2:11-13 tells us how it is the original, saving message of "grace alone" that consequently leads us to sanctified living: "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of our great God and savior Jesus Christ.*" Many Christians are "defeated" and stagnant in their growth because they try to be holy for wrong motives. They say "no" to temptation by telling themselves "God will get me" or "people will find out" or "I'll hate

myself in the morning" or "it will hurt my self-esteem" or "it will hurt other people" or "it's against the law--I'll be caught" or "it's against my principles" or "I will look bad". Some or all of these may be true, but Titus tells us they are inadequate. Only the grace of God, the logic of the gospel will work. Titus says it "teaches" us, it argues with us.

Therefore, the one basic message that both Christians and unbelievers need to hear is the gospel of grace. It can then be applied to both groups, right on the spot and directly. Sermons which are basically moralistic will only be applicable to either Christians OR non-Christians. But Christo-centric preaching, preaching the gospel both grows believers and challenges non-believers. If the Sunday service and sermon aim primarily at evangelism, it will bore the saints. If they aim primarily at education, they'll bore and confuse unbelievers. If they aim at praising the God who saves by grace they'll both instruct insiders and challenge outsiders.

(3.) Leading to commitment. We have seen that unbelievers in worship actually "close with Christ" in two basic ways. Some may come to Christ during the service itself (I Cor. 14:24-25.) Others must be "followed up" very specifically.

a) *During the service.* One major way to invite people to receive Christ during the service is as the Lord's Supper is distributed. We say: "if you are not in a saving relationship with God through Christ today, do not take the bread and the cup, but, as they come around, take Christ. Receive him in your heart as those around you receive the food. Then immediately afterwards, come up here and tell an officer or a pastor about what you've done, so we can get you ready to receive the Supper the next time as a child of God." Another way to invite commitment during the service is to give people a time of silence after the sermon. A "prayer of belief" could be prayed by the pastor (or printed in the bulletin at that juncture in the order of worship) to help people reach out to Christ.¹ Sometimes it may be good to put a musical interlude or an offering after the sermon but before the final hymn. This affords people time to think and process what they have heard and offer themselves to God in prayer. If, however, the preacher ends his sermon, prays very briefly, and moves immediately into the final hymn, no time is given to people who are under conviction for offering up their hearts.

b) *After meetings.* Acts 2 seems to show us an "after meeting." In v.12 and 13 we are told that some folks mocked upon hearing the apostles praise and preach, but others were disturbed and asked "what does this *mean*?" Then Peter very specifically explained the gospel, and, in response to a second question "*what shall we do*?" (v.37), explained very specifically how to become Christians. Historically, it has been found very effective to offer such meetings to unbelievers and seekers immediately after evangelistic worship. Convicted seekers have just come from being in the presence of God, and they are often most teachable and open. To seek to "get them into a small group" or even to merely return next Sunday is asking a lot of them. They may be also "*amazed and perplexed*" (Acts 2:12), and it is best to "strike while the iron is hot". This is not to doubt that God is infallibly drawing his elect! That knowledge helps us to relax as we do evangelism, knowing that

¹ An example: "Heavenly Father, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful than I ever before believed, but, through your Son Jesus, I can be more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I thank you that he lived the life I should have lived, and paid the debt and punishment I owed. Receive me now for his sake. I turn from my s² But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Sam 16:7); Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. (1 Pet 3:3-4)

conversions are not dependent on our eloquence. But the Westminster Confession tells us that God ordinarily works through secondary causes, normal social and psychological processes. Therefore, to invite people into a follow-up meeting immediately is usually more conducive to "conserving the fruit of the Word."

After meetings may consist first of one or more persons who wait at the front of the auditorium to pray with and talk with any seekers who come forward to make inquiries right on the spot. A second after meeting can consist of a simple question-and-answer session with the preacher in some room near the main auditorium or even in the auditorium (after the postlude.) Third, after meetings should also consist of one or two classes or small group experiences targeted to specific questions non-Christians ask about the content, relevance, and credibility of the Christian faith. After meetings should be attended by skilled lay evangelists who can come alongside of newcomers and answer spiritual questions and provide guidance as to their next steps.

