

Called to Lead:
Yourself and Others
January 26, 2021
Topic: Gospel-Centered

Vision for Called to Lead:

One person has sought to summarize the Christian life as: “living for God through Jesus Christ.”¹

- What will it take to live for God through Jesus Christ for your whole life?
- What will it take (to use Ezra’s language) to be led by God, to lead yourself, and to lead others towards God and for God through Jesus Christ?
- What is the shape of being led by Him, leading yourself, leading others?
- What are the most basic building block for this?
 - ***The first building block is Scripture. Without growing understand and love of Scripture, there are going to be limits on our joy and God using us.
 - ***The second building block is Gospel-centrality.

Main Point in terms of Leading: to our ongoing attention to Scripture, we need to add a focus or a lens to our faith that sees and acts on all things in life through the Gospel. In this we ought to strive more and more to apply the facets of God’s grace in Christ to our identity, relationships, leadership, work, and mission in the Christian life. Gospel centered is more than being biblical.

Main Point in terms of Gospel-Centrality: there is an infinite depth and practical application to the Gospel of Christ, so we must never stray far from it in thought or action but keep returning to it that we might apply its joyful peace to our souls and be led by its beautiful means to *its* goals.

Gospel-Centrality Terms

Gospel (εὐαγγέλιον: εὖ = good, + ἀγγελία = message): good news

Gospel of course refers to the message of faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Nearly all Christians would say that how we start the Christian life is by believing the gospel.

But what I want to get at is seeing the Gospel not as a content we believe once but a new reality that we never leave.

Law (νόμος: nomos). There is a nomian approach to the Christian life--a law-based approach. There is also an antinomian approach to the Christian life—an “against the law” or “a law rejecting approach.”

What we want to live is: Not nomian or antinomian but God’s covenant of grace and the law in its proper place.

¹ Petrus van Mastricht, *Prolegomena*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester, vol. 1, Theoretical-Practical Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 63.

These are all problems with at least partial, if not largely, gospel solutions:

1. What do you do when you are succeeding in the Christian life and so are becoming proud and possibly apathetic?
2. What do you do when you are realizing how far short you are falling in the Christian life and so are becoming depressed or self-condemning?
3. What do you do when you fail your own standard?
4. What do you do when a love one dies? When a non-Christian parent dies? (The chief way that I dealt with the death of my non-Christian father was with the Fatherhood of God through Adoption and with the wonder that God saves anyone by the gospel.)
5. *And many others! In one sense all our problems are either gospel problems or they have a gospel-problem component to them.

1. **Depth in the Gospel:** developing an awe and wonderment in the gospel (Isaiah 53:1: Who would have believed what we just heard? NET)
 - a. The gospel is a depth, so much so that it is able to bring together seeming contradictions and paradoxes. (Thomas Goodwin, *Glory of the Gospel*, 4.274-80²):
 - i. God loved us while we were still sinners, disobedient, and his enemies. Romans 5.8-10, Eph. 2.3-7.
 - ii. Coming to faith in Jesus Christ is nothing short of new birth (being born again). John 1.12-13, 3.3-15.
 - iii. God, who is Spirit, took on to have blood and then paid that blood to obtain the Church. Acts 20.28
 - iv. Christ, who wrote the law, became cursed by that very law so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith. Gal 3.13-14.
 - v. The Holy One who cannot suffer sin, became sin so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Cor. 5.21.
 - vi. We die (we are crucified with Christ) but we live (and it is no longer we who live but Christ lives in us) and we live a life now of faith being loved by Christ (the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.) Gal 2.20

² [T]he depths of [the gospel] are so great that it will always produce new knowledge; though you read and understand the same things again, yet your knowledge shall be always new. Why? Because 'it passes knowledge.' ... But when the depths of the gospel are unfolded to you, you may still search into them, and search further with new pleasure, and to a renewed understanding they are always new and fresh. ... Therefore, as the mercies of God are new every morning, so the thoughts of these mercies, they are to a holy heart precious, sweet, new every morning. And you shall find this, that as you grow up more in holiness, still the things you knew before will be new to you[.]. ... Now, my brethren, it is not only perceiving the depths of the gospel, but the holier one grows to be carried on to further depths, to be led along thus with continual new knowledge, there is nothing more pleasant; and yet this the gospel is, and all the depths of it. And then when you shall have depths of love added, a sea of love breaking in upon your hearts at every thought ... to fill one's will and affection, as the other filled one's understanding, this ought to fill the heart with unspeakable pleasure and joy and contentment in the view and contemplation of this great and high mystery. Now if we had holiness enough, and love enough, and faith enough, and grew in these, this would certainly be our case. Thomas Goodwin, 4.279-80. (Edited minimally for flow and to update language.)

