

Exploring the Simple Gospel

by Major Ian Thomas

The simple gospel is not just about receiving Christ as Redeemer, but also about understanding God's purpose in creation and re-creation, and living a life that reflects God's nature.

Duration: 30:46

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1

Topics: "Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of godliness in the life of a believer. He explains that while physical exercise has some benefit, godliness is profitable in all aspects of life, both in the present and in the future. The speaker highlights the need for Christians to strive to be like God and Christ, as this is the purpose of their creation and redemption. He also addresses the misconception that the simple gospel only involves understanding and mental consent, emphasizing the need for believers to fully explore and understand the implications of the Christian life.

Transcript

A Christian life convention, and the purpose of these meetings, that we might explore together more fully, all the implications of the Christian life, how it really functions. Sometimes one hears folks say, I love the simple gospel. Well, I love the simple gospel too.

But I have a strong suspicion that sometimes when folks say that, what they really mean is this. Tell me again what I've already heard a thousand times, and explain to me again please what I already understand. And that means I shall be relieved from the onerous task ever of really having to think about what you're saying.

And that's what they mean by the simple gospel. So, in all probability, in these days we shall be talking about matters that aren't often talked about. Maybe I shall seek to explain to you things that haven't been explained before.

I shall tell you some things maybe that you haven't heard. Now don't get angry with me, and don't imagine that I'm not preaching to you the simple gospel. I am.

But we're simply explaining and exploring more fully into what is involved in the simple gospel. You see, it's one thing to register your decision for the Lord Jesus Christ, that initial act of faith that ushers you into

the company of redeemed sinners. But that's only the threshold of salvation.

That's only the door in. And that in itself would be hopelessly inadequate. True enough, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Redeemer will make you accepted in the beloved and fit for heaven.

But it may leave you pathetically unfit for earth on the way to heaven. And that isn't really what God's at. We need to understand God's purpose in creation, if we are fully to understand God's purpose in our re-creation.

And it'll only be as we come thus to understand God's purpose in our re-creation that we shall come to understand God's purpose in our redemption. Because, quite obviously, God's purpose in re-creation is to restore fallen man to that intelligent purpose for which he was created. This is constantly underlined by the apostle in his letters to the early churches.

This is the will of God, even your sanctification. That's God's will for you and for me, our sanctification. Writing in his epistle to the Thessalonians, the fifth and last chapter of his first epistle, Paul says, I pray God that he may sanctify you wholly, spirit and soul and body.

Faithful as he that calleth you, who will also do it? Sanctification isn't a blessing. It isn't some quaint, exotic experience. Sanctification simply means that you are set apart to be used specifically for that specific purpose which you were specifically created.

That's all that sanctification means. Intelligently applied to the intelligent purpose for which intelligently created. And God's will for you and me in our sanctification is that we might function as men, precisely as God intended us to function.

Therefore, I shall understand God's purpose in my redemption, which brings about that re-creation and restoration to my initial function, only in the measure that I understand God's purpose in my first creation. In other words, why did God make man? And the answer to that is given to us very simply in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, Genesis. Genesis in chapter 1 and verse 26.

And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Verse 27, so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him. That is why God made you and me.

He created man in his own likeness, in his own image. The measure, therefore, in which God's redemptive purpose is accomplished in you and me, may be determined solely by the measure in which once more we have been restored to the divine image. The measure of your salvation is not how firmly you believe the truth, how categorically you exercised your decision to receive Christ as your redeemer.

That isn't the measure of your salvation. The measure in which you have entered into your salvation is simply the measure in which other people in your presence become compellingly aware of God. Compellingly aware of Jesus Christ.

Only in the measure of your restoration to the image of the Lord Jesus, only in that measure, has redemption become effective experientially in terms of your redeemed humanity. And in the last analysis, that really is all that God is concerned about. Now when we're told that God created man in his own image, that of course doesn't mean that God looks like a man physically, or that man looks like God physically.

We don't know what God looks like, for one good reason. No man has seen God at any time. And Paul tells us in his epistle to Timothy that no man can see God.

Neither has nor can. God is invisible. But God created man so that the nature of God, the character of God, might be displayed, expressed in terms of man's behavior, man's character.

The image of God in man is an expression of the nature of God. And that's God's purpose in creation, and God's purpose in our recreation. God-likeness, we have abbreviated, and we call it godliness.

