

Gospel Renewal & the World
Sunday, October 23, 2016
Pastor Kevin Thiessen

TITLE SLIDE #1

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.² ^k The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Slide #2 VISION: Renewing our community through the gospel.

We envision a movement of the gospel that is bringing renewal to “our community,” which encompasses:

- **Slide #3** *Ourselves:* We need the gospel to renew how we relate to God, family, culture, sexuality, money, singleness, and every other area of our lives.
- **Slide #4** *Our City:* We envision gospel renewal throughout the CRD as we seek to introduce people to Jesus Christ, multiply gospel-centred congregations, engage in social justice and compassion, and discover how the gospel transforms the way we do our work.
- **Slide #5** *Our World:* through global missions and strategic partnerships, we envision Central bringing gospel renewal to those places around the world where we have influence.

For those of you who read Trevin Wax’s Counterfeit Gospels, you may remember his comments about the ‘threefold crisis in the church’ ... saying that we have lost our **confidence** in the gospel – we’ve lost our faith in the power of the gospel to change a life. We’ve also lost our **clarity**, with some churches trying to tweak the message to make it more palatable for our culture. Some of us have lost the ability to clearly articulate the center of our faith. Wax’s question was: “Would the basic message of Christianity survive your conversation with a friend, family member or colleague?” Then, when we lose our confidence and clarity, many churches have begun to lose their distinctiveness – and the joy of joining with gospel **community**. **Too many Christians are living lives that are no different than unbelievers.** As Wax comments, “Because we are no longer confident in the gospel and have lost clarity regarding its message, our churches are looking for other things to unite around: politics, worship style, social activism, etc.” **At Central – we want to renew our confidence and clarity regarding the good news of Jesus, and be the community God has intended us to be.**

That’s what the RENEW vision is all about, and as we’ve been unpacking the vision over the past few weeks, I hope you’ve been captivated by our intention to refocus our life and witness together around the gospel and its life bringing, restoring and transforming work in and through our lives. I hope that you are already beginning to regain lost confidence and motivation, and that you are discovering a clarity with which you can share the hope you have in Jesus and his redeeming life and message. I hope that you are excited to be a part of our community as we seek to live his truth out in everyday life.

God has commissioned the church – the people of God – to be the community that embodies the message of the life bringing good news of Jesus. Through our life together, we individually and corporately obey the gospel by living according to the truth of the message that Jesus Christ is our Savior and the Lord of the world.

As we continue to unpack the RENEW vision, our specific focus for today is on Gospel Renewal and the World: The gospel is good news not just for us and our city, but for the whole world. Jesus came for people from every tribe, nation, and tongue. Therefore, I'd like to propose that, when captivated by this truth, we will be compelled (impelled) to take the good news across ethnic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Let's **PRAY!**

WE ARE ALL ABOUT RENEWAL

At Central, we want to join God's mission with the desire to see spiritual, social and cultural renewal in each of us personally, in our city and in communities all over the globe as we and they are changed by the message and power of the gospel. As we read in our passage today, through his son Jesus, God is reconciling the world to himself. This is literally everything that exists, that God is in the process of reconciling to himself through his Son Jesus. **God is taking all the chaos, the disruption, the pain and hurt and he's ordering it, calming it and mending it.** And we believe that the end of the story of this world - when Jesus returns - he will make all things new. The entire world will finally be at peace, unified and centered in God's love and presence.

God gave us – his church – the ongoing ministry of reconciliation – so we believe that it is through communities changed by the gospel that God brings about renewal all over the world between now and the renewal of all things. ***This is often very difficult to see – one only has to turn on the TV to be reminded of the chaos and pain and hurt that is not yet made new and restored.***

Renewal here-and-now is not all or nothing. While we wait for Jesus to return and renew everything, we do not simply abandon the world. *Last week Barton warned us against some churches tendency to isolate.* God calls us to live as citizens of this world and ambassadors of his Kingdom, which means we cannot shirk off our responsibility to care of the world. Yet, we do not think we can perfect the world on our own strength and progress into some sort of utopia. **The renewal God works through only gives us glimpses of the renewed world-to-come.**

So, today we're going to consider what renewal practically looks like? To do this we'll look at three areas, and specifically how these areas impact global renewal. We're going to look at how God brings about renewal here-and-now in first the **spiritual**, second the **social** and finally the **cultural** spheres of our world. So let's start by looking back at our text starting at verse 17 of 2 Corinthians 5.

Slide #6 ¹⁷Therefore, if **anyone** is in Christ, he is **a new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸**All this is from God**, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**.

Renewal starts with the spiritual, because it is the basis of every form of renewal.

