
RP Christians Sidebar Compendium

400s - The Internally Whole Man

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401 The Gospel

The Gospel is the foundation of all things. It is the core of God's plan from the beginning to the end, and it is also what defines us in our inner-most being. We'd better understand what it is first.

This is going to seem overly basic for a 400-level post to anyone who has been in the church for any length of time. But the 400-series is all about being transformed by the Gospel into the men God wants us to be. Where 100 was about intellectual inspiration and 200/300 about being physically/emotionally motivated toward living and experiencing life differently, the 400s will be about transformation itself, and the Gospel is at the core of that.

This conversation will be useful not only for men themselves (just because you're a man doesn't mean you're perfect!), but also for men to understand how to lead their wives to overcome significant internal problems that are holding them back from living as right wives/women in the order of how God designed them. After all, Ephesians 5:25-27 says this is your responsibility as her husband.

So, I don't think I could proceed without a clear, definitive outline of the whole of the Gospel message. Yeah, there are ways to shorten and summarize this or explain in greater detail, but here's what I believe covers all of the necessary components to utilize the Gospel as I intend to use it in this 400-series.

Creation and The Fall

Why did God create the world? The Bible says it's because he wants a relationship with us. Acts 17:26-27 specifically says that throughout all of time and all of space in the order of creation, God determined where and when each of us should live. Why? "That they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us."

In Eden, Adam and Eve were already with him in that relationship, but they sinned, which separated them and us from God (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 5:12-21). Romans 6:23 says that the result is also death - not just a physical death, but a spiritual death (i.e. hell). Romans 3:23 says that this is the natural fate of all people because all people are imperfect and sin.

Human Effort

Since the dawn of time, humanity has tried numerous things to address the problem of sin, which is what separates us from God. All of these ways usually boil down to one of three categories:

- *Morals*: If we can be "good people" and avoid doing bad things, that will be enough to get rid of our sin.
- *Good works*: If we do enough good things, it will outweigh our bad things and God will love us for it.
- *Religion*: If we do enough religious practices and show our devotion to God, God will reward our effort with heaven, escaping hell.

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." As to each ...

- Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God, so we can never be "morally good" on our own by God's standard.
- Matthew 5:48 demands perfection, so it's not a matter of good works outweighing the bad. A baseball player who strikes out once and gets on base every other time for the rest of his career will still not have a "perfect" record.
- Although sacrifice was the primary religious ritual for salvation in the old testament (where religion reigned supreme as compared to today), God was clear in Hosea 6:6, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Religious practices are not the answer.

To refrain Proverbs 14:12, anything we try on our own will still only get us to hell.

Salvation

If left to ourselves, this would be a hopeless predicament. God didn't have to give us a solution. He could send everyone to hell and be totally just in doing so. But by grace he chose to give us a way.

1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God; he was put to death in the body, but made alive in the Spirit." John 3:16 clarifies that it is those who "believe in him" who will be saved and have eternal life. Because of all of this, Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For it is by grace you are saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God so no one can boast."

Faith

So, what exactly is faith? Imagine you receive a note under your door in the middle of the night saying, "I am going to kill you and everyone you love tonight at midnight." How would you respond? There are three likely responses:

- You can choose not to believe the note. You have no faith in the genuineness in the threat, so you ignore it. At the end of the day, you and everyone you love are murdered.
- You can choose to believe it, but not to care. Suppose you're fine with letting yourself and all those other people die. Well, this probably means you didn't really love them, but it also means that your belief won't save you - you'll die too. (see James 2:17 - "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead"). At the end of the day, you and everyone you love are murdered.
- You can choose to believe the note and take some action to protect your family and yourself. Ideally, rather than running away (assume he'll find you) or getting yourself killed hunting him down on your own (or otherwise committing a crime that would equally ruin your life), you call the cops and let them save and protect you and your loved ones. At the end of the day, this is the only option that will save everyone.

In the same way, a mere intellectual acknowledgment of the truth is not enough. For it to actually save a person, it must be internalized within the person. Jesus describes this saying, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you" (John 15:4). If you don't internalize the faith in a manner that compels you toward action, it's not genuine faith. Note that the actions themselves are not what saves us in the case of Christ - it is the faith itself. But the actions are the automatic byproduct of genuine faith.

Reconciliation

Because of Christ and our faith in him, we have a *reconciled* relationship with God (2 Cor. 5:18) and it is our job to continue reconciling the world to Him (id). Because of the Gospel we are now able to experience with God what sin had stolen from us. We are able to be eternally and perfectly content. Satisfied. At peace. Joyful. Everything that we struggle through in this world can be satisfied by God because we are reconciled to Him by Christ to live life as we were always intended to experience it.

