



JESUS & THE GOSPEL FROM GOD'S WORD

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Centering on Jesus and the gospel is essential for God's people. However, just saying we center on Jesus and the gospel does not necessarily convey what we mean by this. Various images or ideas may come to mind when one says "Jesus" or uses the term "gospel." Scripture even says it is quite possible to distort the gospel or be led astray from pure-hearted devotion to Christ for another Jesus, another spirit, or another gospel (*Gal 1:6-7; 2 Cor 11:1-4*). We believe it is crucial to explicitly articulate what we mean by Jesus and the gospel from God's written Word. Below we do this using three excerpts from The Cape Town Confession of Faith to articulate what we mean. We retained the exact wording and non-American variant spelling in these excerpts from The Cape Town Confession of Faith, but we modified the paragraph numbering for ease of reading. Footnotes have been retained throughout so one can still look up biblical references cited.

The three excerpts below that express our understanding of Jesus, the gospel, and God's Word are entitled: We love God the Son; We love the gospel of God; and We love God's Word.

/// WE LOVE GOD THE SON

God commanded Israel to love the LORD God with exclusive loyalty. Likewise for us, loving the Lord Jesus Christ means that we steadfastly affirm that he alone is Saviour, Lord and God. The Bible teaches that Jesus performs the same sovereign actions as God alone. Christ is Creator of the universe, Ruler of history, Judge of all nations and Saviour of all who turn to God.¹ He shares the identity of God in the divine equality and unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just as God called Israel to love him in covenantal faith, obedience and servant-witness, we affirm our love for Jesus Christ by trusting in him, obeying him, and making him known.

We trust in Christ. We believe the testimony of the Gospels that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the one appointed and sent by God to fulfill the unique mission of Old Testament Israel, that is to bring the blessing of God's salvation to all nations, as God promised to Abraham.

- In Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, God took our human flesh and lived among us, fully God and fully human.
- In his ministry and miracles, Jesus announced and demonstrated the victory of the kingdom of God over evil and evil powers.

¹ John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:15-17; Psalm 110:1; Mark 14:61-64; Ephesians 1:20-23; Revelation 1:5; 3:14; 5:9-10; Romans 2:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:9-12; Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:30; Acts 4:12; 15:11; Romans 10:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 2:10; 5:9; 7:25; Revelation 7:10

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- In his death on the cross, Jesus took our sin upon himself in our place, bearing its full cost, penalty and shame, defeated death and the powers of evil, and accomplished the reconciliation and redemption of all creation.
- In his bodily resurrection, Jesus was vindicated and exalted by God, completed and demonstrated the full victory of the cross, and became the forerunner of redeemed humanity and restored creation.
- Since his ascension, Jesus is reigning as Lord over all history and creation.
- At his return, Jesus will execute God's judgment, destroy Satan, evil and death, and establish the universal reign of God.

We obey Christ. Jesus calls us to discipleship, to take up our cross and follow him in the path of self-denial, servanthood and obedience. 'If you love me, keep my commandments,' he said. 'Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things I say?' We are called to live as Christ lived and to love as Christ loved. To profess Christ while ignoring his commands is dangerous folly. Jesus warns us that many who claim his name with spectacular and miraculous ministries will find themselves disowned by him as evildoers.¹ We take heed to Christ's warning, for none of us is immune to such fearful danger.

We proclaim Christ. In Christ alone God has fully and finally revealed himself, and through Christ alone God has achieved salvation for the world. We therefore kneel as disciples at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth and say to him with Peter, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,' and with Thomas, 'My Lord and my God.' Though we have not seen him, we love him. And we rejoice with hope as we long for the day of his return when we shall see him as he is. Until that day we join Peter and John in proclaiming that 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.'²

We commit ourselves afresh to bear witness to Jesus Christ and all his teaching, in all the world, knowing that we can bear such witness only if we are living in obedience to his teaching ourselves.

¹ Luke 6:46; 1 John 2:3-6; Matthew 7:21-23

² Matthew 16:16; John 20:28; 1 Peter 1:8; 1 John 3:1-3; Acts 4:12

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/// WE LOVE THE GOSPEL OF GOD

As disciples of Jesus, we are gospel people. The core of our identity is our passion for the biblical good news of the saving work of God through Jesus Christ. We are united by our experience of the grace of God in the gospel and by our motivation to make that gospel of grace known to the ends of the earth by every possible means.