Why? Because any sort of lasting, sustainable renewal **needs to be aligned with God's heart and desires**, which can only come from reconciliation with God. When Paul mentions "the old has passed away" it refers to a completed act in past time – it refers to conversion – there has been a distinct change. The "new things have come" is in the perfect tense, which refers to a past completed act with abiding results. This refers to discipleship. **Knowing Christ and having**

him in our lives changes us (v. 17). Paul the apostle, the author of this letter to the Corinthians, mentions Jesus' earthly life, teaching, and redemptive acts of crucifixion and resurrection often. Redemption allows believers to view all of life and history in a new Christ-centered light. **Human history turns into salvation history.** This man Jesus *is* the Messiah, the promised One. His life and teachings become inspired Scripture. Now, the old - Israel's history - must be reinterpreted in light of Him!

Slide #7 Tim Keller writes: The Greek term "gospel" (ev-angelion) distinguished the Christian message from that of other religions. An 'ev-angel' was news of a great historical event, such as a victory in war or the ascension of a new king, that changed the listeners' condition and required a response from the listener. So the gospel is news of what God has done to reach us. It is not advice about what we must do to reach God.

God has entered the world in Jesus Christ to achieve a salvation that we could not achieve for ourselves which now 1) converts and transforms individuals, forming them into a new humanity, and eventually 2) will renew the whole world and all creation.

This is not just good news – this is the **great** news! If the message of the Bible is true – if Jesus is who he said he was, and he has done what the Bible said he did – this is the most wonderful news ever! **Jesus lived the life we could not live.** We are not reconciled to God through our efforts and record, as in all other religions, but through his efforts and record. Christians who trust in Christ for their acceptance with God, rather than in their own moral character, personal commitment or performance, are simultaneously **sinful yet accepted.** Another helpful Tim Keller line you've likely heard before is: **"We are more flawed and sinful than we ever dared believe, yet we are more loved and accepted than we ever dared hope at the same time."** Ok, back to our text, let's look at verse 18.

5:18 "Now all *these things* are from God" It is God's love that sent the Son into the world (cf. John 3:16). Salvation is totally from God (cf. John 6:44, 65; Eph. 2:8–9), but believers must respond and continue to respond to God in repentance, faith, and obedience and good works.

Slide #8 The concept of being **reconciled** is a major theological truth. The word means to exchange or change and thereby to bring together that which was alienated. Rebellious humans who were separated from God because of sin ... have been brought back into fellowship with God through Jesus. God exchanged his righteousness – his perfect life – for their sin. Jesus died in *our* place.

This passage, along with Romans 5:10–11 are the definitive passages on this theological term. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." **Sinners are now friends, even family, with God.** Restoration of the perfect fellowship with him – that was damaged in the Fall in Genesis 3, has been made complete in Christ. This is awesome news!

Let me refer back to Tim Keller, who states: "Without this unique understanding of grace-salvation, religions have to paint God as either a demanding, holy God who is placated by back-breaking moral effort, or as what C.S. Lewis calls 'a senile, old benevolence' who tolerates everyone no matter how they live. The problem is that if I think I have a relationship with God because I am living morally according to his standards, it does not move me to the depths to think of my salvation. I earned it. There is no joy, amazement, or tears. I am not galvanized and transformed from the inside. On the other hand, if I think I have a relationship with God because the Divine just embraces us all, no matter what or how we live— that also does not move me to the depths.

I simply have the attitude of Voltaire, who, on his deathbed famously said, “Of course God forgives—that’s his job.” Any effort to take away the idea of Christ’s substitutionary atonement and replace it with a moralism robs the gospel of its power to change us from the inside out.”

The gospel is, therefore, radically different from religion. The religions of the world operate on the principle: “I obey, therefore I am accepted”. The gospel operates on the principle: “I am accepted through Christ, therefore I obey.” **So the gospel differs from both religion and irreligion.** Not only can you seek to be your own ‘lord and savior’ by breaking the law of God through irreligion, you can also do so by keeping the law in order to earn your salvation through religion.

Slide #9 & 10 A lack of deep belief in the gospel is the **main cause of spiritual deadness, fear, and pride in Christians**, because our hearts continue to act on the basis “I obey, therefore, I am accepted.” If we fail to forgive others – that is not simply a lack of obedience – but a failure to believe we are saved by grace, too. If we lie in order to cover up a mistake – that is not simply a lack of obedience – but a failure to find our acceptance in God rather than in human approval. So we do not ‘get saved’ by believing the gospel and then ‘grow’ by trying hard to live according to Biblical principles. Believing the gospel is not only the way to meet God, but also the way to grow into him.

Slide #11 **Spiritual renewal happens through the gospel because it is a transforming grace that changes our hearts and inmost motives.**

Now from spiritual renewal, social and cultural renewal will flow abundantly.

First let’s consider the SOCIAL – please read again with me verse 19 of our text:

Slide #12 ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and **entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.**

“entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation” Theologically this is parallel to vv. 14–15. Jesus became believers’ reconciliation, and now they must become the means of sharing the gospel of reconciliation with others.

