

# Live through the Gospel

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Father, we always need your help to soften our hearts, to unblock our ears, to let the scales fall from our eyes so that we can see what is in your word.

So Father, this morning I pray that you would again do that supernaturally by your spirit so that we might want to live for you, so that we might want to give you our all in every part of our lives.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now so far, we've seen that gospel centrality is about making the gospel the engine and the number one priority of our lives.

To be gospel-centred is to live from the gospel. We don't live for God by depending on religious activity, extraordinary spiritual experiences, or harsh external rules.

Rather, we depend on Jesus. We know our old selves have died with him and we are raised with him to new life. We are made into new creations and given a new nature, knowing that we are no longer condemned, but pardoned.

[ 1 : 15 ] We are no longer under God's wrath, but secure in his love. And as we experience his transforming grace, we can grow to be more like Jesus.

We live from the gospel. That's what we saw a few weeks ago. And then we saw that to be gospel-centred is to live for the gospel.

We saw that the overriding priority of our lives is to make Jesus known to unbelievers, to magnify him in every situation, and also to work to help one another to grow in Christ.

That's what we live for. That's what is most significant. But is that all there is to being gospel-centred? Well, you know, the answer is no, because our sermon series hasn't ended yet.

We still need to flesh it out more. You see, there is a slight danger that what I've said so far can be misunderstood. It's possible that you could hear me talk about living for the gospel and think that all I'm saying is that all that matters is evangelism and coming to church and nothing else.

[ 2 : 26 ] Again, this could happen if we still think of the gospel like a ticket to a concert hall. Now, remember that analogy? In that kind of thinking, the gospel is nothing more than something we need to make sure that we get into heaven.

Once we are sure we are in, we can throw the ticket away. Or to use a different analogy, it's when we think of the gospel simply like firemen in a fire truck rushing to put out the fire in a burning house.

And just as the fireman's job is to get as many people out of the burning house as they can, so Jesus is just there to get people out of the burning pits of hell.

But once that happens and the fire is put out, the fireman and the fire truck lose their relevance to those being saved. So if we think of the gospel only as a ticket or as a fire truck, then not surprisingly, it can make the gospel seem irrelevant to the rest of life.

But this morning, we're going to see that the ticket and the fire truck is an inadequate picture of the gospel. It's not wrong, I think, but it's not enough.

[ 3 : 43 ] We're going to see that the gospel involves more. And once we see that, we're going to see that being gospel-centred is not just to live from the gospel and to live for the gospel, but also to live through the gospel.

Now by that, I mean this. When we look at the world we live in, when we look at all the issues we face, when we look at every area of life, and we ask, how should I approach this part of the world or this issue, this area of my life, and bring it in line with the gospel?

When we ask, how can I let the gospel shape this particular area of my life? We are being gospel-centred. So that's the kind of thing I want to talk about this morning.

So today we'll talk, we'll think about living through the gospel in three parts. Firstly, we'll think about what we mean when we say we should live through the gospel from Colossians chapter 1.

Then we will look at some work examples from Colossians chapter 3 about how to live through the gospel. Then finally, we'll go a little bit more big picture and try to think about how we can do that even when the Bible doesn't seem to address particular issues or areas.

[ 5 : 08 ] So firstly, what do we mean when we say we live through the gospel? We mean that we live knowing Jesus is Lord.

Now come with me first of all to Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 to 20. And here we find the spotlight completely on Jesus. Keep working through the passage and you keep finding phrases like in Him, through Him, for Him, through His blood.

You keep finding phrases like He is this, He is that. The spotlight is on Jesus. So what is He? You would notice that in verses 15 and 18, Jesus is twice described as the firstborn.

Now that does not mean that Jesus just so happens to be the very first created being who comes from God. That is a heresy known as Arianism still around today in the form of Jehovah's Witnesses.

That is not what He means. Rather, it is to highlight that Jesus has all the rights and privileges of the firstborn son.

[ 6 : 24 ] He has all the special privileges of inheritance. That is what being firstborn in the ancient world was all about. It is about the highest possible status.

Jesus. So for example, back in Psalm 89, King David is called the firstborn. Why? Because he is the most exalted king on this earth.

And so Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. He is exalted over the entire universe. Not convinced? Then Paul says, let me hammer it in.

Notice how he keeps using the all language. Verse 16, in him all things were created. Verse 17, he is before all things and in him all things hold together.

Verse 18, in everything he may have the supremacy. Verse 20, and through him to reconcile to him all things. So it's pretty comprehensive.

