

ARTICLE I

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

GOSPEL MESSAGE

Hearing and responding in faith to the gospel message is foundational to life as a disciple. The word gospel simply means “good news.” It is important for us to have a full understanding of what this good news is, as it was historically proclaimed by the Apostles. One helpful passage where we see the fullness of the gospel message is found in Peter’s sermon in **Acts 10:34-48**. This is the first time that the gospel is proclaimed to the gentiles. We learn from Peter that at the center of the gospel message is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Consider some of the key points he makes in his preaching:

- The message of peace was sent to Israel through Jesus Christ -- He is Lord of all.
- Jesus was anointed by God and went about doing good by the power of the Spirit.
- He was put to death on a cross by the Jewish people but God raised Him up on the third day.
- He appeared in a physical body to the Apostles and witnesses who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.
- He commanded the Apostles to preach to the people and to testify that He is the One appointed by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead.
- All who believe in Him will receive forgiveness of sins.
- All of this was predicted by the prophets in the Old Testament.

All of the Gospel proclamation captured in the book of Acts is centered around the person and work of Jesus Christ, and those who believed this message were considered true believers.

GOSPEL POWER

As we have seen, the Gospel is a historical message proclaimed by the Apostles and rooted firmly in what the person of Jesus Christ accomplished in real history. But the gospel isn’t just a message; it is also deeply personal. **Romans 1:16** tells us the Gospel is the power of God to save, and the power of the Gospel doesn’t stop with our initial response. Let’s look at the power of the Gospel and how God personally has saved us, is saving us, and will save us in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul gives us one of the most detailed expressions of the gospel and theology in all of the bible. In Romans 1:15-16 he says, *“I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* He then goes on in rich and deep detail to unpack the power of the

gospel to save everyone who believes. Below we've summarized the "power of God to save everyone who believes," looking thematically across the scriptures.

We have been saved from the penalty of sin...

Every human being has rejected God, sinning and rebelling against him. Just like Adam and Eve, we have all chosen to worship creation over the creator. Although God is knowable by all, not one has chosen to honor him as God. Because of this we are guilty, under the wrath of God, justly deserving the penalty of sin, which is death. But showing his great love for his creation, God sent the Son who honored him perfectly in his life, absorbed God's wrath on the cross, and paid our price in his death. His resurrection assures us that the price has been paid. In Christ, we have been saved from the penalty of sin and are no longer enemies of God. Now we are his dearly loved children, his adopted sons and daughters.

We are being saved from the power of sin...

Once slaves to sin, doing its will, we are now being freed from the desires of the flesh. The Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is the same Spirit who is at work in the life of every believer, bringing about transformation through continual repentance and faith in the gospel. As we learn to bring every aspect of our life under the lordship of Jesus Christ, we are being saved from the power of sin and experiencing real and tangible transformation. This transformation is God's will for our lives, and he has given us every thing we need for it-- his Spirit, his word, and his church.

We will be saved from the presence of sin...

Although we still experience the presence of sin in our lives every day, there will be a day when we won't. Jesus will one day return and will make an end to sin, suffering, evil, and brokenness. He will establish a new heaven and a new earth. When he does, those who trusted in the gospel message will be saved and will enjoy life in God's presence forever. Those who rejected God and trusted in something or someone other than Jesus for their life and justification will be separated from God forever. It is our job as the church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to display the foretaste of God's kingdom, so that people will hunger for it and put their faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel that Paul says "*I am not ashamed of...for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes*". It is indeed "good news" because God is completely aware of our sin problem, but in and through the work of Jesus Christ, he has, is, and will resolve it for his glory and his glory alone!

We have been saved from the **penalty** of sin (justification), we are being saved from the **power** of sin (sanctification), and we will be saved from the **presence** of sin (glorification).

GOSPEL PURPOSE

The Bible isn't just a story about humanity and our sin problem. It is a single, amazing, true story about God. He is the author and the hero. It is a story about who He is and what He has done. Yes, in Jesus, He powerfully and personally rescues us and sets us

free from sin and death for his glory, but it goes beyond us. We know from the grand narrative of Scripture that God is reconciling all things in heaven and on earth in Christ, and this has been his plan from the fullness of time (**Ephesians 1:10**).