4. Evangelistic Worship and teaching.

Q: Won't "evangelistic worship" mean Christians won't get the deeper, meatier teaching?

A: First, we should make a distinction. Some people may mean by 'deeper and meatier' a discussion of denominational distinctives or other controversial issues such as different views of baptism, charismatic gifts, and so on. With this view of worship, it is best not to spend too much time on those subjects. But that doesn't mean that in evangelistic worship we stay away from the *central* controversial issues. The doctrines we must not shy away from include: a) that Jesus is the only way to God (a defense of Christian 'exclusivism'), b) the inerrancy of Scripture, c) the reality of hell, d) the sovereignty of God over every circumstance including trouble and suffering, e) the sinfulness of sex outside marriage, including homosexuality f) the Trinity, g) total depravity and inability, h) propitiation and penal substitution, i) imputation, j) justification by faith alone, k) sanctification by faith alone, l) last-day judgment, and the m)reality of transcendent moral absolutes.

Second, we should keep in mind the cycles of the church year. At some times in the year there are more new people and inquirers coming into the services. At that time you may wish to preach to the non-believer, new believer, and less mature believer. Other seasons of the year it would be good to give more attention to mature believers and their needs and interests. You must also have in mind the thrust of the text you are expounding. Often the teaching can be applied in different ways depending on your audience, but often the text's meaning is much more evangelistic—or not. In short, while we seek to both edify and evangelize in our services, that doesn't mean we have a wooden, 50-50 kind of emphasis every week. The text and the time of year usually mean edification or evangelism take some precedence.

Third, however, it is healthy to have an approach to corporate worship that prevents ministers from trying to load into the service all the Biblical teaching we want the people to have. Every Christian will need to get eventually in to Biblical and theological details that are inappropriate for a sermon. We must also keep in mind the difference between a sermon and a lecture. The sermon is more oriented to the affections. Many young ministers fresh from theological training don't know the difference between a theology paper and a sermon. But the congregation sure does. I must confess that I used to give lectures under the title of sermons. I explained all the reasons for our church's position on baptism.---but I got a lot of "MEGO" looks from people. ("My Eyes Glaze Over") They said, "this is surely something I need to work through--but today I need some food for my soul." A lot of pastors who really don't understand the ways of the heart very well (and just don't know people very well) make their sermons into lectures. Ironically, many preachers ignore the felt needs

of others as a way of meeting their own felt needs. They are more personally comfortable making arguments than curing souls.

B. Connecting people to each other– Community and discipleship

Introduction- We seek to spiritually form people mainly through community. Growth in grace and wisdom and character does not happen so much in classes and instruction, or even in coming to large worship gatherings. They happen mainly through deep family-relationships and in counter-cultural communities where the implications of the gospel are a) really worked out cognitively and b) and 'worked in' practically in ways that no other setting or venue can afford. The essence of disciple-making is here—to put it colloquially, you become like the people you hang out with the most. Just as the single most formative experience is being members of a nuclear family, so the main way we grow in grace and holiness is through deep involvement in community. Classes and studies and reading don't really change you unless you do your study in community.

Christian community is not simply a supportive fellowship but an alternate society. Because the gospel points us to a man who died for his enemies, the gospel creates relationships of service rather than of selfishness. Because the gospel calls us to holiness, the people of God live in loving bonds of mutual accountability and discipline. Because the gospel removes both fear and pride, people get along inside the church who could never get along outside. Thus the gospel creates a human community radically different from any society around it.

I. The Function of Christian Community.

For Mission. The quality of our community is the real secret of mission. I once heard Jeff White say that exceptional character in individuals does not really prove the reality of Christianity. First, atheism and other religions also produce individual 'heroes' of unusual greatness. Second, though such individuals may inspire us, it is easy to conclude that they are just that--unusual and unattainable standards for the rest of us. But what atheism and other religions cannot produce is the kind of loving community that the gospel can produce. When the world sees exceptional *community* it is both a) more convincing of the truth of Jesus' message, and b) far more inviting and encouraging to join up with. In John 17:23 Jesus says this directly, that our deep unity is the way, '*the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*' Amazing. Jesus says that the main way people will believe that Christians have found the love of God is in the quality of their unity.

