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The Gospel, the Church, and Christian Love

Introduction:

- A. Some of you are beginning college this week and have just moved away from home to begin life on your own. Some of you are at a crossroad in your life where the decisions you make over the next year will radically alter the direction of your life from here on out.
- B. Some of you were raised in a church and you are now in the position to see what you will make of your upbringing. Will you follow in the steps of your parents? Will you adopt some of their thinking, culture, practices, and traditions, or will you reject them completely?
- C. Others of you have been a college awhile now and have made many of these choices, but many of them have been unconscious or coincidental. Some of you go to certain churches because friends go there or because it happened to have good music or food.
- D. But everyone here this morning is in the same position on one thing, and that is to make up their mind about Jesus Christ and Christianity.
- E. If you didn't know it already, there are a lot of different ideas about what it means to be a Christian. On the college campus, you will be confronted with many Christian groups, and you will have to decide which ones you think are correct and which ones are wrong. One path you cannot take is the one that says they are all right.
- F. So this morning, I hope to walk through several different bible passages that I think get at the heart of the message of Christianity and some passages that explain what it means to believe that message in terms of the community in which participate.

I. The gospel message that Christ died for our sins is the central claim of Christianity. (I Corinthians. 15:1-19)

A. The gospel is the message of salvation to all who believe in it and hold fast to it. (v.1-2)
1 Corinthians 15:1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you- unless you believed in vain.

B. The gospel is the central message of Christianity. (v.3a)

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:

C. The gospel is the message of the historical event where Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. (v.3b-4)

that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

1. The gospel concerning Jesus Christ is the object of faith, not us.
2. Faith contains understanding, agreement, and commitment to the object.

D. The resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ was an attested historical event. (v.5-8)
⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

E. The gospel is a message of God's grace to sinners who continually need God's grace.
(v.9-11)

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

F. If the gospel is not true and Christ did not die for sin and rise from the dead, then
Christianity is futile, misguided, deceptive, worthless, and evil. (v.12-19)

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

G. Applications:

1. To trust the gospel and to be a follower of Jesus Christ, we must repent of sin and trust in the forgiveness Christ offers on the basis of his death on the cross.
 - a. There are two aspects of our sin that must be repented of:
 - i. Relativism/Irreligion: Relativism and irreligion say that we all must find what is true for us. The relativist insists that we experience God in various ways and that we need to find what works for us. Everyone has their own truth and so we all independently determine what is right for ourselves. God hates this and counts this as sin because it is nothing more than claiming to be god. Instead of recognizing that we were created and given a purpose by God, relativists say that God is in all of us and all of us are god. Irreligion denies that God exists altogether and thus we are our own gods. The gospel calls us to repent of this rebellion and to submit to God.
 - ii. Moralism/Religion: The moralist and religious person say that we are acceptable to God on the basis of our good attitude, works, or intentions. This is the way many people who go to church or follow some religion seriously often think. This needs to be repented of as well because this is a rejection of the seriousness of our rebellion. It wrongfully thinks we can earn our way to God. It also spits on Jesus' face by saying that he didn't need to die for sin since our good behavior can bring us to God.
 - b. Both religion and irreligion breed pride because both approaches lead people to find their identity in themselves. The relativist takes pride in his open-mindedness and hates those who are close minded. THE moralist takes pride in knowing the truth and doing such a good job at living it out.
 - c. Only the gospel drives us to our knees in humility since the gospel tells us that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ who paid for sin.

2. We must keep this message central to everything we do as Christians. Our tendency is always to fall into relativism/irreligion or moralism/religion. This is why we need one another.

II. Christ's church which contains all believers everywhere who all have been gifted by Christ through the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the body must gather in local expressions so that we can grow in love and mature faith in the gospel. (Eph. 4.1-16)

A. Faith in the gospel must result in love for other Christians. (v.1-3)

Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

B. Everyone who has put their faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ is part of the Church.(v.4-6)

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

C. Everyone in the Church is given grace from Christ to love other Christians. (v.7-10)

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

D. Even though Christians are part of one church, Christians prove their membership in it through commitment to local bodies. (v.11)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

E. Local churches have leaders who are appointed by Christ to equip the members to carry out the mission of the church (evangelism and kingdom living). (v.12)

¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

F. Pastors are to seek to build mature believers who know sound doctrine and love. (v.13-16)

¹³ 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, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

G. Christians are to be wise with their time. (5.15-16)

Ephesians 5:15-16 ¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

H. **Application:**

1. Recognize that the Church is exclusive. Only those who have believed the gospel can be and are a part of it.
2. Recognize that being a Christian is not just about you and Jesus.
3. Recognize that if you believe the gospel then you must commit to a local church out of love for other Christians.

- a. You need other people to remind you of the gospel because we all fall into moralism and relativism.
- b. People need you to remind you of the gospel.
- c. We all have different gifts that help us trust Christ and love the world.
4. Recognize that if you believe the gospel then you must commit to a local church because you need more mature people to guide you.
5. Recognize that if you believe the gospel, you have a mission that transcends your ambitions and life goals.
6. Be wise with your time. Make your local church the first priority and then get involved elsewhere.