We can sum it up this way:

The gospel is the good and true news that Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil through his own life, death, and resurrection and is redeeming all creation, including us.

Through the story of God we see the good news is that God sent his Son to redeem the world from the effects of sin and create a new humanity. Eventually the whole world will be renewed to the way God originally created it. Rebellion, death, decay, injustice, and suffering will all be removed. In the New Creation, God will be seen by all for who he truly is—he will be glorified. (Ephesians 2:10,14-22; 2 Corinthians 5:15-21; Revelation 21)

How does this happen? Jesus helped clarify how we accomplish the purpose of the gospel by giving us his mission: “Go and make disciples”. (Matthew 28:19). As the arts, industry, politics, families—all areas of culture—are being filled with Jesus’ disciples bringing about his gospel renewal, the earth is being filled with his glory! This is the point of the renewal of all things—that God would be glorified!

The gospel is not just about my individual happiness or God’s plan for my life. It is about God’s plan for the world-- his glory filling the earth as the water covers the sea.

THE GRAND NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE

CREATION

God, who always does what is good, right, and perfect, created a world to reflect his truth, beauty, and goodness. Out of everything he created, humans were his most cherished creation, made in his own image, and entrusted to rule over the earth. Adam and Eve (the first humans) were given ultimate purpose-- to fill the earth with God’s image by creating life, community, and culture.

FALL

What was once declared “very good” was shattered. Adam & Eve rejected their divine purpose in order to seek their own glory, thus distorting the image of God. Humanity multiplied a marred, self-centered image (Gen. 3; Rom. 1). As a result, the community and culture that followed is in glorious ruin, beautiful and broken. Everything in its beauty testifies to a good and powerful Creator (Rom. 1). Yet, everything in its brokenness is in need of redemption (Rom. 8). Before expelling Adam & Eve from the Garden of Eden, God mercifully promised to send a Redeemer to rescue humanity and crush the evil one (Gen. 3:15).

REDEMPTION

After humanity's failure, God called out a new people to spread his glorious image—Israel. However, like Adam, Israel also rebelled against God, seeking her own glory. Before expelling Israel from their land, God mercifully promised to send one, faithful Jew who would restore humanity—Jesus Christ. Like His Father and in the power of the Spirit, He only did what was good, right, and perfect. He would prove to be the better Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David—the ultimate human, father, rescuer, and king.

NEW CREATION

Jesus's first coming initiated a redemption that is yet to be completed. Throughout the New Testament we encounter the promise of a renewed humanity and creation. This renewal is already-not-fully. We are redeemed people (Eph. 1:7) but wait for the final day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). We are renewed but long for the renewal of all creation (Rom. 8:18-25). Our discipleship is characterized by hope in Jesus who redeems and will rule over a renewed creation. God has called us to presently join him renewing all things (Rev. 21:5), community and culture, in the power of the Spirit, to be a foretaste of our promised future—a new humanity in a renewed heavens and earth!

ARTICLE II

RESPONDING TO THE MESSAGE

REPENTANCE, BAPTISM, & DISCIPLESHIP

Throughout the book of Acts we see a clear pattern emerge of people **hearing** the Gospel proclaimed, **repenting** (turning from idols and false beliefs and turning to Jesus), **being baptized** (identifying as belonging to Jesus and his people), and **being taught**. Those who responded were turning from idols to Jesus, and the first step of obedience was baptism. Baptism was an outward sign of an inward change. They were now identifying themselves with Jesus and his people. After being baptized these new believers needed to be taught. So they were brought into local churches where they learned how to live out their new identity as disciples of Jesus.

Consider Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 2:37-42

1. REPENT & BELIEVE

When we hear “repent and believe” with modern ears, we assume that it means to quit sinning (repent) and believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead (believe). This is not what Jesus or the Apostles meant. **What they meant was abandon your agenda and embrace His agenda. Turn from false promises (repent) and turn to His true promises (believe).** This is the same response demanded of us today. It is not simply enough to believe the story or understand the facts of the gospel. Upon hearing the gospel, we are called to respond in faith to the Lord Jesus. How can we respond to the gospel?

