

THE GOSPEL IN STEP 1

Introduction

- What is the “Gospel”? “Gospel” lower-case “g” simply means good news. The “Gospel,” capital “G” simply means “the good news of Jesus Christ.” We don’t worship the Gospel, but we are grateful for the Gospel, because it tells us about Jesus Christ, who we do worship. It is Jesus Christ who saves. It is Jesus Christ who heals. It is Jesus Christ who reconciles. It is Jesus Christ who transforms. Jesus Christ is the best news in the world, and we need this news, this Gospel to help us access all that is ours in Christ Jesus.
- Jesus Christ saves, heals, reconciles and transforms. The twelve steps do none of these things. But the twelve steps are a powerful spiritual discipline that can help us to apply the Gospel to our lives, and in the context of recovery, to our point of greatest need.
- The twelve steps, and CR in particular, has been a vehicle for transformation for a lot of people, but ultimately they are effective because they point us to Christ. We can never hear enough of the Gospel, and while Jesus Christ is at the center of what we do each Tuesday and Thursday, I have felt for a while that we need to hear more about the good news of Jesus Christ – intentionally, directly. We hear about him in testimonies, we hear about him in the CR teachings, but I feel we can do even more in **focusing on Him and less on ourselves – more on what He has done and is doing, and less on what we haven’t done, and aren’t doing.** The more we see how He is for

- us, how He loves us, how faithful He is to us, the more we will be able to respond in way a that brings glory to Him and healing to ourselves.
- So – in 2012, I will do a 12-part series, *The Gospel in the Twelve Steps*, one a month, and one lesson on each step. The Gospel is all through the twelve steps, but we are going to intentionally identify where it is.
 - On these twelve lessons, we'll really focus on God's Word, so bring your Bibles if you think of it. As Colin says, "There is power in the open Book."

The Gospel and Step 1

Step 1. We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors. That our lives had become unmanageable.

Where is the Gospel in this? It's depressing, not hopeful. It's defeatist. And it's depressing especially for Christians who hear each Sunday that they can "do all things through Christ, who strengthens me," and who are surrounded by other Christians who apparently can do all things through Christ who strengthens *them*.

*When we walk into Celebrate Recovery for the first time, or for the first time after having failed again, for the hundredth time, we are **all** in some state of denial or defeat. Paul's example from two weeks ago, how he insisted he didn't need to be in detox as he sat in a wheelchair with IV tubes hooked up to him, is actually a great picture. It's as if we're coming here in a wheelchair, unable to walk or stand on our own power emotionally (afraid, angry or depressed), relationally (unable to love, or to receive love, judging or being judged) and spiritually (where is God when I need Him, or why does God allow this to happen to me?).*

It's a spectrum, from denial to defeat. But to work step 1 well, the sooner we admit defeat, the sooner the healing begins.

Here's the Gospel message in step 1: **Victory (in Christ) starts with Surrender (to Christ).** *When you walk in to CR admitting defeat (admitting that your life is out of control), you are surrendering. And when you surrender to the Lord of the universe, you are on your way to victory. So the first step of surrender may indeed be the most important step you ever take.*

It sounds counter-intuitive, but much about the Christian life is counter-intuitive. The point is that each of us is in a war, and as long as we think we have the power to win this war, we deceive ourselves, and our lives will continue to be less than we want; out of control; unmanageable.

You don't have any power over that bottle; that drug; that person; that feeling. That person or feeling has all the power, because you gave it to them.

There Is A The War Within

Our lives are lived in wartime. What God created, including man, was good and beautiful, but when sin entered the picture, a conflict was established. When God confronts Adam, Eve and the serpent in the garden, he says to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and her," meaning "you are now her enemy, and Adam's."

And the war starts within each of us. It will always be this way because we have two natures: Gen 1:27 – we have been created in the image of God, called to be his image bearers in this world. And, we are descended from Adam. After Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve had Seth, and Gen 5:3 tells us that Seth, and therefore the rest of mankind, was created in Adam's image.

In Adam, we have the “way of nature.” In God, we have the “way of grace.”