Now, not everyone, even after salvation, is willing and able to receive the benefits of this. We still live in sinful bodies. We still forget that we are free. We still fail to open our hand when God tries to give us what now belongs to us by right as his adopted children. But the option is there and the rest of this series will be about understanding how to utilize the Gospel to take it.

Continuing Obligation

From here it is important to recognize that salvation is not the end-point, it is only the beginning. Philippians 2:12 says, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." That "fear and trembling" bit comes because the Bible talks a lot about the need to be concerned with the genuineness of our salvation.

- Matthew 7 references people who thought they were saved and were doing great things, but to whom Jesus says, "Away from me, I never knew you."
- Hebrews 10:26-31 talks about those who continue in sin intentionally even after alleged salvation and that their fate is "a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries."
- 2 Peter 2:20 says that if a person knows Christ and has escaped sin, but is again entangled in it, "the last state has become worse for them than the first."

Instead, we see Paul saying in Romans 1:16 that he is "obligated" both to Jews and Gentiles. We see Jesus and the apostles not preaching obedience not merely for the sake of showing the impossibility of perfection without Christ, but because of a genuine post-salvation obligation to follow what was commanded. Both Paul and Jesus' last recorded words centered around sharing our faith and making disciples.

If you want to prove your salvation, you must bear good fruit (Matthew 7:15-20) - and that fruit, by comparison with every other time Jesus talks about plants, fruit, seed, etc., is when your faith spreads so the Gospel can spring up and grow in others. If you don't have proof of your salvation, what good is it to argue that you're saved on a technicality? Didn't Jesus come to abolish technicalities of the law as a means of judging the saved from the unsaved?

So, I forever refrain: adopt the mission of disciple-making as the cornerstone of your frame. Build on it from there, but let everything else rest on that principle. This is how the Gospel will be taken to the nations. Like the parable of the minas/talents, the Gospel is wasted if given to you and you don't do anything with it - and we all know how it turned out for that guy ...

Summary

To shorten this whole message, if someone asks me, "I just want to know how to get saved. What's the simplest answer you know how to give?" To that, I recite the ABCs:

- Admit you're a sinner, can't be perfect on your own, and need a savior.
- Believe that Jesus died and rose again to be that savior.
- Commit in your heart to living out of love for him, proving this love by your fruit.

402 The Impact Of The Cross

There are many theories on how the Gospel actually functions to save us and reconcile us to God. What are these theories and how do they affect our perception of the world and our internal state of being through daily life and struggles?

In 401 I explained the essential components of the Gospel itself. Most people get saved and leave the Gospel at the door. They will acknowledge it has value, but usually limit that value to things like:

- *Reminding ourselves of the Gospel makes us thankful to God.*
- *Jesus' sacrifice is an inspiration.*
- *We need to master our understanding of the Gospel to share it with others.*
- *We need to know where our journey started to know where we're going.*

These are good reasons. But they're also pretty nominal in comparison to the true impact the Gospel has on us today. Your very identity is defined by the Gospel itself. More to the point of this post: the way you experience life is controlled by what you believe about the cross.

Theories of the Cross

The primary operative function of the Gospel is to restore us into a right relationship with God. That's what was lost in Eden. That's what Jesus was trying to fix. There are several ways the cross functions to address the problem of sin, imperfection, and our broken relationship with God. Here are nine.

1. **Ransom Theory:** In God's justice, the consequence of our sin is that it gave us over to Satan. God loved us so much that he sent his son to die as the ransom price for our sin. Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:5-6.
2. **Reverse Ransom Theory:** Our sin was against God, creating a debt we could never repay. Jesus was perfect for us, paying the debt on our behalf. Satan is not a factor at all. Matthew 6:12, 18:21-35; Colossians 2:14.
3. **Wrath Theory:** God hates sin and must exert his wrath against those who sin. When Jesus bore our sins on the cross and died, God put his full wrath on Jesus instead of us. Romans 1:18, 5:9; 1 John 4:18.
4. **Recapitulation Theory:** Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, which spread to all of their physical descendants. Jesus lived, died, and rose in parallel to undo what Adam did. Romans 5:12-21.
5. **Atonement Theory:** God preordained that the blood of a sacrifice would wash away sins. The animal sacrifices were a symbol, but Jesus' blood washes us clean once and for all. Leviticus 17:11; John 1:29; 1 John 1:7.
6. **Penal Substitution Theory:** The wages of sin is death. We sinned, we deserve death. Jesus died in our place, taking the punishment instead of us so we are free to live. Romans 6:23; Isaiah 53:5; 2 Cor. 5:14-15.
7. **Moral Example Theory:** Jesus' life modeled how mankind should live. His death was designed as the ultimate example of the extent of the love we must have for one another. Matthew 5:48; John 13:34-35.
8. **Vicarious Repentance Theory:** Because mankind is imperfect, we can't repent perfectly. Jesus bore our sins and in his perfection he repented of them for us. Matthew 3:11, 15-16; Luke 23:34.
9. **Spiritual Warfare Theory:** There is a battle in the spiritual realm. Death was the enemy's greatest weapon. Jesus died and rose to defeat death so it has no power over us. Ephesians 6:12; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 1:18.

