

CPC101

THE "WHO ARE WE?" COURSE OF
CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
NASHVILLE, TN

(REVISED NOVEMBER 2019)



PURPOSE OF CPC101

CPC101 aims to provide you with information about Christ Presbyterian Church and how to become part of the story God is writing in, around, and through the shared life of our growing church family. It also aims to address common questions about what it means to be a Christian in general and a member of Christ Presbyterian Church in particular.

In CPC101, you will learn about (and hopefully connect with!) our mission, vision, core beliefs, and ministry philosophy. It is very likely that along the way, you will also have some questions. When this is the case, please feel free to ask, or to contact any of the church staff members to find the answers.

We hope that CPC101 will be a positive experience for you. We're very glad you are here!

5 SECTION 1: THE GOSPEL

OUR CORE BELIEFS

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN, AND WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

SUMMARY AND THE HISTORICAL PICTURE

12 SECTION 2: OUR STORY AND MINISTRY MODEL

OUR ABBREVIATED STORY

OUR MISSION, VISION, AND CULTURE

OUR DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY: WORSHIP, CONNECT, SERVE

16 SECTION 3: SIX KEY PRACTICES

WORSHIP PRACTICES

Be fully present with the church every single week.

Be fully present with Jesus every single day.

CONNECT PRACTICES

Take every opportunity to gather with your group.

Befriend and bring in people who don't have a church.

SERVE PRACTICES

Strengthen the church by serving and giving.

Enhance flourishing by serving your work, your world, and people in need.

23 SECTION 4: NEXT STEPS

WORSHIP STEPS

CONNECT STEPS

SERVE STEPS

JOINING THE CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN FAMILY

32 RESOURCES

SECTION 1: THE GOSPEL

OUR CORE BELIEFS

At Christ Presbyterian Church, we embrace biblical and historical Christianity as expressed in the Old and New Testaments, and as summarized in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. Additionally, we affirm the five tenets of the Protestant Reformation: Scripture alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and to God alone be the glory.

- 1. The Bible** is the inspired word of God. It is without error in its original manuscripts and contains everything we need to know about having a right relationship with God and our fellow human beings. The Bible is the basis for all of our essential beliefs (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- 2. God** is one (Mark 12:29), yet mysteriously exists in three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), who are to be equally loved, honored, and adored (Matthew 28:19).
- 3. Jesus Christ** is fully God and fully human. He is the sole Mediator able to restore the broken relationship, and the resulting alienation, between God and people (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).
- 4. The Holy Spirit** is God, the Third Person of the Trinity. He is alive and active. He indwells followers of Christ, working in unison with the Word of God to guide them in all truth. He is the power that enables Christians to live as new creations in Christ and empowers believers for service (John 16:7-14; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 6:17).
- 5. People** are created by God and in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). On this basis, all people must be treated with dignity, honor, love, and respect (James 3:9-10). At the same time, in their quest for independence and the centrality of self, all people begin their lives alienated from God, and in this condition are without hope and under judgment, a condition that can only be cured through God's loving, gracious, and saving intervention through Christ (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1). As the image of God, we are most alive when our trust, affections, and allegiances center on him.
- 6. Salvation** (restored relationship with God and newness of life) is activated when the Holy Spirit gives people a new heart, leading and enabling them to trust in Jesus alone for salvation (John 1:12-13). Because God loves his creation, he will also restore the entire universe to a condition of beauty, rest, joy, perfection, and freedom (Romans 8:18-30). God's world, which began as a promising garden (Genesis 1:27-31), will find its fulfillment in a perfected, life-giving city in which there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain (Revelation 21:1-8).

7. Good works do not and cannot make us acceptable to God (Ephesians 2:8-9), but are the natural outcome of authentic faith in Jesus (James 2:17). We become more fully human—the very best and healthiest version of ourselves—to the degree that we follow God’s loving commands. His commands, properly understood, are neither limiting nor oppressive, but life-giving. Obedience to God’s commands is an essential prerequisite for true human flourishing.

8. The Church is the family of God and consists of those who place their personal trust (faith) in Jesus. God wants all members of his worldwide Church, together with their children, to be active in a local church that gathers weekly to worship God, serve each other, and be a life-giving presence in their local community and world (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25).

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN, AND WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

A Christian is anyone who _____ the Gospel or “good news” of Jesus Christ. At its core, the Gospel is about who Jesus is, what Jesus has done, what Jesus is doing, and what Jesus will do to “make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found” as he brings his Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, and as he fulfills his _____ of loving people, places, and things to life.

The Gospel is the _____ message of biblical Christianity—it is good news that is not just a _____ step in a “staircase” of truths. It is better likened to the hub of a wheel, the _____ reality around which everything else orbits. It is not a basic truth from which we move on to deeper truths but is the _____ truth from which all other truth flows. Whether you are just starting to investigate Christianity or are a life-long follower of Christ, the Gospel is the single thing that must be grasped, internalized, and embraced to move forward with Jesus. Without the Gospel, life becomes _____ and disoriented in more ways than one can count. With the Gospel, we are placed on a trajectory toward beauty, truth, and wholeness.

THE GOSPEL DEFINED

The Gospel contains a “_____ news” element as well as a “_____ news” element. The bad news is that the universe and everything in it is wearing down all the time, and people are more sinful, corrupt, and damaged—spiritually, emotionally, physically, relationally, and vocationally—than we even realize. The good news is that God, through the person and work of Jesus, intends to _____ both the universe and His people to the original beauty and glory for which he created both.

THREE TRUTHS

The following are three truths that flow from the Gospel. Each one is foundational for all other teachings about faith and life.

The First Gospel Truth:

God is actively at work to _____ and renew _____ people, places, and things.

Through Jesus, the love and power of God have entered _____ to make all things new. This renewal includes people, and also much more. God will also renew the entire _____—people, places, and things! Scripture teaches that things like sin and sorrow and decay have tainted every aspect of God’s creation. As a result of this, both people and creation _____ in anticipation of all things being made new again—restored to their original beauty before sin entered the world (Romans 8:18-25; Revelation 21:1-5).

There are already signs of this future reality. Though the world is fallen, it also includes occasions for joy and splendor and thankfulness.

Thoughtful people also recognize and **LAMENT** that so much is also fractured, tattered, and falling apart.

In spite of the fact that all things eventually break down, believers in the Gospel, even in dire circumstances, can live with _____ (2 Corinthians 4:7-18, 12:7-10). Though things aren’t perfect now, it will all be made right when God renews all things (Revelation 21:1-5).

The Second Gospel Truth:

God is rescuing a _____ for himself—by _____ and through _____.

The central teaching or “crux” of the Gospel surrounds not a list of ideas, rules, or propositions, but a _____. That Person is Jesus Christ, who, being fully God (Philippians 2:6; 1 John 5:20), took on human flesh to mediate the insurmountable gap between a holy God and a sinful, wounded humanity (Isaiah 6:1-7).

The falsehood of religious _____ amplifies the demand for virtuous behavior—“You can’t be acceptable unless you perform and keep rules!”

The falsehood of expressive _____ amplifies the demand for personal autonomy—“Happiness is not found by drawing near to God, but by getting away from God and being the lord of your own life.”

The _____ is altogether different than both religious moralism and expressive individualism. Contrary to both, the Gospel emphasizes personal trust in God's heroic rescue through Jesus. The average person believes that a Christian is someone who follows Christ's teaching. Scripture says this is impossible. You don't rescue people unless they are in a perishing condition and incapable of rescuing themselves.

The Gospel's core message is that Jesus, who experienced and therefore _____ with the helplessness of the human condition (Genesis 6:5; Ephesians 2:1-10), gave himself as a voluntary _____ for all who place their trust in his gracious gift. He gave himself—not to buy us some sort of second chance, but to be our substitute and advocate before God. Everything we must do to satisfy God, Jesus has already done for us.

Jesus endured the _____ we should have died—which included being separated utterly from the loving presence of God—to ensure that we would never be condemned (Romans 3:23-26). Likewise, he lived the _____ that we should have lived so that God would treat us as blameless in his own sight. God is so intensely pleased with us that he actually enjoys us! (Zephaniah 3:17; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Because Jesus gave himself as our substitute, all who _____ in him can confidently say:

"As far as God is concerned, everything that's true about Jesus is true about me. Through Jesus, God regards me as blameless and beautiful. He loves me as much as he loves Jesus. He credits me for all the good that Jesus did, and he puts all the responsibility on Jesus for all that was, is, and will be wrong about me."

In summary, the Gospel assures us that the pressure is _____. Christianity is not something that we _____ as much as it is a Savior whom we _____. Our "doing" merely flows out of the trust, like fruit from a well-rooted tree. The more awakened we become to the "roots" that the Gospel gives us in Jesus, the more naturally we will respond in surrendered, obedient love toward God and other people because if anyone is in Christ, s/he is a new creation. The old has gone, and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Third Gospel Truth:

God has already begun the process of _____ his people toward becoming the very best, and eventually most _____ version of themselves. As Scripture says, "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

This is something about which we can be confident. It is a _____ process that the Bible calls "_____." In addition to saving His people from sin, God also intends to _____ them, bit by bit and over time, into the likeness of Jesus Christ. As this happens, they will find themselves—more and more over time—loving the things Jesus loves, hating the things Jesus hates, and walking

the path that Jesus walked. Finally, and in the life to come, they will actually be _____ God in their character, behavior, and desires (1 Corinthians 13:8-12; Ephesians 4:24). While we are never complete in this lifetime, and while we never grow past our need for Jesus, each advance in sanctification gets us an inch or two closer to our ultimate destination, which is to be like _____.

TWO ERRONEOUS, DAMAGING ALTERNATIVES TO THE GOSPEL

Martin Luther said that a sinner trying to believe the Gospel was like a _____ man trying to ride a horse—he will always struggle with a tendency to fall off on one side or the other. These two errors that the sides of the horse represent are:

The First Error: _____ or “truth” at the expense of grace, which is actually _____.

Legalism feels a lot more like _____ and a lot less like freedom. It thinks, prays, relates, and behaves as if there is something to prove to God, other people, and/or oneself. Legalism feels overly stiff and serious and leads to anxiety and tiresome striving. Practitioners of legalism either feel:

- self-_____ when they think they are succeeding,
- self-_____ when they think they are failing, or
- a deep-seated _____ toward God when they feel he isn’t treating them in the way that they think they deserve.

Other symptoms of legalism include a hyper self-awareness or narcissism, a judgmental spirit toward people who don’t measure up, a lack of prayer (especially intimate prayer), and disproportionate amounts of anger.

The Second Error: _____ or “grace” at the expense of truth, which is actually _____.

Relativists are on the opposite side of the pendulum from legalism. On the surface, relativism adopts a “live and let live” approach to life, relationships, and faith. If God is in the equation, it is only a kind of god who affirms everyone just as they are—regardless of how they live, how they treat others, or what they believe.

Relativists will talk about God’s _____, but since they do not see themselves as deeply sinful people who are deeply in need of God’s grace and rescue, God’s love for them ends up _____ him little or nothing. For relativists, the _____ of Christ is neither valued nor needed—because deep down, we are all basically good people who don’t need to be forgiven.

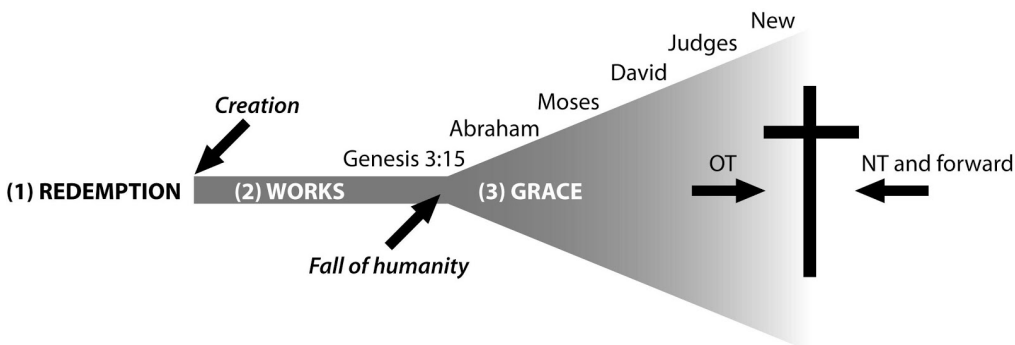
Christians and non-Christians both stumble over the two counterfeits of the Gospel. Many churches are deeply legalistic or deeply relativistic. Christians who understand the Gospel very clearly still look like the drunk man on the horse, as the desire to justify ourselves and trust in our own performance continually reappears. The Gospel tells the pragmatist that he is more flawed and sinful than he ever dared believe. The Gospel tells the legalist that he is more loved and accepted than he ever dared hope. In summary:

- God alone saves us; we do not save ourselves. Even if we wanted to save ourselves, we couldn't.
- God creates good in us and through us, but we cannot be good by ourselves.
- God keeps us in his love; we are not under pressure to earn or keep his approval. It is not the strength of our faith that causes God to love us, but rather the strength of Jesus and his finished work on our behalf.
- God's salvation has always been through Jesus, even in Old Testament times before Jesus was born (see the diagram below called "The 'Big Picture' of Redemptive History.")
- God's salvation always leads, over time, to new and better, more life-giving ways of thinking, believing, and living.