The war *within* is **the way of nature vs. the way of grace.**

We’re going to look at a passage of Scripture that speaks to this war – it is James 4:1-6:

4 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? **2** You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. **3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. **4** You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **5** Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? **6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

The war starts in each of us, just as it did in Adam and Eve, when we believe the lie that we can be like God; that we are the center of our universe, and that we are entitled to have our desires fulfilled. This is the way of nature in each of us, and it is only strengthened by the pain and disappointment and lies that we experience in this fallen world.

*Verse 1: Our **passions** are at war within us. We are hedonists – that’s the literal meaning of the Greek word for “passion”.*

God has given us a desire for good things – food, wine, sex, comfort, security, love and acceptance – all good things, but gifts from God to be enjoyed as God

intended. But when we believe the lie that we can be like God, the center of our own universe, our desire for God's good gifts become passions. Our passions then war with the way of grace.

- *Pleasure: God has given us the ability to enjoy such things as food, wine and sex. But the war within begins to rage when we elevate these good things to a level where they are a passion. The way of nature in us says we are entitled to more and more pleasure, and it's a war, because the way of grace says, "Enjoy these things the way God intended."*
- *Security: No one wants to live in fear, and to avoid danger is a good thing. And it doesn't help when we have been hurt – when all we've ever known is insecurity and fear. But the way of nature says, "Be safe at all costs. Take no chances, never be vulnerable, never trust." That is not the Gospel.*
- *Power/Control: Closely related to security, we can be the most safe when we are in control of every situation or person in our life. The way of nature encourages us to seek power and control, since in our natural state we see ourselves as the center of our universe.*
- *Approval: We were created for relationship, and for relationships where we affirm and care for each other. It is good to feel accepted and approved. But the way of nature says, "I must have people like me, and I will do whatever it takes – I will put up with wrong behavior, I will allow myself to be hurt – as long as I think there's a chance that people will like me, or value me, hold me up as a great example." The way of nature says*

someone's approval is all you need. The way of grace says God's approval is all you need.

There is a War Without

Our passions for pleasure, or security, or power, or control, or acceptance begin to consume us, and then our lives become unmanageable as we fight and argue with others because we cannot get enough of what we think we need. The war within us is being won by the way of nature.

² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Now we find ourselves at war with others who we see as threats to what we need – a spouse, friend, co-worker, or boss, and the relationships which God intended to be open, honest and loving become angry, dishonest and judgmental. All because you “desire and do not have.” When James says you have become a “friend of the world,” part of what he means is that you like whoever can get you what you want – the way of nature is the way of the world.

Then, most tellingly, James calls the members of his church “adulterers.” We are the bride of Christ, and yet, because of the passions within us we have chosen to cheat on him.

2 The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ²“Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD,

“I remember the devotion of your youth,
your love as a bride,

how you followed me in the wilderness,
in a land not sown.

²⁰ “For long ago I broke your yoke
and burst your bonds;
but you said, ‘I will not serve.’

Yes, on every high hill
and under every green tree
you bowed down like a whore.

²¹ Yet I planted you a choice vine,
wholly of pure seed.

How then have you turned degenerate
and become a wild vine?

²² Though you wash yourself with lye
and use much soap,
the stain of your guilt is still before me,
declares the Lord GOD.

²⁵ Keep your feet from going unshod
and your throat from thirst.

But you said, ‘It is hopeless,
for I have loved foreigners,
and after them I will go.’

*Do you see the connection? The way of nature has enslaved you. Your passion
has become your master. The adulterer is unable to change – “it is hopeless.”*

*Step 1 – I am powerless. Yes! You gave away your power to your passion – to the
bottle, or drug, or image, or person or pleasure – because you thought it could
satisfy you; keep you safe; make you feel better about yourself; give you power and
control.*

*More to the point, the passions within you were used to take your power away. It is
all about power, but it’s never really been about your power or God’s. It’s about the
power of evil versus God’s: ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but
against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present
darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

*When you really understand step 1, you admit (confess, agree with God) that you
are powerless, and that there is a power greater than you that has enslaved you.*

You are a slave to your own sin nature.

The way of nature, the world, as James puts it, is at war with God, and you have been forced (because you are powerless) to fight this war against God – and you say, “enough!”

