

Gospel Doctrine and Gospel Culture

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Date: 12 November 2023

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- [0 : 0 0] So we're going to go through what Craig read for us earlier in James 2. And the tone, I believe in preaching the tone of the text, but the tone of the text is stern.
- And I'm not going to do that with you. And I don't think that you need what they needed, per se. So he calls them foolish people for their perspective on works and deeds.
- And that's not the tone that we're going to take today. And what I do want to get across today, what I pray the Lord lays to heart for us, is his commitment.
- So his commitment to you through his word. He's prepared for each of us good deeds, things, works to do.
- And he prepared them before earth was created just for you to walk in. And he's committed himself to these works that he's prepared for you, that as you do them in the name of Jesus, whether it's showing patience you don't have with the kids, or whether it's giving money to something that matters, or whether it's donating to a thing.
- [1 : 1 0] It doesn't matter what the good work is, small or big. His commitment is when it's done in faith, from faith, the power of God stands behind that. And that's an incredible thing.
- So I hope that we find some joy in the text and some comfort and encouragement from the Lord today. Now, you know, imagine that, I don't know, Gareth takes me to his favorite restaurant.
- I don't know what your favorite restaurant is. But say we go there together. And I said, what's good on the menu? And he says, the fish and chips are the best thing on the menu. They're fantastic.
- And so I said, okay, I'll have that. And then the waiter comes around and says, what would you like? And he says, I'll take the chicken nuggets, please. Well, I thought that you said it was the fish and chips.
- Why, if you believe that's the best thing, why are we getting the kids' meal, right? Now, that's a little bit like what James is talking about. He's saying what happens when we say we believe one thing.
- [2 : 1 4] And then our actions say that we believe another thing. There's a dissonance there. And so in the text in James 2, 14 through 26, he's dealing with these two categories.
- One he calls faith and one he calls deeds. Faith is just what you believe and it's an internal thing. And deeds are what you do and they're an external thing. And his point is, let us not separate what God has brought together, so to speak.
- Faith and deeds. It's like fuel in an internal combustion engine, right? That's kind of what faith is like.
- As the internal combustion drives the pistons up and down, it works through the car's whole system so that the axles end up turning and then the wheels end up turning and the car is propelled into action, right?
- That's what the combustion does is it drives the car forward. And that's what the Christian life should be like. And that's what a church should be like, is our faith drives us into action.

[3 : 16] Not just in word, but in deed. And so we need both of those things. Like he says in verse 17, faith by itself, if not accompanied by deeds, is dead.

And that's some of that strong language, that sort of severity that James brings to the text here. He's speaking about deedless faith isn't just something you need to grow in.

It's not just an immaturity. It's not just an inconvenience. It's dead faith. That's pretty serious stuff. So we need both. And if we press the gas pedal in the car and nothing happens, it doesn't go forward, we don't hear the engine going, well, it might be an electric car, but really in a normal car, if you press the gas pedal and it's not going forward, you know that the internal combustion's not working.

It may be out of fuel. There's nothing there. On the other hand, if you're not pressing the gas pedal and the engine's not on, but the car is moving forward, then you're coasting.

And inevitably you're probably going to crash. Like it's going to bring harm somewhere. And that's a bit of what James is talking about. There's the sort of way of living the Christian life that is just slamming the foot down on the gas pedal and nothing's happening.

[4 : 43] Your life doesn't look different at all. You're just going about your business. You're the same person as before you came to Christ. And on the other hand, there's all kinds of people doing good deeds, not tethered to Jesus at all, right?

And there's people believing things wrongly about Jesus and about the Bible that are still actually accomplishing good deeds. But what stands behind that is not the commitment of Christ to make it eternally significant in the world and into the resurrection.

It's just, it's like coasting. So in this passage, James gives a warning. And I think you can also see an invitation in the text with that strong language of deadness and, you know, a body without breath, a dead body.

He tells us essentially that unless we learn in Christ to pair our faith and our deeds, unless we learn to let our faith flow into action, then we've never really lived.

We don't even know what it's like to be alive in Christ. But the flip side of that is the invitation then. That is, James is giving us this stunning opportunity to actually live the kind of life that we all actually deep down want to live.

[6 : 04] I'm convinced, maybe it's just my hypothesis, but if you could test it, I believe you'd find that everyone wants to be a person of integrity. Everyone wants to have nobility, generosity.

That's why all of our great stories are about the heroes who are those things and not about the villains who aren't, right? That's why we honor soldiers who stood with integrity and nobility and ultimate generosity and honor.