All of these theories are grounded in Scripture and true, working in harmony with one another. There are others I'm sure we could add as well, but these are the most common ones I see that impact people's lives.

What You Believe Matters

I have found that everyone tends to resonate with one or two of these very closely, while inherently having an aversion to another one or two (or at least to recognize them less than the others). The aspects of the Gospel that resonate with you or which you shy away from are quite telling as to how most people experience life. Let me give some examples from my own observations.

ME: The wrath theory is the one I most closely identify with. I don't know why, but it just clicks with me. As a result, I experience no shame in life. I have no worry or fear that my actions will disappoint God. I know that any wrath God would have against me was expressed on Christ in my place. That doesn't free me to keep on sinning, but it does mean I don't go through what most others do who claim to struggle with feelings of guilt, shame, and depression at their sinfulness. I am free from these things. That said, I naturally reject the ransom theory. Ever since reading C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the ransom theory has not sit well with me. As a result, I don't emotionally experience the vast depth of love that God expresses toward me - that he would pay any price for me. I just don't experience that the same way others do.

MY WIFE: My wife closely identifies with the atonement theory. In knowing that she has been washed clean once and for all by Christ, she has great security in her salvation and has a deep conviction of the purity that God is leading her into. But she really struggles with the spiritual warfare theory, seeing that as more of an ancillary component to all of this. Result? She lacks any perception of what's going on in the spiritual realm in her daily life and struggles to see the value in prayer.

FRIEND 1: A guy I discipled was very, very strongly aligned with the moral example theory. This view of the cross created a compulsion in him to live as a generous, humble servant. He lived out Christ's good-will to the world as the vessel by which it would be carried out. But he was weak in the wrath theory. Consequently, he struggled with a constant feeling that he was a disappointment to God, which was only magnified by the moral example theory compelling him to try to measure up to Christ's life and sacrifice.

FRIEND 2: Another guy I discipled connected with the recapitulation theory. It was an amazing intellectual concept to him - the pattern from beginning to end that Christ was fulfilling. He had a keen sense of his place in this pattern that let him feel confident in the fact that God could and would use him as an ongoing expression of the reversal of the curse, namely through redeeming as much in this world to God as he could (i.e. social campaigns, service projects, ministry to the poor, etc.). But he really struggled with penal substitution. As a result, he constantly felt like God was going to punish him if he sinned, or he would often crumble under the weight of the fact that he doesn't deserve to be saved.

Conclusion

I could go on and on with different combinations and patterns - and they are all unique and fascinating to explore. I encourage you to think through some of these theories and process what you can learn about how your beliefs about the Gospel have affected your life - positively or negatively. Praise God for the positives that he has given you through the Gospel, and pray for repentance at those aspects of Jesus' sacrifice you inherently reject and the distance that rejection may have caused in your ability to relate with God.

As you strive to be a more complete, full man, living in light of how God intended you, remember that the Gospel is at the core of this. You cannot live to be the man God created you to be if you are not reconciled to God through Christ's death and resurrection - but also that *what you believe about the Gospel affects the terms of how your reconciled relationship with God will play out in your daily life*. Explore new ways of connecting with God by embracing different aspects of the Gospel that you previously had not considered. Then consider how those previously ignored theories were affecting your internal well-being and daily living patterns and start experiencing and living life the way God intended instead!

403 The Lens

403.1 The Hopeless Cycle

All men start in a cycle of hopelessness apart from Christ. There are measures we can do to understand our problems, but can we ever really escape them? This post explores the fallacy in traditional thinking about internal problem-solving.

Several men have come here suggesting that they've been screw-ups most of their lives. Some come to me with mental health problems, a history of abuse, serious anger issues, addictions to alcohol, drugs, or pornography, or any number of problems. RP claims to fix the man, but there are limits to what can be done apart from Christ. This series will cross those boundaries into the realm of secular impossibility.

Your Image: You're Not Perfect

Accept this as a fact. Even if you think you're an awesome guy and have nothing to learn from this series, dig deeper. Romans 3:23 says all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. Romans 6:23 says that the wages of that sin is death - a spiritual death. That isn't just eternal hell later on, but starts internally in our spirits today. Even apart from hell, Ephesians 2:1 makes clear that this "death" is something we experience in the

present on earth. In Romans 7 Paul affirms his ongoing sinful nature and references himself as having a "body of death."