I Surrender – Nothing Else Matters

You are in a war between two sources of real power, and in step 1, you say, “I don’t care what happens to me, but I am not serving in this army any longer.” Picture these two sources of power as army camps. You have been forced to serve in the army of evil, because your passions enslaved you. But now, you lay down your weapons, you sneak out of this camp, and you make your way across the battlefield to the other army, willing to fall on the mercy of whoever is in charge. You’re walking in with your arms raised in surrender. You don’t know what to expect, but you’ve decided it can’t be any worse than where you’ve been serving for God-knows-how-long.

This is step 1 surrender, and whether you know it or not, this is the right way to walk into Celebrate Recovery, and into the presence of God.

You see, the powers of this world, the way of nature, the way of Satan, the great deceiver, is to enslave you. They have used the passions at war within you to accomplish this. You serve as a slave in this army, with no hope, no power and no future.

But when you enter the camp of God, really working step 1, you are surrendering to a force whose objective is to free you; to heal you; to give you hope and a future.

You might not know it in step 1, but the One you are surrendering to has your best

interests in mind: ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Christ Has Won the War

Now I've used the term "war" intentionally, to emphasize the importance of surrender. But really the struggle of the way of nature vs. the way of grace is a battle in a war that has already been won. The way of grace has won the war. For whatever battle you are fighting, whatever battle, no matter the power it has over you, James says this: "but he gives us more grace." God's grace wins – God's grace has won. His grace triumphed at the Cross of Jesus Christ. The way of the world, the way of nature, was apparently going to be victorious as Christ died, but the world did not know that His death brought forgiveness to us, and his resurrection brought power to us. Grace wins, but it wins for those who are humble. God will oppose the proud – all of us who still feel we have the power to control our tendency to do the wrong thing – but he gives grace to those who are humble. In other words, he gives grace to those who surrender, who lay down their arms, and confess their rebellion against their Lord and their Savior.

You've walked out of a camp where the way of nature says:

"I want what I want." You walked into the camp of grace where you say, "I want what God wants."

You've walked out of the camp where you said, "I need to be in control," into the way of grace where you say, "it is a joy to serve."

Out of the camp where you said, "I must avoid pain," into the way of grace where you say, "I accept pain, I will walk through the pain."

Out of the camp where you said, “I will judge you,” into the way of grace where you say, “I can forgive you. I can love you.” This is victory in Christ, and it starts with surrender to Christ.

Now listen to this passage from Colossians: ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” This is a picture of victory – in the time of Christ, the conquering king and army would parade into town, and behind them, disarmed, often naked, totally powerless, were the defeated powers. Certainly the people of Israel had seen the Roman army do this whenever there was a rebellion.

And Paul says this is what the victory of the Cross looks like. The dark forces of this world that were happy to enslave you, the way of the sin nature that is in each of us, the authorities of this world that condemn us as sinners, unlovable, useless, unforgivable – these forces themselves have been humiliated by the grace of God, and by the Cross they now march behind us, defeated, powerful no longer, unable to condemn, judge or enslave. Jesus Christ has indeed won the war, and you are in His camp, all because you surrendered to Him.

Never Be Ashamed to Surrender

For the way of nature, there is nothing but shame and humiliation, just as the Colossians passage pictures. It is a defeated, naked enemy, now powerless. But because you surrender in step 1, this is not your fate. Paul says in v. 16 of Colossians 2, “therefore, let no one judge you.” Your surrender to Christ will bring you victory in Christ, so that the powers that judged you will themselves stand condemned. Let no one judge you – never be ashamed to surrender to Jesus Christ. In fact, be willing

to surrender daily. Step 1, admitting we are powerless, is not something the Christian will do just one time. The war within our soul will rage while we have breath. We will gain victory in one area, we will lose in another. We will make progress, and we will regress. We will sin again – but when we do, the spiritual discipline of confession, which is what step 1 is, will humble us so that we may receive God's grace. He will oppose us when we're proud, thinking once again that we actually might have some control, some power over this particular area of our lives, but he will give us more grace as we humble ourselves in step 1.

There is no shame in admitting you're powerless, in surrendering to Christ. In fact, it's the beginning of victory in Christ. This is the Gospel in step 1 – we finally agree with God (admit, confess) that we are powerless to control our compulsive behavior – He's been waiting for us to do this! – we are surrendering to a higher power that has our freedom in mind, not our continued slavery – we are surrendering to the One who has won the war for us on the Cross, and we are surrendering to the One who says, "Never be ashamed to surrender to me!"