[ 7 : 33 ] And go back to verse 16. Twice, Paul says, all things were created by Jesus and for Jesus.

In other words, Jesus does not fall into the category of created things. He is before those things.

God So that can only lead to one conclusion. Jesus is God. God alone is the creator and sustainer of all things.

And Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is the God who has now become visible. In other words, he is the fullness of God.

Verse 19, which is just another way of saying he is God himself. So if that is true, that means Jesus is utterly relevant to the entire lives of all people in every age.

[ 8 : 44 ] Everyone and everything exists for him. He is connected to them in some way. He is Lord not just of religious matters. He is relevant to politics, to art and creative media, to artificial intelligence, to city planning, and everything in between.

He made it all. He cares about them. He has something to say about them. Abraham Kuyper was the Prime Minister of the Netherlands in the 19th century.

He was also a Christian, a theologian, in fact. Hard to find theologians who now become Prime Ministers nowadays, isn't it? But he famously said this, and it's on your handout.

There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine.

him. But that is not all Paul says here. In verse 18, Jesus is also described as the firstborn from among the dead.

[ 10 : 01 ] He is the first to be raised to life, never to die again. And notice what does Jesus' resurrection accomplish? Verse 18 again, Now, that sounds puzzling at first.

I thought Jesus was already supreme over all creation? I thought everything was made by him, through him, for him? But this is the Apostle's big point.

By his resurrection, Jesus is now properly declared and demonstrated to be the Christ, the king whose kingdom will reign forever.

There can be no doubt. The truth of his supreme kingship, which was always a fact, is now publicly and indisputably confirmed.

Or let me use a modern analogy. Right now, Charles is already king of England, even before his official coronation. But his coronation will confirm and display his kingship over his kingdom.

[ 11 : 23 ] Well, same with Jesus. His resurrection is his coronation. This, you see, is part and parcel of the gospel.

gospel. The gospel doesn't just say, Jesus saves us by his blood shed on the cross. It also says, Jesus is now risen as the living ruler of the world and indeed of my life.

Notice verse 18 that the risen Christ is the head of the church. He is Lord of all, but it is Christians especially who acknowledge and bear witness to that fact, to the fact that he is the head.

It is Christians whose life should put Jesus' lordship on display. And verse 18 makes clear the scope of Jesus' supremacy.

He is supreme in everything. In my work, Jesus should be supreme. In my hobbies, Jesus should be supreme. In my dealings with the government, Jesus should be supreme.

[ 12 : 36 ] In the way I use my smartphone, Jesus should be supreme. Or to use the language that we are adopting in this series, in everything, we should live through the gospel.

We should view everything through the lens of Jesus' lordship. And that is why Paul says down in Colossians chapter 3 verse 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Because Jesus is Lord, whatever we do is for him, done for his glory, but also done in his way.

all of my life becomes worship. The doing and the speaking. And that means there is no part of my life that is untouched by the gospel.

Sometimes people tend to divide up their lives into compartments. So they say, in this compartment is the spiritual bit, the sacred bit. This is the part where I go to church, I read my Bible, I pray, and it's a nice compartment.

[ 13 : 59 ] But it's disconnected from the other parts of my life. It's a bubble on its own. Because the other parts are the unspiritual bits, the secular bits, or some people might even say mistakenly, the real bit.

And the danger is that Christ also becomes disconnected from other parts of life. You know, he becomes a bit like a relaxing massage.

Somewhere I go to when I just need to de-stress from the other stressful parts of my life. But when I leave the part of my life, Mark, spiritual massage, then I leave him behind.

So when I go meet Christ in church, I put on my best clothes, put on my best behaviour, but all that goes outside the window, outside of a Sunday.

But the Bible just won't allow us to compartmentalise in that way. Whatever you do, in word or deed, Jesus is Lord of everything.

[ 15 : 14 ] So a good question to ask this morning already is, if I call myself a Christian, is that how I treat Jesus? Not just as the fireman taking me away from the burning house, but as the supreme Lord who now owns every part of my life, who is worthy of all my worship.

So that's what we're talking about when we say we live through the gospel. But what does it look like? How is it that all of my life can be lived in worship of Jesus?

Well, Paul now goes on to give us some work examples in Colossians 3, 18-4, 1. So here's the second part of my sermon today. How we can live through the gospel in every area of life.

So come with me now to Colossians 3, 18-4, 1. And I hope that as it was read just now, you notice its focus straight away.

Did you notice how in just 9 verses, 7 times, Paul ties everything back to the Lord? Let me just take you through them. In verse 18, he talks about how everything is done as is fitting to the Lord.