We want to be people like that. We just don't think we have what it takes. But the people who live with that kind of stunning integrity and honor are the freest, most joyful people I've ever met.

And we're invited into that. And we say, well, I don't have what it takes. I don't have that strength in me. And to which God responds, you're right.

I do. And I give it to you. That's the invitation that James is extending to us. So we're going to just dive into that a little bit this morning. I prepared something like two points, but they're kind of confusing, so I probably won't really allude to them at all.

[7 : 15] But ultimately, I want to talk about gospel doctrine and gospel culture, by which I mean faith and deeds. And then I want to talk about the power to actually live like that.

So we'll do gospel doctrine and gospel culture first. Excuse me. That cough is going around. All the way around the world, I think. So doctrine.

I know you're familiar with the term, but doctrine is simply it's teaching, isn't it? It's what you received from someone else. You've been taught, and then you believe it, you hold it to be true.

And often doctrine is thought of as an intellectual thing, your mind, right? You're taught something, now you think differently, and you just cognitively believe that thing to be true.

Well, I wasn't a Christian until I was 19, but I thought I was a Christian ever since I was five. Because I was told Jesus loves me and died for me, and I said, okay, it's true.

[8 : 17] I believe that doctrine, right? But it wasn't until I met the risen Christ at the age of 19 that I encountered the word of God and received him with a meekness not my own, like James talks about, received the word with meekness, that I became a new kind of person.

And that I began receiving from outside of me the power to live what I actually believed. So James says, when he says faith without deeds is dead, he's saying, if you have gospel doctrine, you will live like it.

But if your life does not flow out of the gospel that you claim to believe, then your heart has not actually been transformed by that gospel. And so he's not suggesting this is a good idea of how things should go.

He's actually saying this is just how it is. The fact of the matter is, right, the internal combustion will drive the car forward or it's broken. A real living faith, then, is what I think of it as productive.

That's a theme that I just keep thinking about when I read James 1 and 2. Real faith produces something. A life of gospel-shaped beauty and truth will be produced by gospel doctrine in our hearts.

[9 : 42] So let me explain what I mean from a few passages in James that you've probably gone through already with Robin. First, James 1.18. You can look at it if you've got your Bible open.

He says, He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

So God chose to birth us through the word in order that we can be produce, fruit of his creation.

So if we're Christians, it's because the word of God was productive. The word produced something. It produced us. We're birthed through it.

And it produced us as first fruits. His word is productive like a seed is productive. You plant the seed and all the normal things happen. The seed will grow.

[10 : 44] It bears fruit. And, of course, his word to us is the gospel of Jesus. It's stunning in Mark 1. I should turn there and just actually read it instead of trying to quote it from memory.

Mark 1, verse 1. Changed the way that I think about the Bible. It says this. The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

Robin and I were just chatting about this earlier. It's funny that I had an example without knowing it. The Greek below that doesn't say about Jesus.

It says the good news of Jesus. Now, if you want to get nerdy about it in a minute, it's a particular genitive relationship that doesn't mean necessarily that it's from Jesus or possessed by Jesus.

It means it is Jesus. The gospel of Jesus means the contents of the gospel are the person and work of Jesus Christ. He's the gospel.

[11 : 46] It's not simply a set of doctrine we believe. It's a person we follow. We receive the word himself. The word is a person that we receive. And he's productive.

Jesus doesn't waste his time. When the word comes into the world, he saves the world. When the word comes into a person, he saves and regenerates and redeems and renews us.

So that good news that we were more broken and sinful toward God than we ever could have fathomed.

And still more loved by God indeed than we ever could have imagined. That's the gospel word that we're receiving here.

That's the productive, transformative, powerful word of God. And so when we've received that word, we begin having the ability from God to live like that.

[12 : 50] Moving toward the broken like he moved toward us. Moving toward the hurting. Moving toward the people that hurt you. Because God didn't love us when we felt pretty good about him.

He loved us when we were rebels and enemies. He came to us when we were dead and had nothing to offer him. And if we want to be people of integrity and nobility and honor and generosity, we have to first encounter him as that to us.

Now, back to James 1, verses 19 through 21. He says this, my dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Why? Because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. So first he says God's word is productive. Now he goes, but your anger is not productive.

Our angry words, our wrath. I always pause when I say wrath and stop them because I know you don't say it that way. But, you know, our angry words don't do the thing that we want them to do.