The diagram below explains that God's "covenant of grace" (salvation by grace through faith in Jesus alone) with Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, David, etc. all pointed to the same promise to bring salvation through a coming Messiah—which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The "Big Picture" of Redemptive History

The following diagram summarizes the history of the unfolding of the covenant of grace:



THREE KINDS OF CHURCHES

| TYPE OF CHURCH | FIRST HURDLE | SECOND HURDLE | MOTIVATION | ASSESSMENT |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| <p>LEGALIST CHURCHES <i>truth without grace</i></p> | <p>Measure up to our laws! Embrace our political agenda, the finer points of our doctrine, our customs, our dress code, our worship style, and everything else we regard as sacred!</p> | <p>We will accept you and give you our full embrace... IF you can get past the first hurdle! (We embrace everyone except those who disagree with us about anything.)</p> | <p>Performing to gain acceptance with the church, God, and/or yourself.</p> | <p>The bully church. Controlling, hurtful, coercive, manipulative, prone to police and condemn the sins of others while turning a blind eye to our own.</p> |
| <p>RELATIVIST CHURCHES <i>grace without truth</i></p> | <p>Measure up to our laws! Embrace our agenda of complete tolerance!</p> | <p>We will accept you and give you our full embrace... IF you can get past the first hurdle! (We are tolerant of everyone except those who aren't as tolerant as we are!)</p> | <p>Performing to gain acceptance with the church, God, and/or yourself.</p> | <p>The enabling church. Sappy, sentimental, sinful. Permissive in the name of 'tolerance,' yet strangely embittered and bullying toward those who aren't 'tolerant' like we are.</p> |
| <p>GOSPEL CHURCHES <i>grace and truth</i></p> | <p>See how loved you are! We accept you and give you our full embrace... because you are a person of great value...you are the image of God, and God values you enough to die for you!</p> | <p>Receive the love of God and, in response to his love, live a life of love and obedience to his commands (not the quirky laws of our particular tribe, but God's loving, life-giving laws!).</p> | <p>Loving God and other people, because you know you are loved by God and by our community. Even those who don't believe as we do feel strange, yet warmly, at home and embraced.</p> | <p>The grace and truth church. Whatever you believe, we celebrate your value as the image of God. We invite you to consider faith and repentance in the Gospel. We want to walk alongside you in your journey toward and with Jesus.</p> |

NOTES

SECTION 2: OUR STORY AND MINISTRY MODEL

OUR ABBREVIATED MODEL

Christ Presbyterian Church was born on January 4, _____ when we held our first worship service at Hillsboro High School in Green Hills.

We have had several wonderful pastors who have led us through many chapters and, frankly, through a handful of ups and downs along the way. The “up” seasons have been a demonstration of God’s kindness, and the “down” seasons a demonstration of God’s _____ love for his church—as evidenced by the fact that we are still here, and by the grace of God are still stewards of a very visible, broadly-reaching ministry to and beyond the metropolitan Nashville region.

Those who have led us as senior pastors include Dr. Cortez Cooper (1981-1985), Dr. Peter Doyle (1985-1988), Dr. Charles McGowan (1988-2004), Dr. Ray Ortlund (2004-2007), Dr. Wilson Benton (2007-2012), and Rev. Scott Sauls (2012-present).

Additionally, we became a **MULTI**-site church in recent years and have congregations at several locations around the metro area, each of which has its own dedicated pastoral leadership. For information about each of the sites, you can visit our website at christpres.org.

In retrospect, we also celebrate several Nashville area churches that were formed by people from Christ Presbyterian, including Christ Community Church, Covenant Presbyterian Church, and Midtown Fellowship, just to name a few.

The Multi-Site Church Model Conversation (Video Segment)

OUR MISSION, VISION, AND CULTURE

In March, 2012, our elders began asking how Christ Presbyterian can preserve its rich heritage of being a life-giving “_____” for our members and a value-adding “_____” to our city and the world, in a way that honors our history while also looking to the future. The result of that season is the following commitments related to our mission, vision, and culture.

Our Mission:

To follow Christ in his mission of loving _____, _____, and _____ to life.

OUR VISION:

As a family united in Christ and led by Scripture, we exist as partakers in a _____ of God's Kingdom that offers spiritual life, public faith, mercy and justice, and the integration of faith and work to the people, communities, institutions, and churches of greater Nashville, and through Nashville, to the world.

OUR CULTURE:

At Christ Presbyterian Church, we are a family united in Christ that aspires to be _____ and _____ by Scripture. Together, we will look to the Father's perfect Word as given in the Old and New Testaments—and as interpreted by the historic ecumenical _____ and Protestant reformed _____—to form our spiritual life. We will look to Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of sinners, to forgive our sins, refresh our spirits, ignite our worship, and transform our character. We will prayerfully depend on the Holy Spirit, whose power raised Jesus from the dead, to also empower us to live _____ lives, loving God with our whole selves and our neighbor as ourselves.

Because Christ's church is called to be a _____, we will aspire to share life with one another. In our beliefs and teaching, we will unite around Scripture's essential truths, while promoting _____ around things about which Scripture is flexible or silent. In our worship, we will honor God, gather weekly around the Lord's Table, and create _____ for one another and our guests. In our life together, we will honor one another _____ ourselves as we pursue the Father's vision for welcoming, listening to, loving, confessing, forgiving, serving, comforting, sharing burdens with, caring and praying for, remaining loyal to, and spurring on the best in one another.

We will celebrate our _____—opening our lives and hearts and homes to sinners and saints, doubters and believers, seekers and skeptics, prodigals and Pharisees, Presbyterians and non-Presbyterians, young and old, married and unmarried, leaders and followers, famous and infamous, our own races and other races, happy and depressed, helpers and those who need help, creative and corporate, conservative and liberal, American and international, affluent and bankrupt, public and private and home-schooled—and all others who enter our doors. We will aspire to expand our 'us' by carefully listening to, learning from, and being shaped by one another's unique experiences and perspectives.

As a church rooted in Jesus Christ—who taught that it is more blessed to _____ than it is to receive and that greatness is found through _____—we will aspire to give ourselves away. Indeed, our '_____,' belief that every word of Scripture is right and good and true, will compel us toward '_____,' lives of generosity and love. We will aim to live not only for ourselves but as partakers in a movement of God's kingdom.

God, because he loves us, sweeps us up and includes us—along with all of his children everywhere—in his mission of loving people, places, and things

to life. As his beloved _____, he sends us out to 'so love the world,' in hopes of leaving the world _____ than we found it. We hope to be part of something that adds such value to our city that if Christians disappeared, the whole city would weep.

Because Jesus called us to let our light shine so the world will _____ our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven, our faith will be a _____ faith. We will aspire to love and serve all our neighbors in the places where we live, work, and play. We will host and encourage _____ conversations that unite believers, seekers, and non-believers around shared interests, in hopes that the truth, beauty, love, and justice of God will be brought to bear on the most central and pressing issues of our time. We will host life-giving _____ for our city and our neighbors as a sign of God's Kingdom, and of how heaven rejoices when prodigals come home and cynics lay down their defenses and join the celebration.

Although Jesus reserves membership in his church and participation in his table for those who trust him and seek to obey Scripture, we will join Jesus in befriending those who _____ believe as we do. We will welcome all people into our worship services, parties, conversations, homes, and lives, including those who have _____ or _____ about the beliefs, ethics, generosity, self-denial, and counter-cultural nature of historic Christianity.

As Christ's ambassadors to our neighbors in _____, we will aspire to live lives of _____ and _____. We will give special attention to, and generously channel our resources toward improving conditions and systems—whether spiritual, social, economic or vocational—for the poor, immigrants and refugees, ethnic and other minorities, and others who lack resources, opportunity, or privilege. We will embrace the idea that as conditions improve for those who have power, conditions must also improve for those who lack power, and never at their expense. For wealth, privilege, and power are given to be stewarded and _____ for the benefit of _____, not protected and kept merely for the benefit of some.

As those who have been called into the world by Christ to serve him in our _____, we will aspire to eliminate the false dichotomy of _____ versus _____. We will affirm that every good work—whether _____ or restorative—is no less God's work than the work of pastors and missionaries.

We will commit our resources to train, equip, and resource Christians for the _____ of faith and work, in hopes that people and institutions representing church, business, education, the social sector, arts and entertainment, government and media, and other channels of influence—will approach their work with tenacity, purpose, and confidence so that their work contributes meaningfully to God's mission to heal the world.

Finally, because God's Kingdom is much _____ than a single church, we will pray and work for the flourishing of all people and not just our people; of all churches and not just our church; of all cities and not just our city; and of

all nations and not just our nation. We will do this chiefly by making disciples, equipping leaders, creating and sharing content, and starting new, like-minded _____—including cross-denominational and cross-cultural ones—throughout greater Nashville and across the globe.

Because our city is a _____ hub for multiple spheres of impact, we will expect any movement of God’s Kingdom in greater Nashville to also extend beyond Nashville to the world. We will pursue and embrace opportunities to _____ our resources and capital—whether spoken, written, creative, financial, relational, professional, or otherwise—toward Jesus’ vision to bless and heal the world. As we do this, we will celebrate wherever, whenever, and through whomever, God chooses to grow his Kingdom. We will not concern ourselves with who gets the attention or the credit. Our task is to advance _____ fame and glory, and not our own. For it is from him, and to him, and through him that are all things. Amen.

The Christ Presbyterian Church/Christ Presbyterian Academy relationship: “A church for all schools and a school for all churches.” (Video Segment)

PREVIEW: SIX KEY PRACTICES

In the next section, we will explore the three key building blocks of discipleship and their corresponding, key _____ (two each). Together, these form the pathway for participating in our mission, vision, and culture described above. The more engaged you are in each of the following practices, the more enriching your participation in the life and ministry of Christ Presbyterian will be—both for you and for our community!

_____ PRACTICES

Practice 1: Be fully present with the _____ every single Sunday.

Practice 2: Be fully present with _____ every single day.

_____ PRACTICES

Practice 3: Take every opportunity to gather with your _____.

Practice 4: Befriend and bring in people who don’t have a _____.

_____ PRACTICES

Practice 5: Strengthen the church by _____ and _____.

Practice 6: Enhance flourishing by serving your _____, your _____, and people in _____.

SECTION 3: SIX KEY PRACTICES

At Christ Presbyterian, we affirm that the Lord formed the Church for a purpose—to be a community of faith bound together for the purposes of giving glory to Christ and living as his witnesses in this world. This is why our _____ is to follow Christ in his mission of loving people, places, and things to life.

As we've prayed through and worked diligently to distill our mission down into specific practices, we've zeroed in on three areas of focus: _____, _____, and _____. Our vision for a flourishing follower of Christ is someone who worships Jesus regularly with the local church weekly and personally every day; is connected to people in the church and befriending and bringing in those outside the church; and is serving in their church, but also enhancing the flourishing of their world in the places where they _____, _____, and _____.

So where do we start? We've distilled this vision down into six fundamental practices—two focused on worship, two on connection, and two on service. Let's unpack them together.

STEP 1: _____

Practice 1: Be fully present with the _____ every single Sunday.

In Hebrews, we read about an early church that had already formed the habit of not meeting together. They "habituated" not being present with their church. We are living in a time when we are faced with the choice of whether or not to live faithful, spiritually maturing lives. One sign that we're struggling to do this is when we trade the habit of worshipping _____ our brothers and sisters in Christ for either worshipping _____ or not at all.

The faith Christians share is headed someplace—to an eternity of worship and delight, as a _____ people, in the presence of our Savior and King. In this life, the local church exists, in part, to serve as a dress rehearsal for that. There's no such thing as individualized Christianity, where one person, or even one family, can say to the rest of the church, "I don't _____ you" or "I'm not going to be an active _____ of you."

So we are committed to cultivating this practice: Be fully present with the church every Sunday. "Don't forsake meeting together...and all the more as you see the Day approaching..." (Hebrews 10:25)

Statistically, church-going people in America attend church an average of _____ times per month. At Christ Presbyterian Church, we don't just want to see that number increase to 2.5. We want to see it increase to _____

times per month. We want to cultivate the habit of corporate worship in such a way that we're building the rest of our lives around worshipping Christ with his _____ rather than trying to fit worship in as an add-on.

When, because of your sin and mine, God owed us _____ in terms of eternal fellowship with him, unthinkable access to God has been given to us. And so, we have _____ to enter the presence of God. Through Christ's flesh, he has opened the way for us to have a lasting, unbroken fellowship with our Creator.

So let us hold fast to the confession of our hope. Let's stir one another up to do the same. That's why I need you here. That's why you need others here, and that's why _____ need you here—to hold each other up, to stir one another's confidence, to remind each other that the Gospel is true. Be fully present with the church every Sunday.

Practice 2: Be fully present with _____ every single day.

Following Jesus through daily Scripture reading and prayer are forms of art. They're not just things we do. They're things we _____. Here's a promise: mastery begets _____. If you practice habits like prayer and Scripture reading regularly, you will develop in the craft.

In a world where people are trying to find their way to their deepest meaning, Scripture holds the answer. We weren't created to glide through this life as cynics, turning the sublime into memes. We were created to stand in awe of glory and bow our hearts to holiness. We're meant to love our Creator through reverence.

Question: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

- The Westminster Confession of Faith

Do you think you see all that is broken in your own life? How thoroughly do you comprehend your own worth? Your own limits? Psalm 19 says we are a people of hidden faults and presumptuous sins, which unchecked, can have dominion over us. What is the answer to this? The Psalmist turns us to _____ with God—regular intimate engagement with his word and prayer. Here is where we learn. He shows us our weakness. He breaks the dominion of sin. That is why the Word of God is so sweet. The Lord works through it, by his Holy Spirit, to reveal himself, his love, our need, his rescue.

