THE GOSPEL IN COUNSELING[[1]](#endnote-1)

You and I have the greatest opportunity and potential to be everything God wants us to be because of the gospel. If we consistently seek God’s Truth and apply God’s Truth to everyday life, if we do a constant inventory on our lives and lay our lives up against the grid of God’s Word, we can examine the dissimilarities and it should motivate us to change. The gospel is transformational, 2 Corinthians 5:17, it is all about being changed into His image, 2 Corinthians 3:18. The gospel, which is described in the Bible as, “*the hope that is in you”* 1 Peter 3:15, is literally life changing, life altering, life influencing, as well as totally and entirely comprehensive in its power and ability to save anyone from their sins.

The influence of the gospel does not end our struggle with sin; we continue to go through life struggling with sin and its destructive influence because we are still under the effects of sins curse. Romans chapter seven describes this struggle, and Who delivers us from this struggle. *Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

The final end to our struggle awaits us in death. Happily, by God’s grace, the gospel carries us through life’s struggles, equipping us to deal with the sin that too often besets us now. In other words, God has not left us without the ability and the power to overcome sin through the continued application of the gospel. “The Gospel is to be adorned by both sound doctrine and godly living. Our salvation does not end at new birth. We are taught by Scripture to say not only that we have been saved Ephesians. 2:8, but also that we shall be saved Romans 5:9–10; 13:11; 1 Peter 1:5) and even now are being saved Philippians 2:12–13; 1 Peter 1:9.” [[2]](#endnote-2) When we consider the implications of the gospel, we note a multitude of blessings and benefits that we should capitalize upon in our counseling

One author makes two points about the power and sufficiency of the gospel. “In Galatians 2:14, Paul lays down a powerful principle. He deals with Peter’s racial pride and cowardice by declaring that he was not living *“in line with the truth of the gospel”*. From this we see that the Christian life is a process of renewing every dimension of our life-- spiritual, psychological, corporate, social--by thinking, hoping, and living out the “lines” or ramifications of the gospel. The gospel is to be applied to every area of thinking, feeling, relating, working, and behaving. [[3]](#endnote-3)

“The implications and applications of Galatians 2:14 are vast. Implication #1 The power of the gospel. First, Paul is showing us that bringing the gospel truth to bear on every area of life is the way to be changed by the power of God. “Implication #2 The sufficiency of the gospel. Second, Paul is showing that we never “get beyond the gospel” in our Christian life to something more “advanced”. The gospel is not the first “step” in a “stairway” of truths, rather, it is more like the “hub” in a “wheel” of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C’s but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom. We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience, but the gospel is *the* way we grow Galatians 3:1-3 and are renewed Colossians 1:6. It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier Romans 1:16-17”.[[4]](#endnote-4) When we consider the implications of the gospel we should capitalize upon it in our counseling. For instance, how can we capitalize upon the power of the gospel in relationships?

The Importance of the Gospel in Relationships

One of the many places where sin is so destructive, and the gospel is so forgotten, is within marital relationships. Why is it that in the most important relationship other than relationship with the Lord, the gospel is overlooked or neglected? Think about it, every relationship in our lives literally was first formed in our mother’s womb. Women will tell you how they conversed with their child as the child developed within their womb, even as a father I would speak toward and pray with my unborn child within my wife’s womb. Then the day came when the child came forth and the nurturing love from our hearts formed a bond of family relationship that continues to grow to this day. As a believer we could not wait to introduce our child to their Creator, and finally experience watching them bow to their Creator and accept the gospel that we so eagerly and carefully kept before them. The gospel oriented our marriage relationship and now our relationship as new parents.

As we raised our children they learned about relationship, and they learned that the relationship that they saw in their parents was based on the gospel, our commitment and our belief in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was our responsibility to “b*ring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”* Ephesians 6:4, it was our responsibility to give them the gospel and teach them how to live the gospel. So, the gospel forms a relationship between God and man, as well as between man and man. The gospel should be something that occurs within the context of the home forming a deeper bond within the relationships in the home.

What does that mean for marriage? It means that the marriage covenant is based upon the gospel. The greatest of all relationships is one with God and that was made possible because of and through the gospel. What kind of relationship do you have in your marriage? With your children? Is the gospel in a predominant place in your relationship at home? You and I have the greatest opportunity and potential to be everything God wants us to be in our marriage, in our home, in any relationship because of the gospel. The gospel should have a huge effect on relationships, marriages and family.