What is it that's killing you inside? **Identify the issue.** Start with something bite-sized and work your way up. If you've been molested as a kid, shelf that for now and work on "I get mad when my wife denies me sexually," and get to the bigger issues when you're ready to wrap your mind and spirit around it wholly. Smaller issues at first.

For this series I'm going to use three common issues all the way through to demonstrate the application of this process in varying contexts:

- A: struggles with loneliness/depression
- B: struggles with pornography addiction
- C: struggles with fear of rejection

First Lens: Re-Focus Your Self-Perception

Most people's struggles are foggy and vague. Like a pair of glasses, you need to correct your vision to see your struggle for what it is.

Whatever negative in your life you're struggling with, re-frame it as a lost positive. Focusing on negatives is dangerous and leads to a vicious cycle if we don't see the good that they are rooted in. Specifically, we know that God is good (Matthew 19:16-17) and everything he creates is good (1 Timothy 4:4) and if there is anything good, it came from God (James 1:17). In the beginning was God and nothing else (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1). We were made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Isaiah 59:2 says that sin is what separates us from God and walking in His image alongside Him. So, anything "bad" in your life is not of substance itself - it is defined by its being an inversion or absence of the goodness we were created in and from.

That said, let's apply this to our three examples. Bear in mind that there are many possible directions this can go, so I'm just going to pick one for each and run with it. Your "positive" might be different from what I describe here.

- A: The negative of loneliness is rooted in the positive of fellowship - specifically in the sense of the true oneness *koinonia* bond I referenced in 103. Similarly, depression is the negative of joy as a positive. So, rather than saying "I'm lonely and depressed," A would do better to understand, "I don't experience fellowship or joy."
- B: Pornography addiction could come from a multitude of places, and the feelings surrounding it are often their own beast that we won't tackle here. For now, let's just assume B does it because he likes the physical sensation and that's it. The negative of his behavior is rooted in the positive desire for physical pleasure.
- C: The fear of rejection is rooted in the desire for acceptance.

First Focal Point: Our Effort

The focal point is the conclusion you reached in the last section, but the question then becomes: How do you satisfy this positive that you now understand you're lacking? Most often we reassess through a secular reflective mirror. We take a good look at ourselves, assess strategies for solving the problem, and then take action.

- A: A can create a plan for meeting new people and seek joy through those relationships. He decides to join a local community softball team, gets more involved in his church, makes a point to call his friends more regularly, etc.

- B: He puts up porn blockers on his computer, puts sticky notes all over his desk with verse reminders, gets an accountability partner, tries to re-initiate with his wife, etc.
- C: He reads self-help books, practices reciting confidence-building phrases, works out to "become the prize," etc.

All of these things are good things. They're steps in the right direction. But if we look to them as THE answer, they will fail us. A's going to meet some people who laugh him out of the group. B's going to see a hot girl on the street and jack off afterward. C may actually act on the approach and experience the rejection he feared. All of them have made positive life changes, but have not yet addressed the core of the issue plaguing them.

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." In other words: if we go with secular ideas for solving all our problems, somewhere along the line we're just going to keep returning to critical failures. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear that we are saved by grace through faith, "this not of yourselves, not by works." Galatians 3:3 says, "Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit are you now trying to be perfect by human effort?" Putting these two together, we understand that if salvation was by the Spirit and not our works, then solving the ongoing effects of sin in our life must also be by the Spirit and not by our works.

The result is that if left to our own devices, we will always reflect on our problems, create an action plan, follow through, see things get better for a time, then return to another critical failure, and repeat the cycle. It is endless. It is vicious.

In part 2 we will address the answer to the problem, which is found in the Gospel and how something that happened 2,000 years ago still helps us today.

403.2 The Empty-Full Dynamic

As believers in Christ we have access to a source of eternal abundance. Do we experience that? Or do we look for our satisfaction in other things? This post explores the patterns that both Christians and non-Christians alike follow which ultimately interfere with our ability to find satisfaction from the only person who can truly and eternally give it: God.

Before solving the problem addressed in part 1, I think I must bring forth another illustration that I always share alongside The Lens. For lack of a better name, I call it "The Circles Illustration" and it comes from Dr. Larry Crabb's book, Understanding People.

Here's the picture so you can follow along.

The Premise

Imagine a circle that represents the maximum fullness, abundance, joy, etc. you can possibly experience in this life. Now imagine another smaller circle just inside of that one, which represents the degree of fullness you're actually experiencing. If these circles were exclusively about sexual fulfillment, that'd be one thing, but the point of this sub is to address the whole of the man and not only his sexual satisfaction, so let's look at this as being from the whole of your life.

