

MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

TRANSFORMATIVE GRACE: HOW GRACE IMPACTS THE LOCAL CHURCH

A REFLECTION PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE

M-MN 5468 LEADERSHIP PRACTICUM

BY

ZACHARY BARNHART

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

APRIL 21, 2017

## Beating Grace Into Heads

Here I must take counsel of the gospel. I must hearken to the gospel, which teacheth me, not what I ought to do, (for that is the proper office of the law,) but what Jesus Christ the Son of God hath done for me: to wit, that he suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death. The gospel willeth me to receive this, and to believe it. And this is the truth of the gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consisteth. Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually.<sup>1</sup>

Who, according to Martin Luther, needs the gospel of grace beat into their heads continually? Pelagian theologians? Catholic priests? Gospel-centered pastors? Yes. The pastor never outgrows his need of grace, nor should he his want of it. Moving on to maturity in the pastorate requires a growing sense that the grace of God is sufficient, that true power boasts in the weakness of man and the power of Christ (2 Cor 12:9).<sup>2</sup> Administering this message, after all, is the makeup of ministry. “Pastoral ministry,” Owen Strachan writes, “is nothing other than the ministry of the good news of God’s grace made available in Jesus Christ through his Spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, ministry clothed in the gospel of grace is a pastor’s ultimate goal. But how can one administer grace if his own theology and character are not shaped by it? As Ray Ortlund puts it, “Gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture. The doctrine of grace creates a culture of grace.”<sup>4</sup> Ortlund is right, but *how* is he right? This paper, leaning heavily on Paul’s letter to the Galatians

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (Philadelphia: Smith, English, and Co., 1860), 206, quoted in Jared C. Wilson, *The Pastor’s Justification: Applying the Work of Christ in Your Life and Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 141-142.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this paper are to the English Standard Version (ESV) (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 50.

<sup>4</sup> Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 21.

as a guide, will argue that the gospel of grace fits a pastor for his high calling, shapes him into a shepherd, and protects him and his flock from turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one (Gal 1:6). The first section of the paper will devote time to these first two benefits of grace, and the following section will address the third.

### **A Gospel For Shepherds**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. (Gal 6:18)

The ending words of Paul’s letter to the Galatian church are words from the pastor to the pastored. But such encouragement should be offered to pastors as well, as mentioned above. When considering what a gospel of grace does for a pastor’s theology and character distinctly, there are two subtle, but central ideas that Paul will soon demonstrate in his letter. The gospel of grace is the bedrock on which the pastor's vocation is formed, and by which it is performed.

#### *A Pastor’s Formation*

In Galatians 1-2, Paul outlines his career as a gospel minister, from his pre-conversion life (Gal 1:13) to the life he lives in the present day (Gal 2:20). In his plenary address at The Gospel Coalition’s 2017 National Conference, pastor and author John Piper re-assorted the text of Galatians 1 to chronologically outline Paul’s pilgrimage to the pastorate.<sup>5</sup> Piper begins in Galatians 1:15-16, where Paul writes that God “had set me apart before I was born, and [he] called me by his grace.” From the outset, Paul recognizes his calling was anchored in a plan from before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), a plan only God could establish. Piper moves to Galatians 1:12, where Paul becomes aware of this divine calling for the first time “through a

---

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, “Paul's Pilgrimage, Paul's Plea” (sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 03, 2017).

revelation of Jesus Christ.” Notably, Paul acknowledges this was not a calling received from man. Paul then recognizes his call to “preach [Christ] among the Gentiles,” (1:16) and decides to take a significant season of discernment and retreat (1:16-21). Virtually unmoved by the apostles of the day, “Paul’s newness,” according to Piper, “is attributed to Christ’s resurrection” in verses 20-24.<sup>6</sup> His gospel message to the Gentiles is sourced from Christ directly, and therefore, his message is not manipulated by an instinct to be a man-pleaser (1:10), as he is even willing to take angels to task over the exclusivity of this gospel (1:8). All of this undergirds Paul’s original astonishment that the Galatians are “so quickly deserting him who called” (1:6).

What does all of this have to do with the gospel of grace, and how it shapes a pastor’s formation? Paul compellingly presents a vision of ministerial calling that is only enabled by the power and grace of God. Paul could have come up with a hundred ways to boast in his achievements, but only grace could give him enough humility to recognize his office as apostle and minister of the gospel as completely God-ordained and God-sustained.