[ 16 : 38 ] We have to live in such a way, verse 20, for this pleases the Lord. Verse 22, in reverence for the Lord. Verse 23, as working for the Lord.

Verse 24, to receive an inheritance from the Lord. Verse 25, stresses it is the Lord Christ you are serving. And for verse 1, you remember you also have a master in heaven.

So everything is to be done because Jesus is Lord. And this passage then is not for a general audience.

This is specifically for those who recognize Jesus as Lord, that is Christians. This is Paul showing us what it means to live through the gospel.

Or to use the language of Colossians 3, verse 17 again, it is for those who do things in the name of the Lord Jesus. So in this section, Paul is focusing on three key relationships.

[ 17 : 45 ] That of the Christian husband and wife, child and parent, slave and master. Now that covers a big portion of our existence, doesn't it?

You see, the gospel centred life is ultimately worked out in the everyday ordinariness of life. If Jesus is Lord, he is not just Lord when things are all spectacular and dramatic, but when things are all quiet and mundane.

Jesus' lordship is exercised not just on spiritual retreats on mountaintops, but in the hustle bustle of the workplace. For if Jesus' supremacy is cosmic, it also comes to pass in the domestic.

He is supreme in everything. Remember? And so gospel centrality extends even to those areas.

And Paul is going to show us how he sees those relationships through the gospel.

people. So let's look at each of them in turn. But first, I want you to notice something really interesting. Notice who Paul addresses first in each of these pairings.

[ 19 : 11 ] He addresses the wives first in the marriage, and then the children in the family, and then the slaves first in the slave master relationship. Now, why might that be significant?

because, I think, Paul is already looking at each relationship, at each pairing, through the gospel.

You see, what status did these people have? Well, they were considered lowly. In fact, the Greek philosophers who did sometimes write books of advice for households often didn't even bother addressing the wives, children, or slaves, because they thought they were not worthy of any attention.

After all, if you are a woman, sometimes you are taught to be just a necessary evil for reproduction, you're just a baby-making machine. If you are a child, you're just an economic liability.

If you are a slave, you're just something to be owned, you don't even need to be acknowledged. But Paul not only addresses them, but he addresses them first.

[ 20 : 29 ] He gives them dignity. He shows them a respect almost unheard of during that time. And I suggest he does so because he is living through the gospel.

You see, what does he know from the gospel? He knows Galatians 3 verse 28 that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

He knows that God values them equally because he offers them salvation freely. And he knows, Colossians 3 verse 10, that all are being renewed in the image of their creator.

So he knows that the gospel effectively demands that he sees them not as the world does, not as the Greek philosophers do, but as his Lord does, which is as those being made and being renewed in the image of God.

So he is seeing them through a viewpoint provided for by the gospel. He doesn't let the Greeks and the Romans think, shape his way of thinking.

[ 21 : 53 ] He's already living through the gospel just by how he writes. And now he wants to help his fellow Christians also live through the gospel, to let the gospel filter down to their actions.

So first, he talks to the wives, verse 18. Submit yourselves to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Now this part doesn't sound very gospel-centered.

Sounds oppressive in fact. But Paul isn't asking the wife to be a doormat here, who simply grins and lets the husband do whatever he wants.

Now notice that the word submit is used instead of the word obey, which is used in verses 20 and 22. So they are not the same thing. Rather, in brief, the wife is to order herself under her husband to respond to what he gives.

She isn't to be bossy, hard-headed, and totally inflexible. And she is only to submit in as far as it is fitting to the Lord.

[ 23 : 07 ] Now remember this is the same apostle who in Romans 13 encourages Christians to submit to government authorities. And yet at the same time, at the very moment when the authorities want Christians to go in an anti-Jesus direction, he says that Christians should obey God instead.

And so the same applies here. If the husband wants the wife to go in an anti-Jesus direction, that is a no-go. But how is this living through the gospel?

Well as the wife submits, she is actually following the model of Christ who himself submitted to the Father's will even at the Garden of Gethsemane.

And so the gospel is now shaping the wife's relationship with the husband. And it is not one way.

The husband too is to live through the gospel.

Verse 19, he must love his wife. And in case we think that that is too general and fuzzy, well look back to Colossians chapter 3 verse 12 to 14.

[ 24 : 23 ] What is love? It is to clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. It is to bear with one another and to forgive one another.

Christ defines his love. This is the love of Christ. This is the love that the husband must exhibit. Now we find this logic made even more explicit in Ephesians chapter 5 where Paul says the husband must love his wife the way Christ loves the church, holy and sacrificial.