Slide #13 The gospel is not just a truth about us that we affirm with our minds, it is also a reality of a changed life that we must experience in our hearts and souls.

At this point I want to invite Karen Schmidt back up to share a current story of how social renewal is being worked out in Southeast Asia through the gospel – and specifically through two amazing women whom the Schmidts are supporting and empowering.

The beauty of a life changed by the gospel is that it is not one compelled by pressure or order – but rather by **inspiration** and **responsiveness**. As a pastor at Central Baptist Church, it is not my place to put pressure on you dictating something like ‘I’m your pastor and this is your duty to as a follower of Jesus!’ Nor am I going to pressure and guilt you through the emotions by sharing stories about how much the poor are suffering and how much more you have than the sufferers.

Slide #14 Instead, as Paul vividly and unforgettably says later in this second letter to the Corinthians, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that **though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor**, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). When he says ‘you know the grace’—he uses a powerful image, bringing Jesus’ salvation into the realm of money, wealth and poverty. He moves them by a **‘spiritual recollection’** of the gospel. Paul

is saying, 'Think on his costly grace. Think on that grace until you are changed into generous people by the gospel in your hearts.' So the solution to tightfistedness is a re-orientation to the generosity of Christ in the gospel, where he poured out his abundance for you. Now you don't have to find your security in money—the cross proves God's care for you and gives you security. Now you don't have to envy any one else's wealth and status. Jesus' love and salvation confers on you a remarkable status—one that money cannot give you.

Slide #15 We are translators of the gospel – it is our responsibility to communicate in such a way that people can understand it – to bring them to a place where they can accept it or reject it.

God still has to bring people the rest of the way.

With the women the Schmidts are working with – their faith is such that when they employ these women, they're viewing it holistically – it provides a place of employment, dignity, counsel, love, community and care – and the impact of this environment will radically change and reshape the worldview, perspective and previous life encounters of the women they employ. As we in the West keep hearing, many Muslims see Jesus in dreams and visions often before they ever hear about him ... so along with the Schmidts ... we are anticipating that God is already doing his work in their lives ... and we're just playing our part in that process.

As we deepen our understanding of the salvation of Christ and seek to live out of the changes that understanding makes in your heart—it shapes our mind, will, and emotions. Faith in the gospel re-structures our motivations, our self-understanding and identity, and our view of the world. Behavioral compliance to rules without heart-change will be superficial and fleeting. **The gospel changes your heart and develops within us a rock solid commitment and motivation to serve and honor our Lord and King.**

The gospel brings a new 'order' in which believers no longer are controlled by material goods or worldly status and have solidarity with others across customary social barriers.

I want to point out that this impacts us right here in Victoria, just as much as throughout the globe. God is bringing the world to our doorstep. We don't have to get on a plane to meet a Sikh or Muslim or Hindu. We have various ethnicities, socio-economic, cultural and vocational differences all around us. And the one thing that can break down the barriers and communicate across these demographics is the gospel.

Finally, let's consider the impact the gospel has on CULTURAL RENEWAL

Slide #16 ²⁰ Therefore, we are **ambassadors** for Christ, God **making his appeal through us**. We implore you on behalf of Christ, **be reconciled to God**.

Let me remind you of a simple acrostic we use at Central, as we seek to BLESS our city. Begin with prayer – Listen – Eat – Serve – Story. If you want to get to know another culture, you need to invest the time. Again, we have opportunities to do this right on our doorstep. We have a ministry called International Fellowship. It was started some years ago by some of our faithful Filipino members. And yet their desire was that it would not be exclusively a Filipino fellowship but a cross-cultural one. Yet, the simple fact that we call the ministry "International Fellowship" usually means the majority of us Caucasians do not see ourselves as a part of it ... but rather viewing it as a place for people of other nations to attend. Though you don't all need to attend, I encourage you to consider whether this is a ministry and a community that you need to be a part of. This fellowship would love to have you join them every other week as they share food, fellowship and the study of God's Word. And then, when newcomers to Canada do attend – we

can collectively help them learn and transition into life in the Canadian and Christian culture, introduce them to the Gospel, and disciple them in the way of Jesus!

Ok, back to the text!