This is an important lesson for pastors and ministers everywhere. Satan tempts those in ministry to preach a justification by faith alone while at the same time justifying their own pastoral calling by works alone. One pastor, writing to David Murray about burnout, put it this way: “I was a paper Calvinist, but a closet Pelagian, working more by law than by love. Work is good. But it’s only good if it’s anchored and totally conditioned by grace.”<sup>7</sup>

### *A Pastor’s Vocation*

---

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in David Murray, *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 68.

As argued above, grace is the sole foundation that a man finds his pastoral footing in the same way Paul did in Galatians 1-2. But the gospel of grace, when applied to a pastor's formation, will inevitably bleed over into the nuts and bolts of ministering to the flock itself. Only one who sees his calling as embedded in the gracious favor of God will be truly fit for the office of administering this same grace. Not only this, but a pastoral calling informed by grace will see the church not as his own possession, but as Christ's, owing not to "pastor ingenuity or multitasking facility," but only to grace.<sup>8</sup> Paul's pleas found throughout the book of Galatians may come off to the unassuming reader as harsh in tone and anything but gracious, but as will soon become evident, this letter compellingly shows Paul's operating as a gracious shepherd of these people.

Returning to Paul's original intent for writing the Galatians, he expresses perplexity at their turning from the gospel of Christ (1:6), worried they have been turned back to "elementary principles of the world" (4:9). Throughout the letter, Paul uses words and phrases that could be perceived as offensive to 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers. "O foolish Galatians! Are you so foolish?" (3:1, 3). Paul expresses righteous anger over the Galatian drift from the gospel of grace. Though he fears his work in Galatia may have been futile (4:11), Paul deeply cares for the people there. He refers to them as "my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" (4:19). He laments in the following verse, "I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you" (4:20).

Paul's level of concern for the Galatians strikingly mirrors the role of shepherd. Shepherds have immensely difficult jobs in caring for sheep. They are constantly concerned with

---

<sup>8</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, 51.

keeping sheep from getting off-course or being caught by predators. Sheep are animals that are prone to wander, just like the flocks called “churches.” Paul’s attempt in this letter is to move the church at Galatia together from foolishness (3:1) to Christ (3:29), and to do it, Paul must be gracious enough to prod them along to a promise that eternally stands –the promised Spirit through faith (3:14). Grace is not synonymous with pretty, nice, or tip-toeing. It oftentimes means conflict, striving, and suffering. Golgotha was not a cakewalk. Shepherding is a dirty, thankless, hard task, but it is a necessary task for the flock, one that is formed by grace.

### **A Gospel For Sheep**

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. (Gal 1:11)

Grace is a supreme doctrine, because not only does it help birth the pastor’s call to minister, but it becomes the purpose for one’s zeal in ministry.<sup>9</sup> A gospel of grace, though, also has a third function, in that it shapes churches into what they were intended to be. What brought the original church together? According to Luke, gatherings stemmed from a weaving together of theological, relational, and missional convictions:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. (Acts 2:42-47)

---

<sup>9</sup> “Zeal cannot be evaluated properly unless you evaluate its purpose.” See Don Carson, “The Gospel of Grace: How to Read the Bible, Part 2” (sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 04, 2017).

As the universal church has grown from the gathering at Pentecost into millions of local churches across the globe, many churches have taken the shape of something that is not expressed in Acts 2. In Galatians 1:11, Paul makes a distinction between “*the* gospel” and “*man’s* gospel” (emphasis mine). Many churches are not built with a foundation of the gospel of grace by which Paul was called and by which the Acts 2 church operated, but rather by “man’s gospel.” What is man’s gospel? It rears a variety of ugly heads, making its complexity and its influence significant. Churches built on “man’s gospel” are centered on bringing inspirational words, principles and advice for life, emotional and ego-boosting response, social justice, recreating Babel, and a thousand more: their name is Legion. Preachers are dubbed “speakers,” sermons are called “messages.” This is a small, but telling harbinger of how churches are becoming less about the exclusive gospel of grace and instead functioning as “religious resource centers.”<sup>10</sup>

In Jared Wilson’s fascinating study of church piety and practice, *The Prodigal Church*, Wilson defines the attractional church as “a way of ministry that derives from the primary purpose of making Christianity appealing.”<sup>11</sup> Wilson gives credit where it is due; the aims of the attractional movement are well-meaning.<sup>12</sup> And yet, “too often this message of Christ’s death has become assumed, the thing you build up to rather than focus on. Or, in too many other cases, this message is treated as the ‘add-on’ to other messages.”<sup>13</sup> So, what are the differences between these two opposites? How do gospel-centered churches differ from man-centered churches?

---

<sup>10</sup> Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against the Status Quo* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 58.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 27.