Spending time with Jesus on a daily basis is like spending time with anyone that often—it is the work of cultivating _____ and _____. These are the ways we practice the art of intimacy and friendship with God. By spending time in his word, we tune our minds to fix on him and our hearts to rest in him.

The goal of practicing these spiritual disciplines is to move to a place of trust, confidence, and familiarity with our Lord. It is to move from the _____ to the intimate. This is why we practice the spiritual disciplines of daily Scripture reading and prayer. Be fully present with Jesus every day.

STEP 2: _____

Practice 3: Take every opportunity to gather with your _____.

Woven into the story of God calling and redeeming a people for himself is a call for those people to live in _____. It was there in the beginning. It was not good for man to be alone. When God gave Eve to Adam, he didn't just give him a partner. Through her, he gave them both others. He gave them a community. Scripture describes that community for Christians as a _____ and a _____.

One Christian's association with other Christians is, in the sight of God, intimate and unbreakable. We are _____ to each other forever, as far as God is concerned. So we respond to this call to unity by forming intentional communities—i.e., smaller _____, where Christ is our head, and we gather as a people under the authority of his word—seeking to live out the two great commands he says summarizes the entire law of God:

1. Love the _____ with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and
2. Love your _____ as yourself.

The leadership and staff at Christ Presbyterian Church are committed to facilitating this process by establishing _____ Groups, _____ Groups, _____ Groups, and the like. But the work of connecting lies with you. You have to do that part. And it won't always be pretty. You'll have lots of reasons to decline. We all do. We always will. But remember, the language the Lord uses to describe the life of a flourishing believer—someone who loves God with their entire being as a part of the Body of Christ and who loves their neighbor as themselves—is a _____ life. This can't be done in isolation. Find and join a group, and take every opportunity to gather with them.

Practice 4: Befriend and bring in people who don't have a _____.

The South has a reputation for having a church on every corner—as though we have more churches than we need. This is _____. Not by a long shot. Our city is growing exponentially right now—and projections indicate that our greater metro area will possibly double in size over the next twenty years. Studies also indicate that most people in our city don't go to church—_____% of them, to be exact.

We never want to recruit and steal people away from other churches. This does not grow the kingdom. But because we are committed to being an outward-facing church filled with people who are public with their faith, one of the hallmarks of our health is that we form the habit of befriending and bringing in people who _____ have a church home—seekers, skeptics, the de-churched, the unchurched, and folks who are new to town. When we do this, we're not merely inviting people to _____. We're inviting them into our _____.

Lifeway did a study a few years ago that found that, in general, non-Christian neighbors, or people with no current church community, will _____ be offended if you invite them to your church—especially if you have a connection with them. What was the reasoning? If someone _____ you and _____ about you or senses that you care about them, they will have some interest in knowing what you care about.

When we invite someone to church, we're saying, "Though I may be a work in _____, I'm telling you that I am loved here, and I am committed to loving others here. I think you would benefit from this community, and I believe you have something of value to bring to it. Come join me."

Befriend and bring in people who don't have a church. The Lord will add to our numbers—not to merely grow a church, but to deepen a community. We get to play a role in that, and we get to do this our entire lives. Amazing.

STEP 3: _____

Practice 5: Strengthen the church by _____ and _____.

A key component to our vision is also built into the membership vows of every church in our denomination—that we would strengthen the church by supporting it in its worship and work to the best of our ability for the glory of God. This means: get plugged in. Serve. Give. Engage your church with your _____ self.

Serving and strengthening the church is about contributing to a _____ where anyone who considers this church home would never think, "The church is a place I go," but rather, "I _____ the church." Serving the church is a fight for our hearts—that we would see, embrace, and live out our calling to be people who steward well the garden the Lord has placed us in.

Consider the work-life of a Christian. Along with whatever family and job responsibilities we have, we belong to the body of Christ. If we see ourselves as more than just church _____—if we see ourselves as part of the body itself—then part of the work in front of us is to pour ourselves into the local church. We are part of the life of this community of faith. _____ members of a community do not only take. They give. They serve. They invest.

The practice we're after here is that we would be people who are engaged with this life we've been given. An _____ life is one marked by worship, connection, and service.

Practice 6: Enhance flourishing by serving your _____, your _____, and people in _____.

When we think about what it means to be outward-facing Christians in public, seeking to enhance flourishing by serving our work, world, and people in need, this involves more than trying to convert people to Christianity. It means living our faith in every corner of our lives.

In our _____, we're after more than mentioning Jesus at the water cooler. Serving our work means we go about our work with excellence, treating co-workers, clients, and competition with dignity and respect. We conduct ourselves with _____. We seek to improve the world through our work. We pray for those we work with—whether co-workers or the people we're caring for. We see our work as an opportunity to enhance the flourishing of others.

In our _____, we seek to be good neighbors who care for others and the planet we share. We get to know our neighbors by name so that we can be there for them in times of need. We bring levity and _____ to others. We show up for parties. We _____ alongside the broken-hearted, not with an ulterior motive of winning them to Christ, but simply because it's the right thing to do.

With people in _____, we seek to live outward-facing lives. We recognize as C.S. Lewis said, that we've never met a "mere _____." Everyone we encounter bears the image of God and is worthy of respect, even if they believe, vote, school, eat, or live differently. And if they have a need we can meet, we should do what we can to meet it.

This is why we don't distinguish between _____ work and _____ work. All work that contributes to the flourishing of this planet and the creatures and plants which inhabit it is holy. The sanitation worker confronts decay, the designer seeks to marry beauty to function, the builder employs people and makes homes, the doctor prolongs physical well-being, the entrepreneur seeks to introduce something new and useful, the artist holds out for us mystery, beauty, wonder, and awe, and invites us to consider matters of the heart.

We get to have a role in mending what's broken, in standing up against what's toppled over, in healing what's afflicted, in adorning with beauty what's ugly. We get to _____. And that part each of us plays gets added to the work of so many others. We don't have to do or be everything, but we get to do and be part of lots of things.

APPLYING THESE SIX PRACTICES

WORSHIP

Be fully present with the church every Sunday.

The application is pretty simple here. Come to church _____ week. Put your phone away, engage with what's being said and read, and with what you're saying and singing. When you're out of town, you can always catch the live stream online, or better yet, find a _____ where you are and visit it.

Be fully present with Jesus every day.

Get into Scripture. Develop and cultivate the habit of prayer. There are lots of resources _____ and in _____ that you can use to dig into Scripture starting today. Here are a few we recommend:

- *She Reads Truth* and *He Reads Truth* offer free daily Scripture reading plans online and via email. You can also download their easy to use apps or order their beautiful print books.
- *The Dwell Bible App* is a great resource for listening to Scripture. It is very customizable, down to the reading plans and the reader's accent.
- *The ESV or CSB Study Bibles*. These are both very readable translations with loads of helpful notes and accessible commentary. These Bibles come with a variety of daily reading plans—including reading through the Bible in a year and also reading Scripture chronologically.

CONNECT

Take every opportunity to gather with your group.

Identify and get involved with a group in your church. Here are some ways you can find a group, along with some "_____ door" opportunities through which you can invite others in today:

- Join a Connect Group. Connect Groups are one of our most "on the ground" opportunities to find a handful of other individuals and families to get to know and walk through life.
- Be part of one of our Learning Groups.
- Get involved in or start a City Group.
- Check out Christ Presbyterian Church's men's and women's groups.
- Save the dates and come out for church _____.

Befriend and bring in people who don't have a church.

Application here is simple too—_____. Our city is growing at a rapid pace. A recent study conducted by TheAmericanChurch.org indicated that only _____% of Davidson and Williamson County residents have a church home. Invite. Though some may not be open to your invitation, many will be.

Strengthen the church by serving and giving.

The church is full of _____—you can serve with the Kids' Ministry, help with set-up at one of our locations, become part of the hospitality team, teach a class, become a mentor with the student ministry. Explore the website or ask hosts at your location's Welcome Table for more opportunities.

And give. Give in a way that is in proportion with your income, intentional, _____, joyful, and in _____ to what Christ has given you.

Enhance flourishing by serving your work, your world, and people in need.

There are many ways to do this in partnership with the church. Get involved with The Nashville Institute for Faith and Work (_____). Join or start a City Group. Serve with one of our Partnerships.

But beyond all these opportunities lies the vision that we would be a church filled with people who are intentionally _____ not only in the church, but in the places where we live, work, and play.

Worship. Connect. Serve.

SECTION 4: NEXT STEPS

STEP 1: _____

Practice 1: Be fully present with the church every single Sunday.

Choose your worship service, and enthusiastically _____ to it weekly. Order your life around worship with the church like you do other healthy, life-giving endeavors. Approach Sunday worship as you would showing up to work on Monday morning, watching every episode of your favorite TV series, or prioritizing a weekly date night. We show up weekly together not because we have to, but because it represents something (and Someone) that we treasure. We will naturally, and always, dedicate our best and most focused time, energy, and resources to the things we treasure most.

Part of being “fully present” with the church includes being fully committed to contributing to the worship and work of the church through planned, regular, and sustained giving of our _____ resources to the church. For some, faithful giving will be a relatively small amount (like the widow’s mite). For others, faithful giving will be in the thousands, tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands. Generosity is not only part of how the _____ of the church is accomplished. It is also essential for our own health and flourishing. God, who _____ nothing from us, tells us to cultivate regular patterns of generosity because he _____ us and wants what is best for us.

Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. - Malachi 3:8-10

Now concerning the collection for the saints...on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper. - 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Practice 2: Be fully present with Jesus every single day.

- Find an ideal _____ that works for you to spend time in Scripture and prayer each day. If you miss a day here and there, don’t let it turn into a reason for guilt. Just treat it like you would treat eating dinner with family, or a regular appointment with a close friend, by simply getting back on track the next day. Remember, God wants to be _____ you, build you up, and _____ you into his likeness through these daily means of grace.

In the previous section, several options were offered to help you get started with regular Bible reading. Regarding prayer, we recommend starting with a good “how-to” book like *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller or *Prayer* by Timothy Keller.

Practice 3: Take every opportunity to gather with your group.

In Acts 2:42, we read about the formation of the first Christian church. Two things are specifically mentioned which form the foundation of the “Connect” portion of our membership pathway—those two things are _____ and _____.

At Christ Presbyterian, you can participate in Christian community by joining a _____ Group, a _____ Group, or both. Connect Groups tend to major in fellowship and minor in teaching, whereas Learning Groups tend to major in teaching and minor in fellowship.

- You can participate in a _____ Group.

There are numerous types of Connect Groups comprised of all kinds of people. Most are smaller gatherings of 8 to 16 people who meet in homes, restaurants, at the church, or other accessible locations. Some are organized by _____, others by life stage, and others by shared _____. Connect Groups are asked to meet at least twice a month and engage in _____-based discussion during the gathering. Beyond the sermon-based study, Connect Groups engage with and share life together (Acts 2:42).

To obtain more information about Connect Groups, email connect@christpres.org.

- Become an active participant in a Christ Presbyterian _____ Group.

There are numerous Learning Groups at Christ Presbyterian Church, all of which are designed to aid in increasing biblical _____ or aid in understanding everything through a biblical mindset. Subjects range from Bible basics to more in-depth studies of different books of the Bible. All Learning Groups allow people to share in their learnings, spurring one another along in the flourishing of their faith.

_____ Learning Groups meet in the morning between services at the Old Hickory Blvd location. But we also have other _____ Learning Groups, accessible to all Christ Presbyterian congregations, through our Women’s Ministry, Men’s Ministry, and Wednesday night Learning Groups.

To obtain information about Learning Groups, email connect@christpres.org.

Practice 4: Befriend and bring in people who don't have a church.

As you _____ in your church we also encourage you to _____ your friends and neighbors to church. As we've already seen, we will invest in what we most care about, and we will order our lives around what brings us joy. When we experience this joy, we naturally want others to experience it as well. Just like our favorite restaurants and music, we want others to take up what we invest in. Whether we bring them to a Sunday service or Connect Group, Learning Group, or City Group, we want people to _____ what we love.

Inviting people to church should be a natural byproduct of having a meaningful _____ with them. And as we invite, we need to remember we are inviting them _____. We are asking them to invest. We want to demonstrate _____ for our friends by welcoming their questions and giving them the freedom to go at their own pace. Invite your friends to _____ our church in both their relationships to the Lord and others. Any invitation should be a _____ extension of your relationship to them and the church, rather than pressure or an obligation.

STEP 3: _____**Practice 5: Strengthen the church by serving and giving.**

□ _____ in the church.

The apostle Paul tells us "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, we are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor 1:12). How does the Church work? It functions as a _____ which means there are many opportunities to serve as a part of the whole. No matter what type of person you are, no matter your background or current place in life, there is a place for you to _____ at Christ Presbyterian.

If you're interested in joining a Service Group at Christ Presbyterian Church, email serve@christpres.org.

□ _____ to the church. (See notes from prior section)

Practice 6: Enhance flourishing by serving your work, your world, and people in need.

□ Serving your _____ (see nifw.org for more).

“What is the Christian understanding of work? . . . [It] is that work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker’s faculties . . . the medium in which he offers himself to God.”

- Tim Keller and Katherine Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor*

When we hear the word “serve,” we immediately think of serving at _____ or serving those in _____. But have you considered that your work can be the _____ place you can serve God and neighbor on a daily, if not hourly basis? Whether you are a banker, a janitor, a songwriter, a community volunteer, or a parent, all work is a way to _____ God, and through that, love people, places, and things to life.

