



Communicating the Gospel within the Whole Counsel of God

by Jill Nelson

In this seminar, I would like to suggest that in order to “fill in” the true meaning of the Gospel, we need to communicate it within the context of the whole counsel of God—highlighting essential doctrines—as revealed from Genesis to Revelation.

1. Scripture – Its authority, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency.

God has communicated the message of the Gospel in a Book – the Bible. If we want our children to have a solid faith in Christ we must communicate to them the trustworthiness of the Bible.

The authority and inerrancy of the Bible—

- o All the words of the Bible are God's words.
- o God always speaks the truth → The Bible is truth.
- o There is no higher authority than God → There is no higher authority than the Bible.

The clarity of the Bible—

- o The Bible is understandable – it is meant to read and studied by everyone.

The necessity of the Bible—

- o We need the Bible in order to truly know, trust, love and obey God.

The sufficiency of the Bible—

- o The Bible contains everything we need in order to know, trust, love, and obey God as we should.
(Selected Scripture—Psalm 19:7-11; 119; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3, 21; Revelation 22:18-19)

2. The Triune God

We must communicate the Gospel within a basic, foundational knowledge of who God is and what He is like.

John Piper— ... today I think the biggest challenge [for the church] is: Do people know God? ... Are they getting the whole counsel of God so that they can love the whole God?
 (“What Are the Biggest Challenges Facing the Evangelical Church in 2016?” at www.desiringGod.org)

A W. Tozer—The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him—and of her... We do the greatest service to the next generation of Christians by passing on to them undimmed and undiminished that noble concept of God which we received from our Hebrew and Christian fathers of generations past.
 (“The Knowledge of the Holy”, page 4.)

God is ...

Independent, unchangeable (immutable), eternal, omnipresent, unity, spirit, invisible, omniscient, wise, truthful, faithful, good, love, merciful, patient, holy, peace, righteous, just, jealous, wrathful, free, omnipotent, sovereign, perfect, blessed, beautiful, glorious. (“Systematic Theology”, Wayne Grudem)

Jerry Bridges—The love of God has no meaning apart from Calvary. And Calvary has no meaning apart from the holy and just wrath of God. Jesus did not die just to give us peace and a purpose in life; He died to save us from the wrath of God. (“The Practice of Godliness”, page 24.)

J. Gresham Machen— ... when men say that we know God only as He is revealed in Jesus, they are denying all real knowledge of God whatever. For unless there be some idea of God independent of Jesus, the ascription of deity to Jesus has no meaning. To say, “Jesus is God,” is meaningless unless the word “God” has an antecedent meaning attached to it. (“Christianity and Liberalism”, pages 48.)

- ✓ Our children need to be taught a robust doctrine of God.
- ✓ Communicating the Gospel means that we must first emphasize essential truths relating to the “fullness” of God – His character and attributes as revealed over the entirety of Scripture.
- ✓ Our children also need to be made acquainted with the important concept of the Trinity. Although this truth is mysterious and beyond full human comprehension, it is CENTRAL to Christianity.

3. Man—Who we are in relation to God and our purpose

Once our children have a basic understanding of God and the authority of His Word, it now gives them categories to see who man is in relation to God.

God is the one, eternal, self-existent, almighty Creator. (Acts 17:24-25)

- God rightly owns and governs His creation. (1 Chronicles 29:12)
- God decides what is true and right. (Psalm 119:137)

Who we are in relation to God—

- We are His creatures, dependent on Him for “life and breath and everything else”. (Acts 17:25)
- He is our Ruler. (1 Chronicles 29:12)
- We are accountable to Him. (Hebrews 4:12)

Our purpose—

- **To glorify God as His image bearers by trusting, loving, obeying, and enjoying Him – always giving God the thanks, honor, and worship He deserves.** (Deut. 27:10; Psalm 16:11; 96:9; 100:4; Proverbs 3:5; Matthew 22:37; 1 Corinthians 10:31)

- ✓ Only the Bible rightly defines the relationship between God and man and only the Gospel can bring this relationship into perfect and joyful fruition.

4. The Law of God

Glorifying God as His image bearers has to have some defined meaning – a standard. God is holy and commands His people to be holy also. (1 Peter 1:15) God has revealed His holiness through His law and commands. (Romans 7:12)

R.C. Sproul— ... The law reflects the will of the Lawgiver, and in that regard it is intensely personal. The law reflects to the creature the perfect will of the Creator and at the same time reveals the character of that Being whose law it is.

... by revealing God’s character, [the law] exposes our fallenness. It is the mirror that reflects our own images—warts and all—and becomes the pedagogue, the schoolmaster that drives us to Christ.

... [the law] shows us what is pleasing to God... A knowledge of the law of God gives to us the pattern of loving obedience. If we love the Lord, we must also love His law.

(“Getting the Gospel Right: Interview” at www.ligonier.org.)

- ✓ All three functions of the law are important where the Gospel is concerned. The Gospel doesn’t abolish the law it demonstrates its importance, fulfills it in Jesus, and then serves to instruct God’s redeemed people.
- ✓ “Law” is not a minor theme in the Gospel, it is a major one. Jesus’ perfect obedience was necessary for our salvation.

5. Our Sin and God’s Judgment

IF you understand who God is and what He is like, who you are in relation to God, and understand the function of His law, then your sin and God’s judgment will take on a proper Gospel meaning.