This is living through the gospel. And if you want to apply a practical test, then Paul gives one at the end of verse 19. Are you harsh with your wives?

Then maybe you are failing to display a gospel-shaped love. After all, where is the compassion you see in the gospel? Where is the forgiveness you find in the gospel?

Now the same goes for the child-parent relationship. The child, which is here talking about those who are still under the total care and protection of their parents, must obey their parents.

[ 25 : 50 ] Again, as long as they don't move you in an anti-Jesus direction. But interestingly, Paul says to fathers in particular, you have a role to play too.

This is how you live through the gospel, fathers. Verse 21, you don't embitter them. You don't provoke them to discouragement. You do need to teach them that Jesus, not them, are at the centre of their lives, but you do so in a way that leaves them encouraged, not discouraged.

But how is that living through the gospel? You see, isn't that how God disciplines his children? He definitely disciplines us, yes, but never in a way that leaves us discouraged.

Think of the story of the prodigal son, and think of the picture of the father in particular. When the younger son decides to come back, repentant after indulging in a sinful life, how does the father respond?

He welcomes him back extravagantly. He doesn't try to score points, doesn't try to say, I told you so, doesn't try to make the child beg for forgiveness.

[ 27 : 16 ] In fact, when the son is still far off, we are told that the father has been waiting regularly to see if his son will repent and come back. Well, that is God the father.

And God wants human fathers to treat their children in a manner that doesn't embitter them because that ultimately paints an accurate picture of the God of the gospel.

You see, if this is how the God of the gospel treats repentant, wayward children, that the gospel cause fathers to do the same.

Even their discipline is shaped by the gospel. This is living through the gospel. And then we come to the third pairing, slave and master.

Now, slavery in the ancient world wasn't quite the same as the slavery you find in the 17th century. Back in the ancient world, some slaves were actually well-treated, even managing their own income.

[ 28 : 25 ] But, of course, plenty still had cruel, harsh masters. But Paul says to all the slaves, here is how you live through the gospel, verse 22.

You follow your master's instructions, as long as they are not in an anti-Jesus direction. You show integrity. You show wholeheartedness. Why?

Verse 23, because you are ultimately working for the Lord. Just like Paul in Philippians two weeks ago, you might be in chains, but if you are a Christian, Jesus is your real Lord, not whichever human being you are serving under.

Jesus is the one who offers you your true inheritance, verse 24. Now, remember how earlier Jesus was described as the firstborn?

His inheritance is the entire creation. Reconciled to him. And that is what he will share with the slave, though their circumstances look unfavorable now.

[ 29 : 40 ] And Christian bosses need to be similarly gospel-centered. Look at 4, verse 1. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair.

Why? Because you know that you also have a master in heaven. Just as the gospel tells the slave that Jesus ultimately is Lord, not their human master, so the gospel tells bosses the very same thing.

You are not ultimately in charge. So let that perspective shape how you treat those under you. Do you treat them as those who belong to God?

So do you see how the Lordship of Christ should condition all these relationships? Do you see how we live through the gospel, both at home and in the workplace?

Whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we do it in the name of Jesus. As my friend Carl Esseri says, God uses us, his people, not only as recipients of renewal, but also as agents of renewal. [ 31 : 05 ] He places us in outposts of the kingdom as his ambassadors, and we daily are renewed by him and live out that renewal through obeying his teachings. So those are work examples from Colossians 3, how we live through the gospel.

But thirdly, how can we live through the gospel when the Bible doesn't seem to talk about certain issues? After all, the Bible doesn't really mention the internet, or transgenderism, or ecological crisis?

So how can we live through the gospel then? How can we live through the gospel whenever life gets messy and complex? And if you are hoping to get a nice, neat formula as to how to tackle all those issues, well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, that is not possible.

But I do want to try to offer a few more concrete examples of what it means to live through the gospel, to see the world through the gospel, to work through issues in a gospel-centered way, even when it is not so clear-cut.

So let me introduce three categories of questions to ask that are on your handout, which I've adapted from Gary Miller, who is the principal of Queensland Theological College.

[ 32 : 28 ] And so this might provide a helpful starting point. Category one, does the Bible address this situation explicitly? Category two, does the Bible tackle a similar situation?

And category three, if there is no explicit instruction, how might the Bible describe what it means to live for Christ in a way that has implications for the issue?

Now we have seen examples of category one and two already in Colossians three. We have the issue of marriage and parenting, which falls more into category one. Slave-master relationship, relationships, while not exactly the same as employer-employee relationships.

