



June 9, 2019

OPEN

What do you consider to be good news? Today we begin a new series to define and defend the Gospel. We also want to detect false Gospels. Notice two important assumptions for the whole series.

a. Gospel saturation

The Gospel should saturate every aspect of a Christian's life. A very helpful book ***Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life*** by Jeff Vanderstelt (Crossway, 2017). In the introduction Jake Hill Perry writes, "The Gospel should impact us not just theologically but also practically. From our preaching to our parenting, the good news gives us the blueprint for how to function within these spheres in a way that glorifies Christ....Being gospel fluent inevitable shapes how we live, which then affects how we engage with the world around us." (12)

b. Gospel corruption

If it is such good news, why is there so much misunderstanding surrounding the Gospel? It reminds one of a carnival mirror, in which the reflected image is a comical distortion of the original image. If Christians look to society we will get a distorted understanding of the Gospel. Much of the distortions result from objections to God's rightful claim of our lives, because of Christ's sacrifice.

DIG

Our focus today is that **the Gospel is not moralism**. What is moralism?

[Matt Slick](#) suggests that "Moralism has different meanings, but in relation to Christianity, it is the practice of keeping various moral laws so as to please God and obtain and/or maintain one's salvation."

[Albert Mohler](#) describes moralism as "one of the most seductive false gospels" and "the belief that the Gospel can be reduced to improvements in behavior."

Consider the cartoon in which a man is typing away and states: "I am writing down all the things I ought to do before I die. It is my 'ought-to-biography'."

Moralism cannot deal with our sin-crisis...and it can actually bring harm to others. As Dallas Willard once said, "It is hard to be right and not hurt anyone with it!" (***Pursuing God's Will Together***, Ruth Haley Barton, IVP, 2012, 24)

Read **Ephesians 2:1-10** to see four foundational facts about the Gospel.

[1] Dead in sins - vv. 1-2

In verse 2 we are reminded that our life, apart from Jesus Christ, is one of following this world's value system and the leadership of Satan. We are, in fact, spiritually dead and completely separated from God. But moralism ignores this fact. And moralistic thinking has crept into the church in many ways. Consider what researchers Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton have concluded about "[Moralistic Therapeutic Deism](#)".

[2] Destined for punishment - v. 3

Not only is a person without Jesus spiritually dead, but that person is therefore destined and deserving of punishment. The lure of moralism is that we can circumvent this fact by good deeds. Consider what we read **Galatians 2:16**. Just changing the way we act, will not change our nature or our punishment. Dr. Azim Shariff, UBC professor of Moral Psychology stated, "A punitive God has become so popular in religions because it's an effective stick to deter people from immoral behavior."

[3] Delivered by grace - vv. 4-9

Because of God's lavish mercy and great love, He has provided a way of rescuing and delivering us. So it is an act of grace that saves us.

- *We are revived to life and raised up with Christ – vv. 5-6*
- *We are living testaments to God's grace and kindness – v. 7*
- *We are restricted from all self-effort or self-glorification – vv. 8-9*

[4] Designed for service - v. 10

Of course God wants us to do good works and be moral in our lifestyle. However, He never intended that we would *depend upon* our good works to earn salvation. Doing good is about living out God's intended "handiwork" or "workmanship". It is His purpose to make us His "work of art" to display the glory of His grace.

REFLECT

Perhaps the poster child for moralistic religion is the LDS or Mormonism. A powerful story about the rescue of a family from moralism is told by Lynn Wilder in her book ***Unveiling Grace***. [Listen to Lynn's testimony here](#)

A former BYU professor, she says that before she came to Christ, she was living according to Romans 10:3, "*Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*"

The question for you is: *are you trying to establish a righteous of your own, or will you submit your life to God?*