The size of that inner-circle is constantly fluctuating. Sometimes it's really big - almost as big as the outer circle, but other times it's really small, and other times in the middle. That's because our experience of life is constantly changing.

The gap between the inner-circle and the outer circle is the degree of dissatisfaction we experience in life. It's all of those negatives you're pondering from Part 1.

Then there's the differentiation between how we are feeling from how we should be feeling. At any given

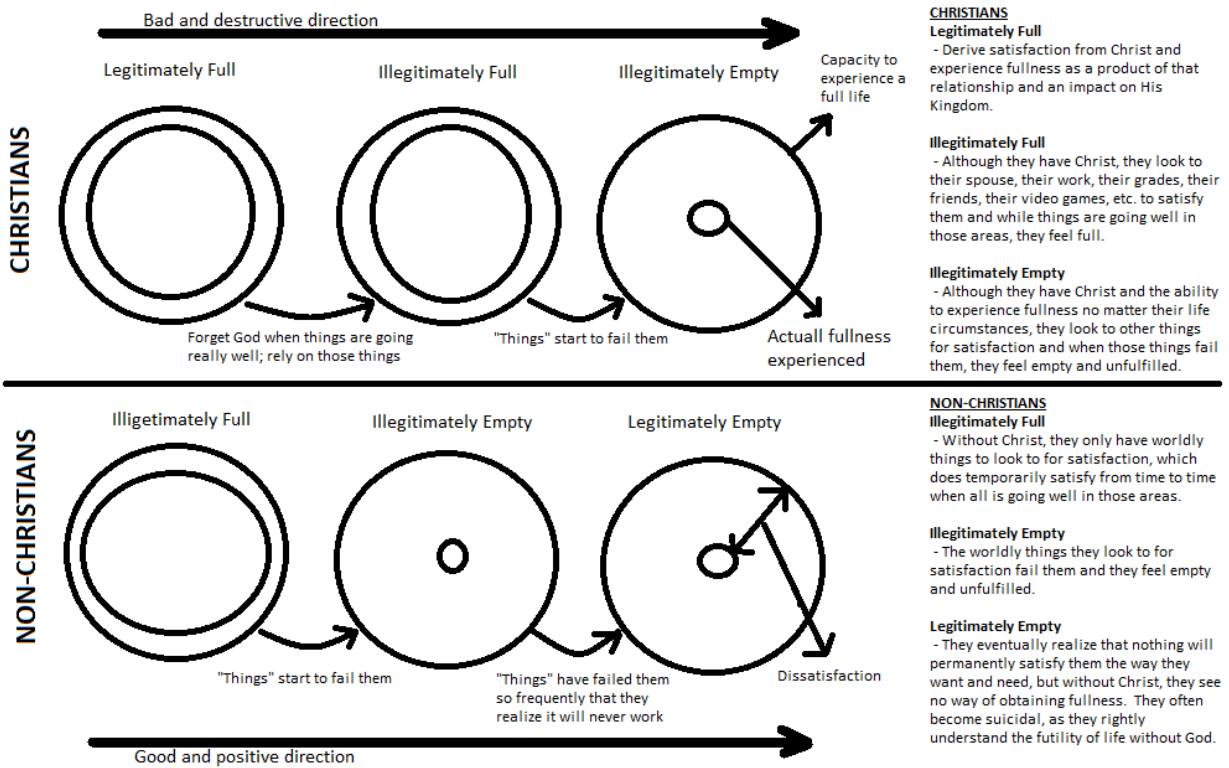


Figure 1: The Circles Illustration

time, our fullness might be legitimate and from the right sources, or it could be a product of relying on the wrong things. Likewise, we might feel empty without cause, or otherwise have good reason to feel that way.

Non-Christian Satisfaction Cycle

For non-Christians, they tend to waver between two positions: illegitimately full and illegitimately empty. They don't have Jesus, so their fullness is only a hollow shell of what God intends for them, or as Hebrews 8/9 says, it's based off of "copies and shadows" of the truer heavenly things. Examples include:

- Alex got a promotion at work and feels great about it.
- Brahbrah's dog just got miraculously cured from epilepsy
- Carl's wife just gave him a BJ for the first time

These are all great things and good reasons to be happy. But if they are the reason the circle is full, each of them are in for a rude awakening. Alex's boss might resign and the new boss fire him. Brahbrah's dog might get hit by a car. Carl's wife might decide that was gross and say she'll never do it again.

