

CROSS OF GRACE CHURCH

GOSPEL THEOLOGY

What We Believe

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CLASS MATERIAL

Class Outline

- **1) God Speaks**
 - *The nature of of God's Word and why we're centered on the Bible*
- **2) God Is**
 - *The character of God, the trinity, and the implications for our lives*
- **3) God Creates**
 - *Creation of the world, nature of humanity, and things are broken*
- **4) God Saves**
 - *Who Jesus is, why he came, how he saved us*
- **5) God Empowers**
 - *The Holy Spirit, power for the Christian life, and how we grow*
- **6) God Sends**
 - *The nature of the church and our mission in Christ to make disciples*

Introduction

This short body of class material is meant to do two things: First, it's meant to help people understand what we believe about some of the essentials of the Christian faith. Second, it's meant to help people exploring membership understand our doctrine and mission, then consider whether God is calling them to join us.

Why "Gospel Theology"?

This class is called "Gospel Theology" because while we're talking about many different topics the gospel of Jesus will be at the center of the material and the center of our life as a church. We strive to make the good news about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, of "first importance" (1 Cor 15) in all we do.

Format

This material has corresponding video content that is based on the written material [Editors Note: Video content will launch January 2014]. Each semester we'll host two "Gospel Theology" luncheons where you'll be able to ask questions and interact with one of our pastors or other leaders, as well as hear some supplementary material.

Membership

There's no obligation to become a member after taking the class, but because we take membership seriously covering the class material is a requirement for membership at the church. After completing the material and attending a luncheon we'll schedule a one-on-one meeting with one of our pastors or leaders to work through any remaining questions and go over our membership covenant.

Session 1: God Speaks

Before we can talk about God, or humanity, or the church, or growing in our faith we have to ask a question: What's our starting point? There are many materials we could use as our textbook—an old church creed, the latest self-help book, our own prayer journal. All of us have to decide what words will define our lives and which words we'll live by.

At our church our starting point is the Bible. We sing truth from it, we hear it preached, we use it small groups, we point to it in counseling. But why the Bible? Why build our entire lives around this book?

Here's why: *The Bible's words are God's words and God's words define our lives and our church*

We're going to work through six points about God speaking to us. On this topic (and for this whole series) I highly recommend the work of theologian Wayne Grudem and his *Systematic Theology*¹. In this session the theological definitions that follow, unless noted otherwise, are from his work.

1) God speaks for relationship

Before talking about God's speech we need to ask *why* God is speaking to us. Why start a conversation with us? We the goal of God's speech as we look at the two main ways God speaks to us.

First, General revelation. This is "God's revelation of *himself* that comes to all humanity through creation" (Grudem).

Ps 97:6 says, "The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory."

Notice here is *what is being revealed*: it's God's glory and character. God reveals *himself*. Now if you think about this for a second, it's mind-blowing. We are finite creatures and God is infinite and if God did not reveal himself we could not discover him. J.I. Packer says, "[Christianity] is a religion that rests on revelation: nobody would know the truth about God, or be able to relate to him in a personal way, had not God first acted to make himself known."²

Second, special revelation. This is, "God's revelation of himself to particular persons at specific times and places, through special means, to enable them to enter a saving

¹ Grudem, Wayne (2009-05-11). *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

² Packer, J. I. (2001-02-01). *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (p. 3). Tyndale House Pub. Kindle Edition.

relationship with himself” (Grudem). God can do this in a variety of ways—such as a burning bush or audible speech—but the predominant way we see God’s special revelation is through the Bible.

2 Tim 3:16 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

This verse makes an amazing claim—that the Bible is “breathed out” by God. That these words are his words. So we believe these words are God’s very words. God is speaking to us just as surely as if he were sitting across from us.

God takes Scripture and writes about himself in it for a purpose—to reveal himself to us so that we could have a relationship with him. It’s not simply a packet of information about God. No, God is writing to make himself known, to initiate a relationship. As J.I. Packer says: “God gives us the Bible to make friends with us.”

2) God speaks about Jesus

So what is the main subject of God’s speech? Well, as we’ll talk about in following lessons we were created for relationship with God but lost this relationship because of sin...and the whole point of the Bible is to reveal how we can be restored to relationship with God. This means the Bible is about Jesus. The focal point of all 66 books of the Bible is Jesus—why we need him, who he is, and what he’s done.

