

The Essence of the Gospel

John Calvin says that the core of the gospel lies in continuously preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31) (John Calvin 1960, 592). The gospel first urges all mankind to repent toward God, and this conveys the good news that the grace of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ will come. The sins of humanity are widespread among all people, societies, and organizations, regardless of race, age, occupation, or gender. If we do not overcome this problem of sin, we will never be able to realize peace and justice for humanity (Cheolha Han 2001, 2). The gospel is essentially the simple truth and good news that sinners receive forgiveness of their sins through Jesus Christ before God and that sinners are changed and become people of heaven.

When John the Baptist and Jesus began their public ministry, the first thing they cried out was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). The writer of the Gospel of Mark says, “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15), placing repentance as a prerequisite for knowing and believing in the gospel. Because all humans, without exception, are sinners before God, they cannot come to God without repentance: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came in Christ Jesus”(Romans 3:23–24). This is where the foundation of the gospel is laid and the power of the gospel is contained. Therefore, anyone who believes in this gospel can receive salvation and become a child of God, “brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile”(Rom. 1:16).

Based on Acts 16:30–32, Francis Schaefer says: “The true foundation of faith is not faith itself, but what Christ accomplished on the cross. The works I believe in are not the basis for salvation. The

foundation is the work of Christ. Christian faith is directed to some objective personality out there. 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.'"

Believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior, is a proposition that no one can disobey. In the front of the Almighty God, humans must confess that they are mere weak creatures and sinners. Schaefer explains that the words "Believe in the Lord Jesus" contain four core elements of the gospel.

First, speaking of God is not just a word or a concept; it means believing in an infinite and personal God, and believing that Jesus Christ is that God. Second, mentioning sin does not just refer to the level of guilt, but also includes specific moral sins and requires one to acknowledge that one is a sinner before God. Third, do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross in historical time and space, that through that death he bore God's punishment for sin, and that his redemptive work was completely accomplished and completed? Fourth, because God has promised through the Bible to communicate with us, we must not rely on ourselves but trust in Christ as our personal Savior and entrust ourselves to Him.

Apostle Paul also clearly teaches what the content of the gospel he testified to at the end of his ministry was: "He testified to both Jews and Greeks repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Paul first wanted to clearly convey what the gospel was to everyone he met. Ministers who deliver the gospel must first be aware of the "seriousness of salvation" contained in the gospel and become those who achieve the "earnest desire of salvation" with one common goal, this salvation.

James Packer mentioned the content of the gospel and said that the purpose of God's action in this gospel is to restore and perfect the distorted order and to glorify God, and that what the gospel

requires is to abandon rebellious behavior and to maintain the sovereignty of Christ. It is summarized as recognizing, gratefully receiving forgiveness, living a new life in the kingdom of God, trusting in God's power, and looking forward to the triumphant return of Christ (Acts 2:14–36; 3: 12–26; 10:34–43; 13:16–43; 17:22–31; John 3:13–15; Romans 1–3, 5; 8:19ff; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 4–5, 17 –21).

Although the gospel may be wrapped in different clothes during the transmission process depending on the form of culture, it should not be overlooked that it contains unique theological content that cannot be altered. Packer helps us clearly see the theological perspective contained in the gospel.

First, the gospel speaks of God who made us and in whom we live, act, and exist. We worship Him and devote ourselves to Him, and let them know that both good and evil are always in His hands. And His will and purpose always determine our lives.

Second, the Gospel reminds us of the sins that prevent us from seeing the Holy Creator, but rather oppose Him and rebel against His dignity. As a result, humans fell, sinned, became unclean, became inevitable slaves to sin, and ultimately became incapable of reaching the state of righteousness on their own. Until we realize this, we can never be thankful for Jesus Christ's declaration that he saves us from sin.

Third, the gospel speaks clearly about Christ. We must clearly teach the meaning of the facts of his life, death, resurrection, and reign. We must speak clearly about who he is and what he has done, and explain to people the meaning and purpose of life according to his words. This is not explained by any theory or philosophy, but is actually achieved through the work of Jesus Christ, who is alive and saves us. If we do not clearly understand the eternal God who takes on the sins of mankind and saves mankind through suffering, we

cannot experience the living Christ.