Now Alex, Brahbrah and Carl are all feeling pretty empty because the thing that made them full let them down. But again, this is a legitimate emptiness because God has a true source of satisfaction that they could draw from, but they're looking elsewhere instead.

At some point, Alex will probably get a new job, Brahbrah will get a new dog, and Carl will find another sexual adventure to try and they'll be right back to their "illegitimately full" circle ... until Alex's new job has some annoying co-workers, Brahbrah's new dog keeps pooping on the floor, and Carl's wife starts getting a series of conspicuously timed headaches. The cycle repeats itself over and over.

Eventually Alex, Brahmah, and Carl realize that these short-lived victories are hollow. Life is a series of ups and downs and it's making them seasick. They realize that nothing in this world will permanently satisfy them. Life is meaningless. If God isn't real, suicide is a legitimate option. They finally identify with Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes. Their emptiness is now legitimate because they're not blaming the wrong things; they're finally realizing the truth of the world. And that's what RP is at its core - an acceptance of the truth, which is why secular RP will always be limited in nature.

To that end, secular RP compels you to live in that "illegitimately full" circle indefinitely - to do whatever it takes to keep yourself there, and even when you're not there to pretend that you're there anyway and to maintain the same mentality as when you are there. But what if you could *actually* be full all the time? Enter ...

The Christian Satisfaction Cycle

Many non-Christians never reach the third "legitimately empty" circle, so their cycle is a constant shuffle between the first two circles. Christians, on the other hand, regularly use all three.

When we first connect with Christ, we feel the abundance that comes with the Spirit of God. It's beautiful. Everything in life is a blessing, even the bad things - because we have an eternal perspective about the good that will result from the bad. Nothing can get you down when you're legitimately full.

Instead, we see all of these wonderful things and we stay up. But the reason for our fullness shifts off of God and onto all of the blessings he's given us. David was at first full on God, but eventually received so many blessings that he had to take a census so he could feel good about the mighty kingdom he was ruling, or look out a window to feel good at the fact that he could have whatever girl he wanted. Rather than experiencing the blessings as a byproduct of our fullness in God, we shift away from God to the happiness that those blessings bring us and enter the realm of illegitimate fullness.

It's possible but rare for a person to go from an illegitimate fullness back to a legitimate fullness. More often what happens is that those blessings wane (including by the fact that God has less incentive to bless people when those very blessings are pulling them away from him) and ultimately the Christian feels empty. But there is no legitimacy to this emptiness. Because the Christian has the Spirit in him, there is no reason he should ever have to experience that emptiness, even through troubled times. He can always be full and abundant in Christ.

Soon enough, someone will remind him of this and he will rely on God once more and regain a legitimate sense of fullness until the cycle repeats. Sometimes the Christian has to bobble between the illegitimately full and illegitimately empty circles several times before he remembers the true source of his satisfaction.

Connecting To The Lens

Part 1 references the hopeless cycle - that constant bobble between illegitimate fullness and illegitimate emptiness. When a non-Christian is legitimately empty, this is when he is most receptive to the Gospel, which is the mirror that will be the focal point of Part 3. The Gospel is also the mechanism that allows legitimate fullness in the first place.

What was the issue that you thought of in Part 1? Ponder that in the context of these circles. Which circle are you in? Are you truly looking to God for your source of satisfaction? Or are you thinking, "If I could just deal with this one part of my life everything would be fine?" That's the hallmark of someone who is in one of the illegitimate circles - whether full or empty. That "one thing" is not going to satisfy you unless it's your relationship with Jesus. Period. I make no exceptions here.

- Alex might be thinking, "If I could just not have to worry about providing for my family, everything would be fine." This might be while he's unemployed. But he might also have this thought while he's

crushing it at work ... but secretly knows that the tides could change very quickly, so he never stops looking to his financial success even while he is very successful. His worry about provision is probably rooted in a positive desire for security, and Part 1 starts to connect with him.

- Brahbrah might be thinking, "I just want a companion in life," and be meditating on that both when her dogs are alive and when they're dying or having epileptic fits or pooping on the floor. Her desire for companionship is the direct good she needs as the subject of Part 1.
- Carl might be thinking, "I can't take it when my wife rejects me," and even when she says yes he takes it not for what it is, but in the context of thinking, "Thank goodness she didn't reject me this time!" And even after 50 yeses in a row, he may still think that. His desire for intimacy is where he connects with Part 1.

RP Praxeology

Now, it should go without saying that all of this is tied to several core RP traits, but opens the door wide on how they can be experienced and practiced.

The most notable is the abundance mentality. Our abundance comes from Christ, not how many plates we can spin or how much money we make or how much sex we're getting from our spouses. If you want the true abundance mentality, one that transcends the physical abundance preached in secular RP circles that only lead to an "illegitimate fullness," you have to be legitimately full in Christ.