What does _____ your work look like?

“Work is as much a human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine, but food for our soul. Without meaningful work, we sense significant inner loss and emptiness.”

- Tim Keller and Katherine Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor*

Serving your work means understanding work as part of God’s plan to _____ the world. Many in the Western world see work as a necessary means to the perceived greater good of _____. We see this view on retirement brochures, in songs like “Everybody’s Working for the Weekend,” and in sayings like “TGIF.”

But God created work _____ the fall, which means that work is not a necessary evil, but a necessary _____. Work is a part of life that God created for our _____, and for service to the community around us.

All _____ work becomes a way to take chaos and bring structure, just like God in the creation account in Genesis. Unloading a dishwasher, writing a melody, negotiating a contract, running financial models, serving on a manufacturing line—all bring structure out of chaos, and in all we can aim for God to declare it good. Each and every _____ has some element of God’s goodness reflected in it. Art shows his creativity, business shows his ingenuity, education shows his wisdom, finance shows his desire to re-allocate resources, etc.

Yet, work is also impacted by the _____. We all feel it. People are broken, systems are broken, the whole world is broken. And thus, work is broken. Being broken, the workplace can function as a factory for our false _____. Long for appreciation? Where better than at work? Long for security? What more than a paycheck?

Work also cultivates broken _____. We see systems go awry when greed distorts capitalism, turning it into an avenue to feed our own selfishness, versus using it as an avenue for loving our neighbor as ourselves.

But believers have the opportunity to work in _____ with God in any vocation to bring flourishing to our world. No matter what our work is, there are opportunities to not only enhance God's imprint on the industry, but also to _____ people, places, and things to life right where we are. How are you loving people, places and things to life in your work?

Christ Presbyterian has developed an entire organization, The Nashville Institute for Faith and _____, (NIFW) to help you learn more about how your work and faith can support each other. Subscribe to the NIFW mailing list at NIFW.org and find them on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook: @nashfaithwork.

"The Gospel frees us from the relentless pressure of having to prove ourselves and secure our identity through work, for we are already proven and secure. It also frees us from a condescending attitude toward less sophisticated labor and from envy over more exalted work. All work now becomes a way to love the God who saved us freely; and by extension, a way to love our neighbor."

- Tim Keller and Katherine Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor*

- Serving your _____. This is another way of encouraging us to commit ourselves to "good neighboring."

Life in the world _____ through _____ should reflect the aroma of our Sunday worship. As carriers of heaven's DNA and the scent of Jesus in his world, we want to reflect his grace, truth, and beauty in all of the places where we live, work, and play. Two very practical ways this can be done include:

1. *Opening our _____.* The biblical practice of _____ has the effect of turning strangers into friends, and friends into family. Because feasting is such a dominant theme in the Bible, because Jesus' first miracle was providing a 'second round' of wine at a wedding feast, and because Jesus is constantly showing up at parties and dinners in the Gospels (Matthew's house, Simon's house, etc.), and because history will end with a grand wedding feast, our homes and lives should seek to communicate to others, "_____."

2. *Surprising our neighbors with unexpected gestures of _____.*

We want to be intentional and creative, looking for opportunities to be the “first responders” wherever opportunities exist to extend the kindness, love, support, and hope of Jesus to people who are hurting, lonely and alone, and feeling ashamed. As your church family, please let us know how we can partner with you to love those with whom you live, work, and play.

- Serving people in _____ (for more information, see “City Groups” at christpres.org).

While service encompasses a wide spectrum of opportunities, it’s important to remember that a disciple of Christ not only serves the people _____ within the walls of the church but is also called to function as a people who are _____ about the world, loving people, places, and things to life.

In other words, it’s our job as disciples of Christ to love our _____ to the exclusion of no one. We should love and serve the world around us.

If you have an interest in joining one of our City Groups, send an email to serve@christpres.org, and we’ll find a service opportunity for you to join today.

JOINING THE CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FAMILY

There are several steps to becoming a member of Christ Presbyterian Church. You are about to be finished with the biggest and most time-committed step. Way to go!

Step 1: Completion of the CPC101 course. Your first step is attending CPC101. Attendance of the course does not obligate you in any way toward membership—you may simply use the experience to find out more about our mission, values, and doctrine if you wish.

Step 2: The membership meeting. When you have decided you want to belong to the Christ Presbyterian family and have completed CPC101, contact Jen Seger, Director of Care, who will set up your membership meeting with a site-specific pastor and/or elder as well as a possible woman in leadership. Generally, this meeting lasts about 30 to 45 minutes and takes place at a time that is convenient for you.

You will share your story and how it has informed your personal faith journey. The interview both enables us to get to know you better and gives you an opportunity to ask any questions or offer any feedback that you may have. This is your opportunity to interact with leaders and make sure you are comfortable with your decision to join Christ Presbyterian Church.

Step 3: Elder approval. After the interviews, the elders vote to officially enter the new members into our body. This is technically the official point of member reception, but the quarterly Joining Day will be the date you are considered a full voting member.

Step 4: Public vows. After the elder meeting, our Director of Care will contact you to confirm the date and service you will attend to make your public promises. When the time is called, you will go forward and affirm the promises after they are read by a pastor. Although not required to be present to join since all necessary steps are covered beforehand, Joining Day allows us to introduce you to the congregation and is your public acknowledgment before the congregation.

Step 5: Baptism. If you have never been baptized and are making your first public profession of faith, you may be baptized during a worship service. Let us know during your membership meeting, and we will schedule your baptism (or for parents, a child baptism). The baptism will take place after you have affirmed the promises of membership.

WHAT IF I DECIDE NOT TO BECOME A FORMAL MEMBER?

If you decide to stay involved with Christ Presbyterian without membership, there will be no effort to pressure you into joining. Do not join unless you are ready to be committed! But if you are ready to commit, let's graduate from our current "dating relationship" and bring you in as a full member!

WHAT ARE THE MEMBERSHIP PROMISES?

Christ Presbyterian belongs to a wider family—the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), a denomination in the Reformed and Evangelical tradition. Membership at Christ Presbyterian means you have committed yourself to our family of believers—that you have agreed to participate as fully as you are able in the life, ministry, and government of the church. Therefore, Christ Presbyterian Church members must affirm the following promises as a vow to the Lord:

Doctrinal promises: Believing the Gospel.

Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope except through his sovereign mercy?

Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the Gospel?

Character promise: Seeking to grow into your identity as a new creation in Christ, not through self-reliance but through daily turning to Christ, repenting from sin, and relying on the Holy Spirit.

Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?

Community promise: Being meaningfully engaged as a participant and contributor in the life and ministry of Christ Presbyterian.

Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

Accountability promise: Holding yourself accountable to the Bible, the leaders of the church, and your fellow believers to live according to the promises. Seeking to be a biblical peacemaker in your relationships, according to Matthew 5:23-26, Matthew 18:15-35, and Galatians 6:1-2.

Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to strive for its purity and peace?

To explore further: See the Resource article, The Value of Church Membership

AS WE CONCLUDE...

1. What are your questions about Christ Presbyterian Church and/or anything from this course?

2. Is there any advice you would like for us to pass on to our Leadership?

RESOURCES

PAGE

33 THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

36 HOSPITABLE WORSHIP PRINCIPLES

**40 COVENANT PEOPLE AND THE SACRAMENTS
OF GRACE**

48 GRACE AND TRUTH IN THE ATMOSPHERE

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

BY SCOTT SAULS

At Christ Presbyterian Church we see membership as an important step for those who have come to the place of seeing Christ Presbyterian Church as 'their church.' Here are the reasons:

WHY CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

At Christ Presbyterian Church we understand the concept of church membership, its responsibilities, and its blessings, from the teachings of the Bible regarding Christian community. Some of the biblical reasons for connecting oneself to a local church family include:

The biblical pattern of spiritual care. Scripture exhorts local church elders to '*be shepherds of God's flock that is under (their) care*' (1 Peter 5:2), a flock which consists of specific believers who have been '*entrusted to (them)*' (1 Peter 5:3). It follows by reason that such elders can discern who is under their official care only by virtue of those who have covenanted to be part of their specific church family.

The biblical pattern of believers in covenant with the church. Paul writes to the local church in Rome (Romans 1:7) and reminds them that '*each member belongs to all the others*' (Romans 12:5). Membership in the local church is an expression of each believer's calling to officially *belong*, rather than merely be autonomous 'members' of the universal body of Christ. He has called us to be officially and covenantally connected with each other. Paul follows this instruction with an exhortation to Roman church members to use their various gifts to serve one another, and to '*be devoted to one another in brotherly love*' (Romans 12:10). The local church is, biblically speaking, to function as a family. To be family is to belong to the others.

The biblical pattern of spiritual discipline and oversight. Jesus teaches that it is occasionally the unfortunate and sad responsibility of church leaders to take the final steps of church discipline (Matthew 18:17-18). Such action can be effectively taken only when the impenitent person has submitted himself/herself to their discipline, oversight, and care.

The biblical model of a 'membership roll.' The lists of names in the book of Numbers evidences God's concern to define membership for his people. The '*Lamb's book of life*' (Revelation 3:5; 21:27), serves as an archetype of the Church's earthly register. A prophetic Psalm foresees the recording of Gentile names on the rolls of Zion, which is representative of the Church (Psalm 87:4-6). The names of Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement, recognized members of God's church at Philippi, are in the book of life (Philippians 4:2-3). Those who were added to the church were numbered with the disciples so that total numbers could be set down (Acts 1:26; 2:41; 4:4). Significantly, the first total of 3,000 is given in connection with baptism, which is the mark of membership in Christ's community (Acts 2:41).

To be a communing member of Christ Presbyterian Church, one needs to be able to answer, in good conscience, the five membership questions articulated and elaborated upon in the *CPC101* course. We believe that full affirmation to each of these questions is the biblical prerequisite for a person to be in covenant with a local church. The affirmations reveal:

A confirmed profession of faith in Christ. Admission to church membership is based upon one's ability to articulate and provide an indication of an authentic profession of faith in Christ. In view of Jesus' appointed oversight structure in the local church (Matthew 16:19; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), one is officially admitted into church membership (and, by virtue of the profession of faith and baptism, to the Lord's Table) by elder(s) of the church, following their confirmation, based upon her/his credible testimony of saving faith.

A public profession of faith in Christ. At Christ Presbyterian Church, a person's public profession of faith in Christ is ordinarily made in front of the church family in the context of a worship service, following her/his meeting with the elders.

A commitment to faithfully follow Christ. This is evidenced by the following:

A commitment to worship and serve. This involves a commitment to regularly attend Christ Presbyterian Church worship services and, where possible, church family functions (Hebrew 10:24-25), and to serve and support the church with the generous giving of one's time, talents (Romans 12:5-8), and treasure (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

A willingness to be under the spiritual discipline, oversight, and care of the elders. This involves a commitment to yield and submit to the biblical and spiritual correction, guidance, and care of the Christ Presbyterian Church elders (Matthew 16:19; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

A commitment to peace and purity in the church. Cultivating peace assumes a commitment to handle personal offenses in a constructive, biblical fashion, which entails (1) dealing directly with the person who has offended you (Matthew 18:15-20), repenting of your offenses against others (Matthew 18:15-20), and refraining from gossip, slander, and other community-damaging behavior (Proverbs 26:20). Cultivating purity assumes a commitment to the Scriptures as one's final source of authority regarding what to believe and how to live.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Benefits that are unique to church members at Christ Presbyterian Church include the following:

Care and nurture. Each church member, along with her/his family, has priority access to Christ Presbyterian Church's system of pastoral care. Christ Presbyterian Church Care includes trained pastors, counselors/therapists (both in-house and by referral), lay ministers, and church officers (elders and deacons) who work together to provide comprehensive care, nurture, and protection to members in vulnerable and hurting places. In addition, Christ Presbyterian Church's pastors, officers, and leaders seek to create a place of intimate belonging, a family in which to laugh, learn, live, and love in grace, for all of our members, and regular attendees.

Accountability. Each church member has the benefit of official accountability to the elders. The Bible exhorts each member to '*obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls*' (Hebrews 13:17). This command presupposes that a person is in a covenantal relationship with the local church leaders. Those who say, 'I am only accountable to God' are not only out of line with Scripture but are placing themselves in spiritual danger.

HOSPITABLE WORSHIP PRINCIPLES

BY SCOTT SAULS

In addition to members practicing hospitality each Sunday with each other and our guests, the following are a few “ways of being” that we aim for in every part of the service—whether through preaching, singing, reading, prayers, or any other element of up-front leading. We ask that those who call Christ Presbyterian Church their church home to embody these principles, also.

Christ-centered throughout. Our goal is to direct all attention to Jesus, not ourselves. We want people to leave saying, “What a great God,” as opposed to “What great music,” “What great preaching,” etc.

A subtle stage, removing ourselves from the center. Optics and positioning communicate purpose. Our purpose is to direct eyes and hearts toward Jesus and not ourselves. So, we will aim to position musicians and choir accordingly.

Shared experience. Musically, we will sing *with* the church versus *for* the church. We are lead worshipers versus worship leaders. Our aim is to help congregants be active participants *with*, not passive observers *of*, our worship. We will seek to engage the whole person—heart, mind, ears, voices, bodies—through active participation. The optimal “feel” of the service will be reached when the congregation blends in with the band/choir, and the band/choir with the congregation.