And by its abbreviation, sometimes we have camouflaged its real content, because we may be tempted to define godliness in a thousand different ways other than in God-likeness. Godliness may simply be conformity to certain patterns of behavior that are acceptable within the particular Christian community in which I live. That's godliness.

But we should get to its basic definition. Godliness is God-likeness. The pure expression of the nature of God in terms of my behavior and character.

And the preaching of the gospel is designed primarily to the make men godlike. Never persuade yourself that the preaching of the gospel is primarily concerned with getting people out of hell and into heaven. That's a baby concept to the preaching of the gospel.

It's gloriously true that the boy or the girl or the man or the woman who, repenting toward God, convicted by the Holy Spirit, and exercising faith in the Lord Jesus, will be redeemed from the punitive consequence of their sin, and will be lifted out of a state of spiritual death, restored to life, and added to that great community of redeemed sinners whose names are recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. But that being true, and glorious true, it is incidental. Purely incidental.

To the ultimate purpose of God in my redemption, and that is that the image may be recreated of the nature of God. And it's because, by and large, we have neglected this fact, that we have established our unholy haste to register decisions, and thereby simply multiply numerically the numbers of those whom we say have been saved. But you're not saved by the death of Christ, except in a very limited sense.

You're saved by the life of Christ. And the life of Christ is a continuing process. That is to be expressed in every area of your life, in character and behavior.

If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, that's the act of faith, that's the crisis that re-establishes peace between a guilty sinner and a holy God. If, when we were enemies, past tense, we were reconciled to God, past tense, by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, an accomplished fact, much more we shall be saved by his life. It's Jesus Christ in the present tense, being allowed to give expression to himself in terms of our behavior and character and conduct that constitutes, ultimately, God's purpose in salvation.

God-likeness. Now, in the first epistle of Paul to Timothy, the third chapter in the 16th verse, the apostle makes it abundantly clear to us that God-likeness or Godliness is a mystery. 1 Timothy and 3.16. Without controversy, great is the mystery of Godliness.

It's a hidden secret that remains a hidden secret to the unregenerate but becomes an open secret to the regenerate. The mystery of God-likeness. God manifest in the flesh.

The nature of God, the character God, the purity of God, the righteousness of God, clothed with humanity. This is a mystery. And it's a mystery in which we must exercise ourselves.

In the fourth chapter of the same epistle, Paul writes, refuse profane and old wives' fables and exercise thyself rather unto God-likeness. For bodily exercise profiteth a little, but God-likeness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. God-likeness is as relevant and profitable to now as to the will be.

It's to be the contemporary experience of every redeemed sinner that he is compellingly like God, like Christ. And this is a mystery. And it's into the nature of this mystery that we're going to explore in our evening sessions.

When our brother Bass wrote to me and asked me to conduct this series, he specifically asked me if we might explore along this particular theme. It's a theme that you will find also enunciated in printed form in the book. We shall uncover, of course, the whole ground, and also we shall maybe take little diversions here and there that are not covered in the printed page.

But we're going to explore, essentially, the basic principles of the Christian life which involves the mystery of being like God. And the fact that we recognize that God-likeness is a mystery, will at once wean us from many immature and baby concepts of God-likeness. And the first basic principle that we need to grasp about the mystery is this, that God-likeness or Godliness does not derive from our capacity to imitate God.

Now, that's absolutely fundamental. If God-likeness were the consequence of my capacity to imitate God, there would be no mystery about it. And yet, it's pathetically possible for us to have this purely objective view of God-likeness that simply puts God there and me here, and God-likeness the consequence of my attempt to be like the God who's there.

And the moment that's my concept of God-likeness, I detach myself from God. The moment Christ is there and I'm here and my Christ-likeness is my attempt to be like Christ, I detach myself from Christ. And my Christianity, being detached from Christ, is purely object and ceases to be subject.

It is no longer derived, it's an accomplishment. And the moment your Godliness or my Godliness or Christ-likeness is an accomplishment and not a derivation, it only produces self-righteousness. You see, when you imitate something or somebody, the object of your imitation makes no contribution to the act of imitation other than being the object of the act.

If a small boy at school in the classroom, while the teacher's back is turned to the amusement of his fellow classmates, imitates the teacher, what contribution does the teacher himself make to the act of imitation? None whatever other than being the object of his imitation. If the boy succeeds in making an accurate and amusing imitation of the master, there's only one person to be congratulated. Not the teacher, but the boy.