[13 : 53] All it does is create conflict. So what does produce righteousness and salvation? Well, he goes on. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Our anger is not productive. God's word is productive. And if we want righteousness and salvation to be in our life and in our communities, it comes through receiving God's word in us first.

And then lastly, in verse 22, he says, Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

So if we think we've received the word, but it hasn't done anything in our lives, James says we're deceiving ourselves. Because his word is productive and powerful, like internal combustion.

That word was always meant to produce a life of righteousness. Gospel doctrine, as I was taught to talk about it, and I find it a helpful category, produces and ought to produce gospel culture.

[15 : 05] The way that we are, the way that we move through the world, the way that we... Not just culture like the music you listen to and the way that you dress, but culture like the way you welcome someone into your home and into your life.

Right? The love that you show for people. The welcome, the honor that you show people. But what happens then when gospel doctrine doesn't happen into gospel culture?

Now, the Nashville area is full of churches with sound gospel doctrine and no gospel culture. Churches where people walk in and think, I'm not going to go to church today, actually, because I need to get my life in order first.

Right? I need to put myself together before I can go worship God. That's not gospel culture. Right? Gospel culture says that Christ welcomed us when we were unwelcome.

When we were unrepresentable, he said, come on in. And so that's a problem. When gospel doctrine isn't paired with gospel culture.

[16 : 13] So what happens with that? James says in 2.26, As the body without the spirit or breath is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Okay, so your body has a set of lungs that is meant to produce breath by expanding and contracting. It draws air in and expels air out. That's the way it's meant to work.

So how do you know if a body's alive? You can take a little mirror and put it in front of its mouth and see if it's producing breath. Right? How do you know, how do I know if I'm really alive in Christ?

You put a mirror to your life. Am I producing breath? Is my faith producing deeds? And if not, I'm like, do you have plastic fruit here?

Do people decorate with plastic fruit? You know what I mean? Like you go into someone's house, maybe your grandmother, and they have a bowl with some hairs in it. And you think, oh, I want one of those.

[17 : 17] But it's plastic, and it's hollow, and it's brittle. And it looks wonderful, but there's no substance to it at all. Or like, I don't know, I'm not into cars.

I don't know why I keep talking about cars today. But, you know, imagine going into a showroom, a car showroom, and seeing a Ferrari or a Lamborghini there. And you think, wow, that's beautiful. And you sit down and turn the key, but there's no engine under the hood.

It's a shell. It's just for looks. It's just for looks.

That's how strong he's going with his language here. Here's what he says. In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, well, you have faith, I have deeds.

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. This is where I'm going. You believe that there is one God. Good. Even the demons believe that.

[18 : 42] And shudder. Now, when James says you believe there is one God, we think monotheism, as opposed to a whole lot of gods, we're talking about one God.

That's not really what James has in mind. James has in mind Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4 and 5. It was this creed that Israel had.

They prayed one to three times a day, and they called it the Shema. It's the... Shema means to hear or to obey. In fact, Hebrew didn't have a separate word for obey.

It was just Shema, hear. Because right hearing results in obedience. That's the idea that James is playing with here. So, the Shema begins, and every Jew would have known this.

It begins with this statement. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Right? James says, if you believe that, one God, good.

[19 : 46] That's bottom shelf normal. Everyone should believe that. Demons believe that. That's not what makes Christianity alive. Believing in the one God.

So, what is it then that sets Christians apart from, in James' category, demons? Well, it's the second part of the Shema. The Shema is two verses. Hear, O Israel, the Lord is your God, the Lord is one.

And then he goes on, part two. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Not love like just have good feelings.

An active love. Right? The verb of love. James is saying if we separate our doctrine about what we know to be true about God from the life of loving God with all that we have and therefore loving our neighbors as ourselves, then what we have is just the same theology as the fallen spiritual world.

And in my opinion, honestly, we'd be better off, perhaps, as calling a spade a spade and just saying, I'm an atheist, rather than being a name-only Christian who refuses to live out what we know to be true.

[21 : 03] That's how serious this is for James. So we don't need plastic fruit Christians who say, in his categories, be warm and well-fed, but then does nothing about it.

And we, you know, just like we don't need showroom citizens who say, I love my country, I would do anything for my country, but when war comes, refuse to go and make that sacrifice that we've talked about today.

And we don't need a lip service Jesus who says, be forgiven, be cleansed, and does nothing about it. And we don't have one.

Our Lord, our Savior, is the one who exercised the humility that you were talking about, Robin, the kids. He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped after, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.

And he came down, and then he went lower still, and was obedient even unto death. He put his words into actions, so that when he says, be forgiven, be cleansed, the power of Almighty God stands behind those words and does something.