Repentance means to give up on your agenda. Turn away, not simply from sin, but from believing false promises. God wants your heart, not just your morality. Repentance is a stepping stone to true joy. False promises -- like— “Be bright, witty, and wise and people will give you the acceptance you need.”-- aren’t truly satisfying. No human can offer perfect acceptance or lasting joy.

To believe is to place your faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as your means to salvation and life, trusting the promises of God. Jesus’s call to repent and believe was a call to give up on all other agendas and false promises and trust him and his work and promises. Notice that the facts of the gospel are not the object of our faith. Neither is our faith the object of our faith. Faith in faith or faith in facts is not saving faith. Faith in the person and work of Jesus, who he is and what he has accomplished for us, is true saving faith.

2. BE BAPTIZED

Again, we see a clear pattern emerge from the book of Acts. Those who believed the message were instructed to repent and be baptized. They were turning from idols to

Jesus, and the first step of obedience was baptism. Baptism was an outward sign of an inward change. **The word baptism in the Greek literally means “to immerse, to dip.”** Baptism was a practice of immersing an individual in water. It was symbolic. It meant that you were becoming a follower of a certain teacher or the message they were teaching. Secondly, it meant that you were also identifying with a new way of life, a new people.

There are two things we should see baptism as symbolic for.

1. **Publicly Identifying With Jesus & His Message** - I have heard the Gospel message of Jesus, I believe it, and now I want to align myself with Jesus. I am identifying with him in his death, and with his resurrection. ***If you think about the imagery of baptism, this is what it is signifying. I am lowered under the water with Christ, my old self crucified with him, buried with him, and then I am raised to resurrection life with him.***
2. **Publicly identifying with a new community** - Now as the person is raised up they are embraced by this new community around them. This is a new family that is born of the Spirit not simply of flesh. We don't get this part as much in our individualistic cultures, but in a muslim or Jewish community people understand what this means. People can accept Jesus all day, but their family is up in arms when the are baptized. While baptism doesn't diminish the individual, it is corporate in its nature. I am now a part of a new community that lives out their new identity together as God's people. As a part of this new community there is also an understanding that I will be disciplined.

3. BE DISCIPLINED

After being baptized I am now a part of a new community that lives out their new identity together as God's people. As a part of this new community a new disciple needs to be rooted in their new identity, learning to live in line with the Gospel.

ARTICLE III

A NEW WAY TO LIVE

THE APOSTLES' TEACHING

“We usually think of the Christian message mainly as a set of beliefs, and miss the New Testament’s emphasis on a body of teaching about the Christian way of life. Jesus made it a central part of His ministry to instruct His disciples in the life God intended men and women to live... The apostles and early church leaders made it a central part of their pastoral work to hand on and explain this instruction. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the writers of the New Testament passed on this teaching to the church for all time. It forms the measuring rod for determining the soundness of Christians’ lives. As Paul wrote to the Romans, ‘Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the *standard of teaching* to which you were committed’ (6:17; see also 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2).” ¹

FAITHFUL TO THE TEACHING

“Christ, the apostles, and the leaders of the early church considered the teaching about the Christian way of life to be the norm for Christians. They viewed the *didache* not as a distant ideal but as something that ordinary people would actually live out. Conversion meant new behavior..