For effective mission, in which the character of Christian community is itself a convicting, attractive, sign of the kingdom, the church must go beyond 'fellowship' to embody a 'counter-culture,' showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money, and power. We must show sex, money, and power being used in life-giving ways, and to see people united in love who could never have been brought together without the power of the gospel to humble, affirm, and transform our identity.

a. With sex: We avoid both the secular society's idolization of sex and traditional society's fear of sex. We also exhibit love rather than hostility or fear toward those whose sexual life-patterns are different.

b. With money: We promote a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the immigrant, the economically and physically weak. We also must do radical economic sharing with one another—so 'there is no needy among us.'

c. With power: We are committed to power-sharing and relationship-building between races and classes that are alienated outside of the Body of Christ. The practical evidence of this is that we need to be as multi-ethnic a body as possible.

Western believers usually think that we show the world 'Christ-likeness' through our individual lives as believers. But it is just as important to exhibit 'Christ-likeness' through our *corporate* life together. Here are just a couple of examples.

The example of dating. When we think of "sex ethics" we usually think very individualistically. What does it mean to follow the Biblical sex ethic as a single Christian? It means: a) you should not have sex until you are married, and b) you should not marry someone who does not share a similar commitment to Christ. But does that exhaust what it means to be a 'light to the world' in the area of sex and relationships? Jesus told us to 'let our light shine forth' to the world as a city--as a counter-culture. How should Christians as a community show the difference Christ makes in the area of sexuality? Here is one idea. What if we were a community in which the single men didn't only date good-looking women but actually assessed a potential partner's worth primarily on the basis of her character? And what if we were a community in which single women didn't only date prosperous men but actually assessed a potential partner's worth primarily on the basis of his character? (cf. 1 Sam 16:7; 1 Pet 3:3-4)² In our culture looks, appearance, and money are all-important in mate-selection. Yet it may be that most churches, even the more conservative ones, are basically 'conformed to the world' in this area. So it is quite possible to be following the letter of the law in your *individual* ethics and still miss the importance of showing forth God's glory in our *community's* ways and practices. This is one way that we could be an alternate society--in the way sex and dating is carried out within our midst.

The example of career advancement. Jacques Ellul's book *The Technological Society* is a Christian analysis of the centrality of "technique" today. Our modern society is very secular (oriented to the concrete "now" rather than to spiritual or eternal values) and therefore it is rationalistic and mechanistic. Ellul says that this modern sensibility shapes everything including our relationships. Relationships often become not a good or an 'end in themselves' but rather a means to further your own interests. In this environment you choose to spend time with people who will 'open doors' for you. Your friendships and social relationships are often, usually, or always based on their usefulness for reaching your economic and social goals. In other words, the people you network with and relate to are not *persons* (subjects) but *objects*. They are means to ends. But the Trinitarian/Christian view of reality tells us that relationships are ends in themselves. We are not to use others. A Christian counter-culture must be a place where relationships do not work like that. We are not to gravitate only toward the people who are more attractive, more "connected," more powerful. We are not to relate to people in order to further our own personal agendas.

For Character. If we read how Jesus taught his disciples, we see that he did not educate his disciples in a classroom. A classroom relationship is one in which the students and teachers contact one another on the intellectual point only. They do not live together, eat together, and contact one another socially, emotionally, and spiritually as well. Jesus did not set up a classroom relationship between himself and his students nor between his students with one another. Rather he created communities of learning, where there was plenty of time to work out truth in discussion and dialogue and in application. Therefore, the crucial (though not exclusive) venue for discipleship is in communities, not classes. That is, fellowship groups and friendships, not academic settings alone.

Character is mainly shaped by the people with whom we live--with whom we eat, play, converse, counsel, and study. It is therefore our primary social community that makes us what we are at the deepest level. All the 'one another' passages of the Bible apply to this aspect of Christian community. We are to honor (Rom 12:10), accept (Rom 15:7), bear with (Col 3:12-13), forgive (Eph 4:2,32), pray for and confess sins to one another (James 5:16). We are to cheer and challenge (Heb.3:13), admonish and confront (Rom 15:14; Gal 6:1-6), warn (1 Thess 5:14), and instruct one another (Col. 3:16). We are to stop gossiping and slandering (Gal 5:15) or being 'fake' (Rom 12:9) with each other. We are to bear burdens (Gal 6:2), share possessions (Acts 4:32ff) and submit to the needs (Eph 5:21) of each other.