5:19 “in Christ God was” This is the main issue of Christianity. Was God (the Old Testament YHWH – God who is with us and for us), in Jesus of Nazareth, reconciling the world to Himself? If so, Christianity is true; if not, it is false. Is Jesus truly the only way to reconciliation and forgiveness? **If so, then the gospel is the most important information that people will ever, can ever, hear! We must tell the truth; we must preach the gospel; we must lift up Christ; we must share this offer of salvation to a lost world.**

Slide #17 The passage goes on to read, **“not counting their trespasses against them”**. In the face of known human rebellion there is forgiveness in Christ. Jesus’ blood cleanses from all sin! **Sin is no longer the barrier between God and mankind, but now it is **unbelief**, rejection of faith in Christ, unwillingness to respond to God’s offer.**

Slide #18 Now, Jesus is **“entrusting to us the message of reconciliation”** **A lost world is not on the doorstep of a powerless, loveless God, but is on the doorstep of an apathetic, unconcerned church.** Folks, it’s time for us to **WAKE UP!**

- We have the **message**
- We have the **keys of the Kingdom**
- We have the **indwelling Holy Spirit**
- We have the **marching orders of Jesus**

What will we do?

The prophetic voice of Scripture is constantly calling for **justice** within corrupt systems, **freedom** for those in captivity, **provision** for the marginalized and care for the widows.

Slide #19 This prophetic voice for renewal originates from the lips of Jesus. Renewal within our city and world means embracing the teaching of Jesus and allowing it to shape all areas of our lives. While we wait for Jesus to come and make all things new, we want to see our own city and the places where we have influence look like the one Jesus envisions ultimately.

The gospel is the good news of the new world coming. The plot-line of the Bible is:

- 1) God created the world,
- 2) The world and humanity fell into sin and decay,
- 3) But God sends his Son to redeem the world and create a new humanity, and
- 4) Eventually the whole world will be renewed. Death, decay, injustice, and suffering will be all removed.

The gospel then is not just about individual happiness and fulfillment. It is not just a wonderful plan for ‘my life’ but a wonderful plan for the world. It is about the coming of God’s kingdom to renew everything. **Gospel-centered churches do not only urge individuals to be converted, but also to seek peace and justice in our cities and in our world.**

At Central, through our Outreach and Missions Committee, we have been aligning ourselves with international partners who are gospel-centered and are making significant cultural and Kingdom impact. Though there are many more, these are a few that we have chosen to partner with as

we desire to see the gospel penetrate a broken world – in the hopes of seeing peace, justice and freedom for the broken and lost accomplished.

Slide #20 International Justice Mission. We're going to be looking more intimately at justice in a few weeks time, so you'll be hearing more about IJM if you don't know much already. Our Fellowship has initiated a partnership with them, and we absolutely love their work. IJM works around the world to help the oppressed find justice and freedom. **Their team includes investigators and legal professionals who work tirelessly to defend those who have no defense. Their labor is not just their passion - it is their ministry to the Lord.** An investment in their work is part of praying for God's justice to be established on the earth.

Slide #21 Compassion. Our family supports Netzer, a young Indonesian boy, monthly through Compassion Canada. Throughout the year we have opportunities to write letters and pray for Netzer and his family, and through Compassion we hear back from him and how he's doing in school, at church and how his family is doing. Compassion exists as an advocate for children, to release them from their spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty and enable them to become responsible and fulfilled Christian adults. So, we know that these children are connected with a local church, and as we play our part, we know that Netzer and other Compassion kids are being supported long term not just once off.

Slide #22 Samaritan's Purse. Many of us take great joy in filling up a Christmas Shoebox. This ministry helps those in need while keeping their focus on sharing Christ with every person and connecting people with local churches where they can grow and be disciplined.

²¹ ⁹For our sake he made him **to be sin** ⁷who knew no sin, so that in him **we might become** ⁸the righteousness of God.

When we understand that we are saved by sheer grace through Christ, we stop seeking salvation in other things. The gospel frees us from bondage to the power of material things and worldly status in our lives. Likewise the gospel creates a radical shift of mindset where racial and class superiority, wealth, status, and power at the expense of others, yearning for popularity and recognition are no longer the marks we live for. Instead, Paul reminds us in verse 20, we live as ambassadors for Christ.

Notice that Paul does not say believers should be ambassadors, but **that they are ambassadors**. Believers are salt and light. The question is what kind of salt and light they will be. Believers are Christ's representatives, but what kind of ambassadors are they: factious, heretical, unloving, etc.?

We are reconciled to God through Jesus ... so let's **"be reconciled to God"**. The larger context is mandating an appropriate lifestyle on the part of believers. Jesus saved us from sin and strife; **we are saved to serve!** We are called to Christ-like ministry, not personal agendas.

This context has a message to a lost, needy world—Christ died for you. This context has a message for a factious, unloving church—Christ died for you.

Believers proclaim the truth.

The Spirit convicts the lost.

The Son provides the means.

The Father accomplishes His will through his covenant response.

This is how the gospel brings renewal to the whole world.

VIDEO: Li Yang

Benediction: Romans 16:25-27

Now to him who is able to establish & strengthen you with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now as the prophetic writings foretold and as the eternal God commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles so that they might believe and come to the obedience which comes from faith—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.