Because the act of imitation derives from his capacity to imitate, but not from the imitate-er. If God-likeness in me derives from my capacity to imitate God, there's only one person to be congratulated if I succeed. Not God.

Only myself. Sometimes you've been asked to put this test to your behavior as a Christian. A very simple question.

You've been asked to say to yourself, in a certain situation, what would Jesus Christ do in this situation? Have you ever been presented with that particular test of your behavior as a Christian? Well, it's a sincere suggestion, but it's fundamentally opposed to the basic principles of man's humanity and true God-likeness. Because the moment you ask yourself what would Jesus Christ do in this situation, immediately the very question presupposes the absence of Jesus Christ. What would he do were he here? And that strikes fundamentally, of course, at the very roots of your salvation.

Because the purpose of God in re-creation is to re-establish man in that relationship to God for which he was made in the first creation. And what's the criterion of being a Christian? That Christ is in you. Paul puts this examination at the end of his epistles.

Examine yourself whether you'll be in the faith. Prove your own self. Know you're not that Christ is in you.

Except you'll be reprobate. A counterfeit. That's what the word reprobate in that particular context means.

An imitation of the real thing. The criterion of being a regenerate, born again, redeemed sinner, is that the Lord Jesus Christ himself dwells within you. God-likeness does not derive from your capacity to imitate God.

God-likeness derives solely from God's capacity to reproduce himself in you. That's why, as we emphasized last evening, it takes God to be a man. Functionally.

And that's why it takes Christ to be a Christian. Functionally. Because it is Christ restored to the man that restores God to the man.

Christ in the Christian restores God to the man. And it's the life of God in the soul of man that produces the image of God's nature. God must be in man the origin of his own image and the source of all his own activity.

And it is precisely to this end that God created you and me. Now, this immediately involves on the part of man an attitude of total dependence. Because if the fulfillment of that function for which I was created, that is to be God-like, derives from God's capacity to reproduce himself in me, I need God.

You can see the inevitable consequence of the reverse where that not the case. Supposing just for a moment that God-likeness were the consequence of your capacity to imitate God. That immediately makes God impersonal to the act of imitation.

You can imitate a person who's not even aware of your act of imitation. They may have their back turned. And if God-likeness were the consequence of my capacity to imitate God, God becomes impersonal to my act of imitation, and that means my Godliness simply will be determined by the measure in which I succeed in my act of imitation.

But it also means this, that the God who I am imitating, being impersonal himself to my act of imitation, leaves me with the option to choose the God whom I like to imitate. The moment my God-likeness is my act of imitation of the God whom I have chosen to be the object of my act of imitation, I am no longer anchored to anything absolute. I may say I like this kind of God, and that's the kind of God I'm going to imitate, and my God-likeness would be the measure in which I succeed in being like the God I've chosen to be like.

And somebody else says, no, I don't like that kind of God, I like this kind of God, and I'm going to imitate that kind of God, and the measure of my God-likeness will be the measure in which I succeed in imitating the God I've chosen to imitate. See? Somebody else says, no, I don't agree with either of you. I don't think God's like that, and I don't think God's like this.

I've got my own philosophy of life, and I believe that to be, for me, God. So I'm going to submit myself to the certain patterns of behavior that are inherent in the particular philosophy that I am adopting, and that will be my God-likeness, the measure in which I myself succeed in conforming to the demands of my own philosophy. Therefore, every individual not being anchored to anything absolute, in that the God who is the object of our imitation is impersonal to the act of imitation, can choose his own God.

And of course, that's precisely the situation worldwide. But the moment I recognize that true God-likeness derives alone and exclusively from God's capacity to reproduce himself in a man, and I want to be God-like, I'm left with absolutely no alternative whatever but to find God, and then let God be God in me. And there is only one God.

And at once, therefore, I am anchored to the absoluteness of the only God there is, who has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. And I recognize at once that I am totally dependent. And some of us this morning recognize that this to be inherent in the doctrine of man.

A faith-love relationship that demands of me of my own free moral choice out of love to God, an attitude of total and utter dependence upon God that makes it imperative that in every situation I obey God. God becomes absolutely preeminent in every area of my life. It was from this attitude of dependence that allowed God to operate within man to reproduce his own image, that Adam fell.

For Satan's temptation to man was the possibility of being like God without God. You'll remember that in the third chapter of the book of Genesis, the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said you shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden.