Warm and hospitable tone. We will nurture an environment that says, “Welcome home” to Christians and “We respect you and take you seriously” to our spiritually curious and non-Christian guests. In everything, we will, with intentionality, embrace and include people who are most at risk of feeling like outsiders at Christ Presbyterian Church. We will eliminate in-house, “us”-oriented insider language and behavior. We will avoid speaking or behaving in ways that create separation between us and our guests. We will aim to draw attention to our common ground—through the image of God and our shared humanity.

An outward face. Our ministry focus in every part of the service will not merely be “our church” or even “the church,” but all the people and city of Nashville. We are neither against nor separate from our city but *for* our city.

A tone that is warm, welcoming, honest, and beautiful. We will create an environment that enhances welcome and eliminates barriers. We will diligently aim for the “Yes” and strive against the “No” as follows...

YES

Warm
 Authentic
 Intellectually serious
 Emotionally honest
 Culturally thoughtful
 Beautifully God-ward
 Formative emphasis
 Thematically cohesive

NO

Removed
 Cheesy / “Churchy”
 Intellectually lazy
 Emotionally dishonest
 Culturally insensitive
 Awkwardly man-ward
 Manipulating emotions
 Thematically disjointed

YES

Active participation
 Can hear everyone
 Sing *with* the church
 Lament and Joy
 Conversational language
 Inclusive dynamic
 Inviting sound/aesthetic

NO

Passive observance
 Can hear only the stage
 Sing *for* the church
 Lament or Joy
 “Churchy” language
 Insider/outsider dynamic
 “Big show” sound/aesthetic

Songs that are accessible to and known by the congregation. While we will introduce new songs along the way, we will work hard to ensure that no more than one new song is introduced per month.

Song selection that is God-centered, theologically rich, and leans ancient. Congregational singing will typically include 2-3 ancient hymns (old or new melody) plus, typically, 1-2 theologically rich and beautiful contemporary songs. Offertory is flexible, but should usually veer away from modern popular songs and prioritize more complex and/or historic pieces with spiritual and biblical depth and/or content-rich “instructive” and formative songs.

Representing our diversity on stage and around communion tables. Up-front leadership in every service should, in every way possible, represent our value of diversity—generational, economic, gender, race, special needs, etc.

Spiritual depth throughout. Sacred, transcendent, with full range of Psalm-like human emotion, honesty and accessibility. Biblically based. In your ethos, demonstrate not only belief in truth, but love and need for truth.

Grace. All talk, even 'sin talk', should express hope because of grace and a standing and identity that is "in Christ."

Intelligible, accessible, and respectful of non-believers. Assume non-Christians are sitting in the front row, listening to every word you say. Anticipate their struggles and potential hang-ups with what you are saying. Assume Christ Presbyterian Church folks have taken the risk of inviting their friends and are depending on you to speak and lead in such a way that they say to themselves, "This was exactly *what* I hoped for my friends to hear, and it was exactly how I hoped for them to hear it." Non-Christians should leave sensing that you understand, care for, and respect them, and that you have taken them seriously intellectually and personally. For further learning, immerse yourself in Tim Keller's "Evangelistic Worship" and "The Missional Church" articles until the principles become your natural default.

Nashville-positive. Demonstrate respect, never scorn, for the city and the world in which we live. Look for opportunities in your leading to celebrate the good, the "common grace" that exists in Nashville and beyond—even as you critique things that are broken in the culture. Look to Paul's example in Acts 17, speaking to the Athenian intellectuals. Be in tune with the fact that Nashville is filled with wealthy and poor, academics, creative, healthcare professionals, business people, athletes, as well as homemakers, and blue-collar professionals. Seek to build bridges with a variety of our Nashville neighbors as you lead.

Warm, welcoming, and inclusive. In word and tone, build bridges, especially with those who may have difficulty "breaking in" to a church like Christ Presbyterian Church. Singles, young couples, widows, single parents, divorcees, couples struggling with infertility, people who are not affluent, non-Christ Presbyterian Academy families, non-whites, non-Christians, those who have been away from the church, come to mind. Avoid stereotypes. Do not assume that everyone is from a traditional family, or that everyone is familiar with church, the Bible, or Christianity. Speak as if both "older Nashville" (Bible belt, traditional, Southern, conservative) and "new Nashville" (secular, non-traditional, not Southern, coastal, largely progressive) folks are present.

Third-way posture. Maintain a nuanced posture with politics, as well as other potentially divisive issues in the culture. Familiarize yourself with *Jesus Outside the Lines* and other books that promote a “third-way” approach.

Centered around the sermon’s theme. All your words and content should reinforce the sermon’s text, theme, and tone. The sermon should be the guiding reality that shapes all aspects of the service, bringing together a single, cohesive whole. By the time the pastor gets up to preach, everyone in the room should know—based on everything that has been said, prayed, and sung prior—what he is going to talk about.

Awareness of the clock. Ideally, the preacher should be starting the sermon at the 25-minute point of the service (30 minutes at the latest). The sermon should end, and communion commences, around the one-hour point in the service.

Save pastoral remarks for later in the service. Because it is the nature of people to show up late, liturgists and leaders especially are encouraged to save their best remarks for times in the service when most people are present. It makes little sense to introduce the call to worship with a 3-minute homily, versus doing so before the confession instead.

COVENANT PEOPLE AND THE SACRAMENTS OF GRACE

BY SCOTT SAULS

NOTES

Beginning with Genesis 3:15 and culminating with Revelation 22, God has provided salvation by *one* means and *one* only: by *grace* (his undeserved favor) through *faith* (personal trust) in Jesus alone. Old Testament Christians looked ahead in time by faith in Jesus Christ as their promised Savior. Since New Testament times, Christians have looked back in time by faith in Jesus: 'Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, (Jesus) explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' (Luke 24:27). Some implications include:

There has been one, and only one, plan of salvation since the fall of Adam and Eve.

This plan is salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Here is how that plan has played out through history:

Genesis 3:15—*The first presentation of the Gospel.* As early as Genesis 3, Adam (and the human race) is given the promise that the 'seed of the woman' (fulfilled in Jesus) will crush the head of the serpent (representing Satan). This is the earliest form of God's promise to deliver his people from the brokenness, oppression, and evil brought about by the entrance of sin into the world.

- Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 9:6—*The Abrahamic covenant* fulfilled ultimately by Abraham's *spiritual* offspring, that is, those who trust in Christ or the true 'Israel of God' (Romans 9:6). In Genesis, God promises to Abraham that he will have descendants that are as numerous as the stars in the sky and grains of sand by the sea. The fulfillment of this promise, though certainly having an ethnic fulfillment in the birthing and development of the nation of Israel, is ultimately a *spiritual* and *global* fulfillment, as we are taught that all those who belong to Christ *by faith* (whether ethnically Jewish or Gentile) are Abraham's seed and heirs according to God's promise (Galatians 3:29). Hopefully the diagram provided below will help to shed light on the nature of the true, spiritual 'Israel of God:'
- Exodus 20:1-2—In *the Mosaic covenant* (God's covenant with Israel through Moses) Israel's deliverance from Egypt foreshadows the Gospel of Christ. Their deliverance from slavery symbolizes the Christian's deliverance from sin through the power of the Spirit working through the Gospel.

2 Samuel 7:11b-16—In *the Davidic covenant* (God’s covenant with David to give him a ‘son’ who would reign on his throne forever) Jesus is the long-term fulfillment, whose government would never cease to increase, and who would ‘reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom’ forever (Isaiah 9:7). This covenant is an example of what theologians call ‘prophetic foreshortening’—meaning that there are several prophecies in Scripture that have both a short-term fulfillment (the birth of Solomon, David’s son), which points to an ultimate long-term fulfillment (the coming of Jesus, the Son of God descended from David’s genetic line). Some implications regarding the Davidic covenant:

In Old Testament times, the concept of God’s Kingdom is that of a *theocratic* (ruled by God) government in which God ruled over the *ethnic* nation of Israel through a king (i.e., David), who received the laws of the land through God’s spokesmen, the prophets.

In New Testament times, and until Jesus returns, the concept of God’s Kingdom is still that of a theocratic (ruled by God) government, but one in which God rules over the *spiritual* nation of Israel (as described above) through the eternal King (Jesus), who now speaks by his Spirit through the Bible.

Jeremiah 31:31-34—In *the new covenant*, the full picture of the covenant of grace is portrayed. The new covenant is first introduced by the prophet Jeremiah:

The time is coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Some points of clarification about the new covenant:

First, the new covenant is NEW in that it explicitly, overtly, and deliberately includes all *nations* on earth as beneficiaries of the covenant of grace (see Matthew 28:19; Galatians 3:28-29), and it begins a new era in which the ministry of the *Holy Spirit* takes the forefront (Acts 2:17-21).

Second, the new covenant is *NOT NEW* in that salvation is still by grace through faith in Jesus as it has *always* been since the fall (Romans 10:9, 13), and the core covenant promise that the Lord will be our God and we will be his people is the same (Genesis 17:8-9; Jeremiah 31:33; Acts 2:38-39; Revelation 21:3).

THE LORD'S SUPPER (THE SACRAMENTAL MEAL)

The Lord's Supper is the completed expression of the Old Testament Passover (Exodus 12:23-27; Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 11:17-34) and is a 'meal' of bread and wine which gives us a visible, tangible expression of the love-sacrifice Jesus made for his followers by both living and dying in their place. There are four basic views of the Lord's Supper:

First, there is the Roman Catholic view (transubstantiation). Roman Catholics believe that the substance of the bread and wine is miraculously transformed into Christ's physical body and blood. The elements then appear to be bread and wine, but in actuality are the literal body and blood of Jesus, which are 'eaten' by the worshipper. Roman Catholics view the Lord's Supper as representing what they refer to as the 'continuing sacrifice' of the Son of God for sins.

The Lutheran view (consubstantiation). Lutherans believe that Christ's physical body and blood are literally 'in, with, and under' the bread and wine, which itself remains bread and wine.

The Zwinglian view (memorial or Baptist). The Zwinglian view teaches that the glorified Christ is not present in any unique way during the observance of the Lord's Supper. Rather, his presence is localized in heaven, at the right hand of the Father. The Lord's Supper, therefore, is merely a memorial of his death, something believers remember as a way to be encouraged about God's love for them in the Gospel.

The Reformed view (memorial and means of grace) is the view taken by this paper. The Reformed view teaches that while the bread and wine remain unchanged in themselves, the Holy Spirit works in the Christian through faith to enjoy the actual, spiritual presence of Christ and the benefits of his death in a way that is glorious and real, though indescribable. In summary, this 'presence' means three things:

Lord's Supper as commemoration. As the Zwinglian view teaches, the Lord's Supper is in fact a *commemoration* or memorial. We remember the death

of Christ and its benefits and are encouraged by what the bread and cup represent (the body and blood of Christ).

Lord's Supper as communion. The Lord's Supper is also a communion or fellowship. We enjoy the fellowship of both the risen Christ and his Church, the members of his body. In biblical times, the Lord's Supper was most often, if not always, celebrated in the setting of an agape (love) feast, where Christians would come together for a huge, celebratory meal, part of which was to welcome and enjoy the real, spiritual presence of Christ among them as they shared the Lord's Supper together.

Lord's supper as anticipation. The Lord's Supper is a confident anticipation. It is a reminder to us that we have a certain hope that Christ will return from heaven, where he will affectionately receive us as his bride at the 'wedding feast of the Lamb.' We will then live directly in his loving presence forever.

BAPTISM (THE SACRAMENTAL SIGN)

This sacrament is the full expression of the Old Testament circumcision (Genesis 17:7, 9-11; Acts 2:37-39; Colossians 2:11-12). As is the case with the Lord's Supper, professing Christians have varying views on the nature and meaning of baptism:

First, there is the Zwinglian view ('believer's' baptism). According to this view, baptism is a public, formal symbol of our inward washing by the Holy Spirit and is reserved only for those who have professed Christ as their King and Deliverer. Baptism is seen primarily as one's public 'testimony' or profession of faith.

Second, there is the view of both Roman Catholics and traditional Lutherans (baptismal regeneration). In this view, baptism is given to adults and infants alike. At the time a person is baptized, she/he immediately and automatically receives the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Third, there is the Reformed view (household sign of the covenant of grace), which is the view assumed here. This view teaches that baptism is a sign and seal of one's inclusion in the covenant of grace (as a ring is a sign of the marriage covenant) and is to be given to Christians and their children. In the case of infant or child baptism, the sacrament itself does not ensure the child's salvation, nor is there necessarily an instantaneous filling with the Holy Spirit connected to the water. A child's baptism becomes fully effective when she/he receives the Gospel by faith. Prior to this time, the child is considered a 'non-communing member' of the church and is entitled to the same oversight, care, and instruction as a communing member. However, a non-communing member of the church may not celebrate the Lord's Supper until faith in Christ is declared.

Three modes of baptism. There are three modes of baptism commonly practiced by Christians. These are sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. Generally, but not exclusively, those from a Reformed heritage use the mode of sprinkling (Ezekiel 36:24-27; Hebrews 10:22).

Two recipients of baptism. Those from a Reformed heritage believe there are two qualified recipients of baptism:

- First, there are adults and children who have professed faith in Christ (Acts 2:41; 8:36-38).
- Second, there are the children of Christian parent(s) who have not yet made a profession of faith in Christ but who are under the authority of their parent(s).