We love the good news in a world of bad news. The gospel addresses the dire effects of human sin, failure and need. Human beings rebelled against God, rejected God's authority and disobeyed God's Word. In this sinful state, we are alienated from God, from one another and from the created order. Sin deserves God's condemnation. Those who refuse to repent and 'do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will be punished with eternal destruction and shut out from the presence of God.'¹ The effects of sin and the power of evil have corrupted every dimension of human personhood (spiritual, physical, intellectual and relational). They have permeated cultural, economic, social, political and religious life through all cultures and all generations of history. They have caused incalculable misery to the human race and damage to God's creation. Against this bleak background, the biblical gospel is indeed very good news.

We love the story the gospel tells. The gospel announces as good news the historical events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. As the son of David, the promised Messiah King, Jesus is the one through whom alone God established his kingdom and acted for the salvation of the world, enabling all nations on earth to be blessed, as he promised Abraham. Paul defines the gospel in stating that 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, according the scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve.' The gospel declares that, on the cross of Christ, God took upon himself, in the person of his Son and in our place, the judgment our sin deserves. In the same great saving act, completed, vindicated and declared through the resurrection, God won the decisive victory over Satan, death and all evil powers, liberated us from their power and fear, and ensured their eventual destruction. God accomplished the reconciliation of believers with himself and with one another across all boundaries and enmities. God also accomplished his purpose of the ultimate reconciliation of all creation, and in the bodily resurrection of Jesus has given us the first fruits of the new creation. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.'² How we love the gospel story!

¹ Genesis 3; 2 Thessalonians 1:9

² Mark 1:1, 14-15; Romans 1:1-4; Romans 4; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5; 1 Peter 2:24; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; Ephesians 2:14-18; Colossians 1:20; 2 Corinthians 5:19

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We love the assurance the gospel brings. Solely through trusting in Christ alone, we are united with Christ through the Holy Spirit and are counted righteous in Christ before God. Being justified by faith we have peace with God and no longer face condemnation. We receive the forgiveness of our sins. We are born again into a living hope by sharing Christ's risen life. We are adopted as fellow heirs with Christ. We become citizens of God's covenant people, members of God's family and the place of God's dwelling. So by trusting in Christ, we have full assurance of salvation and eternal life, for our salvation ultimately depends, not on ourselves, but on the work of Christ and the promise of God. 'Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'¹ How we love the gospel's promise!

We love the transformation the gospel produces. The gospel is God's life-transforming power at work in the world. 'It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.'² Faith alone is the means by which the blessings and assurance of the gospel are received. Saving faith however never remains alone, but necessarily shows itself in obedience. Christian obedience is 'faith expressing itself through love.'³ We are not saved by good works, but having been saved by grace alone we are 'created in Christ Jesus to do good works.'⁴ 'Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.'⁵ Paul saw the ethical transformation that the gospel produces as the work of God's grace – grace which achieved our salvation at Christ's first coming, and grace that teaches us to live ethically in the light of his second coming.⁶ For Paul, 'obeying the gospel' meant both trusting in grace, and then being taught by grace.⁷ Paul's missional goal was to bring about 'the obedience of faith' among all nations.⁸ This strongly covenantal language recalls Abraham. Abraham believed God's promise, which was credited to him as righteousness, and then obeyed God's command in demonstration of his faith. 'By faith Abraham...obeyed.'⁹ Repentance and faith in Jesus Christ are the first acts of obedience the gospel calls for; ongoing obedience to God's commands is the way of life that gospel faith enables, through the sanctifying Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Obedience is thus the living proof of saving faith and the living fruit of it. Obedience is also the test of our love for Jesus. 'Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.'¹¹ 'We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.'¹² How we love the gospel's power!