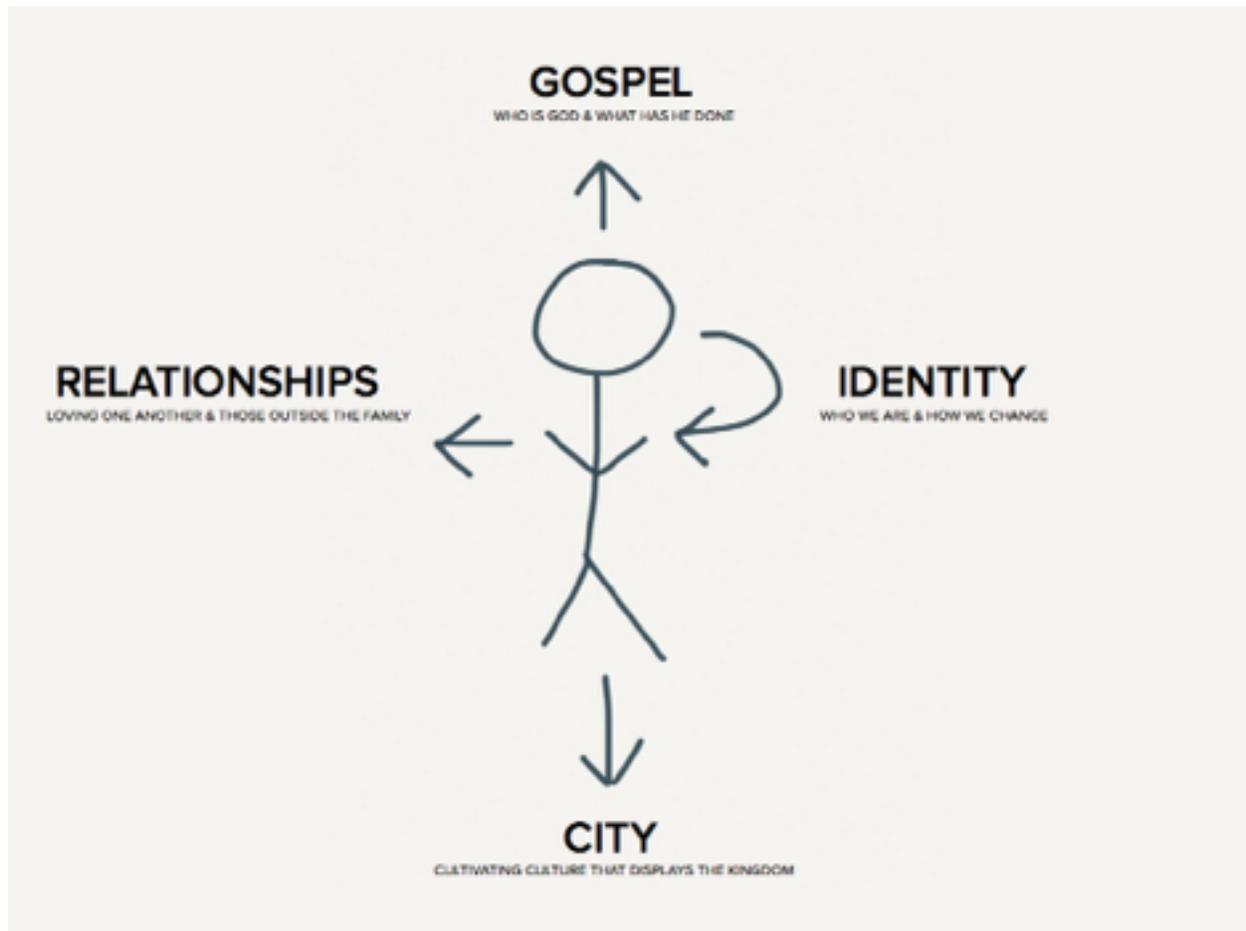
“The early church was not perfect. But the early Christians followed the Christian way of life sufficiently well that their distinctiveness--along with their bold announcement of the gospel--brought on them almost three centuries of persecution in the Roman empire, and at the same time helped to attract thousands of men and women to Christ, even though commitment to Him could end in martyrdom.

“In our own day it cannot be said that Christians in the West are following the teaching of Christ in a way that makes them particularly distinct. At a time when Western societies are swinging away from Christian values, Christians’ lives are generally failing to become more clearly distinguishable. Rather, as society becomes less Christian, so do Christian’s own patterns of life.” ²

¹ From “A Distinctive Way of Life” by Kevin Perrotta, chapter 7 in *Leading Christians to Maturity*, Ed. by John Blattner.

² *Ibid.*

ESSENTIALS OF A DISCIPLE: A DISTINCTIVE WAY OF LIFE



1. **GOSPEL** - It is of first importance that a disciple is formed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We want to establish disciples who know the Story of God, understand the historical message of the Gospel, the power of the Gospel, and the purpose of the Gospel.
 - a. **Story of God** - *Do you know the story of God and how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption? Genesis to Revelation*
 - b. **Gospel Message** - *Do you know and have you responded to the Gospel message proclaimed by the Apostles? Galatians 1:1-5; 3:1-18; 1 Corinthians 15; Romans 1:1-7; 4:24-25; Ephesians 1:1-3:21; Colossians 1:9-14; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:1-5, Acts 10:34-38*
 - c. **Gospel Power** - *Do you know the power of the Gospel that saves you from the penalty, power, and presence of sin? Romans 1:16, Romans*
 - d. **Gospel Purpose** - *Do you know how the Gospel gives us a new purpose and*

shows us God's redemptive plan for the world? Ephesians 1:10; 14-22, 2 Corinthians 5:15-21, Revelation 21