[22 : 18] If we don't see that, we'll never be the kind of people of integrity, nobility, and generosity that we all want to be.

So let me sum up point one, let's sum up point one, this way. Gospel doctrine, without gospel culture, is brittle and hollow.

And it's not the kind of churches we want to be, and it's not the kind of people we want to be. But gospel culture, without gospel doctrine, is unrooted and temporary.

It's just vanity, smoke. But when gospel doctrine flows into gospel culture, faith giving birth to deeds, there is nothing like it in the world.

And it will, I was praying for you guys earlier. I think that what the Lord is doing in this community, and I mean in this body of Christ, is so knitting you together in the Lord, with such a vibrant faith, that one day people you never thought would come to church, will set foot in this place, and they might be confused by the music, they might not understand the message, but they'll see your life, and they will be in awe of God.

[23 : 47] That's what can happen. The question is how. Right? And that kind of takes us to the second point. How?

How do we get the strength, the capacity, the emotional wealth to be those kind of people without slipping into a sort of legalistic earning God's favor sort of thing?

Excuse me. Like, think back to that car illustration again, the internal combustion engine. If faith is like a fuel, we need a spark still.

Right? There has to be some sort of energy source from outside of us to come and ignite it and set that combustion in motion.

We need power from outside of us, is my point. So we really have three options of what to do next. Right? The first two. The first one is be passive. Don't do anything. Hope.

[24 : 48] Like, just wait for God to do something in your life until all of a sudden you just overflow and, you know, that's one option. Sit back and wait. The other option is try harder.

Do better. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Really, you know, grit your teeth, set your mind to it, and get after it with all of your might. But if those are the only two options we have, neither of them is the gospel, then we'd be impoverished.

And you might get somewhere for a little while with effort, but you won't last because we are finite creatures. And we've only run on fumes so long.

So, there's a gospel third way. And James lays it out in verse 25 of chapter 1. He says, Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

So, there it is. There's the third way. It's looking intently into the perfect law that gives freedom. In other words, gaze, behold, the gospel of Jesus.

[26 : 04] Look at Jesus. I'm really helped by how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 3.18. He says, And we all who with unveiled faces contemplate, or better, behold, the Lord's glory, we're being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

I know I'm a guest here, but I would suggest to all of you to get that verse in your heart and heads. Like, write it on your heart in such a way that you never have it out of reach.

Because that is the key to understanding how to do the Christian life without earning grace.

You look intently at Jesus. The glory of the Lord is the gospel. That's the cross and the empty tomb are where you see God's glory most profoundly in all of Scripture.

You look there. And as you continue gazing and beholding, you become made more and more in his image. The Bible teaches us that, excuse me, that you become like what you love, and you become like what you worship.

[27 : 28] You know, I don't know if it's true or not. Sometimes you see older couples, though, that you think they kind of look like each other now, in their 70s and 80s or 90s, right?

They love each other. They spend so much time around each other. They begin mimicking each other's mannerisms and ways of speech. They might dress in complimentary ways. My wife and I ended up matching two Sundays on a row in accident.

As I go to church before she does, and then we're both wearing the same thing. Like, you become like what you love. Or, you know, there might be some older generations out there who, I don't know, I don't mean this to be rude, but I've noticed some people look strikingly like they're dogs.

Have you seen that before? Or, there's something about you spend so much time staring at this thing with this person, loving this person, you begin to reflect them. Well, the Bible has a bigger category for that, which you can read about in, say, Psalm 115, and somewhere in Isaiah as well.

He says that the gods of the nations who don't worship our God, the gods of the nations are wood and silver and stone, and having mouths they do not speak, and ears they don't hear, and eyes they don't see, and those who worship them become like them.

[28 : 45] The thing that we set our gaze on is the thing that we become more like over time. So take good, long looks at Jesus.

And his commitment to you is that by his spirit, he will renew your affections, renew your mind, broaden your capacities, strengthen your hands, and set you into motion on the good deeds he's planned for you since the beginning of time.

I find that tremendously comforting, because I know, I was sharing with Robin and Annabelle last night, we're very tired in this season. This is a very busy season for us, and it's very taxing, and my wife and I speak often about this.

You know church planting is hard, and we speak often about, we'll say things like, I'm at my end. I have nothing left. I am running on empty, right?

How do you keep doing that? You have to take time to gaze at the gospel, get it in your bones, sing the gospel to yourself, preach the gospel to yourself, spend time in prayer, read your Bible, know its words, meditate on it, chew it over throughout your day.

