

GRAVITY | Week Two: Beauty

- Big Idea:** The Gospel frees me from the trap of comparative living. The Gospel is a story of return, not of finding a new way.
- Scripture:** Psalm 8
- Lament:** I match up pretty well with the world. What's wrong with that?
- Takeaway:** You were made beautiful.
You may be setting your sights too low.

The gospel is a story of restoration. In Christ, God is restoring the relationship disrupted by our sin. At the same time, God, in Christ, is restoring the beauty disrupted by sin. God made us to perfectly reflect his beauty, but sin has distorted our reflection of the image of God. Think about a carnival “hall of mirrors.” The imperfections in the mirrors distort your actual image. Your image is bent, stretched, and exaggerated. In the same way, the reality of sin has disrupted our reflection of the image of God. Instead of reflecting his love, the craving created by sin causes us to be demanding users and manipulators. We do not love with the expectation of nothing in return. We love for the purpose of getting something in return. Frankly, our culture has discarded the sense of sin as a matter of legal record (God made the rules. We broke the rules. Now, a penalty must be exacted.). However, we continue to feel like sinners even when we reject belief in sin. We know that we are not free – free to love, free to live in peace, free to serve, or free to be who we were made to be. That sense of being bound or driven is the felt reality of sin’s consequences – dislocation from the true and living God who is the author and sustainer of life and freedom.

Here is a personal illustration that reflects the fact that I am not free to love without expectation of anything in return apart from the gospel. I spent an evening with a few men who needed a place to stay for the evening. Regardless of the reason, be it economic or behavioral, their ability to secure permanent housing had been disrupted. After an uncomfortable night on a cot, I got up early to put together a breakfast for the men. It was a modest breakfast exacerbated by the fact that we forgot to pick up orange juice. One of the neighbors, the youngest and most able of the group, was disappointed that there was no juice included with breakfast. With every “no orange juice” comment, I found my frustration level rising. Finally, the distorting impact of sin revealed itself in my words as I shut the guy down for continually commenting on the absence of juice from the breakfast menu. I felt justified. He was receiving a gift. How could he be demanding?



Think about what has to be in place for me to respond in that way. Pride – I have to feel superior to him in order to look down on him for his demandingness and lack of gratitude. Literally, I am responding in a prideful way to his pride. Poverty – I have to feel like he is taking something from me that I have in short supply. He is taking beyond what is reasonable. He took my time and now he is taking my sense of accomplishment by criticizing my service. My pride and poverty, the image distorting residue of sin in my life, transforms the beauty we were created to reflect into something grotesque – a demanding, self-righteous “do-gooder.” Reflecting on this event in my life, we are able to see the deep, broad effect of sin in our lives. Religion minimizes sin to a few behavioral issues. The gospel places the focus on something more heinous and distorting. Sin is ultimately the rejection of the true God for the worship of a false god(s). This personal anecdote illustrates that I can actually sin (worship the god of power and approval) while doing good works (serving the homeless). The person for whom the gospel is coming into focus says, “I am more flawed and sinful than I ever dared believe. I have a problem for which there is no self-derived solution.”

So where do we turn if even our good works can contribute to the barrier that separates us from God? Romans 3:21–25 is a dramatic telling of the profound grace offered in the gospel. “21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” In the gospel, we gain the humility (God’s forgiveness is received as an unearned gift) and emotional wealth (God’s love and forgiveness is given in unending supply) needed to love without strings, serve without expectations of return. In the gospel, the distortion of our sin is transformed into beauty reflecting the image of the true and living God who saves us by his grace and loves us with rugged, relentless commitment.

INTEGRATION QUESTIONS

- > Have you ever seen in yourself the capacity to sin while doing good? Do you have a story similar to my story of self-serving service? (Allow time for others to expose their dirty laundry. It will make me feel less self-conscious.)
- > How do you think most people would define the concept of sin?
- > What does this study and Bruce’s talk show us about the distorting impact of sin in our character and relationships?
- > Romans 3:21 contains a very important phrase in terms of gospel understanding, “the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.” So, what does that mean? [NOTE: Romans 1:17 gives the mirror image of this statement, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’” Righteousness is offered as a gift earned by Christ and received by faith.]
- > It is important to know that the gospel is experienced truth. What is the significance of that phrase, “experienced truth?” [NOTE: The gospel has content (truth). But it is not enough to memorize the content, but rather it is a content that is experienced. Belief includes understanding along with experience. I can read of my wife’s love in a Hallmark card, but I experience her love, and am changed by it, in her kiss, her words of affirmation and her acts of kindness/service.]