2. **IDENTITY**- Because of Jesus those who are in Christ are a new creation. As disciples we are learning to live out this new identity (Family of Servant Missionaries) by the power of the Holy Spirit. Each believer is instructed to lay aside his old life, having his mind renewed, and live out his new identity in Christ according to the will of God.
 - a. **Who We Are** - *Are we learning to live out our new identity as a Family of Servant Missionaries? Do we understand who we are in Christ and how this changes what we do?* 1 Peter 2:9, Ephesians 1:3-6, Romans 12:10-16, John 1:11-13, Galatians 2-4, Romans 8, Phil. 2:5-11, John 13:1-17, Colossians 1:19, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
 - b. **How We Change** - *Are we committed to renewing our minds by the power of the Spirit? Are we setting our minds on Christ and things above? Are we addressing the issues of our hearts with the power of the Gospel? Are we learning to walk obediently in the power of the Spirit (putting off the old man and putting on the new)?* Colossians 3, 1 Peter 3, 2 Peter 1, Galatians 2-5, Ephesians 4-5, Romans 12:1-2, James 4:1-10
3. **RELATIONSHIPS** - The primary place we live out our new identity in Christ is in the context of relationships. God has changed us and we are learning to relate to others in a new way. This is a distinctive relating to others based on Christ.
 - a. **Covenant** - God has ordered our relationships in a particular way. While we are called to love even our enemies, there is a sense of priority in how we order our relationships. We relate to our families and those in our church community people in covenant relationship (deep commitment). The scriptures give us clear instruction on how we are to relate to our immediate family and our church family.
 - i. **Family {Marriage, Singleness, Parents, Children}** - Individual households must be ordered properly, consistent with God's created design for man and for the Church. *Does each person in the household know and living in line with the roles God has given them?* Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Colossians 3:18-4:1, 1 Peter 3:1-7
 - ii. **Church Family** - A pattern of relationships within the church must be observed, characterized by love, brotherhood, mutual acceptance and respect, in which each is to diligently pursue unity in the bond of peace. *Are your relationships with others in the church family characterized by love, brotherhood, mutual acceptance and respect? Are you diligently pursuing unity with the body? Are you speaking the truth in love to your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you honoring and submitting to your leaders?* Romans 12:3-16, 1 Cor. 12:4-6, Titus 1:5-2:15, 1 Timothy 3:14-16, 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6, Ephesians 3:1-13, Acts 2-5
 - b. **Outward {Neighbors & Networks, Authorities, Enemies}** - As God's display

people we are called to have relationships with those outside of the church characterized by respect for government, employees and other authorities, and love and good deeds toward neighbors and those in need. We are called to continue doing good works to all and to love our enemies. *Are you living with respect to the authorities in your life (government, work, other authorities)? Are you regularly serving those in need around you (neighbors, coworkers, marginalized)? Does the way you interact with those outside of the church display a accurate picture of Christ to outsiders?* Romans 13:1-7, Titus 2:14; 3:1-14

4. **CITY** - As God's display people we are called to live distinctively in our city. We care for those in need, work as those working for Christ, and we steward God's resources as good managers of the gifts he has given us.

a. **Work** - Disciples must lead a responsible and sober life, working hard, providing for his own, making the most of the time (because the days are evil) and keeping on the alert for Satan and his strategies. Our work is not seen as a way to become something but as a way to display the glory of Christ. *Are you working hard as if for Christ and regularly resting in Christ? Are you managing your time appropriately and keeping alert to Satan's strategies in your life? Are you making decisions based on a biblical understanding of your priorities?* Genesis 1-3, Ephesians 6:10-18, Colossians 3:23, 1 Thess. 4:9-12