The Importance of Understanding the Power of the Gospel

You and I have the greatest opportunity and potential to be everything God wants us to be, if we consistently seek and apply God’s Truth to everyday life. If we do a constant inventory on our lives and lay our lives up against the grid of God’s Word, we can examine the dissimilarities and it should motivate us to change. The gospel, which is described in the Bible as” *the hope that is in you*” 1 Peter 3:15, is literally life changing, life altering, life influencing, as well as totally and entirely comprehensive in its power and ability to save anyone from their sins. But this is not the end of our struggle with sin; we continue to go through life struggling with sin and its destructive effects. Happily, by God’s grace, the gospel carries us through those life struggles equipping us to deal with the sin that too often besets us. In other words, God has not left us without the ability and the power to overcome sin through the gospel. *Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

You have the spiritual ability and power to grow and change by grace through the study of God’s sufficient Word. God’s Word actually tells us that it profits us, trains us, and eventually completes, equips and produces “*good works”* in us. That is a breath of fresh air to the weary soul that is spiraling into despondency because they are trying to do everything on their own or have given up. Listen within your heart to these verses, *2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

Rejoice and be joyful in small steps of growth and don’t be driven by expectations that are unreasonable. Be sure to include an accountability partner so that you can have a greater understanding from outside of yourself to determine these small steps of spiritual growth. Be sure you have an accountability partner to help you with self-evaluation. Personally, I want you to think simple, to live a simple Christian life, don’t over complicate life. Life is complicated enough at times, but God untangles the tangled interwoven things of life by the profound and simple truths of His Word. Go to God’s Word with purpose, study deliberately upon issues that are relevant to your life. Take it slow and then build momentum as you grow in your understanding of what God’s Words says about these areas of your life. The Spirit of God lives in you, and He will guide you to truth, John 16:13, that will transform your life. Share and grow with others and be confident of the power of the gospel in your life. A counselor and counselee should be firmly confident in the potential of change brought about by the transformational effects of the gospel.

The Importance of Understanding the Transformational Effects of the Gospel

The gospel is the means by which a person grows, it was the gospel that transformed us, and it is the gospel that progressively transforms us into the image of God's Son. We are not just asking people to do something, we are encouraging them to submit to and enjoy the powerful effects of the gospel on their lives, how to become like Someone, that is the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s what the gospel does, the gospel is not about doing something, it’s about becoming like Someone, the Lord Jesus Christ. That difference may seem subtle, but it is actually very significant, there is nothing necessarily wrong with teaching someone how to do something, but the result just might be a person who has learned “how to do something”, by becoming a performance-oriented type of Christian, rather than learning how to become like Christ. We want to guard against being performance oriented, by searching for ways to improve our lives, meet expectations of other people, look good or well informed. The destructive effect of being performance oriented is a perversion of God’s righteousness that leads to an exhausting merry-go-round of ever trying to live in my own self prescribed righteousness, or living my life concerned about what others think of me.

“The gospel also reminds me that my righteous standing with God always holds firm regardless of my performance, because my standing is based solely on the work of Jesus and not mine. On my worst days of sin and failure, the gospel encourages me with God’s unrelenting grace toward me. On my best days of victory and usefulness, the gospel keeps me relating to God solely on the basis of Jesus’ righteousness and not mine.”[[5]](#endnote-5) The Christian life is to be lived in harmony with the righteousness imputed in us as a result of the gospel. That righteousness is expressed by the Spirit in my everyday life, living a righteous life.

Paul’s message of the gospel points to and exalts the Christ of the cross, a gospel that not only transforms a sinner but continually and progressively transforms them into the image of Jesus Christ. It is all about the gospel; it is all about the gospel that transforms lives, read 1 Corinthians Chapters 1 & 2. It was Martin Luther who said: "This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

We should take advantage of speaking the gospel to all of our counselees at various times during our counseling sessions. We should remind them of the power of the gospel that lives in them. The power of the gospel that not only saves but also sanctifies and brings about constant change. Let’s not forsake the gospel in our counseling.

1. You are free to distribute this paper as a homework assignment or use its contents for other useful means, as long as it is not altered, and credit is given to the author Brad Hilgeman. <https://christinyoucounseling.com> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Packer, J. I.; Parrett, Gary A. Grounded in the Gospel [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The Centrality of the Gospel" by Dr. Timothy Keller [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Vincent, Milton. A Gospel Primer for Christians [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. A small quotation from Luther’s Defense of the gospel, see Ninety-five Theses [↑](#endnote-ref-6)