For Ethics. Far more of the Biblical ethical prescriptions is addressed to us as a community than as individuals. The 10 commandments were given to Israel at Mount Sinai to form them into an alternate society that would be a light to the nations. Romans 12:1-2 call to "present your bodies a living sacrifice" is usually interpreted as a call to individual consecration, but it is (as we saw) a demand that we commit ourselves to a corporate body and not live as autonomous individuals any more. Then all of Romans 12 should be read as a description of this new society. In the same way, Jesus' call for us to be a '*city on a hill*' means we must read the whole Sermon on the Mount as a description of this new community. So most of the 'ethical principles' or 'rules for behavior' in the Bible are not just code-books for individuals but descriptions of the new community of love and holiness.

But this is common sense, really. Why? 1) It is far, far harder to live godly lives as individuals. Unless we make ourselves accountable to a body of believers, we simply will slip up and fall away constantly. 2) Many of the ethical prescriptions of the Bible seem maddeningly 'general'--not specific enough. They don't spell out just what to do in every situation. But that is because Jesus expected us to be walking *as a community* and determining these things as a community. One example is all the warnings against greed. Unlike adultery, which is nice and clear--greed is hard to define. When are you spending too much money on yourself? Greed is so insidious, that unless you do some talking with other Christians about it, you will never see it in yourself. This best worked out in community. 3) If we read all the rules as individual codes rather than as community standards, we will more likely fall into the error of legalism and of seeking to merit God's favor by our behavior.

For Spirituality. In a very famous passage (I've quoted it so much it is now famous!) C.S. Lewis describes a very close friendship that existed between Charles (Williams) Ronald (J.R.R.Tolkien) and Jack (C.S.Lewis.) Then Charles Williams died. And Lewis noticed that--

In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Charles joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. Hence true friendship is the least jealous of loves. Two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth....we possess each friend not less but more as the number of those with whom we share him increases. In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious 'nearness by resemblance' to Heaven...for every soul, seeing Him in her own way, communicates that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy' to one another (Is 6:3). The more we share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we shall all have.' - C.S.Lewis (*The Four Loves*)

Lewis's point was that even a human being is too rich and multi-faceted a being to be known one-on-one. You think you know someone, but you by yourself can't bring out all that is in the person. You need to see the person with others. And if that is the case with a human being, how much more so with the Lord. You can't really know Jesus by yourself.

Sum: It is a typical mistake of Christians to miss the centrality of community. 1) We often think of it as simply a result of the gospel. Well, it is. As we will see next week, the gospel creates community with the changes it makes in our hearts. But here we've seen that 'community' is not simply the result of the preaching of the gospel, but it is *itself* a declaration and expression of the gospel. It is demonstration of the good news of freedom in Christ, transformed character. It is itself *part* of the good news, for the good news is--"*This is what Christ has won for you on the cross--a new life in the people of God. Once you were alienated from others, but now you have been brought near.*" 2) We often think of community as simply one more thing we have to do in the 'rules' of behavior. "Ah, I have to read my Bible, pray, stay sexually pure--and I need to go to fellowship". But actually, 'community' is the way we are to do all that Christ told us to do in the world. It is the way we do 'ethics'; it is the way we do learning. Example: We really only learn to study the Bible in community, learning from others before us. There is nothing more dangerous than someone who feels that their interpretation of a text is right even though no one else thinks it is. 'Hermeneutics' apart from community is a recipe for a cult.

2. The Gospel and Christian Community.

Community is no longer natural or easy under our present cultural conditions. It will require a deliberateness and an intentionality greater than that required by our ancestors, and uncomfortable to most of us. But we have a secret weapon—the gospel of grace.

Community grows naturally out of shared experience, and the more intense the experience, the more intense the community. Strong community is formed by powerful common experiences, like going through a flood or battle together. There have been countless 'buddy movies' about some group of soldiers who are extremely different in all kinds of ways, but then they are thrown together into a life or death situation. When they come through it together, it becomes the basis for a deep, permanent bond, stronger than blood. The more intense the experience, the more intense the bond.