b. **Stewardship** - Each disciple is committed to using their time, talent, and treasure for the building up of the body and the good of their city. This is reflected in how they spend their time, money, and talents. *Are you committed to using the gifts and abilities God has given you to serve others in the church family? Are they giving their time, resources, and finances to support the mission of making disciples? Do you have a clear understanding of your gifts and know how they fit within your local church family?* Psalm 24:1, Genesis 2:15, 1 Peter 4:10-11, Matthew 6:33

c. **Mercy** - As we display the coming city disciples are called to care for the poor, widows, and orphans in our city. We especially take care of those within our covenant community but we also work to help those in need around us. We serve those who have nothing to offer us just as we have been served by Jesus. *Are we aware of the needs in our city? Are we using our resources to care for the least among us? Are we caring for the widows, orphans, and poor?* Luke 12:33, James 1:27, Galatians 2:10, Acts 2:45

ARTICLE IV

THE RENEWED MIND BY JOHN PIPER³

We are perfectly useless as Christ-exalting Christians if all we do is conform to the world around us. And the key to not wasting our lives... Paul says, is being transformed. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed.” That word is used one time in all the Gospels, namely, about Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration (the mountain of “transformation”—same word, *metemorphōthē*): “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” ([Matthew 17:2](#); [Mark 9:2](#)).

The Transformation Is Not Just External

I point this out for one reason: to make the point that the nonconformity to the world does not primarily mean the external avoidance of worldly behaviors. That’s included. But you can avoid all kinds of worldly behaviors and not be transformed. “His face shown like the sun, and his clothes became white as light”! Something like that happens to us spiritually and morally. Mentally, first on the inside, and then, later at the resurrection on the outside. So Jesus says of us, at the resurrection: “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” ([Matthew 13:43](#)).

Transformation is not switching from the to-do list of the flesh to the to-do list of the law... The Christian alternative to immoral behaviors is not a new list of moral behaviors. It is the triumphant power and transformation of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ—our Savior, our Lord, our Treasure. “[God] has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” ([2 Corinthians 3:6](#)). So transformation is a profound, blood-bought, Spirit-wrought change from the inside out.

The Freedom of Being Enslaved to Christ

This is why the Christian life—though it is utterly submitted ([Romans 8:7](#); [10:3](#)), even enslaved ([Romans 6:18](#), [22](#)), to the revealed will of God—is described in the New Testament as radically free. “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” ([2 Corinthians 3:17](#)). “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” ([Galatians 5:1](#)). You are free in Christ, because when you do from the inside what you love to do, you are free, if what you love to do is what you ought to do. **And that’s what transformation means: when you are transformed in Christ you love to do what you ought to do. That’s freedom.**

An Essential Means of Transformation: The Renewal of Your Mind

³ From “The Renewed Mind and How to Have It,” a sermon delivered on August 15, 2004 by John Piper. ©2013 Desiring God Foundation. Website: desiringGod.org. <http://bit.ly/jqW2Tu>

And in Romans 12:2 Paul now focuses on one essential means of transformation—“the renewal of your mind.” “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Oh, how crucial this is!

- If you long to break loose from conformity to the world,
- if you long to be transformed and new from the inside out,
- if you long to be free from mere duty-driven Christianity and do what you love to do because what you love to do is what you ought to do,
- if you long to offer up your body as a living sacrifice so that your whole life becomes a spiritual act of worship and displays the worth of Christ above the worth of the world,

then give yourself with all your might to pursuing this—the renewal of your mind.

Because the Bible says, this is the key to transformation. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

What’s wrong with the human mind? Why does our mind need renewing? And what does this renewal look like? And how can we pursue and enjoy this renewal?

The Problem with Our Minds

... In Ephesians 4:23 Paul uses a striking phrase to parallel Romans 12:2. He says, “Be renewed in the spirit of your minds.” Now what in the world is that? “The spirit of your mind.” It means at least this: the human mind is not a sophisticated computer managing data, which it then faithfully presents to the heart for appropriate emotional responses. The mind has a “spirit.” In other words, our mind has what we call a “mindset.” It doesn’t just have a view, it has a viewpoint. It doesn’t just have the power to perceive and detect; it also has a posture, a demeanor, a bearing, an attitude, a bent. “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”

The problem with our minds is not merely that we are finite and don’t have all the information. The problem is that our minds are fallen. They have a spirit, a bent, a mindset that is hostile to the absolute supremacy of God. Our minds are bent on not seeing God as infinitely more worthy of praise than we are, or the things we make or achieve.