Nevertheless, has some parallels that we can adopt to know how to live in the workplace, so that falls into category two. But what if the matter doesn't fall into category one and two?

Then we're in category three territory. And so we have to wrestle more. But let me very, very, very briefly try to give a couple more examples of how to live through the gospel.

[ 33 : 43 ] And one way to think about it is to compare how the world tries to approach that particular issue and contrast it with how a gospel-centered approach might look like.

So here's one example. Let's think about this question. How do we approach other ethnicities and cultures?

Well, how does the world do it? It seems to me as if the world generally goes down one of two paths. One path is to relativize all cultures.

All cultures are the same. They each have their own truth. There is no better. There is no worse. we must be inclusive and accepting without any questions asked, honor killings, female genital mutilation, polygamy.

Oh, okay. It's your culture. The other path the world tends to go down is this. Forget this multiculturalism nonsense because in the end, clearly, my culture is superior.

[ 34 : 50 ] My culture is the supreme one. I'll look down on your culture. I will ridicule it. But where does the gospel lead us? Well, the gospel says there is such a thing as objective truth.

After all, the gospel tells us there is only one God, Jesus is Lord, and it is his standard which every culture must be measured against.

And so there is a place where we can look at the particularities of each culture and ask, is that cultural practice right? Is that cultural value in line with the gospel?

We know every culture, including our own, is tainted by sin, and so we can be critical of cultures, knowing that there is no every single thing in a culture that is completely correct.

But the gospel also reminds us that we can be morally superior to no one. We are saved by grace alone, the gospel humbles us, and because the gospel welcomes Jews and Gentiles alike, it welcomes the different aspects of different cultures that are good and beautiful that glorify him.

[ 36 : 17 ] We can look at Jesus, who frequently reached out to people of a different culture, in love, but also uncompromisingly called others to him and his way alone.

So that's one example. Here's a second one. Let's take Instagram in particular. Now, how might the world view Instagram? Well, you might see Instagram as a place where we can play God, although of course it will never use such language.

After all, on Instagram, we get to control how our image is projected so that we can project perfection like God.

We can conceal our shortcomings and our sin. And Instagram can also be a place to play God in the sense that it can give us the illusion of being able to see into the lives and places of many people all at once.

You know, as I open up Instagram, I get to see what feels like the whole world, just like God as I do my infinite scrolling. And of course it can become addictive.

[ 37 : 31 ] You know, I need to see what's going on in the lives of others. I need to experience what my friends experience in real time. So, ironically, Instagram actually becomes our God instead.

But what might it look like to live through the gospel in the world of Instagram? It might mean remembering that in this world of images, Jesus Christ is the true image of the invisible God who is now renewing us in his image.

And so we no longer need to feel the need to use Instagram to construct perfect images of ourselves online. because our sense of self is now dependent on God's grace.

It might mean thinking of Instagram as a place of testimony. We are always created to praise something or someone, and the gospel now orients us to praise the true and living God.

And so we take photos to testify to this beautiful world that he's put us in. we can use it to practice thankfulness as we testify to his goodness.

[ 38 : 51 ] Now in both of these examples, there is so much more we can say, I'm sure. I'm only scratching the surface. And without a doubt, it requires us knowing our Bibles.

The better we know our Bibles and how it all fits together, the better we can be at living through the gospel in this way.

And as your pastor, one of my jobs is to try to equip you in this area as well. Some of you with longer memories might remember that we had a little controversy about Pokemon Go a few years back, and I wrote a paper on it for our congregation.

And what I was really trying to do, even back then, was simply to model a gospel-centered approach. And it's why I try to stock our church library with good books on various issues, and that's why I keep recommending specific books to you, because I believe that it's part of my job to help all of us live through the gospel.

So yes, the gospel-centered life does require us to put in effort to wrestle with things that are often not simple, it is a lifelong endeavor, but we do it because Jesus is our Lord.

[ 40 : 15 ] And because Jesus is Lord, whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we confess that Jesus is Lord and there is no other.

And so Father, we just pray now, Lord, that you help us not to divide up our lives into bits where Jesus is Lord and other bits where Jesus is not Lord. Instead, help us to bring our whole lives integrated before you and letting you shape our lives, letting your word shape our perspectives.

Father, we know that living through the gospel is not easy. It can be complex sometimes, but we pray, Lord, that you'll help us not to give up, but to persevere and to keep wanting to know your Bible more and more and more so that we can live in line with your will.

And so, Father, please, Lord, may we live our entire lives to the praise and glory of your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.