The second is amused mastery. One who can see the circles for what they are and spot at a whim which circle he's in at any given moment can easily and even without thinking return to the legitimately full circle. He realizes that it's like the board game of "life." You roll the dice and crap happens - good or bad. But in the legitimately full circle, it doesn't matter whether your house burns down or you have another kid - it's all still just a game. You enjoy the good things in the context of thanking your good, good Father. You see the bad things and know you're still loved and protected under his care. You remain unphased because you have an eternal perspective about the world, knowing that it will all pass away. You've watched Francis Chan's Rope Illustration and think to yourself, "I totally get it now!"

The third is frame. When you are bobbling between circles, you have no frame. Your experience of the world is dictated by what happens to you. When you are legitimately full, nothing the world throws at you can shake you because you have a divine source of strength. You live under God's frame and have adopted it as your own. And when you live out that frame, others are drawn in and want its protection as well. Because of the Spirit's power exuding from you, you're the one to shape the world around you, not them shaping you - and all to the good of the Kingdom.

I'll let you all add to this list.

Application

So, I ask you now - and imagine yourself in a dimly lit auditorium, worship band slowly playing in the background, dozens of people praying and crying out to God all around you ... whatever gets you in the mood to think seriously and critically about your life: *which circle are you in and why are you living there?*

What is it going to take to get you in the legitimately full circle?

What's it going to take to keep you there?

What are the constant hang-ups that draw you back into illegitimacy?

Have you ever been legitimately full even once in your life yet?

Do you know people who are legitimately empty?

Do you know people who are caught in a vicious cycle - whether as Christians or non-Christians - who desperately need pulled out?

What can God do through you to bring yourself and others into His frame so that you can all be a beacon of light to the rest of the world?

403.3 The Gospel Is The Answer

Once we determine not to look to the wrong places for our satisfaction, how can we be legitimately full in Christ? When we reflect on the Gospel and the way it speaks to the very specific issues in our lives, as opposed to the general way the Church often views the Gospel, we see that God intended a power behind the cross that most people in the church never come to realize. That power is what can make us whole, healing all of our brokenness and bringing light to our darkest places.

As a recap:

- 401 laid out the essential elements of the Gospel.
- 402 showed that the way we view the Gospel affects our internal sense of identity and emotional dispositions.
- 403.1 began the "lens illustration" by showing that our negative experiences are rooted in a positive desire that is lacking and how it's futile to believe anything on this earth could satisfy those desires with any permanency.
- 403.2 utilized the "circles illustration" to demonstrate this impermanent satisfaction through worldly solution, but that we have the capacity to find legitimate fulfillment in Christ.

The purpose in addressing this is that many people come here from dark, broken places. Several men have disclosed either publicly or privately that they struggle with things like pornography, rage, depression, guilt, shame, or the like - or that their wives may struggle through one of these things as well - and that this affects their sexual and relational satisfaction. For single men, it also affects their framework for living in general, often compelling them to seek a wife as the means of curing these internal ailments. If we cannot discern through Scripture a solution to these problems, we will be left to the chaos of the world, which is too harsh an environment for the male heart to survive in.

If you want a right sex life, ministry, marriage, etc., you must be a right man. If you want a right wife, you must sanctify and cleanse her the same way Christ did: through the Gospel (Ephesians 5:25-27). That is why the Gospel as a solution is distinctively important for all men on this sub, above and beyond the technical strategies we may employ. If we are not made whole by the Gospel, all our efforts at sexual strategy will be worthless, and in Christian marriages, they will most likely fail.

God May Crush Your Desires

In 403.1 I referenced the general self-reflection that people do in an effort to find answers to the problems that ail them. This is why psychology often fails to do much more than give a temporary mood boost. Its solution is for a person to look inside themselves for the answer. In reality we must look to Christ for the answer. I referenced three people: A, B, and C, who struggle with loneliness/depression, pornography addiction, and fear of rejection, respectively. We also discussed the ways they expected their desires to be met: A wants friends, B wants physical pleasure, and C wants people to love and accept him. But the harsh reality of the Bible is that God doesn't promise any of these things:

- A: We constantly see Scriptural examples of people who were isolated from human contact. Jeremiah, Elijah, Isaiah, David ... even Jesus was abandoned by the 12 before the crucifixion. God never promised

the Christian life wouldn't be lonely. If anything, the Bible narrative proves that this might be a real challenge for many.

- B: Again, the Bible never promises physical pleasure. In fact, for centuries people believed the Bible specifically condemned physical pleasures. Although I disagree with that interpretation, that alone should emphasize the point. More specifically, Jesus did promise we would suffer and be persecuted. The Bible also doesn't promise that everyone will get sex. Many people will die under God's will without ever having had sex.
- C: Jesus said point blank that the world would reject us. He never promised acceptance.