...

The Double Work of the Holy Spirit

Now what is the double work that [the Spirit] must do to renew our minds so that all of life becomes worship? 2 Corinthians 3:18 sets the stage for the answer: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

What does the Spirit do to “transform” us into the image of the God-exalting Son of God? He enables us to “behold the glory of the Lord.” This is how the mind is renewed—by steadfastly gazing at the glories of Christ for what they really are.

But to enable us to do that, the Spirit must do a double work. He must work in two directions: from the outside in and from the inside out. He must work from the outside in by exposing the mind to Christ-exalting truth. That is, he must lead us to hear the gospel, to read the Bible, to study Christ-exalting writings of great, spiritual men, and to meditate on the perfections of Christ. This is exactly what our great enemy does not want us to do according to 2 Corinthians 4:4, “The god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” Because to see that for what it really is, Paul says, will renew the mind and transform the life and produce unending worship.

And the Spirit must work from the inside out, breaking the hard heart that blinds and corrupts the mind. The Spirit must work from the outside in, through Christ-exalting truth, and from the inside out, through truth-embracing humility. ...

What Then Shall We Do?

What then do we do in obedience to Romans 12:2, “Be transformed in the renewal of your mind”? We join the Holy Spirit in his precious and all-important work. We pursue Christ-exalting truth and we pray for truth-embracing humility.

Listen to rich expositions of the “gospel of the glory of Christ.” Read your Bible from cover to cover always in search of the revelation of the glory of Christ. Read and ponder the Bible-saturated, Christ-exalting writings of great, spiritual men and women. And form the habit of meditating on the perfections of Christ. And in it all pray, pray, pray that the Holy Spirit will renew your mind, that you may desire and approve the will of God, so that all of life will become worship to the glory of Christ.

ARTICLE V

WEAKER BROTHERS, PHARISEES, & SERVANTS BY GARRY FRIESEN⁴

THREE PRINCIPLES

Martin Luther began his treatise, "On the Freedom of a Christian Man," with two striking statements:

A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.'

One could hardly expect to find a more concise summary of the apostle's thought in Romans 14:1-15:13. The first sentence captures the essence of the believer's freedom in Christ, the relational ramifications of which are developed in Romans 14:1-12... [and] discussed in terms of three principles...

1. Learn to distinguish between matters of command and matters of freedom (14:14, 20).
2. On debatable issues, cultivate your own convictions (14:5).
3. Allow your brother the freedom to determine his own convictions even when they differ from yours (14:1-12).

Luther's second observation, that the "free" Christian is by vocation a "dutiful servant," captures the essence of Romans 14:13-15:13. These verses form the central passage for this chapter.

Ideally, if everyone in the Church followed Paul's directions as expressed in the first three principles of Romans 14, there would be no further problems. (And this book would be slightly shorter.) But the characters in the drama of real life tend to deviate from the script. So further instruction was given to guide our responses to those who are not inclined to leave well enough alone.

CARING FOR WEAKER BROTHERS

Such a person, failing to adopt God's perspective on different opinions in the area of freedom, invariably reacts in one of two ways... The Pharisees in the gospels provide the classic example of those who pressure others to conform to their traditions. But Paul was apparently more concerned for the welfare of those who are too easily influenced by the opinions of others. He called them "weaker brothers," and his message to the church was "Fragile: Handle With Care."

⁴ From "Weaker Brothers, Pharisees, and Servants," chapter 24 in *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* by Garry Friesen.

Principle 4: Let Your Liberty Be Limited, When Necessary, By Love.

Previously, in a letter to the church of Galatia, Paul had written:

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another (Galatians 5:13).

Sometimes, words like "love" and "serve" suffer from ambiguity. But Paul's instructions in Romans 14 move us out of the realm of the theoretical in a hurry. For it is one thing to graciously permit a brother to hold a different viewpoint; it is quite another to actually restrict my freedom because of his different viewpoint! On the face of it, such a requirement is unfair. But that is the nature of the love that is to characterize the Christian's walk (Romans 14:1). For [Christ-like] love is other-centered, and it is costly.