In Luke 24:13-35 Jesus has risen from the dead but his disciples don’t recognize him. He finds his disciples trying to figure out what Jesus’ death meant. So then, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” In other words, Jesus taught them how the *entire Bible* was about him.

III: Think of it this way: Do you remember as a kid falling in love with certain heroes? I do. I think I loved one hero above all others—Han Solo. So my mom would ask, “Do you want this book?” “Is it about Han Solo?” “Yes.” “Then YES.”

Here’s a practical application of this: When we love someone we love everything that reflects them. We treasure letters from a spouse, treasure crayon drawings from our kids. As Christians we love Jesus. And then we get handed this book. “What’s it about?” we wonder. Then we learn that Jesus is the message of the Bible from beginning to end. This means we treasure each page telling us about Jesus.

3) God speaks with authority (Authority of Scripture)

We’ve seen why God speaks to us, and what the main subject of God’s speech to us is in Scripture...but now we want to learn more about God’s speech in the Bible. What does the Bible say about itself? It says, first of all, that God’s words in Scripture hold authority.

2 Tim 3:16 says “All Scripture is breathed out by God...” If Scripture is God-breathed it carries all the authority of God himself. It carries with it all the authority of God—the same authority as if God were in front of us, the same authority of royal universe-shaking decree.

Grudem shows us the implication: “The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”³ Think of a young Christian guy in college deciding how far to go physically with his girlfriend. Who gets to set the boundaries? The authority of Scripture means that God, through his Word, defines the boundaries.

How exactly did we know that the writings mortal men such as Paul are really and truly God-breathed with authority? How did this work? The Apostle Peter says this about God’s Word: “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. [So Peter is saying, “I was there! I heard the voice of God!” But...] And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, [He says *the written Bible is more fully confirmed* than hearing God’s voice] to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:16-21, ESV)

So how does Scripture work? Peter says that in Scripture men “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” So God didn’t just do simple dictation, he used these men and their backgrounds and intellects but he “carried them along” by the Spirit. So their words are not just “their words” they are words from God himself.

4) God speaks with clarity

Words of authority are no use if we can’t understand them. Grudem says it this way “The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.”⁴

Many folks own a Bible but have never read it themselves, or have tried and gotten discouraged. But we shouldn’t give up so easily. The clarity of Scripture means that the main message of the Bible and the clear teaching of the Bible is supposed to be clear even to kids: “The Words I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you

³ Grudem, Wayne (2009-05-11). *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (p. 73). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Grudem, Wayne (2009-05-11). *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (p. 108). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deut. 6:6–7) Don’t feel to smart sometimes? Proverbs has good news: “The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”

Now what this does not mean is that every part of Scripture is equally clear. There are hard to understand sections. The Bible has deep theological waters. Even the Apostle Peter had to work to understand the Apostle Paul sometimes (2 Peter 3:16). You can easily spend a lifetime studying this book. But according to Scripture itself, anyone should be able to get the gist of it, especially the good news about Jesus.

5) God’s speech is necessary

But with so many other books and teachings do we really need God’s Word? Grudem says it this way: “The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God’s will, but is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God’s character and moral laws.”

2 Tim 3:15-16 refers to “the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” So Scripture does two things: It reveals the gospel of Jesus, but it also matures and disciples us. We need the Bible to tell us the gospel story! But we also need it to teach us, correct us, train us...so that we may be complete and ready to serve.

6) God’s speech is sufficient

Yet sometimes the Bible doesn’t seem to have every answer we could want. Yet God says the Bible is sufficient for us. Grudem: “The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.”

2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that the Bible “makes us wise to salvation” — meaning it has all we need to be saved then 2 Timothy 3:17 says it grows us — meaning it has all we need to grow as Christians. Even if we had no other Christian books God’s word would be enough for us to mature and be faithful disciples of Jesus.

Now, not every question we might want answered will be answered in the Bible, or with the clarity we’d desire. Scripture says, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God” (Deut. 29:29). So there will be some things that haven’t been revealed to us, but if we’ve got a question that really requires an answer we’ll be able to find it.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE AT CROSS OF GRACE?

