

THE APOSTLES CREED

Session I

I. THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE GOSPEL

- A. What is the Gospel? The Gospel comes to us from God and so it reveals God's wisdom in such a way that our perspective is called into question. God gives us the Gospel not so that we can evaluate it but so that it can evaluate us.
- B. Christians did not invent the term "gospel" and before Christians used this term to designate a written account of Jesus' life they used it to designate the announcement of the good news about Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension (note Acts 2:14-36). It is absolutely essential to note that gospel designated the announcement of a fact, a fact that had huge implications for life.
- C. The ACNA catechism To Be A Christian (TBC) defines the Gospel as follows: "The Gospel is the good news of God loving and saving lost mankind through the ministry in word and deed of his Son, Jesus Christ" (TBC, 1). This good news calls for a response on the part of human beings and this response involves effort which is not possible apart from God's grace.
- D. In Romans 1:1-3 Paul says three absolutely fundamental things about the Gospel.
1. "the gospel of God" (1:1): The good news of the Gospel is news which both comes from God and is about God. The Gospel does not offer us hints about how we can find our way to God but, rather, it announces that God has come among us.
 2. the Gospel was "promised beforehand...in the holy Scriptures" (1:2): This means that the good news is not about a new religion but the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.
 3. While the Gospel is "the gospel of God," it is also the Gospel "concerning his Son" (1:3): Jesus Christ is himself the Gospel (see Ephesians 1:3-14). Belief in the Gospel does not simply involve accepting doctrines or ideas but becoming conformed to Christ and sharing in his life (Romans 8:29).
- E. We should think of the Gospel as having three dimensions. The Gospel is the good news about something that (1) has happened, something that (2) is happening now and something that (3) will happen in the future.
1. **Acts 2:22-24, 32-36:** The Gospel is good news about something that has happened. The Gospel announces the good news that Jesus Christ is the world's true King and that the redemption which he has brought about on our behalf cannot be reversed or negated.
 2. **Romans 8:1-11:** The Gospel is good news about something that is happening now. Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension have resulted in the sending of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is working to free us from sin and enables us to live in a way pleasing to God.
 3. **1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 21-28:** The Gospel is good news about something that will happen in the future. Jesus' current rule of the world will be fully manifested in the future in the abolition of sin and evil. The reign of King Jesus over creation means that sin and evil will come to an end.
- F. The Gospel announces that the world will be freed from sin, death and evil and the Christian life is life lived in anticipation of that new world. There is no Gospel and no Christian life apart from God's action as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

II. THE HUMAN CONDITION: SIN

- A. Sin is “the universal human condition” (Romans 3:23). Sin does not simply refer to the fact that some people do wicked things nor does it simply refer to the fact that all of us occasionally make some moral or spiritual error. Sin is the universal human condition affecting the life of every human being. Sin prevents us from having a true perception of ourselves and our world.
- B. We were “made for fellowship with our Creator” (Genesis 1:26-27). Apart from God we cannot be truly human. Sin refers to our “self-centered rebellion” against God, our turning away from God. By turning away from God we harm and distort our own humanity and become something less than human.
- C. Sin has implications for every dimension of our lives (spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, etc.) and this is why it leads to “guilt, shame, fear of death and judgment”. Scripture fundamentally sees sin as alienation: “Sin alienates me from God, my neighbor, God’s good creation, and myself” (TBC, 3).
- D. One of the dangerous things about sin is that it blinds us to its effects. The most tragic aspect of sin is that under it we find ourselves controlled by things that cannot bring eternal joy and lead to darkness and misery (TBC, 4).

III. THE WAY OF LIFE

- A. The effects of sin are so all pervasive that we cannot simply decide to “stop sinning” and restore our relationship with God. Sin blinds us to the fact that we need to have a relationship with God. Under sin, we simply love other things more than God.
- B. The way of life is only possible for us because God acts to reconcile us to himself, to free us from our captivity to sin, to fill us with knowledge of himself, to make us citizens of his Kingdom and to enable us to worship and serve him (TBC, 7). God does this through his unmerited grace which is his undeserved love given to us in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit (TBC, 8). In Christian understanding, true freedom consists not in the ability to make choices but in the freedom to choose God.
- C. God’s gift of grace manifests itself in our lives in three essential ways:
1. **Repentance:** By grace, God enables us to turn away from sin and back toward himself. Repentance is a fundamental change of heart in which we turn from serving ourselves to serving God and our neighbor and can only be brought about by God (TBC, 12).
 2. **Faith:** Through the grace of faith God enables us to believe the truth of the Gospel, to entrust ourselves to Jesus as our Savior and to obey him as our Lord (TBC, 13). Faith is a gift from God and an act of the whole person.
 3. **Sanctification:** Through the grace of sanctification God frees us from the power of sin so that we are more and more free for him. Through the grace of sanctification we come to desire to live a holy life, to love our neighbor and to love God (TBC, 18).
- D. A mature response to the Gospel involves faith, baptism into Christ’s Body the Church and active service to Christ in the world. In receiving the gift of faith from God we also receive a vocation from God.
- E. God’s plan for our transformation involves other people “through corporate and private worship, prayer and Bible reading; fellowship with God’s people; pursuit of holiness; witness toward those who do not know Christ; and acts of love toward all” (TBC, 18).

Notes:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

- To Be A Christian defines the Gospel like this: “The Gospel is the good news of God loving and saving lost mankind through the ministry in word and deed of his Son, Jesus Christ” (TBC, 1). What does this statement mean?
- If someone who is not a Christian, say a friend or co-worker, asked you what the Gospel was about, what would you say?
- Each of the following passages of Scripture deals with one of the three dimensions of the Gospel. In each case, identify the dimension which the passage points to and consider why this dimension is important:
 - Acts 2:22-36
 - I Corinthians 15:1-4, 21-28
 - Romans 8:1-11
- To Be A Christian defines sin like this: “The universal human condition is that, though made for fellowship with our Creator, we have been cut off from him by self-centered rebellion against him, leading to guilt, shame, and fear of death and judgment. This is the state of sin” (TBC, 2). As you understand it, what does sin involve? In what ways do you see sin present in your own life and in the world around you?
- Why is it that we can not free ourselves from the power of sin?
- To Be A Christian defines God’s purpose for us like this: “God wants to reconcile me to himself, to free me from captivity to sin, to fill me with knowledge of him, to make me a citizen of his Kingdom, and to enable me to worship, serve and glorify him now and forever” (TBC, 7). Try to define what each of the things in this list means.
- Repentance, faith and sanctification define the “Way of Life”. What does each of these terms mean? How might thinking about life in these categories change the way you live?
- Why is the Gospel “Good News”?
- Read Colossians 3:1-17. What does this say about the Christian life?