You are a sinner and have disobeyed God. This means:

- You have rebelled against God’s rightful authority and rule.
- You show your sin by repeatedly disobeying God’s perfect commands.
- Your sinful desires, thoughts, words, and actions are evil and an offense to the holiness of God.
- Because God is holy, He can neither look upon nor ignore your sin.
- God is filled with wrath – fierce anger – toward your sin.
- You deserve God’s punishment of death and hell – experiencing His wrath forever.
- You are completely and utterly helpless to save yourself.

(Selected Scriptures – Habakkuk 1:13; Romans 1:18; 3:10-12, 20, 23; 6:23a, Ephesians 2:1-3.)

D. A. Carson— There can be no agreement as to what salvation is unless there is agreement as to that from which salvation rescues us. The problem and the solution hang together... It is impossible to gain a deep grasp of what the cross achieves without plunging into a deep grasp of what sin is... (“Fallen: A Theology of Sin” as republished on www.monergism.com.)

- ✓ Are we helping children really get a deep grasp of what sin is? Or, do we simply jump quickly ahead to the cross, never giving children time to ponder the grievousness of their sin?

6. The Person and work of Christ

There are basic truths we need to communicate to our children regarding the Person and work of Jesus.

Jesus—

- is the promised Savior foretold in the Scriptures
- was born of a virgin, by the power of the Holy Spirit, without a sin nature
- is God's own Son
- is fully God
- became fully man while remaining fully God

Jesus' work—He...

- perfectly revealed the Father
- perfectly obeyed God's law
- willingly died a substitutionary death on behalf of His people
- received the full wrath of God on behalf of His people
- conquered sin, Satan, and death as evidenced by His resurrection
- imputes His perfect righteousness to His people
- reconciles His people to God and obtains eternal life for His people

(Selected Scripture – John 3:16; Romans 5:10; 6:10; Philippians 3:9; Colossians 2:13; Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 4:10)

- If you have first given children a proper biblical foundation and context, you can provide them with a deep, meaningful, and truthful account of what happened on the cross – the redemption of sinners – by explaining a few verses such as: 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24.

- Using the CDG resource “Helping Children to Understand the Gospel” can help you walk through and explain these essential truths in child-friendly language.

7. Salvation as the free gift of God for all who repent and believe

A simple summary based on Ephesians 2:4-9,

Salvation is by Grace alone—Unmerited favor, a gift of God
through Faith alone—Putting full confidence and trust in another
in Christ Jesus alone—Who perfectly accomplished our redemption

True repentance =

- **Understanding you are a helpless sinner, unable to save yourself**
- **You feel a deep hatred of your sin**
- **You feel terrible about your disobedience to God**
- **You want to turn away from sin and run to Jesus for forgiveness**

True belief (faith) =

- You believe that the Bible is true
- You believe that Jesus is God
- You believe that Jesus never sinned
- You believe that Jesus died on the cross and was punished in your place and then rose from the dead
- You are trusting in Him and depending on Him alone. He means more to you than anything else and you want to follow and obey Him more and more.

(Selected Scripture – Matthew 16:24; Mark 1:15; Luke 15:11-24; John 14:15; James 2:14-16; 1 John 1:8-9)

- ✓ **Remember:** God is sovereign over your child’s salvation. Trust Him. Repeatedly teach the truths of the Gospel, pray and rely upon the Holy Spirit. Be patient. Do not minimize the need for true, biblical repentance and belief.

8. The Church and God’s kingdom – living within God’s redeemed family, under God’s rule.

Our children need to know that Jesus’ saving work is building His church—all the redeemed people of God—from every tribe, language, people, and nation. Every Christian is a member of this Church and should also be living in community with other believers within a local church. Here are some basics are children should know about the church.

The Church is—

- the covenantal people of God – everyone whom Jesus has saved.
- the household and family of God.
- to live out the Gospel in community with other believers.
- meant to reflect the kingdom of God by joyfully proclaiming and living under God’s reign.
- to gather to worship God, help other Christians, and proclaim the Gospel to the world

(Selected Scripture – Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:11-13; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 2:9-10)

9. The goal of the Gospel → enjoying God forever.

John Piper— ... the highest, best, final, decisive good of the gospel, without which no other gifts would be good, is the glory of God in the face of Christ revealed for our everlasting enjoyment. The saving love of God is God’s commitment to do everything necessary to enthrall us with what is most deeply and durably satisfying, namely himself. (“God Is the Gospel”, page 13.)

- ✓ From beginning to end, the Gospel is about God. He is the source, means, and goal of the Gospel.
- ✓ As teachers and parents, we are not decisive in our students and children’s salvation. God is. But we are called to do everything in our power to “enthrall” them with God. We are called to present them with the amazing and all-satisfying truth of the glory of God in the face of Christ.
- ✓ We have the great privilege and grave responsibility to share with them the only means of obtaining this everlasting enjoyment – that is the Gospel.

Recommended Resources:

General reading -

Christian Beliefs, Wayne Grudem
God Is the Gospel, John Piper
The Gospel According to Jesus, John MacArthur
What Is the Gospel?, Greg Gilbert

For parents & teachers -

The Faith of a Child, Art Murphy
Your Child's Profession of Faith, Dennis Gundersen

For use with children -

Helping Children to Understand the Gospel (CDG)
God's Gospel (P&R), Jill Nelson