2. One big problem in the Christian life is that it is quite possible to:

- a. Believe the gospel initially but then live a life that is based largely on law (volitional attention to commands).
 - i. Symptoms:
 1. For Identity: when I am doing well, following God, I feel great about my self; but when I mess up, I feel terrible and may I condemn myself.
 2. This can be a life of attention to God's law, or it can be a life of attention to *my* laws. Symptom: I may say to myself that I know God has forgiven me but I can't forgive myself. If that is the case I am setting my law above God's law; I'm too important and God is not important enough.
 - ii. Reality: I am not living in the gospel itself as God desires.
- b. Believe the gospel initially but then think that mere Bible knowledge is how people grow as Christians (cognitive Bible acquisition).
 - a. E.g. let's study all the details of the OT temple system or what is going to happen in the future (eschatology).
 - b. Reality: my mind may be full, but my heart is parched. But the gospel is for renewal and comfort of my mind, heart, desires, and actions.
- c. Believe the gospel initially but then think that the Gospel has made it so that it does not matter how I now live.
 - a. 1 Cor. 6.12: "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.
 - b. 1 Cor. 6.19-20. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
- d. But we are saying that we start with the gospel and we should never leave it! We grow by reflecting on and applying more and more of the gospel to our lives because the gospel has infinite depth for all our problems and God's design for our lives.

3. Aspects of Gospel Centrality: these flow out of the basics of believing in Christ death and resurrection upon my behalf:

- a. In the Gospel, Christ takes away our Shame and Guilt. He removes my shame and guilt and says live now in my honor and goodness. He can do this because he paid for my shame and guilt already on the cross.
 - a. Ps. 14.6: You would shame the plans of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge. Also, Ps. 71.1
 - b. Ps. 74.21: Let not the downtrodden turn back in shame; let the poor and needy praise your name.
 - c. Zech. 3.3-5: ³ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. ⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." ⁵ And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they

put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord was standing by.

1. Romans 10.11: For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."
 2. Heb. 12.1-2: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
 3. Others 1 John 2.28, Rev 3.18.
- b. Jesus as Our Hero, not so much my Example. We ought to look to Jesus much more as our Hero who won that victory for us rather than the example that we are to try to emulate. The word "leader" or "savior" in Acts 5.31 and the two Hebrews passage could be translated as "hero" or "champion," as in how David is the hero so his defeat of Goliath means all Israel is the winner. 1 Samuel 17.
- a. Acts 5.31: God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.
 - b. Heb 2.10: For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.
 - c. Heb 12.2: see above.
 - d. 1 Peter 3.14-18: But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.
- c. Receiving God's Grace is meant to change us. We will be changed over time if God has taken hold of us in His grace. We experience God's grace, and so we live with a new spiritually-born graciously to others. God creates this; it is not merely trying harder or following the law more closely. The law points in the right direction (because grace doesn't mean that truth is set aside), but the spiritually born change in us is from grace's work on us. As we reflect more on God's grace and feel the emotional power and good weight of it, we are spiritually enabled to live it out to others.
1. Parable of Unforgiving Servant: Matt. 18.23-35
 2. Forgiveness in Lord's Prayer: Matt. 6.12, 14-15
 3. So that we might walk in newness of life: Romans 6.1-4

- d. All the Scriptures have Christ present in them or as their focus because God is working out one plan of salvation in them.³
- a. From Gen 3.15 on (or if that is too subtle, Gen 12.1-3), God has been unfolding the gospel, we should read the OT as arrows pointing ahead (precursors, shadows and types) to Christ's work of redemption in his life, death and resurrection.
 - b. Heb 1.1-2: Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
 - c. Jn 5.39: ³⁹You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,
 - d. Lk 24.27: And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
 - e. Lk 24.44: ⁴⁴Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,
 - f. 1 Peter 1.10-11: ¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

³ And here it may be observed that the Work of Redemption is sometimes understood in a more limited sense for the purchase of salvation. For so the word strictly signifies a purchase of deliverance. And if we take the word in this restricted sense, the Work of Redemption was not so long a-doing but it was begun and finished with Christ's humiliation, or it was all wrought while Christ was upon earth. It was begun with Christ's incarnation and carried on through Christ's life and finished with his death, or the time of his remaining under the power of death which ended in his resurrection. And so we say that the day of Christ's resurrection is the day when Christ finished the work of our redemption, i.e. then the purchase was finished and the work itself and all that appertained to it was virtually done and finished but not actually.