When Christians experience Christ's radical grace through repentance and faith, it becomes the most intense, foundational event of our lives. When we meet someone from sharply different culture, race, or social class but who has experienced the grace of Jesus Christ through the gospel, you are looking at someone who has been through the same life and death situation, since in Christ you have spiritually died and been raised to new life. (Eph 2:1-6; Rom 6:4-6.) And because of this common experience of grace, now a deeper identity marker than our family, race, or culture, when we come together, we find we 'fit'! '*As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house*' (1 Peter 2:4-5.) Like stones that already have been perfectly shaped by the mason, the builder simply lays next to each other and they interlock into a solid and beautiful temple. When we speak to others who know God's grace, we see that their identity is now rooted more in who they are in Christ than in their family or class. As a result we sense a bond that circumvents those things that, outside of Christ, created insurmountable barriers to our relationships. Jesus has knocked them down. How exactly does the experience of gospel grace create community?

“Let us have no vainglory— provoking one another, envying of one another. (Gal 5:26). This verse shows that our conduct to others is determined by our opinion of ourselves. It is when we have [“vain-glory”] that we...adopt one of these two attitudes. If we regard ourselves as superior we “provoke” (the Greek word means ‘to challenge’)....but if we regard ourselves as inferior we “envy.” In both cases our attitude is due to ‘vainglory’ or ‘conceit,’ to our having such a fantasy opinion of ourselves....Very different is that love which is the fruit of the Spirit....The Holy Spirit has opened their eyes to see both their own sin and unworthiness and also the importance and value of...people in the sight of God. -- J.Stott (The Message of Galatians)

Our natural condition is to be ‘glory-empty’, starved for significance, honor, and a sense of worth. This condition is rooted in sin. As Paul says, though we want to be our own masters--at the deepest level we know there is a God that we should be living for. Therefore we suppress and repress the knowledge that we are not living as we ought (Rom 1:18-20.) This guilt subconsciously influences us in all we do. Sin makes us feel both superior (because we are trying to prove to ourselves and others that we are significant) and inferior (because at a deep level we feel guilty and insecure.) In different people these deep currents express themselves in different ways. Some people’s ‘glory-emptiness’ takes the form of bravado and pride; some people’s ‘glory-emptiness’ takes the form of self-deprecation and self-loathing. Most of us are in the middle, wracked by both impulses.

The gospel, however, creates a whole new self-image which is not based on comparisons with others (Galatians 5:26, 6:3-5.) We do not earn our worth through approval *from* people nor through power *over* people, so, on the one hand, we are not over-dependent on the approval of others, nor, on the other hand, are we afraid of commitment and connection to others.

The gospel makes us neither self-confident nor self-disdaining, but both bold and humble at once. To the degree I am still functionally earning my worth through performance (i.e. to the degree I am still functioning in works-righteousness), to that degree I will be either operating out of superiority or inferiority. Why? Because if I am saved by my works, then I can either be confident but not humble (if I am living up) or humble but not confident (if I am not living up). In other words, apart from the gospel, I will be forced to be superior or inferior or to swing back and forth or to be one way with some people and another way with others. I am continually caught between these two ways, because of the nature of my self-image.

So the gospel humbles me before anyone, telling me I am a sinner saved only by grace. But it also emboldens me before anyone, telling me I am loved and honored by the only eyes in the universe that really count. So the gospel gives a boldness and a humility that do not “eat each other up”, but can increase together.

This radically changes all my relationships. Jonathan Edwards says that until we have experienced grace, everything we do is out of self-love. We do not work for the sake of the work, we do not relate for the sake of the person. We are doing it all to bolster our own self-image--to derive it, essentially from others. So my relationships are all about me. But when the gospel changes me, I relate to others for their sakes. I can enjoy someone for who they are in themselves, not for how they make me feel about myself. Until the gospel changes us, we are generally 'using' people in relationships. And until the gospel changes us, we have a very narrow 'range' for our relationships. We are capable of reciprocity and mutuality only with people a lot like us. When we meet anyone who is much better than us (socially, economically, mentally, physically) or much worse than us--the sharp dynamics of superiority and inferiority kick in to play. We are intimidated or disdainful.