¹ Romans 4; Philippians 3:1-11; Romans 5:1-2; 8:1-4; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 Peter 1:3; Galatians 3:26 – 4:7; Ephesians 2:19-22; John 20:30-31; 1 John 5:12-13; Romans 8:31-39

² Romans 1:16

³ Galatians 5:6

⁴ Ephesians 2:10

⁵ James 2:17

⁶ Titus 2:11-14

⁷ Romans 15:18-19; 16:19; 2 Corinthians 9:13

⁸ Romans 1:5; 16:26

⁹ Genesis 15:6; Galatians 6:6-9; Hebrews 11:8; Genesis 22:15-18; James 2:20-24

¹⁰ Romans 8:4

¹¹ John 14:21

¹² 1 John 2:3

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/// WE LOVE GOD'S WORD

We love God's Word in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, echoing the joyful delight of the Psalmist in the Torah, 'I love your commands more than gold... Oh how I love your law.' We receive the whole Bible as the Word of God, inspired by God's Spirit, spoken and written through human authors. We submit to it as supremely and uniquely authoritative, governing our belief and our behaviour. We testify to the power of God's Word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. We affirm that the Bible is the final written Word of God, not surpassed by any further revelation, but we also rejoice that the Holy Spirit illumines the minds of God's people so that the Bible continues to speak God's truth in fresh ways to people in every culture.¹

The Person the Bible reveals. We love the Bible as a bride loves her husband's letters, not for the paper they are, but for the person who speaks through them. The Bible gives us God's own revelation of his identity, character, purposes and actions. It is the primary witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. In reading it, we encounter him through his Spirit with great joy. Our love for the Bible is an expression of our love for God.

The story the Bible tells. The Bible tells the universal story of creation, fall, redemption in history, and new creation. This overarching narrative provides our coherent biblical worldview and shapes our theology. At the center of this story are the climactic saving events of the cross and resurrection of Christ which constitute the heart of the gospel. It is this story (in the Old and New Testaments) that tells us who we are, what we are here for, and where we are going. This story of God's mission defines our identity, drives our mission, and assures us the ending is in God's hands. This story must shape the memory and hope of God's people and govern the content of their evangelistic witness, as it is passed on from generation to generation. We must make the Bible known by all means possible, for its message is for all people on earth. We recommit ourselves, therefore, to the ongoing task of translating, disseminating and teaching the scriptures in every culture and language, including those that are predominantly oral or non-literary.

The truth the Bible teaches. The whole Bible teaches us the whole counsel of God, the truth that God intends us to know. We submit to it as true and trustworthy in all it affirms, for it is the Word of the God who cannot lie and will not fail. It is clear and sufficient in revealing the way of salvation. It is the foundation for exploring and understanding all dimensions of God's truth. We live however, in a world full of lies and rejection of the truth. Many cultures display a dominant relativism that denies that any absolute truth exists or can be known. If we love the Bible, then we must rise to the defence of its truth claims. We must find fresh ways to articulate biblical authority in all cultures. We commit ourselves again to strive to defend the truth of God's revelation as part of our labour of love for God's Word.

¹ Psalm 119:47, 97; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21

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The life the Bible requires. 'The Word is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it.' Jesus and James call us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only.¹ The Bible portrays a quality of life that should mark the believer and the community of believers. From Abraham, through Moses, the Psalmists, prophets and wisdom of Israel, and from Jesus and the apostles, we learn that such a biblical lifestyle includes justice, compassion, humility, integrity, truthfulness, sexual chastity, generosity, kindness, self-denial, hospitality, peacemaking, non-retaliation, doing good, forgiveness, joy, contentment and love – all combined in lives of worship, praise and faithfulness to God.

We confess that we easily claim to love the Bible without loving the life it teaches – the life of costly practical obedience to God through Christ. Yet 'nothing commends the gospel more eloquently than a transformed life, and nothing brings it into disrepute so much as personal inconsistency. We are charged to behave in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ and even to 'adorn' it, enhancing its beauty by holy lives.'² For the sake of the gospel of Christ, therefore, we recommit ourselves to prove our love for God's Word by believing and obeying it. There is no biblical mission without biblical living.

CONCLUSION

Every planting network and church faces unique challenges in their generation from individuals, culture, and unseen forces that work to undermine loyalty to King Jesus, gospel centrality, biblical fidelity, and sound theology. We are grateful for those from the historic and global church who are examples of faithfulness. We humbly commit ourselves, here and now, to center on Jesus and the gospel revealed in God's Word. We invite those who partner with us to do so too. We must be strong and courageous and stay true to our risen King as we pursue his mission, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God.

¹ Deuteronomy 30:14; Matthew 7:21-27; Luke 6:46; James 1:22-24

² The Manila Manifesto Section 7; Titus 2:9-10