But then sometimes the Work of Redemption is taken more largely, including all that God works or accomplishes tending to this end, not only the purchasing of redemption but also all God's works that were properly preparatory to the purchase, or as applying the purchase and accomplishing the success of it. So that the whole dispensation as it includes the preparation and the imputation and application and success of Christ's redemption is here called the Work of Redemption. All that Christ does in this great affair as mediator in any of his offices, either Prophet, Priest or King, either when he was in the world in his human [form], or before or since. And not only what Christ the mediator has done, but also what the Father and the Holy Ghost have done as united or confederated in this design of redeeming sinful men; or in one word, all that is wrought in execution of the eternal covenant of redemption. This is what I called the Work of Redemption in the doctrine, for 'tis all but one work, one design. The various dispensations and works that belong to it are but the several parts of one scheme. 'Tis but one design that is done to which all the offices of Christ do directly tend, and in which all the persons of the Trinity do conspire and all the various dispensations that belong to it are united, as the several wheels in one machine, to answer one end and produce one effect. Jonathan Edwards, History of the Work of Redemption, WJE 9.117.

- e. God works our salvation and we respond to him with obedience done in gratitude. Our salvation in the gospel of Christ is accomplished by the Trinity's work alone (monergism). We do not work with God in accomplishing our salvation (not synergism). We believe the gospel but God even gives us faith to do so. God does everything required to create the covenant with us, it is accomplished, and our part in the covenant is to respond to what he has done with faithful obedience. [Illustration: seeing our salvation both from God's side of the coin and our side of the coin, but preferencing God's side.].⁴
 - a. Another way to put this is the "active" righteousness and "passive" righteousness. Passive righteousness is what we receive from Christ; Christ did it and it flows to me apart from what I do. Now that I have a relationship with God because of Christ's passive righteousness, I seek to have an active righteousness by following His commands and seeking to please Him out of gratitude. But my active righteousness never adds to the passive righteousness that comes from Christ. (See Luther's Preface to Galatians)
 - b. Gen 15.17: When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land.
 - c. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.
- f. We seek to use the law rightly: The 3 uses of the law. The law does not accomplish or contribute to our salvation, but the Law does three things:
 - 1. The Law is a Curb: it restrains evil by fear of punishment and the call for discipline.
 - 1. 1 Tim. 1.8-11: that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners.
 - 2. The Law is a Mirror: it shows us our sin.
 - 1. Romans 7.7: Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."
 - 2. When the Law shows us our sin, we are to flee to God's mercy in Christ with confession.⁵
 - 3. The Law is a Guide: it shows believers how God wants them to live to please Him and His purposes.

⁴ "Afterwards, when Christ has thus been grasped by faith and I am dead to the Law, justified from sin, and delivered from death, the devil, and hell through Christ—then I do good works, love God, give thanks, and practice love toward my neighbor. But this love or the works that follow faith do not form or adorn my faith, but my faith forms and adorns love." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, 161.

⁵ In the precepts of the law, God is seen as the rewarder only of perfect righteousness (a righteousness of which all are destitute), and, on the other hand, as the stern avenger of wickedness. But in Christ his countenance beams forth full of grace and gentleness towards poor unworthy sinners. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.8.

1. Ps. 19.7: The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
 2. Ps. 119.105: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
- g. The Gospel should direct how we lead people.
- a. There is a true reality to “guilt” in the Christian life, in that when we are acting against God’s desires, we should feel the Holy Spirit putting pressure on our consciences—revealing to us our wrong. But gospel-centered leadership should not use guilt (*human* pressure on consciences) to motivate people. We are not the Holy Spirit and we cannot see things rightly enough either in terms of what is actually the right thing in the situation or what is happening in another person’s heart. “Guilt is for wimps;” in that it is easiest and quickest way to get people to respond but it will not work in the long-run. And it goes against the above on how we are trying to live gospel-centered lives. When we use guilt to motivate this has capacity to be “our law” that we are applying to people. We should rather do the harder work of thinking about how, in a certain situation, God’s grace leads us, disciplines us, shines a light on what our end goal is or should be.
 - b. We will see in Ezra 9 a non-guilt driven way to respond to great sin in the community. There may be times where a group or community is not living as it should, and the answer is that the community through the Bible and prayer needs for the Word and Spirit to convict them and lead them.
 - c. Especially see Keller’s paper on the Centrality of the Gospel in Resources for contrasts of legalistic and Gospel approaches.