Let us not, however, jump to the rash conclusion that this principle negates Christian freedom for all intents and purposes. It does not. The words "when necessary" are an integral part of the fourth principle. They indicate that the limitation of one's freedom is not always required. But they also imply that something is more valuable than the enjoyment of personal liberty.

...

SOME ESSENTIAL DEFINITIONS

Weaker Brother - a Christian who, because of the weakness of his faith, knowledge, conscience, and will, can be influenced to sin against his conscience by the example of a differing stronger brother.

Stronger Brother - a Christian who, because of his understanding of Christian freedom and the strength of his conviction, exercises his liberty with full peace of conscience without being improperly influenced by the differing opinions of others.

Stumbling Block - an action taken by a stronger brother which, though it would ordinarily qualify as a permissible act of freedom, influences a weaker brother to sin against his conscience.

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COPING WITH PHARISEES

In all, there are three categories of differing Christians to whom we must properly relate. The believer who is correctly responding to biblical guidelines about decisions in debatable areas is a convinced differing brother. I am to accept him and refrain from judging him for his opinions, as he is to do for me. The other classification we have discussed is the weaker brother. I am to be alert for him, limiting the exercise of my freedom when my influence might tempt him to sin against his conscience.

There remains a third kind of differing believer that we encounter from time to time. He is one who does not accept me with my differing convictions; who puts pressure on others to conform to his point of view. In terms of stumbling blocks, he takes offense

when no offense is given. The cause of the offense is his own pride or unbelief, rather than improper behavior on the part of the other. He becomes upset, but is not "destroyed." He is not a weaker brother for he is strong in his convictions and will not blindly follow a contrary example. Nor is he a stronger brother, for he is not strong in understanding. He has not fully grasped the nature and reality of Christian freedom and responsibility, especially as it affects relationships with other Christians.

Though not given the same systematic treatment in Romans and I Corinthians as the weaker brother, this third character appears frequently on the pages of the New Testament. For purposes of terminology, we will employ the title of the classic example to designate this category of debater the--Pharisee.

By way of definition, the Pharisee is a professing believer with strong convictions who, because of his own pride, takes offense at those who resist his pressure to conform to his point of view. By his nature, the Pharisee is most in need of the correctives set forth in Romans 14:1-12. Of the three types of differing brothers, he is also the most difficult to get along with.

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As brothers and sisters in the family of God and fellow members of the Body of Christ, we all have responsibilities to one another. Most of the relational imperatives in the New Testament are constructive in nature. But some are corrective. When correction is called for, the straying brother will more readily respond with repentance when confronted by one who has earned the reputation of a servant through a consistent ministry of edification. As much as anyone in the church, the Pharisee needs the loving upbuilding of a caring family. ...

CHRIST'S SCHOOL FOR SERVANTS

When a human life is infused with the divine Presence, the quest for sovereignty is superseded by a compulsion to serve. In fact, the more the saint becomes like his Savior (which is the whole point of God's construction project), the more servant-minded he becomes. Which is why the apostles so frequently paused in the midst of their expositions to point to the Example. And Romans 15 is no exception.

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. (Romans 15:1-7, ESV)

Principle 5: Follow Christ as the Model and Motivator of Servanthood

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ONLY THE STRONG SERVE

The final point may be the most important: The ability, the enablement to serve others as Christ serves comes from God Himself..

That's why the fifth principle points to Jesus not only as the Model but also as the Motivator of our obedience. For all the instructions, even with the complete diagram, would only mock us if His enablement was lacking.

A significant part of the excitement that comes in understanding and then responding to these truths stems from the realization that God's construction projects are not limited to weaker brothers. As we follow Christ as the Model of servanthood, He will give the perseverance and encouragement that we need. Now that's motivation!

Decision Making When Christians Differ

Romans 14:1-15:13

1. Learn to distinguish between matters of command and matters of freedom (14:14, 20).
2. On debatable issues, cultivate your own convictions (14:5).
3. Allow your brother the freedom to determine his own convictions even when they differ from yours (14:1-12).
4. Let your liberty be limited, when necessary, by love (14:13-15:2).
5. Follow Christ as the model and motivator of servanthood (15:3-13).