The Gospel As A Mirror

If meeting our positive desires our way isn't guaranteed by God, what are we to do? I present that we should not self-reflect, but that we should reflect on the Gospel to find our answers. Galatians 3:3 is actually pretty explicit about this: "Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you now trying to become perfect through human effort?" That "beginning" is when they were first saved and "by the Spirit" references the Spirit drawing them to the Gospel and transforming them through the Gospel. Yet for some reason we all want to jump on the "self-reflection" band-wagon, rejecting what the Spirit can do through the Word of Truth, which is the Gospel, and who is Jesus Christ.

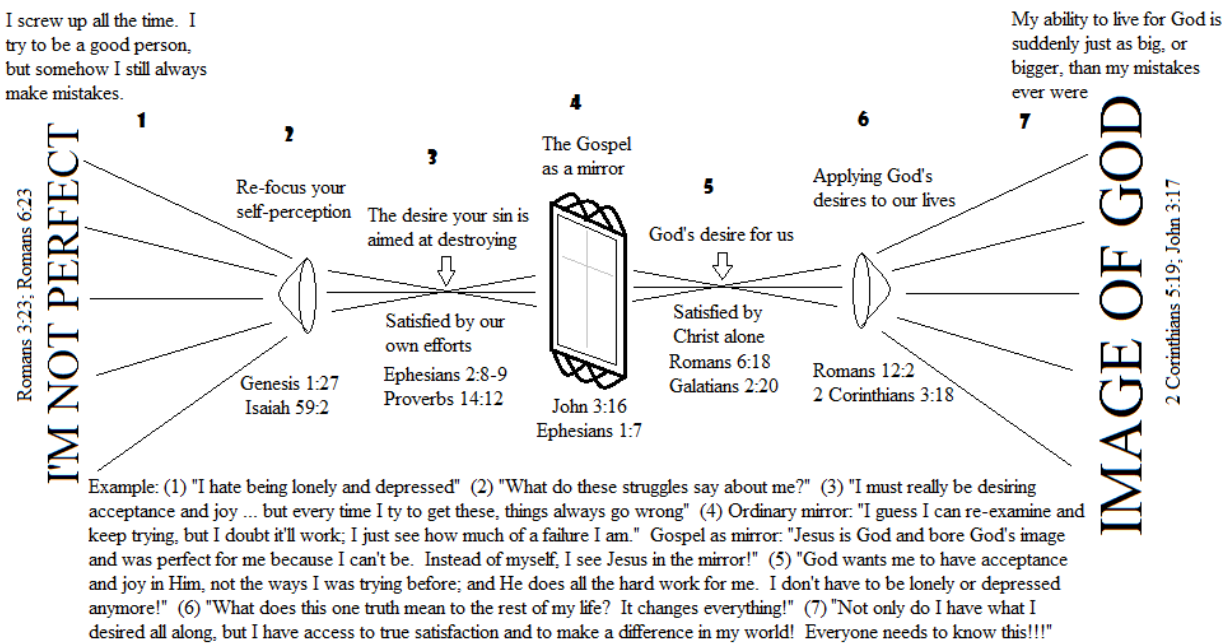


Figure 2: The Lens Illustration

Here is the lens illustration. You will note the pattern we have followed thus far: (1) acknowledging our imperfection, (2) reframing it as a positive desire that we are lacking, (3) acknowledging that we are powerless to find permanent satisfaction - and that no amount of self-reflection can break the cycle, and God might not actually want us to get our desires met on our terms.

Now I add (4) that the Gospel gives us an answer. As I noted in 401, the prime function of the Gospel is to reconcile us to God. The crucifixion and resurrection are the means by which Jesus did this (as explored deeper in 402). Sometimes people get so hung up on Jesus bearing our sin on the cross that we forget the reason why he did it: to restore our relationship with God.

When we reflect on the Gospel we find that the pattern of viewing our ailment works almost the exact same way, but in the reverse ... kind of like a *reflection* (hence a mirror).

- We had pinpointed our actual desire on our terms, the Gospel shows us that exact same desire, but on God's terms
- What didn't satisfy us on earth now does satisfy us through Christ.
- Once we have that desire and satisfaction, rather than the lens taking things from our lives and focusing them into a concentrated point, that one nugget of truth we receive from the Gospel refracts to change multiple areas of our lives.
- Instead of being an image of imperfection, we reflect the image of God.

In Part 4 I will break down in more detail how the other side of the Gospel-mirror functions, including with reference to the examples given.