

Sermon Outline

“Jesus + Nothing = Everything”

Colossians 1: 9-14 – Tullian Tchividjian – November 28, 2010

Introduction

1. For the sake of our lives and our churches, God wants us to understand the nature of grace. Grace’s nature is radically counter-intuitive. In this text of Colossians 1, Paul prays for the church of Colossae to grow in grace and shows that the foundation for this prayer is God’s finished work in Christ.
 - a. We hear talk of two equal dangers for Christians. We hear that, “the Gospel is a tightrope with the ditch of lawlessness on one side and that of legalism on the other. Legalism and lawlessness are equal dangers. The former happens when you focus too much on law, the latter through too much focus on grace. So you have to mix the two.”
 - b. But by thinking this way we run risk of believing the great lie that grace is dangerous and must be kept in check. In reality there is one primary enemy of the church: legalism. And we walk it out in two different ways. The first might be called “front door legalism.” It says, “If I achieve an outward obedience and do everything that others expect of me or I expect of myself, I will have identity and freedom and be rescued from a meaningless life.” The second, “back door legalism,” involves trying to experience freedom and fullness of life by defining one’s own standards (“I’ll live my own way”) and trying to live by them, thus becoming a law unto oneself. Both approaches are expressions of legalism.
2. In Romans 6:1 Paul anticipates the question that emerges after any clear biblical teaching on grace. The fact that Paul anticipates the question teaches us that the radical nature of grace is counter-intuitive.
 - a. A “Yes grace, but…” disposition is what keeps moralism functioning in our lives. The only way licentious people begin a life of obedience is by getting a taste of the radical nature of grace. What leads sinners to repentance? It’s God’s kindness and forbearance that lead us to repentance.
 - b. Qualification: Obedience *is* critical. If you love Christ, you will obey him. This is the fruit of grace at work in a believer’s life.
 - c. But what sustains obedience? Only grace can sustain a long obedience in the same direction. God is concerned with an obedience that flows from an appreciation of grace.

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3. None of Paul's letters begin with what we need to do.
 - a. The first two chapters of Colossians are consumed with what God in Christ has done for us. The same pattern occurs in Ephesians.
 - i. Indicatives precede imperatives. And gospel obligations are sown in gospel declarations. Obedience that is not grounded in the gospel will not last.
 - ii. If we spend more time living in the imperatives (what we must do) than in the indicatives (what God has done), we will become Pharisees. Imperatives minus indicatives equal impossibilities.
 - b. Our standing with God depends entirely on Christ's obedience for us. We must avoid drifting toward functional Saviors.

Main Point

The Gospel is the only engine big enough to sustain obedience for the course of life. Christian growth happens by learning to live in the grace we possess in Christ.

- a. When we are united with Christ, we do not need to spend our lives earning the acceptance and approval of those around us. God has already earned it for us through the person and work of Christ. Our identity is secure.
- b. Because of Jesus's finished work for me, I already have the things I long for: forgiveness, redemption, justification and freedom.
- c. I have everything I need in Christ.

Fellowship Starters

1. Tullian talked about the importance of living in light of gospel indicatives—that is, what God has done for us through Christ. These indicatives are what fuel a life of obedience. What indicatives do we see in the letter to the Colossians, especially 1:12-14? Why are the gospel indicatives of Colossians 1 the necessary foundation for a life of obedience?
2. What are the gospel alternatives that you are most prone to embrace? In what places do you seek identity and significance?
3. Why do your alternatives not ultimately deliver the forgiveness, freedom, and identity you were made for?
4. Take time to make the prayers and gospel indicatives of Colossians 1:9-14 your prayer and meditation.