It is the regular practice at Christ Presbyterian Church to baptize two groups of people. The first group consists of men, women, and children who demonstrate both a genuine faith in Jesus Christ and a desire to join the Christ Presbyterian Church family (i.e., 'believer's baptism'). The second group consists of infants and children of our church members. Perhaps one of the most common questions asked of us is, 'Why do you baptize infants and children who have not yet made a public profession of faith in Christ?' The simple answer to this question is that (1) while we firmly believe this is not an issue over which Christians should divide, yet (2) we are convinced that both the Bible and early church history support the practice of household baptism, which includes infants and young children. Following are some of the factors that have led us to this conclusion.

Is there any biblical support for baptizing infants?

It is the belief of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and of Christ Presbyterian Church that God's covenant of grace (his promise to be our God and have us as his people), in a mysterious way that we cannot quite grasp, extends to the children of believers. Such children, we believe, therefore have a right to the covenant sign, which in the New Testament is baptism (in the Old Testament the sign was circumcision.) Following are some of the reasons why we, at the request of those who share our beliefs on this matter, will baptize infants, as well as other children in a believing household who have not yet made a profession of faith.

In the New Testament, baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant.

- Colossians 2:11-12 teaches that baptism is the full expression of circumcision. The covenant of circumcision required that the infant male be circumcised as a newborn infant (Genesis 17:12), and this covenant was to be an *everlasting* covenant (Genesis 17:13). Physical circumcision is clearly no longer in effect (Galatians 6:11-18), but the covenant it represents is still in effect (Romans 2:29). The new outward sign of this 'everlasting' covenant with believers and their children is baptism (Colossians 2:11-12). Therefore, we believe it follows, then, that baptism is to be administered to the children of believing parents.
- Acts 2:38-39 describes baptism with virtually the same language and terms with which Genesis 17:9-14 describes circumcision. The promise connected with baptism in Acts 2:38-39 explicitly includes the children of believers, as did the promise connected with circumcision in Genesis 17:9-14. No mention of a required age or profession of faith is made with respect to such children.
- As circumcision was a requirement for the Old Testament household (Genesis 17:10, 12-13), so, we believe, was baptism for the New Testament household (Acts 16:15, 31-33; 1 Corinthians 1:16). Never once are children said to be excluded from a household baptism, except in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, who obviously had no children.
- There is no biblical command given for believers to cease the application of the covenant sign with their children.

In the New Testament, believers' children were regarded as members of the covenant community.

- In Luke 18:15-17, Jesus said that God's Kingdom belongs to little children (from the Greek *brephe*, which literally means 'baby' or 'infant').
- In Ephesians 6:1-4 and Colossians 3:20-21, Paul addresses children (from the Greek *tekna*, meaning 'child') as believers in Christ. He speaks to them as he would any saint, regardless of age.

- In 1 Corinthians 7:14, Paul refers to the children (tekna) of believers as 'holy' (meaning set apart for God). The word translated 'holy' (hagia) is the exact same word used elsewhere by the apostles in reference to believers (translated 'saints' – see Ephesians 1:1, for example). The New Testament assumption, then, is that children of believers should be

regarded and treated as believers unless or until they prove themselves to be covenant breakers.

- In 2 Timothy 3:15, Timothy is said to have known the Scriptures from infancy (brephe).

- In Luke 1:15, John the Baptist is said to have been filled with the Spirit, 'even from his mother's womb'.

- The New Testament suggests nowhere that the sign of the covenant (previously circumcision, now baptism) is to be withheld from the children of believers until they make an informed profession of faith in Christ.

Is there any historical support for baptizing infants?

It is a well-attested fact that household/infant baptism was the universal practice of the early church. No reputable biblical historian or scholar, whether Presbyterian or Baptist or otherwise, will dispute this fact.

- Irenaeus (a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John) speaks of infant baptism as a universal practice in the early church.

- Tertullian (end of 2nd century) acknowledged the universal practice of infant baptism.

- Origen (2nd and 3rd centuries) spoke of infant baptism as the common practice of the early church.

- These things being the case, were household (and consequently infant) baptism not the New Testament church practice, then the conclusion must be made that a full reversal of the early church's practice occurred immediately following the death of the last apostle. Because there is neither biblical nor extra-biblical evidence indicating so much as a debate about this issue in the first or second centuries, such a reversal is extremely unlikely. We conclude this in large part because there is a wealth of documentation about virtually every other theological debate and/or alleged 'heresy' in the early church.

Are we saying that water baptism saves children?

No. Our beliefs about household baptism do not reflect a belief that baptism itself saves a child. In order to be saved, a child must possess her/his own personal faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. The initial seeds of faith may or may not be in chronological union with the time of baptism. When a child professes faith at some point after baptism, that is the time in which the baptism and all that it signifies takes full effect. Until that time, the child's baptism is regarded as the sign of the child's inclusion in the church community (and all its benefits, except the Lord's Supper) by virtue of her/his parents' faith and the promise of God to be 'their God and the God of their children.'

What if I still don't agree with Christ Presbyterian Church's beliefs about baptism?

We encourage household baptism at Christ Presbyterian Church for those who agree with our beliefs as a church, but we certainly *do not require* it of those who don't. Parents who are not convinced of our position are fully embraced as members of our church community. This is an issue about which we are happy to disagree without it being any hindrance at all to full Christian fellowship. We will under no circumstance turn this 'non-essential' issue into an essential one.

GRACE AND TRUTH IN THE ATMOSPHERE

BY SCOTT SAULS

NOTES

'Beginning with Moses and the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.' - Luke 24:27

'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.' - John 1:14

WHAT ARE WE ABOUT, ANYWAY?

In a very real sense, the work of Jesus is complete. When it comes to our standing as beloved, forgiven, delighted-in sons and daughters of God, 'It is finished,' just as he said. His sinless life secured for us a new and irrevocable status—holy and blameless in God's sight. His death fulfilled the requirements of God's justice toward our sins. Jesus lived the life we should have lived, and he died the death we should have died. Because of this, we are free. What a wonderful and humbling reality in which we now live—God does not treat us as our sins deserve, because he has already treated Jesus as our sins deserve.

All this being true, there is still much work that Jesus intends to do. Acts 1:1 indicates that the work of Jesus on earth was not completed with his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and seating at the right hand of God. Luke writes, 'In the first book (the Gospel of Luke), O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.' Began to do and teach? How could there be more for Jesus to do than he what has already done? That's where we as Christ's 'ambassadors' come into the picture. We are now the chosen ones, sent into the world on his behalf, filled with his Spirit to represent him in our homes, neighborhoods, and places of work and play. In short, the work of Jesus continues through Christians.

As Jesus' ambassadors, we are chosen to faithfully represent him. Therefore, our calling is to labor in every way possible to model our ministry and message after his. We are to live as those who are 'full of grace and truth,' whose churches and ministries -- because we are walking in the path of Jesus -- will attract the types of people who were attracted to him, and, by unfortunate necessity, will draw criticism from the types of people who criticized him.

The purpose of this essay, then, is to consider what constitutes a ministry that is full of grace and truth. In other words, our task is to align our collective life and ministry to that of Jesus.

CULTIVATING AN ATMOSPHERE THAT IS 'FULL OF GRACE'

What does it mean to have a ministry atmosphere that is 'full of grace' (John 1:14)? We will consider this question from a few different angles.

First, we must address the barriers created by Christians—barriers that have hidden the real Jesus from the world.

Gandhi was once asked why he never became a Christian. His answer was, 'I like *your Christ*, I do not like *your Christians*. Your Christians are so unlike *your Christ*.' Gandhi had an admiration for Jesus, but simply could not reconcile how Christians were such poor representatives of their master. In his mind, this is what kept him from becoming a follower of Jesus.

If we are serious about being Jesus' ambassadors, we need to listen very carefully to statements like this one. We must examine the most common barriers that stand between the real Jesus and people's false impressions of him—impressions which, unfortunately, have been projected to a watching world by sincere yet misguided Christians. These barriers include:

Condemnation. Writer Philip Yancey often asks people he meets what they think about Christians. The answer he hears, with very little exception, is that Christians are judgmental, intolerant, and holier-than-thou. When the September 11 terrorist attacks took place on the World Trade Center, one very well-known Christian leader confirmed this stance by saying on national television, 'If you are a homosexual, a member of the ACLU, in favor of abortion, or part of the People of the American Way, then I point my finger in your face and say you did this. You made this happen.' A Christian friend of mine who is an actor once invited a gay friend over to have dinner with him and his wife. Their guest soon realized (from the Bible on the coffee table) that they were Christians. He then said to my friend, 'You are a Christian, and you actually *like me*?' This is tragic, yet all too common.

If we are serious about being Christ's ambassadors, we must humbly own the fact that many people, especially those who are secular or irreligious, believe that Christians dislike them and are against them. Whether this is actually true or not, it is our starting point in the minds of most non-Christian people. If we are not guilty ourselves, then we are at the very least guilty by association with believers who have misrepresented the biblical Jesus to our culture. So we must take personal responsibility, as far as it depends on us, to reorient people's perception of Christians, and especially of Christ himself.

Separation. In a day when many Christians want to separate themselves and their children from people and things that are considered secular, Christ's ambassadors must resist this 'us against them' mindset. We must do everything in our power to become friends with as many non-Christians as we can—no conditions attached. This must be a central, core value of our Christian communities. It is helpful to look at the life of Jesus in this regard. Luke 15:1-2 tells us plainly that *all* of the 'sinners' made a habit of hanging around Jesus. They *wanted* to be near him, and they wanted to hear what he had to say. Meanwhile,

religious folk were accusing Jesus of being a glutton, a drunk, and a friend of sinners (Luke 7:34). We know that these accusations were false—Jesus was tempted in every way but without sin. But he was unapologetically a true friend to the least and the lost—to all who were alien to the religious communities of his day. He seemed to prefer parting ways with religious folks if that was necessary in order to get close to sinners. The one who ‘welcomed sinners and ate with them’ now insists that his followers assume the same posture. ‘God’s grace is for real sinners’ must be more than merely an affirmation on our church websites. It must characterize the life and practice of our ministries.

Reputation. There is a price to pay if we get serious about cultivating atmospheres that are full of grace. In becoming a friend of sinners as Jesus was, we should expect significant resistance. We should expect on some level to be alienated from religious people. The simple fact is that when we start doing some of the things Jesus did, some fellow believers will become suspicious of us. Consider Luke 7, for example, when a ‘sinful woman’ enters the home of Simon the Pharisee. In the name of love, and in the spirit of demonstrable grace, Jesus received her very un-orthodox display of affection toward him. He breaks with religious customs, allowing the woman to touch his feet (feet were considered unclean—one could not even ask a slave to touch them for this reason). He breaks with social customs also, receiving her as his disciple. It was scandalous in Jesus’ day for a rabbi to receive a woman as his disciple, much less a woman with a scandalous history. Most scandalous, however, is the way that Jesus breaks with moral customs. The woman lets down her hair (this was grounds for divorce—a woman could do this only in the presence of her immediate family). She touches him with the tools of her trade...he allows her to anoint him with a prostitute’s perfume and kiss him with a prostitute’s lips. Of course, we know the rest of the story—Jesus was shunned as a man of ill-repute by religious people. To them, giving positive attention to this woman, who to them was clearly ‘a sinner,’ was evidence of moral compromise.

This has serious ramifications for those who wish to represent Jesus well in a modern context. We must come to terms with the fact that if Jesus were a 21st century American, he would not associate godliness with membership in a political party. He would not tell a lesbian she was outside of God’s will without also offering her a personal, no-strings-attached friendship. He would not talk about how smoking destroys God’s temple while simultaneously devouring his third piece of fried chicken at the church potluck. He would not condemn adultery as being any worse than studying the Bible for the wrong reasons. If we are accustomed to setting up our own Mishnah, our own set of ‘clean laws’ that define one’s worthiness to be received into Jesus’ company, we need to give serious re-evaluation to our methods and priorities!

Pride. Becoming a friend of sinners begins with the understanding that we are much more like the ‘chief of sinners’ than we are like Jesus Christ. Our approach with all people, no matter who they are or what their history, must assume the posture of ‘fellow beggars humbly telling others where to find the bread’ (Steve Brown). If we really want people to be impacted by the Gospel and to enjoy the riches of God’s grace, they must first see in us the humility of those who

have been, and continue to be, genuinely impacted by grace ourselves. Our humility must be authentic and not just an act. Paul was not above humbling himself. In Romans 7, he gives us a window into his personal struggle with the sin of coveting—a sin nobody would see unless he told them—and the ways in which the Gospel heals that sin. In 1 Timothy, Paul identifies himself as the chief of all sinners. If we intend to reflect Jesus in our ministries and our messages, we need to get over our love for reputation and image. Without realizing it, we can begin to build our identities on how good we look—on being ‘model Christians’ that people are supposed to admire because of how put-together we appear to be. This is a trap and it will rob our ministries of power. If people in our midst are going to be changed by the grace of Jesus, they must regularly witness the Gospel working effectively in our lives—healing us of our sins and deepest wounds and fears.

Second, our communities must be sinner-safe.