Realities to which we must constantly return over our whole life:

1. There is a depth of God’s love in the Gospel that is limitless. We need to learn to warm our souls, comfort our hearts, calm our minds in the love of God.
 - a. OT use of *Hesed*
 - b. God’s Fatherly love
 - i. John 16.27: for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.
 - c. Christ’s Spousal love for the Church
 - i. Eph 5.31: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.
 - d. Spirit pouring God’s love into our hearts.
 - i. Romans 5.5: and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

- ii. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
- 2. There is a security in the Gospel that is a big, beautiful “backstop” of all of life. We are most securely held by God in Christ. This should become *one* aspect of healing our worry and desire for control. But this “backstop” comes from trust in Christ alone and not adding to Him.⁶
 - a. We are to hope and dream in Christ, to pursue God’s call and the interests he has given me, but the gospel says even if I were to lose the thing I’m currently most worried about (or even everything), I still have everything that matters and more. The latter is able to swallow up the grief, disappointment, shame, and loss of the former.
 - i. Matt 19.29: And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.
- 3. The grace disciplines us; the law disciplines us but rightly understood, the gospel does as well. We need to learn to let the good pressure (eu-pressure) of God’s grace (see Depth above) change our internal desires.
 - a. Titus 2.11-14. ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.
- 4. The Gospel has a goal for our sanctification and completion in faith. The benefits of the gospel start with forgiveness and the gift of righteousness in Christ, continue with removing (swallowing up) our guilt and shame, but they continues our whole life long in sanctification (becoming more and more like Christ in his holiness). It is God’s desire that we would cooperate with His intention here.
 - a. See Titus 2.11.14 above

How do we grow in the Gospel?

- 1. Cultivate a sense of amazement at how could all this salvation come to me?
 - a. Track down the gospel benefits in scripture (adoption, forgiveness, righteousness, love, acceptance, purpose, etc.) and find the ones that warm your heart the most and keep digging deeper into them.

⁶ But you set the Law and love aside until another place and time; and you direct your attention to the point at issue here, namely, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dies on the cross and bears my sin, the Law, death, the devil, and hell in His body. These enemies and unconquerable tyrants press in upon me and now create trouble for me; therefore I am anxious to be delivered from them, justified, and saved. Here I find neither Law nor work nor any love that can deliver me from them. Only Christ takes away the Law, kills my sin, destroys my death in His body, and in this way empties hell, judges the devil, crucifies him, and throws him down into hell. In other words, everything that once used to torment and oppress me Christ has set aside; He has disarmed it and made a public example of it, triumphing over it in Himself (Col. 2:14–15), so that it cannot dominate any longer but is compelled to serve me. Martin Luther, vol. 26, 160-61.

2. Cultivate a sense of how firmly God has hold of you in Christ, of how much the fact of your salvation is a finished deed that He has accomplished. (But do this without it leading to “he has me; I can do what I want.”)
3. Cultivate a greater sense of your desperate need for God to help you. Don’t fake it until you make it with God!
 - a. Confess your sins to Him with greater granularity. You will be help in this by growing in #2. Confess your weakness in specific areas, and ask for His spiritual abundance to work in you.
4. Cultivate a sense of God’s purposes in the world. What are the things that God cheers about most? What does he want the gospel to accomplish in the end? Ask God to stir your heart with what is most on His. (This doesn’t mean mission and purpose in the Christian life is very narrow—like saving souls is the only thing that matters. This might be part of a larger topic.) His mission is more multi-faceted, but it is *His* mission. Ask Christ to reveal or refine His purpose and mission in the world to you.
5. Know that even in the hardest times, all of the above is still your greatest resource and best path forward.

Moving Forward

1. Standing: believe in Jesus and do my own thing
2. Walking: believe in Jesus and seek to make Him happy. Start to give up your own laws and instead live by the gospel’s eu-laws instead.
3. Running: believe in Jesus and through the scriptures and prayer know that he is happy with you, and out of gratitude, love, and wonder live to Him and for Him, in the ways He has revealed and is leading you. Seek to find the Gospel’s comfort in the areas of your greatest sensitivity and need.
4. Marathon: Seek more to make the Gospel’s comfort a reality every day. Whether it is in worship, scripture reading, scripture study, prayer, cultivate the joyful weakness being supported by his tender strength of salvation accomplished and guaranteed. From that place serve the purposes He has put in front of you and what He is calling you to. (see Luther’s Preface to Galatians, last 3 paragraphs.)

Resources:

1. The Gospel as the third way compared to Religion or Irreligion (Keller):
<https://redeemercityocity.com/articles-stories/the-centrality-of-the-gospel>
2. The Gospel is personal salvation but it is more also, right? Does it address social sins too (new creation)? <https://www.acts29.com/tim-keller-explains-the-gospel/>
3. The Gospel and the Law
 - a. Luther, Preface to Galatians. The whole essay is worth your time but the final page is essential.

- i. Simplified:
<http://storage.cloversites.com/citychurch/documents/Luthers%20Preface%20to%20Galatians.pdf>
 - ii. Full version on the resource page of GH Web site.
- 4. The Gospel and Leadership: Heart of a Servant Leader, by C. John Miller
 - a. Sample on this page: <https://www.wtsbooks.com/products/heart-of-servant-leader-john-miller-9780875527154?variant=9996535889967>