Fourth, the gospel speaks of faith, repentance, and discipleship. Repentance brings about change in all of our lives, entrusting ourselves to the promises of Christ and living with hope in them. He denies himself, lives a new life, and serves the Lord, the King. Discipleship refers to a life of knowing and learning the will of the Lord and following Him, and also living a life of sharing. If this is not clearly communicated, the nature of Christian life will inevitably be misunderstood.

Fifth, the gospel speaks of newness. It means a new life in the Holy Spirit that convinces and makes possible. We form new relationships through loving fellowship in Christ, and we respect and serve each other while looking forward to the 'new heaven and new earth' when Jesus Christ returns. This specifically means that we can taste new life by following the image of Christ and keeping the commandment to love God and our neighbors.

Relationship between the Gospel and Culture

Just as we experience "cultural shock" when we leave the culture we live in and come into contact with a different culture, we also experience a tremendous shock when we deliver the gospel to a place where it is completely unknown. This is because there are unique cultural elements in the gospel, so when the gospel is transmitted in another culture, the cultural elements expressed in the gospel are naturally also transmitted.

Because culture is a "learned pattern of behavior," people living in that culture are engaging in behaviors they have learned within that society, whether they are aware of it or not. If a new culture of the gospel is introduced to people who have lived that way, it is inevitable

that they will be “shocked.” According to Bruce Nicholls, the Hebrew culture shown in the Bible has more meaning than simply their own culture created by their environment. The direction of culture is changed and transformed according to environmental cultural elements and the transcultural instructions of God's Word that show how God guides them in their life situations and history and how to sustain their culture in detail. It is God's history. It is presupposed that God is “the sovereign Creator and Lord who rules over the created world and acts within it according to His own purposes. Biblical concepts of prophecy, miracles, eschatology, and the Incarnation show that this assurance is real.”

From a Biblical perspective, culture is not always neutral. In any culture, there are parts that conflict with the biblical worldview and there are always sinful elements. Therefore, culture must always be judged through the gospel, and sometimes culture must be restricted by the gospel. David Hesselgrave sees that when God created humans and other creatures, God said, “And he saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:31). Additionally, God granted humans the authority to rule over all creation (cultural mandate, Genesis 1:26–28). However, as humans sinned against God and fell, traces of sin are present in all cultures. Through the flood, sinful humans and their culture were punished, and Noah and his family received a promise and “social mandate” from God that would apply to all mankind (Genesis 9:1–17).

God's simple and easily understandable history continues to prove this fact, from Genesis to the Book of Revelation. This helps in biblical understanding of culture and serves as the basis for theology. Correctly understanding the relationship between God and humans allows us to properly understand the Gospel and is the basis for an approach to understanding human culture. In other words, only by properly

understanding the Gospel can one have the correct perspective to view culture correctly. The sin to disobey God's word not only damages the image of God, but also affects everything that human hands touch and make. Therefore, the Bible records, "What then? Are we better? Absolutely not; we have already declared that both Jews and Greeks are under sin" (Romans 3:9). Only in Jesus Christ can fallen humanity and culture be restored. Bearers of the Gospel are those who have been given "the Gospel Mandate" (Matthew 28:18–20) to teach others to observe all that Christ commanded.

All cultures created by sinful humans must be transformed through the teachings of the gospel. Rather than one culture dominating another culture, we must discover new cultural elements that need to be changed as taught in the Bible and change them from a biblical perspective. People who wish to convey the gospel to other cultures participate in this process directly or indirectly in the relationship between the gospel and culture.

According to John Herman Bavinck, within the framework of a non-Christian life, customs and ceremonies follow the path of idols without recognition of God. God's perception of culture in the Bible is completely different from this. The gospel clearly teaches us to return to God from those who do not know God and are heading in the wrong direction. Although there are many similarities in external aspects, they must be renewed in practical terms through the gospel. The gospel must inform us that the old has passed and the new has arrived. We must convey that distorted and wrong culture can be renewed and rebuilt through Jesus Christ. We must let people know that only Christ has the power to make all of this new, and we must testify that he can provide a new direction that gives new meaning to old things.

Just as if we do not know the truth of the gospel, the transmission

of the essence itself will be wrong, if we do not know the culture, the transmission of the gospel will not be complete. The gospel and culture are not separate from each other, but have a very close relationship in the transmission process. However, the communicator must maintain the transcultural elements contained in the gospel and apply it in situations where the gospel is constantly challenged as to how to convey the gospel in the other person's culture.