There was a reason why *all* the sinners ran to Jesus on a regular basis (Luke 15:1-2). Though they knew he was against their sin—he never watered down the law’s demands—they wanted to be around him because they knew the reason why he was against their sin—because he was *for* them. If we want to be his ambassadors, therefore, several commitments must characterize us, our ministries, and our message:

Respecting and valuing all people. People must sense us relating to them on the basis of their God-given dignity, not on the basis of their failures. If we are not careful, we can easily fall into the trap of diminishing the worth of a human being in this way: When we think of them, we think first of the ways they need to be fixed versus valuing them as bearers of the divine image, made for glory. The following quote from C.S. Lewis is extremely helpful to this perspective:

It is maybe possible to think too much of your own potential glory hereafter. But it is impossible to think too often or too deeply about that of your neighbors. The weight of my neighbor’s glory should be laid daily on my back. So heavy a weight it is that only humility can carry it. It’s a serious thing to live in a society of immortals. To remember that millions of years from now, the dullest and most uninteresting person you meet may one day be an incredible creature, who if you saw him now you would be strongly tempted to worship...All day long we are in some degrees helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is therefore in light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the proper amount of awe and circumspection that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations, these are mortal, and their life is to our life as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals with whom we joke, work, marry, snub and exploit... your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.

- C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

A biblical view of sin. Treating people with dignity does not imply a reluctance to challenge sin. If we are going to love people as Jesus does, we will be committed to their flourishing, which means we will deeply desire that they be obedient to God! So, the question is not, 'Will we challenge sin?' but rather 'How will we challenge sin, and with what motivation will we challenge it?' We must be on God's agenda here—he is so vehemently opposed to sin both for his own glory and (how easily we can forget) so very much for the person. God's desire is that we live by his design, which is life to us.

A grace-filled attitude toward sinners like ourselves. Whenever we confront sin of any kind, our motivation must be because we care so deeply for those, like us, who sin. Otherwise, we shouldn't say anything at all about sin. You are no doubt familiar with the group from Topeka, Kansas who picketed the funeral of Matthew Shepard (the young gay man who was beaten to death by some of his peers) with signs that read 'God hates fags' and 'Thank God for AIDS,' among other horrible things. This example is certainly extreme. However, there are going to be seeds in our own hearts that are prone to look down on those to whom we feel superior. It is an evil thing to desire or celebrate someone's harm instead of her/his well-being. As Jesus stood over Jerusalem (who had rejected his love), he wept for them. Do people, especially people who are 'not like us,' sense this kind of love from us? Jesus did much more than merely tolerate sinful people in his midst. He cherished them and pursued their hearts that they might become free indeed. We have no option but to do the same.

Third, we must keep first things first.

This essentially means two things:

Jesus and nothing else must be our 'main thing' at all times. Our main emphasis must always be on the Person and work of Christ. Even Paul the Apostle decided to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). Therefore...

Everything else takes a back seat to Jesus. Often, we will equate 'outreach' to converting others to the norms of our particular tribe (our political views, our theological tradition, our dress code, our ethics, our parenting philosophy, etc.) instead of converting them to a love and adoration of Jesus. But the norms of our tribe must always be secondary to, and in many cases discarded because of, a greater vision for people to see Jesus and know him for who he really is. Additionally, in all things, we must lead with the grace of God versus with the law of God. When we require people to 'get their act together' before we give them access to Jesus and his grace, we fail to follow the methods of the Lord, who welcomed and 'graced' people before he called them to change (Luke 7:36-50, Luke 15:1-2, John 8:1-11, etc.). A cosmetic, outside-in, second-things-first approach to change contradicts the inside-out, first-things-first approach of the Bible. Consider the following quote from Rev. Timothy Keller:

We (need to) be careful with the order in which we communicate the parts of the faith. Pushing moral behaviors before we lift up Christ is religion. The church today is calling people to God with a tone of voice that seems to

NOTES

confirm their worst fears. Religion has always been outside-in—‘if I behave out here in all these ways, then I will have God’s blessing and love inside.’ But the Gospel is inside-out—‘If I know the blessing and grace of God inside, then I can behave out here in all these ways.’ A woman who had been attending our church for several months came to see me. ‘Do you think abortion is wrong?’ she asked. I said that I did. ‘I’m coming now to see that maybe there is something wrong with it,’ she replied, ‘now that I have become a Christian here and have started studying the faith in the classes.’ As we spoke, I discovered that she was an Ivy League graduate, a lawyer, a long-time Manhattan resident, and an active member of the ACLU. She volunteered that she had experienced three abortions. ‘I want you to know,’ she said, ‘that if I had seen any literature or reference to the ‘pro-life’ movement, I would not have stayed through the first service. But I did stay, and I found faith in Christ. If abortion is wrong, you should certainly speak out against it, but I’m glad about the order in which you do it.’ This woman had had her faith incubated into birth in our Sunday services. In worship, we center on the question ‘what is truth?’ and the one who had the audacity to say, ‘I am the truth.’ That is the big issue for postmodern people, and it’s hard to swallow. Nothing is more subversive and prophetic than to say Truth has become a real person... We, of all people, ought to understand and agree with fears about religion, for Jesus himself warned us to be wary of it, and not to mistake a call for moral virtue for the good news of God’s salvation provided in Christ. -Timothy Keller, Religion-less Spirituality

In summary...

In cultivating a ‘full of grace’ ministry atmosphere, we must carefully consider how we are presenting Christ to people who are either not Christian or somewhere along the journey of overcoming sin (that’s all of us, isn’t it?). The following chart is given as an aid for preparing our community to be in line with the Gospel of grace. Obviously, we want to lean against both the religious grid and the secular grid, and saturate everything we think, say, and do from the perspective of the Gospel grid. Different models of ministry and the ‘hurdles’ people feel they must overcome in order to become ‘insiders:’

| TYPE OF MINISTRY | FIRST HURDLE | SECOND HURDLE | MOTIVATION | ASSESSMENT |
|--------------------|--|---|--|--|
| RELIGIOUS | Measure up to our laws! Get on board with our political agenda, our system of doctrine, our customs, our dress code, our worship style, and everything else we regard as sacred! | We will accept you and give you our full embrace... IF you can get past the first hurdle! (We are tolerant of everyone except those who disagree with us on anything!) | Performing to gain acceptance with the group, God, and/or yourself. | A ‘truth without love’ paradigm—you will either become self-righteous (because you measure up to the laws), depressed (because you don’t), or embittered (because you feel oppressed). |
| SECULARIZED | Measure up to our laws! Get on board with our agenda of unqualified tolerance! | We will accept you and give you our full embrace... IF you can get past the first hurdle! (We are tolerant of everyone except those who are not as tolerant as we are!) | Performing to gain acceptance with the group, God, and/or yourself. | A ‘love without truth’ paradigm—you will become permissive (in the name of tolerance), and embittered (toward those who aren’t permissive like you are). |
| GOSPEL | See how loved you are! We accept you and give you our full embrace... because you are a person of great value...you bear the image of God and God loves you enough to die for you! | Process and respond to the meaning of the first ‘hurdle’ of accepting the love of God—you are now called, as a response to God’s great love for you, to live a life of love and obedience to God’s commands (not the laws of our tribe, per se, but God’s loving, life-giving laws!). | Loving God and other people, because you know you are loved by God and by the group. | ‘Full of grace and truth’ paradigm—you will become free in your heart (because you are fully known, fully loved, and never rejected), and deeply motivated to live by God’s design (because his design has become beautiful and life-giving to you). |

Now, we will consider how specifically to encourage an atmosphere that is 'full of truth' (John 1:14), to the end that people become convinced over time that there is nothing more wonderful, nothing more exciting, and nothing more life-giving than becoming an obedient follower of Jesus.

As we think about forming environments that are full of truth, we must consider several factors with regard to our use and presentation of the Law of God. As was the case with Paul, our goal is for Christ to be formed in everyone (Galatians 4:19), meaning that personal character gradually becomes like his. But this is tricky, because true obedience to Jesus is obedience from the inside-out. It is the kind of obedience that aims not to use God and put him in our debt, but to honor him and taste his loveliness and worth. In short, we must encourage an obedience that responds to the love of Jesus. Any other kind is moralism, not Christianity.

First, we must discern and reject the three primary misuses of God's Law.

The three 'misuses' that must be resisted are as follows:

The secular misuse. Those who come from this perspective will resist the notion of all people being accountable to a higher power. Secular people may see biblical commands as oppressive and may then replace them with a new law—the law of tolerance. For this person, the sole 'absolute' is that there are no absolutes. All people, views, and behaviors should be tolerated, except for those that are not tolerant! The problem with this approach should be obvious—to add to or to take away from the Word of God puts one in great danger (Revelation 22)! It also sets the human community up for systemic and relational chaos. If there is no truth in the world that applies to everybody, then everybody will do what is right in her/his own eyes—acting in personal interest versus in the interest of others.

The religious misuse. Those who come from this perspective tend to view God's commands primarily in terms of duty. If you keep the commands, you have done your duty. If you don't, you will be judged and things will not go well for you. Period. Religious people see God's Law more in legal terms and less in relational terms. For the religious person, there is very little dancing in the heart over the beauty of God's commands. In some religious circles, one might be tempted to assume that you are in the center of God's will to the degree that you are grumpy! The Bible gives such a different picture, however. Psalm 1 teaches us that the Law of God is the believer's delight! The writer of Psalm 119 says, 'O how I love Your law!' The Psalmist enjoys God's commands and in no way sees them as 'a burden I must bear' or 'a duty around which I must center my life.' While the Law is duty, it is so much more than duty! If people are consistently burdened by our presentation of God's commands, if they are left feeling weighed down versus liberated, it is likely that we are missing the heart of the Law altogether. 1 John tells us that for the believer, God's commands are *not* burdensome!

The antinomian misuse. Antinomians tend to treat God’s commands as optional. Antinomian means ‘against law’—the thought being that one can receive Jesus as Savior but refuse Jesus as King. The problems with this are obvious. Jesus himself said, ‘Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and not do what I say?’ James reminds us that ‘Faith without works is dead.’ Martin Luther, the Reformation’s champion of grace, said that we are saved by faith alone, but never by a faith that is alone.

The following chart attempts to distinguish between the various uses (and misuses) of God’s Law. We must labor passionately to present the Law of God, but to do so from a Christ-centered approach and none other.

| APPROACH | OUTLOOK ON GOD’S LAW | LAW-SUBSTITUTE | EFFECT |
|--------------------|--|-------------------------------|---|
| SECULARIZED | ‘The Law is oppressive.’ The Bible’s commands are primitive and unenlightened. They take away my freedom. | ‘Tolerance’ and ‘Freedom.’ | Resistance to all authority except self. Disdain for anyone who challenges my personal ‘freedom’ to think, believe, and do as I please. |
| RELIGIOUS | ‘The Law is legal in nature.’ The Bible’s commands are everyone’s duty. If you don’t follow them, you will pay. | Treadmill-living. | Self-righteousness and condemnation of others (I think I am keeping the law and others are not), Anxiety (I have failed at the law), or Denial (I can’t deal with the fact that I have failed at the law). Lack of inner joy. |
| ANTINOMIAN | ‘The Law is optional.’ The Bible’s commands are fine and good. They are a good ideal but not necessary for me as a Christian. | Trust in the sinner’s prayer. | Self-deception (I can be a Christian without being a follower of Christ). Self-centered living (proving that I really love sin, not Jesus). |
| GOSPEL | ‘God’s Law is relational and lovely.’ The Bible’s commands are a gift, and are the key to enjoying the ‘abundant life’ Jesus came to give! They show me what it is to be truly human! | None. | Confidence in the finished work of Jesus for my standing with God—I’m not crushed when I fail at obedience but am driven once again into Jesus’ loving arms. I love God’s commands because I know they are motivated by his deep passion for my well-being! |

Second, we must receive and share God’s commands as an expression of his love.

Remember, God’s Law is not merely legal. While it does have a legal component, it is also deeply relational. God gives us his law in order to set us free, not to burden us. Consider the following:

God’s commands, rightly understood, are a gift. The overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that the Law of God is beautiful and good. It is not oppressive and freedom-robbing, but life-giving. It is not merely duty but delight. It is not an option but a blessed treasure. It was the only thing that made sense!

God’s commands provide freedom. It is important to understand the original meaning and context of the word Torah (Law). For Jews living in the time of Moses, this was the word used to describe a loving father’s instruction to his children. When considering any command of God, we must start with the

question, 'What motivates a parent to tell her/his children to stay out of the street, or to eat vegetables, or to get 10 hours of sleep?' The answer to this question, without exception, is that the parent is committed to the child being healthy and happy. This is the purpose of loving, life-giving parental laws. This is but a reflection of God who gives his Law because he intends for his children to flourish. His Law is our pathway to becoming more fully human, the very best version of ourselves.

God's commands promote human flourishing. God's Law shows us what it is to be truly human. It tells us how we can pursue our potential, how we can be all we can be. If you take a fish out of water, it becomes anxious and afraid. All sorts of distortions are thrust into the fish's existence. Only when you put the fish back in its natural habitat will the fish thrive again. It is no different with a human being concerning the Law of God. The Law is humanity's natural, life-giving habitat. So, when we present the Law of God to our own hearts and the hearts of others, we must constantly be communicating the following things about it:

- The Law will benefit you. It enhances the quality of life and promotes human flourishing.
- The Law will protect you. All distortions in life come from some form of departure from the Creator's design. Just as ignoring dietary wisdom will damage the body, ignoring biblical wisdom will damage the soul as well as relationships. God's Law is our protection here.
- The Law is lovely. We must learn to embrace God's Law as the writers of Scripture did—as beautiful, the only thing that truly makes sense for those who wish to live life to the fullest.

Third, we must emphasize that obedience is motivational, not merely behavioral.