Returning to Galatians 5, Paul expresses pastoral concern and admonishes the church at Galatia to reclaim the gospel of grace and not the gospel of man. Thabiti Anyabwile's outline of the text is helpful here, and will serve to outline the rest of this section.<sup>14</sup>

First, Paul expresses primary concern over the spiritual apostasy of turning to man's gospel. Paul warns his congregants, "if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you...every man who accepts circumcision is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (Gal 5:2-4). Notice Paul's grave conclusion at the end of verse 4. Human attempts to satisfy the requirements of the law by a sort of self-salvation not only prove futile, but actually take away from the glory of Christ, the chiefest of sins. As Peter Adam remarks, "In the mathematics of God, addition is subtraction. Add works, diminish grace. Add Mary, diminish Christ. Add tradition, diminish Scripture."<sup>15</sup>

There is a "clear redemptive-historical turning point" in verse 6, a "but now" change of direction for those receiving Paul's words<sup>16</sup>: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love" (Gal 5:5-6, CSB). This theological forgetfulness (or apathy) expressed by the Galatian church sadly mirrors

---

<sup>14</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, "Gospel Freedom, Gospel Fruit" (sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 05, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Adam, "Living by the Promise: How to Read the Bible, Part 1" (sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 04, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Jason C. Meyer, "Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 90-91.

many attractional churches of today. Owen Strachan comments on how Billy Graham's ministry model contributed to a theological drift in the American church:

Although there is no real contradiction between theology and evangelism, many pastors eschewed the former in favor of the latter, finding their model in the mega-evangelists... Theology seemed separate from evangelism and from the local church's everyday ministry. The church's evangelistic apparatus was strong, but its theological muscles had atrophied due to disuse.<sup>17</sup>

Wilson rightly notes that a fundamental flaw of attractional patterns for ecclesiology is that worship can never be a-theological.<sup>18</sup> To drive a wedge between theology and the church's expression of worship is to misunderstand the very essence of worship. The men and women in Acts worshipped God precisely *because* of their theology.

In considering the differences between gospel-shaped and attractional-shaped churches, not only is spiritual apostasy at stake. Paul fears that the perseverance of the Galatian church will be negatively affected by man's gospel (Gal 5:7-12), contrary to the unification of the saints that the gospel of grace brings (Gal 5:13-26). These verses from Paul's letter carry much weight for how one should think about the church and its practices. Orthodoxy, or to "live by the Spirit," compels the Christian to orthopraxy, to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). As Anyabwile observes, Paul is arguing that grace-filled, gospel freedom in Christ is the remedy to every empty "Jesus-plus" method of ministry. What is Paul expressly telling the Galatians to do in Galatians 5 with their freedom in the gospel of grace? Anyabwile offers these five observations: "to *embrace*

---

<sup>17</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, 91.

<sup>18</sup> Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 98.

freedom (1a), to *protect* freedom (1b), to *express* freedom (5-6), to *employ* freedom (13-14), and to *improve* freedom (16-26).”<sup>19</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Perhaps Tim Keller expressed it best: “All love is a substitutionary sacrifice.”<sup>20</sup> John the Evangelist agrees with Keller: “This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 Jn 3:16, CSB).

Becoming rooted in the gospel of grace helps the pastor love God, the pastor love his flock and vice versa, and the flock to love God and others. Grace prepares a pastor to shepherd the local church, and reclaims the very purpose of the church body: to worship God in fellowship with the saints, persevering together by His grace until He comes again. Theology is a public task, “growing persons, cultivating a people.”<sup>21</sup> It may require constant reminder, getting beat into heads continually, but so be it. May local churches bear on its body the marks of Jesus, marks made by grace (Gal 6:17).

---

<sup>19</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, “Gospel Freedom, Gospel Fruit”

<sup>20</sup> Tim Keller, “Boasting in Nothing Except the Cross” (sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 05, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, 125.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam, Peter. "Living by the Promise: How to Read the Bible, Part 1." Sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 04, 2017.
- Anyabwile, Thabiti. "Gospel Freedom, Gospel Fruit" Sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 05, 2017.
- Carson, Don. "The Gospel of Grace: How to Read the Bible, Part 2." Sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 04, 2017.
- Keller, Tim. "Boasting in Nothing Except the Cross." Sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 05, 2017.
- Meyer, Jason C. "Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ." In *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, edited by Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, 69-99. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016.
- Murray, David. *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2017.
- Ortlund, Ray. *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014.
- Piper, John. "Paul's Pilgrimage, Paul's Plea." Sermon, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN, April 03, 2017.
- Wilson, Jared C. *The Pastor's Justification: Applying the Work of Christ in Your Life and Ministry*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013.
- . *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against the Status Quo*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2015.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.