[30 : 06] Fix your gaze on it, and spend time with him, so that we'll become like what we love. Just by way of conclusion, I want to look at the two characters that James mentions at the end of our passage this morning, and that is Abraham and Rahab.

Abraham did not earn his righteousness by his obedience, right? Remember God said, sacrifice your son, your only son whom you love, and he set out to obey, right?

But that wasn't God saying, I'm not sure how I feel about Abraham yet, but if he does what I'm asking him to do, then I'll love him. That's not how God was feeling in that moment.

Rather, when God saw that Abraham took what he knew to be true about God, and he did, Hebrews 11 says that he reckoned, he had to sit down with pen and paper and do the math.

Go, okay, if God is the God that I know him to be, and he's made promises to my son, then he's going to have to raise him from the dead. So he said, this is what I know to be true.

[31 : 14] Here's my doctrine. And then he obeyed, and he did it. He lived in light of his doctrine. And James is pointing to him, and God is pointing to that and saying, that's what I'm talking about.

That's faith and deeds. And it's credited to him as righteousness. In other words, his salvation, his righteousness flowed into his deeds. He didn't earn the righteousness.

Consider Rahab. Rahab the prostitute. She was living in Jericho. She's a Canaanite. Clearly living a life of sin, right? And yet when the two Israelite spies came to her house, she already feared and revered God.

She might not have been living it perfectly, but she feared Yahweh of Israel. And that's the beginning of wisdom. And so she lived according, she didn't fear Jericho more than she feared Yahweh.

And so she hid the spies, and she let them down through the window of her house by a rope, and was saved, and was preserved. In other words, she didn't get saved because she obeyed and did the right thing.

[32 : 23] She already had salvation. She already feared and worshipped God. And that flowed into her deeds. Now I want to give you one more, and I'll end with this. Luke 19 tells us of a short little guy named Zacchaeus, who I'm sure you'll have read about.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. Nobody likes a tax collector even today in any culture, but for the Jews in the first century, that was a traitor. That was siding with the Roman occupiers and going and taking your own countryman's money and giving it to the oppressor.

That's what Zacchaeus did for a living. And on top of that, all tax collectors had this, they were all thought of to be thieves as well.

Well, Zacchaeus was. He was defrauding people of their money. He might say the tax is 200, and then he'd skim 100 off the top and give 100 to Rome. So he had a home, and he seems to be a person of some affluence, but he was a traitor to his people.

So when Jesus comes to town and sees little Zacchaeus in the tree trying to catch a glimpse, he stops and says, I must eat at your house tonight for the shock and chagrin of everybody.

[33 : 37] So he comes down, and he takes Jesus. He receives him into his home. He receives Jesus. And then he stands up and says, Lord, look, I'm going to give back everything I've taken.

In fact, I'm going to take half of everything I own and give it to the poor, and then I'm going to restore what I've stolen four times as much back. And Jesus said to him, truly salvation has come to this house.

not because he decided to give back. Zacchaeus restoring what he stole and giving to the poor was the fruit of the fact that salvation had already set foot in his doorway.

He received the word with meekness. And God's word is powerful and transforms all kinds of people like me and Zacchaeus into people who are being transformed into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another with integrity and nobility and generosity.

And that's God's invitation to us today. He's saying, I did this for you to create in your life something the world cannot explain.

[35 : 00] Let's go. Let's do it together. Let me pray for us. Father, I praise you for your commitment to us.

We praise you that you are more committed to our holiness than we are. You're more committed to our joy than we are. And we praise you that in your wisdom and power and sovereignty you have completely tethered our good and our joy to your glory.

So, we ask for ourselves two things today, Father. That you will send your spirit into our hearts to so magnify Christ that we're dazzled by his glory.

And then we ask that you will help us to glorify Christ with our lives, with our words and our deeds, that we might take all of the resources that you have entrusted to us and hold them up to you.

All of our time, all of our mental energies, our emotional capacities, our social breadth, and we will hold it up to you and say, show me how to follow Jesus with these things, please.

[36 : 29] I think of when the people were hungry, the thousands at your son's feet, and the disciples brought him just one little bread and fish they had, and they gave him to Jesus, and he blessed them and gave it back and said, you feed them.

And Father, we praise you for the privilege of being Jesus' disciples and friends who get to distribute his mercies and grace through this world.

And we pray that it might transform not only our homes, but Winchborough and Scotland and Nashville and Tennessee and the world. And we ask these things in the name of Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.