Jesus said it is a good root that makes a good tree bear good fruit. We obey God because of the people we have become on the inside and for no other reason. We love God because God first loved us. It is only due to a clear vision of the loveliness of Jesus and the Gospel that anyone will obey in a way that will honor God and set the heart free. This has several implications for us:

We must encourage a want-to obedience versus a have-to obedience. True obedience comes from a heart that loves and enjoys the things of God, not from a heart that is duty-bound. So we want obedience to become second-nature for ourselves and others. Think of Michael Jordan as an example. He is known as one of the hardest working athletes ever—spending unparalleled amounts of time and energy honing his skills (just as we as believers must 'train ourselves for godliness!'). But when Jordan got to game time, basketball had become so much a part of him that he dominated the game effortlessly.

Take, for example, the methods often used to get Christians to tell others about

Jesus. Evangelism courses can be helpful in some instances, but to be honest, very few of them lead to a long-term commitment to tell others about Jesus. Why is this the case? It is because many courses fail to address the *why* of evangelism. Focusing so much on technique, they can miss the heart. Consider the New Testament on the other hand. The Samaritan woman (John 4) went immediately into Samaria to tell as many as she could about Jesus. The Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5), when told by Jesus to go and tell his family what the Lord had done to heal him, instead goes into the Decapolis (ten cities) to tell as many people as he could about the healing he had received. What motivated these people to tell others about Jesus? It was the fact that Jesus had become so irresistible to them that they absolutely had to tell others. When something becomes meaningful to us, our enjoyment of it is not complete until we have shared it with others.

If we present the Law as primarily a means toward modifying behavior, the behavior will happen on the outside but the heart will not change. Obedience will fizzle as soon as the guilt wears off. On the other hand, if we present the Law as a loving expression of God's care for us, we will begin to see people change at the motivational level, it will produce lasting fruit that is in keeping with repentance. I think it was Steve Brown who once said, 'I love to sin, but the reason I choose not to is because I love Jesus more!'

So, our 'strategy' for encouraging people to obey God is to show them the beauty of Jesus on a regular basis. When Jesus becomes truly beautiful, truly lovely to people, they cannot help but follow him. We will always give our lives effortlessly to the things that give our lives the most meaning. We don't become like Jesus by trying to be like Jesus. We become like him because we have been with him, and in this have tasted his irresistible grace, kindness, and love.

Fourth, we must emphasize the many rewards of obedience.

The truth of the matter is that God's commands, when followed from a Gospel-motivation, enhance life. Here are just some of the rewards of obeying God's life-giving commands:

Fulfillment. As Augustine once prayed, 'You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.' Obedience to God's commands gets us in touch with the 'true us'—with the design of our Creator, which gives life. Remember Joshua's words, 'Do not let this book of the Law depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night, and be careful to do everything that is written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful' (Joshua 1:8). When we teach any command of God, we must be careful to highlight how that command will bring ultimate fulfillment and blessedness (happiness) to those who obey.

Inner peace. There is no fear that God's Laws will bite us when we obey them. When we depart from God's design, it brings distortions, anxiety, and disruption to our inner lives. But when we surrender to him, there is inner peace...an integration of life. Remember the fish out of water example.

Intimacy with God. Once we belong to God through faith in Christ, our position with him can never be threatened. Nothing in all creation (including ourselves) can separate us from his love (Romans 8). However, our fellowship with God (our experience of intimacy with him) is always weakened by disobedience and strengthened by obedience to his commands. Jesus said, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him' (John 14:23).

Fifth, we must find joy in owning our failure to follow God's commands.

It is both ironic and wonderful that both obedience and failure to obey can lead to deeper joy and deeper intimacy with God. The rewards of obedience are as stated above. But there are also deep rewards for those who have come to terms with the fact that they fall short of the mark every day:

Joyful humility. As ironic as it may sound, there are few things that are more life-giving than admitting our failure to obey God's commands. As Paul says, 'Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.' Knowing that we are saved by grace and not by our efforts is liberating. It also changes us. WE become tender rather than harsh, gracious rather than judgmental, humble rather than defensive. Don't we all want to be this kind of person? The grumpy people in the Bible were those who would not face their failures, because they had built an identity based on their performance, offering moral and behavioral resumes to God and other people (and to themselves—remember the Pharisee who prayed 'to himself' in Luke 18 so as to feel confident in his own righteousness). This left them in the awful position of either being puffed up with pride (because they thought they were being righteous), despair (because they failed at the laws upon which they built their identities), or denial (because they couldn't handle the thought of being seen as sinful). Those whose hearts were set free, on the other hand, were those like the tax collector who prayed, 'God have mercy on me, the sinner,' and went home justified and healed (Luke 18:9-14).

God's delight in our imperfect efforts to obey. Isaiah reminds us that even our best efforts to obey God are tainted with motives that are sinful and therefore damnable—like 'filthy rags' (literally from the Hebrew, like a used menstrual cloth). Yet, surprisingly, even our weakest desires and attempts to obey bring pleasure to God's heart. Zephaniah 3:17 is breathtaking, 'The Lord...will take great delight in you...He will rejoice over you with loud singing!' I'll never forget the scene in the movie *Radio*, where the football coach tries to teach the mentally challenged man named 'Radio' how to write his name. The coach writes it down for him: R-A-D-I-O, and then says, 'Now you try it.' Radio then smiles, takes a pencil and paper, and proceeds to scribble inarticulate nothingness onto the piece of paper. He looks up at the coach and smiles, and the coach, rather than showing disappointment or frustration, looks at Radio and says, 'YOU DID IT!' If the people under our care are to ever be motivated to attempt obedience (even while knowing their very best efforts will still fall short), we need to regularly pour grace all over even their weakest attempts to follow Jesus. This is how the Gospel is applied to the Law.

Having a big and powerful Jesus versus a small, impotent Jesus. Our failure to keep the Law enlarges our sense of Jesus, who he is, how much we need him, and how willing and eager he is to meet our deepest need. The paradox of the Gospel is that the more we see our sin and the more vivid it becomes to our senses, the more vivid the grace and love of Jesus become to us as well. Consider Paul's words in 1 Timothy 1:15-17 to see this truth.

TARGETING THE HEART WITH GRACE AND TRUTH

We need to pay close attention at all times to the motivational dynamics of the Christian life—the primary reasons (from a human perspective) why people do not see Jesus as precious, and therefore do not see the appeal of following him with their whole hearts, are in fact motivational reasons. Specifically, the 'sin beneath the sin' of all sins is idolatry—the elevation of a created thing to a place where it becomes one's functional 'Lord' and 'Savior,' the ultimate object of worship and service (Romans 1). Therefore, the key to persuading people to trust and follow Jesus (grace and truth) rests in persuading hearts that Jesus is more precious and lovely than the idols that we are all prone to worship and serve. Remember, it is the Gospel (the fantastically great news of Jesus) that alone is the power of God for salvation—it is the only power for true, heart-level transformation.

For every one look you take at your sin, take ten looks at Jesus.
- Robert Murray McCheyne

The reason I preach the Gospel to you every single week is precisely because you forget the Gospel every single week!
- Martin Luther

The first and greatest commandment is that you 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.'
- Jesus

First, we must directly address why the Gospel does not 'take' with many—idolatry is that reason.

John Calvin rightly said that the human heart is an idol factory. Our hearts will instinctively erect counterfeit gods or pseudo-saviors to whom we give our allegiance, our ultimate affections, and our obedience.

A working definition of idolatry. An idol is any person or idea, any created thing that captures the loyalties and affections of our hearts more than God himself. An idol is anything that becomes more essential to us than him.

An idol is anything which occupies God's place—it is anything upon which you will base your life. It is what you look to for your

sense of meaning, happiness, and validation. When something becomes your idol, you will give it your unquestioned loyalty. You will let it run your life, determine your choices, and govern the use of your money and time. You will give yourself to it effortlessly.
- Timothy Keller

We must assume that everyone is religious by nature. Every human being, whether Christian, religious, agnostic, or atheist, will worship something or someone. One of our primary tasks is to understand what is capturing the ultimate affections of people's hearts. Ecclesiastes reminds us that God has put eternity into the heart of man (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We were created to be in relationship with God. He designed us to love, honor, adore, and obey him. If we don't do this, by necessity we will have to love, honor, adore, and obey something or someone else! Our idols are our 'rather-than's' that capture and sabotage our hearts' affections that belong first to God.

Second, we must learn to discern and diagnose the particular idols that exist in our own hearts and in the hearts of those we lead.

How do we do this? There are several diagnostic questions that we need to ask as we minister to people, and especially as we seek to prepare Christ-centered messages (thanks to David Powlison for introducing these and several other excellent diagnostic questions in his article, "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair"):

First, what do people under my care feel they cannot survive or function without? In other words, what do they feel they have to have in order to enjoy life, or to be acceptable as a person? What are the things that they are terrified of losing?

Second, where do people under my care spend their time and money with the least amount of effort? We always, without exception, will give our time and resources effortlessly to the things that give our lives the most meaning.

Third, what do people under my care tend to think and talk about the most? Another way to frame this question is to ask, 'Where do their thoughts go when they are driving alone in the car, when they first wake in the morning, when they are falling asleep at night?' What does this say about where the utmost treasures of their hearts are residing?

Fourth, which biblical commands are the people under my care most hesitant to obey? This is always going to be the most revealing question about the nature of a person's particular idols. Whenever we choose to disobey a command of God—any command of God—at that moment in time our hearts are treasuring something or someone more than him.

Fifth, when do people under my care become most angry? What kinds of people, things, or circumstances irritate them the most, and what is it

about these people, things, or circumstances that give them such power over their hearts? What, if it happened, would tempt them to become angry with God? (Remember Job's wife, who told her husband to 'curse God and die'.)

Sixth, how would people under my care fill in the blank? 'I cannot be happy unless _____.' Whatever is on the other side of the 'unless' is the idol.

Once we discern the idols, we must labor to make them the centerpiece of our application.

Third, we must wisely and patiently direct ourselves and those we lead to dismantle idols of the heart and replace them with Jesus.

Dismantling and replacing idols requires that we labor in our study and meditation to understand the multitude of ways that Jesus fills the hole in the human heart in a much more adequate, life-giving way than any Jesus-substitute that a person may be prone to worship and serve.

Basically every idol (and every sin) traces back to a self-salvation strategy, which replaces something only Jesus can ultimately provide adequately, with a counterfeit. Some examples include (thanks to Timothy Keller for inspiring these insights):

The certainty idol. Those who 'worship and serve' the certainty idol are 'nervous types' who are controlled by worry. They simply cannot handle when things are up in the air or seem to be at risk. They (we) always carry anxiety about losing their health, their money, the spot-free condition of their home, or any other thing that gives them the illusion that they are in control of their universe. To address the certainty idol, we must do so with both 'grace' and 'truth:'

- Truth: You will never feel secure (be 'saved' from insecurity) by putting your hope in things that are uncertain. If you continue to put your hope in your health, your bank account, the well-being of your children, or your GPA, you will remain an anxious person. You will either be horrified of losing control, or will fall into despair when you do lose control.
- Grace: Jesus is the sovereign King of the universe. He knows your needs. He works all things (good and bad) for your good. Trust him.

The success idol. Those who 'worship and serve' the success idol are generally 'achiever types' who don't mind things being 'up in the air' (unlike the certainty idol) as long as they win. They cannot deal with failure and are driven by the fear of it. They (we) are enslaved by their ability (or lack thereof) to 'measure up' to peers, to gain the leverage they desire—whether it be on the athletic field, in the classroom, at the office, or any other place.

To address the success idol, again we must do so with both 'grace' and 'truth:'

1. Truth: Enough success will never be enough for you. (When Rockefeller was asked 'How much is enough?' he said, 'One more dollar!'). You will be like Harold Abrams in *Chariots of Fire*, who ran, ran, and ran, but eventually realized that he had no idea why he was running.
2. Grace: Jesus has already lived the ultimately 'successful' life on your behalf. You can now rest in the record he has provided for you in his life of perfect obedience. Your reputation is secure. You will win the ultimate prize because of what Jesus has accomplished in your place.

The relationship idol. Those who 'worship and serve' the relationship idol are controlled by an inordinate longing for affection and/or approval. They (we) don't mind things being up in the air (unlike the certainty idol), and they don't mind losing (unlike the success idol), as long as somebody is saying 'I love you' to them.

1. Truth: Even your best relationships will be spoiled if you put them in front of your relationship with Jesus. You will become obsessed with a false security that the love/approval of others will 'save' you. Or you will become anxious and depressed when criticized.
2. Grace: Jesus is the lover of your soul. He delights in you and rejoices over you always. He is the one place where you are relationally secure at all times.

In summary, with respect to the idols of the heart, the bottom line consists of the following:

We need to master the art of identifying the heart. We especially need to do so with the people among whom we serve. Our messages should always be addressing the idols of the day with the grace and truth of Jesus (as exemplified above). We need to ask the diagnostic questions mentioned earlier in this section—both of ourselves and those under our care. Then, we need to target our teaching toward the healing of these idols.

We need to master the art of exposing idols of the heart. We need to develop a pattern of leading people to acknowledge their own idols and to admit humbly that the things they love too much will ultimately wound them and may even devastate them. In the most gracious manner possible, we need to convince our hearers that the things their hearts are tempted to 'over-desire' can never bring them the wholeness, happiness, or fulfillment—salvation—they desire.

We need to master the art of replacing idols of the heart. We need to develop ways, sensitive to our listeners, which help them to redirect their deepest loves. We need to masterfully and winsomely communicate in such a way that people begin to see clearly that Jesus will fill their hearts in more adequate and enduring ways than any counterfeit ever will.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

ADDITIONAL NOTES



CHRIST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH