



Week 1

News Worth Living For

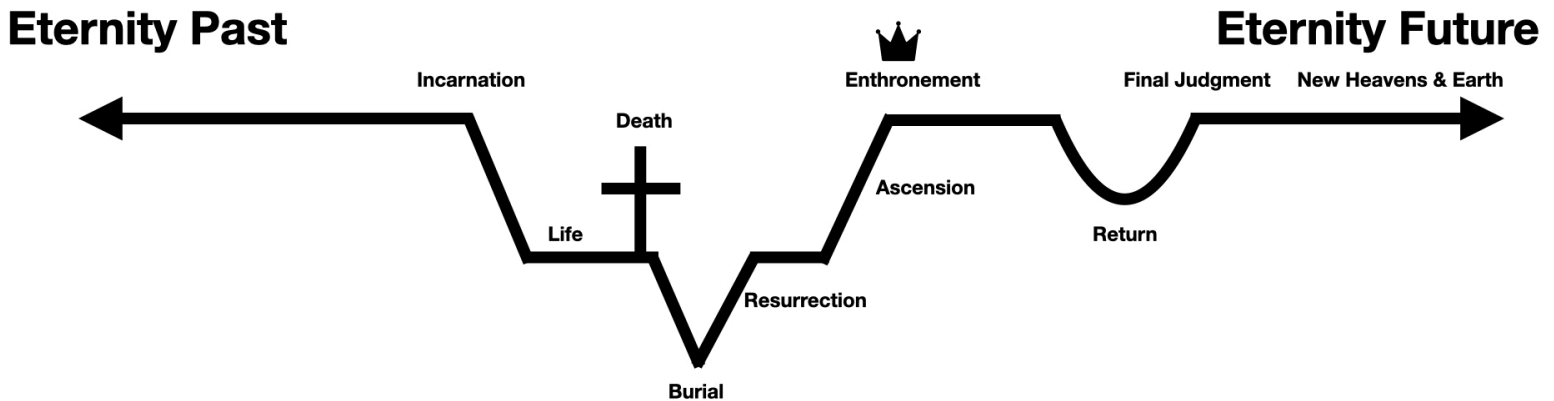
What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is the core message at the heart of Christianity, encapsulating the good news about Jesus Christ and His mission. It declares that through Jesus—God incarnate who lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again from the dead—humanity can be reconciled to God. This reconciliation is offered as a free gift of grace, requiring only faith in Jesus for salvation. The Gospel promises forgiveness of sins, a transformed life here and now through the Holy Spirit, and the hope of eternal life with God. It calls individuals to repentance, faith in Christ, and a life of discipleship, reflecting the love, truth, and holiness of Jesus in the world as they grow in his likeness.

What does the Gospel change in the life of a follower of Jesus?

Many passages in the New Testament explicitly describe the implications of the Gospel in the life of disciples of Jesus. Some passages talk about the work of Christ that he accomplished for us. Other passages emphasize that the Gospel also sets a pattern of life for us to “live into.” These passages demonstrate that the Gospel was not simply a declaration of something Jesus has done for us, but also something God desires to do in us. As the first generation of disciples thought about the work of Jesus in the Gospel, they saw their lives as a continuation of that work. To put it more simply, the first disciples didn’t just focus on being saved FROM something, they saw the Gospel as being saved TO something. After placing our faith in Jesus as the King of kings, a “believer/convert/Christian/follower/disciple” is then enlisted into a life that embodies the values of his kingdom.

The Gospel of Jesus



Exploring how the Gospel is news that is worth living for:

The graphic above provides a visual display of the “good news” about the work of Christ in redeeming his people and establishing his kingdom. As you read the passages below, take time to reflect on the way that elements of the Gospel are applied to various aspects of Christian living. Notice the ways that the early Christians applied the Gospel to their lives. Answer the questions after each scripture. Use a print Bible rather than a phone and take your time with each passage. You may choose to break up the scriptures for meditation throughout the week by answering the questions for just a few a day. Or you may decide to do it all in one sitting. The choice is yours.

Example:

Romans 6:4-5 - "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

Death, burial, and resurrection

Name which aspect of Christian living is being shaped by the Gospel.

The context tells us that this is being used to encourage us to battle against sin.

How does the highlighted aspect of the work of Jesus bring instruction for how to live as a disciple of Jesus?

The same victory that Jesus had in defeating the power of sin on the cross through his death and resurrection is the same victory we can enjoy as those who are battling sin.

Day 1

Romans 8:17 - "and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

Name which aspect of Christian living is being shaped by the Gospel.

How does the highlighted aspect of the work of Jesus bring instruction for how to live as a disciple of Jesus?

Romans 14:8-9 - "For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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Romans 15:1-3 - "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.'"

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

Name which aspect of Christian living is being shaped by the Gospel.

How does the highlighted aspect of the work of Jesus bring instruction for how to live as a disciple of Jesus?

1 Corinthians 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, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

Name which aspect of Christian living is being shaped by the Gospel.

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Responsive Prayer

Take a moment to write a prayer in response to what you have read. In your prayer, give thanks for what Christ has done, and then ask the Holy Spirit to teach you how to embody all that you see Christ doing in the Gospel.

Day 2

1 Corinthians 8:11-12 - "And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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1 Corinthians 15:19-22 - "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

Name which aspect of Christian living is being shaped by the Gospel.

How does the highlighted aspect of the work of Jesus bring instruction for how to live as a disciple of Jesus?

2 Corinthians 1:5 - "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

Name which aspect of Christian living is being shaped by the Gospel.

How does the highlighted aspect of the work of Jesus bring instruction for how to live as a disciple of Jesus?

2 Corinthians 2:14-15 - "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we

are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,"

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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2 Corinthians 4:10-11 - "Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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Responsive Prayer

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Day 3

2 Corinthians 4:14 - "knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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2 Corinthians 8:9 - "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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Galatians 2:20 - "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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Ephesians 4:32-5:2 - "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

Name which aspect of Christian living is being shaped by the Gospel.

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Philippians 2:5-8 - "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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Responsive Prayer

Take a moment to write a prayer in response to what you have read. In your prayer, give thanks for what Christ has done, and then ask the Holy Spirit to teach you how to embody all that you see Christ doing in the Gospel.

Day 4

Philippians 3:10-11 - "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

Name which aspect of Christian living is being shaped by the Gospel.

How does the highlighted aspect of the work of Jesus bring instruction for how to live as a disciple of Jesus?

Colossians 3:13 - "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

Name which aspect of Christian living is being shaped by the Gospel.

How does the highlighted aspect of the work of Jesus bring instruction for how to live as a disciple of Jesus?

1 Thessalonians 1:6-7 "You became imitators of us and of the Lord; for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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How does the highlighted aspect of the work of Jesus bring instruction for how to live as a disciple of Jesus?

2 Timothy 2:11-13 - "The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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Hebrews

Hebrews 12:1-2 - "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

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Responsive Prayer

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Day 5

1 Peter 2:21 - "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

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1 Peter 4:1-2 - "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."

Name which aspect of the work of Jesus is being used as instruction for Christians and write it below. (Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Enthronement, Return)

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1 John 3:16 - "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."

- This verse directly links the understanding of love to Jesus' sacrificial death, setting it as a standard for how believers should love one another.

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Week 2

News Worth Dying For

The Gospel stands as the beacon that guides our steps, the truth that shapes our lives, and the treasure that is worth more than life itself. But in a world brimming with distractions and alternate truths, the pressing question remains: Why is the gospel worth giving your life for? This is not a question of mere intellectual curiosity but one of existential significance. It touches the very core of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This resource invites you to meditate on, wrestle with, understand, and ultimately embrace the staggering worth of the gospel. This devotion is not just another study—it's a heart-stirring, faith-deepening exploration designed to help you see that if the Gospel is true, it is worth living and even dying for. This devotion is your invitation to explore the depth of the gospel's value, allowing it to penetrate your heart, challenge your assumptions, and change your life.

Why Wrestle With This Issue?

Deepened Conviction: Wrestling with the reality and implications of the gospel solidifies your conviction, making your faith not just inherited but truly owned.

Increased Faith: Understanding the depth of what Jesus has done for us fuels our faith, moving us from mere acknowledgment to a place where the gospel becomes the foundation of our lives.

Enhanced Mission: Grasping the worth of the gospel compels us to share it with others. It becomes not just a duty but a joy and the very reason for our being.

Transformative Imitation: As we grow in understanding the gospel's value, we naturally seek to imitate Jesus more closely, aligning our lives with His teachings and character.

Day 1

The Gospel: The Importance According To Jesus

"And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.""

Mark 8:34-38

In this passage, Jesus makes clear his valuation of the Gospel. From Christ's perspective, the Gospel is so precious that it is worth even losing your life over. This teaching is a central part of being a disciple of Jesus. Every person must grow in their understanding of what the Gospel is and how we are to live in response to it. There is a way to live that finds life even if you lose it. There is also a way to live that loses your life even though you sought to save it.

In Mark 8, the Gospel is presented not merely as a set of doctrinal beliefs but as a transformative way of living that demands a radical reorientation of one's life. Jesus calls His followers to a life characterized by self-denial, bearing one's cross, and following Him. This indicates that discipleship involves personal, obedient actions, in response to Jesus and in response to the message about Jesus.

This call underscores the profound truth that the Gospel is indeed worth dying for. This is a conviction that permeates the narrative and the lives of early Christians. This idea is abundantly present in most of the New Testament books. Without controversy, the early church took these words of Jesus literally and acted upon them. The first generations of disciples often considered it an honor to suffer for name of Jesus and the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus said to lose one's life for his sake and the sake of the Gospel is paradoxically to save it. However, Jesus also warns of the severe cost of rejecting this call. He also taught that to gain the world but forfeit one's soul represents the ultimate tragedy. Furthermore, Jesus highlights the eternal consequences of being ashamed of Him and His words; such shame will be reciprocated at the final judgment. Through these teachings in Mark 8, Jesus lays bare the stakes involved in following Him. To follow Jesus will be a path marked by sacrifice and challenge, yet it is loaded with eternal significance and reward.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What three requirements does Jesus say must be met if anyone wants to come after him?

2. What reaction do these requirements of Jesus provoke in your heart and why?

3. In what ways are you tempted to prioritize or value other things more than Jesus and the message about him?

4. In what ways do you see God growing your reverence for Jesus and the message about him more?

Responsive Prayer:

Write a prayer responding to how you answered the questions above.

Day 2

The Gospel: A Prize Worth Suffering For

“...and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” Acts 5:40-42

Throughout the book of Acts, the apostles encounter persecution for the name and the cause of Christ. Because they are heralds of the Gospel, they are at odds with the Jewish culture and eventually the Roman empire. To proclaim Jesus as the eternal king of an eternal kingdom that will outlast all others puts you in a precarious position with the state. Earlier in the book of Acts we read that they are arrested and brought before the very same council that had Jesus crucified. When questioned about a miracle that God had done through them in the temple, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said, *“Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:8–12.*

After being released, they gathered with their friends and immediately began praying for boldness to speak the Gospel even more. Only one chapter later, they are arrested again. (Acts 5:17-21) After being placed in prison, they are miraculously released by an angel who opens the prison doors for them and sets them free. So what did they do? They went right back to the temple and began preaching the Gospel to anyone and everyone. They are then arrested now for the third time. This time they are threatened, physically beaten, and told not to speak in the name of Jesus. What did they do? *“Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”* As soon as they were released, they went right back out and began preaching the Gospel again.

The apostles didn't like suffering more than anyone else. They are not hoping for legal troubles and a beating. However, they had been given a value proposition that made them give more weight to the Gospel than their comfort. For the apostles, knowing Christ and sharing the message about his authority to redeem the world from sin, death, and the devil was the greatest gift from God. They were willing to suffer because knowing Christ, proclaiming the Gospel, and being united with him was their greatest treasure.

Consider the words of some Christians who did give their lives for the sake of the Gospel:

William Tyndale, who was tied to a stake, strangled, and burned for translating the Bible into the common language said: "Christ is with us until the world's end. Let his little flock be bold therefore."

The murdered missionary Jim Elliot famously said: "He is no fool who gives away what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who was executed by the Nazis for his defiance against Hitler said: "*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.*"

Western Christians have lived without much suffering and persecution, we have been inclined to reinterpret or spiritualize Christ's call to give our lives for the sake of the Gospel. While there are many ways to "spiritualize" the truth that the Gospel is worth dying for, Christians throughout history have taken it literally and lost their lives for the sake of it.

Questions for Reflection:

The apostles viewed the Gospel and their relationship with Christ as treasures worth suffering for, even to the extent of physical harm and legal troubles. How does this comparison influence your willingness to face discomfort or opposition for the sake of sharing Christ's message?

William Tyndale, Jim Elliot, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer are mentioned as individuals who literally interpreted and lived out Christ's call to sacrifice, even unto death. What do you find challenging and what do you find inspiring in their examples? Why?

What steps can you take to move from merely intellectual or spiritual acknowledgment of Christ's call to a more concrete, lived-out expression of faith, even if it means facing opposition or misunderstanding in your own context?

Responsive Prayer:

Write a prayer responding to how you answered the questions above.

Day 3

The Gospel: Valued in the Example of Paul

Scattered throughout the writings of Paul in the New Testament, are references to the persecution he would suffer throughout his life for the sake of the Gospel. Take a moment to consider how Paul thought about his suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

Paul told the Ephesian elders that he was headed to Jerusalem and he knew that suffering would result.

“22 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:22–24)

Paul told the Corinthians that his life and the lives of the apostles feel like being sent to the gladiatorial arena.

“9 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. 11 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, 12 and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; 13 when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.” (1 Cor 4:9–13)

Paul listed some of his sufferings in his second epistle to the church at Corinth.

“Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?” (2 Cor 11:23–29)

Paul spoke about the reason for his suffering to the church at Colossae.

“24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known...” (Col 1:24–25)

In reference to the scars on his body from being whipped and beaten so many times Paul told the Galatians:

“17b... for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” (Gal 6:17)

Paul told the Philippian church that his suffering was being used for the whole church.

"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. [...] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have." (Philippians 1:12-14, 29-30)

In the last written words of Paul, he took the opportunity to speak these truths to his friend and co-laborer in the gospel, Timothy.

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me." (2 Timothy 1:8-12)

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."(2 Timothy 2:8-10)

"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Paul saw his life as a worshipful offering unto God. He compares the spilling of his blood in death to the libation offering in the temple where wine would be spilled on the altar to God. Suffering for the sake of the Gospel is a normal part of the Christian life. Our obedience cannot be determined by how painful it will be to obey. Paul knew this truth and lived accordingly.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Considering the immense value Paul and the early Christians placed on the Gospel, to the extent of enduring suffering and persecution, reflect on your personal experience with the Gospel. How does the Gospel shape your priorities, choices, and the sacrifices you are willing to make?

2. How does the example of Paul's life and the early Christians, what do you think the cost of discipleship entails for you in the 21st century?

3. Paul's life demonstrates a radical transformation from persecutor to apostle, committed to spreading the Gospel despite numerous hardships. This transformation was not just about a change in beliefs but was evident in every aspect of his life and actions. Considering your current lifestyle, profession, and relationships, in what ways is the transformative power of the Gospel evident?

Responsive Prayer:

Write a prayer responding to how you answered the questions above.

Day 4

The Gospel: Requires Death Before Physical Death

Read each section and respond to the questions below.

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:1-13

What attitudes in us need to die to fulfill Paul’s call to be like-minded with Christ?

What attitudes must we bring to life to fulfill Paul’s call to be like-minded?

What encouragement does Paul offer from this passage to help us make these choices?

What do you hear God saying and what action will you take to do something about it?

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:1-4

What kind of death does Paul tell the Roman Christians to embrace, based upon the death of Jesus?

What attitudes and actions must be taken to embrace the kind of death that is described in these scriptures?

What are the implications of living a resurrection life now, in this present world, before the fullness of God's kingdom is realized at the return of Christ?

“³⁰ Why are we in danger every hour? ³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! ³² What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” 1 Cor 15:30–32.

In the context of the entire chapter, Paul argues that the resurrection of Jesus changes everything and is essential as motivation to live for more than this life. As Paul describes his life of self-denial in light of the resurrection of Jesus, how frequently does he encounter this experience?

Would Paul's argument about facing danger and death make sense without the resurrection? Why or why not?

How does the hope of the resurrection motivate believers to endure hardship, self-denial, and danger?

Responsive Prayer:

Write a prayer responding to how you answered the questions above.

Day 5

The Gospel: The Life We Find When We Lose Our Lives

“4...though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” Phil 3:4–17.

Paul speaks of his impressive credentials and past life as "loss" compared to knowing Christ. What are some achievements or aspects of your identity that you might need to reconsider in light of your relationship with Jesus?

Paul lists what he gains in exchange for counting all things as a loss for the sake of Christ. What has he discovered to be of more worth than the things he has lost?

Paul said he gained a righteousness that is not his own. It didn't come through following the Old Testament laws, rather it is a righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus. What are the differences between finding righteousness through our own efforts and that which "depends on faith"? What makes it better to have righteousness by faith?

Paul desires to become like Jesus in His death and to share in His sufferings. How can suffering and challenges deepen your fellowship with Christ and transform you into His likeness?

Paul talks about forgetting the past and pressing on towards the future. What past achievements or failures might you need to let go of to fully embrace what God has for you now and in the future?

In what ways does Philippians 2:12-16 bring encouragement to you?

In what ways does Philippians 2:12-16 bring conviction to you?

Paul urges those who are mature to think in this way. What marks spiritual maturity according to this passage, and how does this perspective challenge or affirm your current spiritual state?

Paul encourages the Philippians to imitate him and keep their eyes on those who live according to the example set by the apostles. Who are the examples of faith in your life, and how do they inspire you to live out your faith?

What is God saying to you through these passages and what are you going to do about it?

Responsive Prayer:

Take a moment to write a prayer in response to what you have read and studied this week. Take note of the ways the Holy Spirit has engaged your heart and mind to stir you to action.

Encouragement To Consider:

We all struggle and have the same or similar struggles! No one has “arrived” on this side of eternity. So please reach out to a mature Christian friend, mentor, or Heritage’s pastoral staff to walk out these tensions with you. If you are struggling to find Christ’s victory in your life, you may need the encouragement God offers through the body of Christ. There truly is freedom, peace, hope, and perfect love found in Christ. You are not alone in your journey and you are loved!



Week 3

News Worth Defending

As believers entrusted with the precious truth of the Gospel, we are called not only to live out its transformative power in our lives but also to stand as vigilant guardians of its purity and potency. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the bedrock of our faith, encapsulates the profound narrative of God's redeeming love for humanity, a message so significant and life-changing that it compels us to both share and safeguard it with unwavering commitment.

We live in an era where the Gospel is frequently contested and the sacredness of the Gospel message is challenged by cultural relativism and philosophical skepticism. The urgency for Christians to articulate, defend, and propagate the Gospel has never been more critical. The Apostle Peter exhorts us in 1 Peter 3:15, "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." This scriptural mandate reminds us of the importance of understanding the Gospel and being adept at defending it. We need to be equipped to counter objections, and ready to share the reason for our hope in Christ.

This resource is designed to deepen our collective understanding of the scriptural foundations that underscore the Gospel's inestimable value and the reasons it is indeed news worth defending. Through this resource, we will explore the robust scriptural arguments that reinforce our confidence in the Gospel as the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16) and illuminate the pathways through which we can effectively articulate and champion the truth of God's word in a world yearning for hope.

As disciples of Christ, we are invited into the grand mission of living out and defending the Gospel.

What is the goal this week?

The greatest and most valuable gifts in life are the ones we treasure and protect. When you understand the message of the Gospel and all that we inherit, you cannot help being zealous to preserve the purity of its message. The aim of our work this week is to grow our ability to be disciples with discernment. We seek to increase our ability to spot the difference between the true Gospel and a corrupted Gospel. We will accomplish our goal by growing our familiarity with the warnings about false teachers and false teaching in the Bible. We will also be thinking through a framework for how to continue to grow our discernment and our ability to address errors in the truth. Through this week's devotions, we are creating space for the Holy Spirit to grow our affection for the Gospel and our ability to defend it.

What is in this resource?

Day 1- Getting Familiar With the Warnings of Scripture Pt 1

Day 2- Getting Familiar With the Warnings of Scripture Pt 2

Day 3- What can make the "Good News" bad?

Day 4- How can we grow in discernment?

Day 5- How do we protect the flock and love the lost?

Day 1

Getting Familiar With the Warnings of Scripture Pt 1

The Apostle Paul gives a grave warning about those who distort the Gospel of Christ and our need to defend the “Good News.” Look at God’s warnings throughout the New Testament about those who change the Gospel of Christ to a deceptive & destructive gospel which is not good news, not glorifying to God, and not something that gives life. A false Gospel takes the very breath of life away both now and for eternity. Read these scriptures and answer the questions.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.” Matthew 7:15-20

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” 2 Peter 2:1-3

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:1-6

What word pictures are used to describe “false prophets”?

How can God’s people recognize them?

What message or temptation are they proclaiming to deceive people?

What is the destruction their false Gospel can cause?

What warning does God give about their present and eternal destiny?

What are God's provisions for His people to discern and overcome?

"13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds." 2 Cor 11:13–15.

"3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Jude 3–4.

What are "false apostles" described as?

How can God's people recognize them?

What is the destruction their false Gospel can cause?

What warning does God give about their present and eternal destiny?

Responsive Prayer: Respond to these scriptures with a prayer, that asks God to increase your discernment and love for the Gospel.

Day 2

Getting Familiar With the Warnings of Scripture Pt 2

“3 As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. 5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6 Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, 7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.” 1 Tim 1:3–7.

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, 2 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, 3 who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” 1 Tim 4:1–3.

“Teach and urge these things. 3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.” 1 Tim 6:2–5.

“3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” 2 Tim 4:3–4.

“7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. 9 Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, 11 for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.” 2 Jn 7–11.

What are “false teachers” described as?

How can God’s people recognize them?

What message or temptation are they proclaiming to deceive people?

What is the destruction their false Gospel can cause?

What warning does God give about their present and eternal destiny?

What are God's provisions for His people to discern and overcome?

"17 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. 18 For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive." Rom 16:17-18.

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. 6 For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men." 2 Tim 3:1-9.

What are "the rebellious" described as?

How can God's people recognize them?

What message or temptation are they proclaiming to deceive people?

What is the destruction their false Gospel can cause?

What warning does God give about their present and eternal destiny?

What are God's provisions for His people to discern and overcome?

Responsive Prayer: Respond to these scriptures with a prayer, that asks God to increase your discernment and love for the Gospel.

Day 3

What can make the “Good News” bad?

The Gospel, or "Good News," is central to the Christian faith, encapsulating the full story of God's redemption and restoration through Jesus Christ. Here are a few examples of how the good news of the Gospel can become bad news when its core values are corrupted or compromised.

1. **Salvation through Faith in Christ:** The Gospel proclaims that salvation is freely offered to all who put their faith in Jesus Christ, irrespective of their sin. This is good news because it means we are saved not by our works, but by grace through faith. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—" (Ephesians 2:8).

How it gets corrupted: In legalistic environments, you are told salvation can be earned through good works, self-improvement, or adherence to specific rituals. This contradicts the biblical teaching of grace. This shifts the focus from God's grace to human effort.

Impact: This corruption breeds legalism, pride, and judgmental attitudes, potentially leading to burnout or disillusionment when individuals fail to meet these impossible standards.

2. **Reconciliation with God:** Through the Gospel, those who have faith Jesus are reconciled to a holy God who judges sin at the cross. We are ransomed, freed from the penalty and power of sin, made holy, receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and adopted into the family of God. This complete reconciliation allows for a restored relationship with our Creator.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

How it gets corrupted: When a church emphasizes God's love and acceptance while neglecting His holiness and justice in judging sin, it can lead to a diluted view of sin and its consequences. Conversely, focusing only on God's wrath undermines His desire for reconciliation and love for the lost.

Impact: Such distortions can lead to a casual approach to sin without understanding the need for repentance. Conversely, a person may develop a fear-based relationship with God, not understanding their position in Christ, and missing the relational depth offered through the Gospel. One position blinds you to sin, the other keeps you far from God.

3. **Promise of Eternal Life:** The Gospel assures believers of eternal life. This promise offers us a present and future benefit. We can know and enjoy God now, and we receive an eternal future that extends beyond the temporal confines of this world. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (Jn 17:3)

How it gets corrupted: The prosperity gospel misrepresents eternal life's promise by equating God's blessing with material wealth and success in this life. An "Ascetic (or self-denial) Gospel" says that the only thing that matters is the eternal future. Present and temporal joy or success is equated with a lack of holiness.

Impact: The prosperity and positive confession movements not only foster disillusionment when believers face suffering but also shift the hope of the Gospel from the eternal to the temporal. This undermines spiritual growth and resilience. The "Ascetic Gospel" negates the benefits of salvation in our life before the final redemption of Christ. Holiness is equated with embracing more suffering and self-denial.

The message of the Gospel faces various distortions and corruptions in contemporary contexts. These alterations, whether through addition, subtraction, or misinterpretation, can significantly detract from the Gospel's goodness and lead us away from its foundational truths. Modern corruptions of the Gospel can distort the good news into something far removed from its original intent.

What do we do?

The distortion of the Gospel's message compromises its power to transform lives and society. The remedy lies in a vigilant return to the Scriptures, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth (John 16:13). We must continually be realigning our understanding of and proclamation of the Gospel with the full counsel of God's Word. By doing so, we can preserve the integrity of the good news and ensure it remains the life-changing message of hope and salvation it is intended to be.

Responsive Prayer:

Write a prayer responding to what you have read, asking God to preserve the purity of the Gospel in your life.

Day 4

How can we grow in discernment?

Before we can defend the Gospel we need to know and be familiar with what is “normal” versus “abnormal.” While being trained to treat the body, medical students spend a great majority of their time learning what is normal and its variances. Once familiarity grows, one can begin to discern the abnormal. Defending the Gospel has both the need for knowing & discerning the breadth of what is normative and how to rightly respond to the abnormal. Today we will discover from the scriptures, God’s provisions for us to grow in our ability to know and defend Gospel.

God’s Provision to Help His People

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16

What is God’s provision? _____

How is God’s provision currently being used by you?

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” John 14:25-26

“And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” John 16:8-11

What is God’s provision? _____

How is God’s provision currently being used by you?

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:23-25

What is God’s provision? _____

How is God's provision currently being used by you?

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” Ephesians 4:11-14
“[Elders] Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ...” Acts 20:28-31

What is God's provision? _____

How is God's provision currently being used by you?

God's Filters that Inform His People

“I am the Lord; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,

nor my praise to carved idols.” Isaiah 42:8,

“If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.” John 7:17-18

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 4:10-11

Why does it matter that glory is given to God?

How does this knowledge about God's glory inform our discernment of false teaching?

“And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a

second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:37-40

How do you think loving God and neighbor fulfills the requirements of the law and prophets?

How does love inform our discernment of false teaching?

God’s Call to Action Preserves His People

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.” Jude 20-21

What is the call to action and how does it help the follower of Christ?

“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. Overcoming the flesh & knowing God.” 1 Peter 4:1-2

What is the call to action and how does it help the follower of Christ?

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” John 14:21

What is the call to action and how does it help the follower of Christ?

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ... Let no one deceive you with empty words, ... Therefore do not become partners with them; ... Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” Ephesians 5:1-2, 6-11

What is the call to action and how does it protect the follower of Christ?

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2

What is the call to action and how does it protect the follower of Christ?

"But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene." 2 Timothy 2:16-17

What is the call to action and how does it protect the follower of Christ?

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” John 10: 27-28

What is the call to action and how does it protect the follower of Christ?

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” ... “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” 1 John 5:1-5, 11-12

What is the call to action and how does it protect the follower of Christ?

Responsive Prayer: Take a moment to pray in response to each of the verses above.

Day 5

How do we protect the flock and love the lost?

The decision tree depicted in the image below provides a pathway for evaluating the trustworthiness of a Gospel presentation. It begins with the question, "Is this Gospel presentation heretical?" and branches out based on the responses to subsequent questions that assess key doctrinal aspects of Christ's nature and the implications of the Gospel message. If a presentation diminishes the truth or authority of Scripture, Christ's humanity or deity, or important elements of His work such as His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, or future return, the outcome is that it changes the Gospel and therefore cannot be trusted. In case of uncertainty at any point, we are advised to consult Scripture, compare with Church creeds, and seek counsel from qualified leadership. If no doctrinal issues are identified, the presentation is likely considered "safe for faith and practice." This diagram serves as a tool for Christians to discern teachings and ensure they align with the core truths of their faith.

Modern Examples of False Gospels:

This is a list of some religious movements that are outside of orthodox Christian doctrines and present a false Gospel.

1. Mormonism (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

- Error: It introduces additional scriptures such as the Book of Mormon and teachings that diverge from traditional Christian beliefs, including the nature of God, the pre-existence of souls, and the potential for humans to become gods themselves.

2. Jehovah's Witnesses

- Error: They reject the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the personhood of the Holy Spirit, which are central tenets of orthodox Christianity. Their translation of the Bible, the New World Translation, includes significant differences that support their unique doctrines.

3. Christian Science

- Error: Founded by Mary Baker Eddy, this movement views Jesus as a spiritual healer and not God incarnate. They also interpret the crucifixion and resurrection in a metaphorical sense and prioritize spiritual over physical healing, deviating from the traditional Christian understanding of these events.

4. Unification Church (Moonies)

- Error: Founded by Sun Myung Moon, who claimed to be the Second Coming of Christ, the Unification Church merges Christian terminology with unique teachings that contradict the core Christian doctrine, such as denying the effectiveness of the cross for salvation and introducing new scriptures like the "Divine Principle."

5. Oneness Pentecostalism

• Error: This movement denies the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, teaching that God is a single person who manifests in different modes as opposed to the orthodox teaching of three distinct persons in one Godhead. They also typically insist on baptism in the name of Jesus only for salvation, diverging from the more widely accepted Trinitarian formula.

6. The New Apostolic Church

• Error: They have an additional hierarchy of apostles and prophets and believe that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and salvation are mediated through their ordained ministers, which deviates from the broader Christian conviction that grace and salvation are directly accessible through faith in Jesus Christ.

7. Gnosticism (historical and modern forms like New Age & self-help/psycho- spiritual movements that talk about Christ but make the Gospel unnecessary)

• Error: While not a single, unified religion, various Gnostic sects share the belief in secret knowledge for salvation, a spiritual dualism that often rejects the material world, and a different interpretation of Jesus' divinity, which stand in contrast to orthodox Christian teachings.

8. The Jesus Seminar and associated liberal theologies

• Error: This scholarly group and similar theological perspectives often question or deny the historicity of Gospel events, the miracles of Jesus, and the resurrection, opting instead for a symbolic or metaphorical interpretation, which significantly alters the foundational claims of Christian faith.

These movements are considered “heterodox” (or not conforming to accepted Christian doctrine) because their teachings and beliefs about Jesus Christ, God, salvation, and scripture significantly deviate from those of historical Christianity as defined by the ecumenical councils and the consensus of the early Church fathers. The assessment of heresy is traditionally made in the context of these established doctrines, and beliefs that diverge from them are typically regarded as outside the bounds of orthodox Christian faith.

Biblical Principles For Correcting Error:

The New Testament provides guidance on handling false teachings while maintaining a posture of love towards those propagating such teachings. Here are some key principles and instructions from scripture:

Hold Fast to Sound Doctrine: Believers are encouraged to remain steadfast in their knowledge of the truth. This involves studying and adhering to the teachings of the apostles as recorded in Scripture (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

Protect the Flock: Church leaders, in particular, are charged with the responsibility to protect the congregation from harmful teachings (Acts 20:28-31). Protection of those that can be harmed by false teaching is a top priority.

Be Gentle and avoid quarrels: When addressing those who oppose sound doctrine, Christians are instructed to do so gently, with the hope that God will grant repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:25-26). Believers are advised to avoid getting entangled in quarrels about words, which produce no good but only ruin the hearers (2 Timothy 2:14).

Speak the Truth in Love: Ephesians 4:15 encourages believers to speak the truth in love, growing in every way into Christ. This balance is crucial in confronting false teachings—being direct and clear about the truth while expressing genuine care and concern for the individual.

Warning and Rebuke: There is a place for warning and rebuking those who are teaching false doctrines, but it should be done with the right spirit—one of seeking to restore rather than condemn (Titus 1:9, Titus 2:1).

Do Not Associate with Persistent False Teaching: If someone continues in heresy after being warned, the New Testament advises limited association with them. Yet, even this drastic step is taken in the hope of restoration (Titus 3:10-11).

Pray for Those in Error: The New Testament teaches to pray for everyone, which includes those who have been led into or are leading others into false teachings (1 Timothy 2:1).

Be an Example: Live a life that exemplifies the teachings of Jesus, so that even if words are disregarded, the life lived may be a testament to the truth of the Gospel (1 Peter 3:1-2).

These principles aim to strike a balance between upholding the truth of the Gospel and showing the love and grace that are also central to Christian teaching. Love and truth are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they are intended to work together in our response to false teaching.

Responding to God

What has changed in your perspective after this week of meditation on the need to preserve the purity of the Gospel?

Write a prayer asking God to use this work to equip you to be a discerning disciple who preserves the purity of the Gospel.

Encouragement To Consider:

We all struggle and have the same or similar struggles! No one has “arrived” on this side of eternity. So please reach out to a mature Christian friend, mentor, or Heritage’s pastoral staff to walk out these tensions with you. If you are struggling to find Christ’s victory in your life, you may need the encouragement God offers through the body of Christ. There truly is freedom, peace, hope, and perfect love found in Christ. You are not alone in your journey and you are loved!

Sharpening Scripture Memory:

1. Matthew 7:15-20

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in _____ but inwardly are _____. You will _____ them by their _____. Are grapes gathered from _____, or figs from _____? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the _____ tree bears _____ fruit. A healthy tree _____ bear bad fruit, nor _____ a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will _____ them by their _____."

2. Matthew 24:11

"And many false prophets will arise and _____ many _____."

3. Acts 20:28-31

"Pay careful attention to _____ and to _____ the _____, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to _____ for the church of God, which he obtained with his _____. I know that after my departure _____ will come in among you, not sparing the _____; and from among your _____ will arise men _____ things, to draw away the _____ after _____. Therefore, _____, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears."

4. Romans 16:17-18

"I appeal to you, brothers, to _____ for those who _____ and _____ contrary to the _____ that you have been _____; avoid them. For such persons do not _____ our _____ Christ, but their _____, and by smooth _____ and _____ they _____ the hearts of the _____."

5. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

"For such men are _____ apostles, _____ workmen, _____ themselves as _____ of _____. And no wonder, for even _____ himself

as an _____ of _____. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, _____ themselves as _____ of _____. Their end will correspond to their deeds."

6. Galatians 1:6-9

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a _____ — not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to _____ the _____ of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel _____ to the one we _____ to you, let him be _____. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is _____ to you a _____ contrary to the one you received, let him be _____."

7. Ephesians 4:14

"So that we may no longer be _____, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of _____, by human _____, by _____ in _____."

8. 1 Timothy 1:3-7

"As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to _____ any different _____, nor to devote themselves to _____ and endless genealogies, which promote _____ rather than the _____ from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is _____ that issues from a pure _____ and a good _____ and a sincere _____. Certain persons, by _____ from these, have wandered away into vain _____, desiring to be teachers of the law, without _____ either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions."

9. 2 Peter 2:1-3

"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive _____, even _____ the _____ who _____ them, bringing upon themselves swift _____. And many will follow their _____, and because of them the _____ of _____ will be blasphemed. And in their _____ they will _____ you with _____ words. Their _____ from long ago is not idle, and their _____ is not asleep."

10. 1 John 4:1-6

"Beloved, do not _____ every spirit, but _____ the spirits to see whether they are _____, for many _____ have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the _____, which you heard was coming and _____ is in the world _____. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

11. 2 Peter 3:16-17

"He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which _____ and _____ people _____, as they do the other _____, to their own _____. Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your _____ so

that you may not be _____ by the _____ of the lawless and _____ from your secure position."

12. 1 Timothy 4:1-3

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in _____ some will _____ from the _____ by devoting themselves to _____ spirits and _____ of demons, through the insincerity of _____ whose consciences are _____, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who _____ and _____ the truth."

13. 1 Timothy 6:3-5

"If anyone teaches a _____ and does not _____ with the sound _____ of our Lord Jesus Christ and the _____ that accords with _____, he is puffed up with conceit and understands _____. He has an unhealthy _____ for _____ and for _____ about _____, which produce _____, _____, _____, evil _____, and constant _____ among people who are _____ in mind and _____ of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of _____."

14. 2 Timothy 2:16-18

"But avoid irreverent _____, for it will lead people into more and more _____, and their talk will spread like _____. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the _____, saying that the _____ has already happened. They are upsetting the _____ of some."

15. 2 Timothy 3:1-9

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of _____, lovers of _____, proud, _____, _____, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving _____, treacherous, reckless, swollen with _____, lovers of _____ rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of _____, but denying its _____. _____ such _____. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always _____ and never able to arrive at a _____ of the _____. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also _____ the _____, men corrupted in _____ and _____ regarding the _____. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men."

16. 2 Timothy 4:3-4

"For the time will come when people will not put up with _____. Instead, to suit their own _____, they will gather around them a great number of _____ to say what their _____ want to _____. They will turn their ears away from the _____ and turn aside to _____."

17. Titus 1:10-16

"For there are many who are _____, empty _____ and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be _____, since they are _____ whole families by teaching for shameful _____ what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true. Therefore _____ them _____, that they may

be _____ in the _____, not devoting themselves to Jewish _____ and the commands of people who _____ from the _____."

18. Jude 1:3-4, 17-19

"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to _____ for the faith that was _____ for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in _____ who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who _____ the _____ of our God into _____ and _____ our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. [...] But you must remember, beloved, the _____ of the _____ of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own _____.' It is these who cause _____, worldly people, devoid of the _____."

19. 2 John 1:7-11

"For many _____ have gone out into the world, those who do not _____ the coming of Jesus Christ in the _____. Such a one is the _____ and the _____. Watch yourselves, so that you may not _____ what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes ahead and _____ abide in the _____ of _____, does not have _____. Whoever abides in the _____ has both the _____ and the _____. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this _____, do not _____ him into your _____ or give him any _____, for whoever _____ him takes part in his _____ works."

20. Philippians 3:18-19

"For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the _____ of _____. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their _____, with minds set on _____ things."