But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said you shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest you die. And the serpent said unto the woman, You shall not surely die. God doth know that in the day that you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.

You'll be like God in the day that you repudiate God. And said the devil, God knows it. And that's why he wants to keep you in this attitude of total servility.

But the moment you are prepared to step outside this attitude of servility and begin to exercise an attitude of independence, then you will discover your own inherent capacity to be like God without God, and you will be morally and intellectually free. And this is where man fell into sin, when he embraced the prospect of being self-sufficient and self-adequate in complete moral and spiritual independence of God his Creator. That was the fall of man into sin.

And he embarked upon the unhappy experiment of being like God without God, which made him, of course, his own God. For instead of God in man being the origin of his own image, man began the experiment of being himself the origin of his own image. And yet this left man unsatisfied with a soul that was heart-sick and God-hungry.

And that is why man, even in his unregenerate condition, is incorrigibly religious, producing every form of idolatry, and producing in man very often a pattern of behavior that he feels would represent true God-likeness, and he calls it religion. And even Christianity itself can be reduced to this kind of formula, when, as we have already seen, we allow ourselves as Christians to be detached from Christ in the practice of our faith. The moment I persuade myself that I can practice Christianity with the best will in the world by virtue of my own inherent capacity to be like Christ or be like God, then I reduce the practice of my faith to a formula, but it doesn't have what it takes to deliver the goods.

So that if you'll turn with me to the second epistle of Paul to Timothy, you'll see what happens when Christianity is deprived of Christ, or Godliness is deprived of God, or spirituality is deprived of the Holy Spirit. When you're left with the form, the language, the creed, the philosophy, the dogma, the doctrine, but without the spiritual content that makes it a practical proposition. Chapter three of the second epistle of Paul to Timothy, this know also that in the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truth-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despised of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

And you might imagine that this is the description given by the apostle of some godless, irreligious society. But he goes on to say in the fifth verse, having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it, without what it takes to be godly, because God must be the origin of his own godliness. And this is a humanized form of religion that denies the necessity for the miraculous, that denies the necessity for a spiritual origin, denying the power of God, without what it takes.

That's why there are lots and lots of folk who give sincere mental consent to the moral demands of the Christian faith, but who fall down hopelessly in the practice of that Christian faith because they've never been introduced to that personal encounter with the Lord Jesus through his atoning death upon the cross that brings about spiritual regeneration or the restoration to them of what it takes to be God. Romans chapter 5 and verse 6. Why did God create man? His purpose in creation, that he might be like God in his own image. God's purpose in recreating fallen man, the restoration of man functionally, to the purpose for which he was created, to be like God.

In other words, to restore to man what it takes to be godly, the life of God, which man forfeited in Adam when he fell into sin. For when Adam fell into sin, he repudiated the basic principles of his own humanity. He ceased to act on the assumption that it took God in a man to enable a man to function as God created man to function.

He became independent and self-sufficient. So God's purpose in recreation was to restore to man what it takes to be godly. And if that was God's purpose in recreation, a restoration of man in his function for which he was first created, this will be God's purpose in redemption.

And that, of course, is precisely what is involved in the sixth verse of this fifth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. For when we were yet without strength, denying the power thereof, without what it takes, when we were without strength, in due time, Christ died for whom? For the ungodlike. Christ died for ungodlike people, because they were without strength.

It wasn't necessary that they didn't practice religion. It's been made abundantly clear to us in the third chapter of Paul's second epistle to Timothy that there were many who practiced religion, who had the form of godlikeness, but who were yet without strength. They didn't have what it takes to be godlike.

But in due time, Christ died for the ungodlike. Why do you think Christ died for the ungodlike? So that the ungodlike might become godlike. That's why Christ died for you.

That's why his precious blood was shed. He died upon the cross that by the death of God's Son, you, as a rebel, an enemy of God, ungodlike, might be reconciled to God. That being reconciled, you might receive by the restoration to you of the very life of God, and become godlike.

So that being reconciled to God by the death of his Son, from that moment, you might become continually and continuously saved by his life. So the Lord Jesus might once more have in you that office for which you were created. The opportunity to be in you the origin of his own image.

When we were yet without strength in due time, Christ died for the ungodlike. That there might be restored to the ungodlike what it takes to be godlike. 2 Peter and chapter 1. We considered this for a few moments last evening.

Simon Peter.

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