Here’s the main point: *The Bible’s words are God’s words and God’s words define our lives and our church*

So what does that look like in our church?

- 1. The Bible is our authority as a church:** We love church traditions but they are not our highest authority. We love pastors and Bible teachers but they are not our highest authority. We appreciate good practical advice and good insights but they are not our highest authority. We appreciate when someone gets an impression from God but those are not our highest authority. Our highest authority is this book.
- 2. The Bible is our rock as a church:** Our culture shifts constantly. It's dizzying. But in the Bible we have a rock and sure foundation. The Bible gives us a place to stand and truth to stand on.
- 3. The Bible drives our church:** Psalm 119 is a love song to the Bible and lists all that Scripture does — it corrects us, encourages us, guides us, refreshes us. It is the force beyond what we do as a church. We don't want to get more excited about the latest ministry program or ministry model than about the ministry laid out in Scripture. We want to get shaped and corrected constantly by this book.
- 4. The Bible is everywhere our church:** Meaning the Bible gets into everything. We sing the Bible, we read it for the offering time, we preach from it, we hear encouragements from it, we teach our kids to study it, we study in small group and youth group, we use it counseling. Why? Because these words are God's words.
- 5. The Bible is vital for every member of our church:** Our church will only be as strong as our love for Scripture and reading of Scripture. If you're a brand new believer, we want you in this book. If you've been with Jesus for decades, we need you in this book.

Session 2: God Is

We're going to spend this session looking at what theologians call the "Doctrine of God." The word "doctrine" means "everything the Bible teaches" so we're going to do a quick overview of "everything the Bible teaches about God." But many are wondering, "Why bother? Is this even relevant to my life?"

A.W. Tozer said, "What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Do we believe God is impotent and removed, having nothing to do with us? Do we believe that God is powerful enough to act in history and in our lives? Do we believe God is just and that there will be consequences for our actions?

In this very brief overview we'll cover a few crucial truths the Bible teaches about the character and nature of God:

1) God is

Gen 1:1 starts this way: "In the beginning God..." The first line of a book tells you a lot about that book. The first line of this book tells us two things: First it tells us who this book is about. This book is not primarily about us. It is about us, but not *mostly* about us, it's most about God. The Bible comes to us and says, "This is a story about God. It's about how you fit into God's story."

There are two really common views of God in our culture today that don't line up with what the Bible says about God:

First, the superhero view. This view says, "Here's the universe, and God is inside it with us." God is just a super-created being who can bend the rules but can't do everything. But the Bible says "no before anything was made, before the universe existed...God existed..." He is over and above *all* things. Paul the Apostle preaches this to people who believed in Roman Gods like this: "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man...since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. (Acts 17:24-25)"

Second, there's the Pocahontas view. This view says that God *is* creation in some mystical way. That's also wrong. He is self-existent. He is present in creation, but he is not creation. In Exodus when Moses encounters God, God describes himself and tells us a lot about him....God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14, ESV) This phrase "I am who I am" is very complicated and means both "I am who I am" and "I will be who I will be." It speaks to God self-existence. He simply *is*.

2) God is sovereign

One term the Bible uses to describe God and his relationship to the universe is the word “sovereign.” Wayne Grudem defines “sovereign” simply as “God’s exercise of power over his creation.” How does God relate to creation? He exercises power and rules over it.

What does this look like?

a) God is everywhere-present (Omnipresent)

Psalm 139: 7-10: “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”

God is everywhere in the universe at once. There is no spot in the universe without God.

b) God is all-knowing (Omniscient)

Heb 4:13: “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

There is no fact or figure God does not know. The physics of the universe aren’t hard for him — he created them. He knows who really shot JFK and he knows what you did alone in your house 15 years ago.

c) God is all-powerful (Omnipotent)

Jer 32: 17: “Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.”

This is the logic: God made the stars, the quasars the pulsars the black holes; the volcanos and tectonic plates and atoms. If that’s true, then nothing is too hard for him.

d) God is all-sovereign

Eph 1:11: “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will”

In his sovereignty God decrees what will happen. Who tells him what to do? “His will” tells him. What things does he work? “all things.” Not just some. Now this obviously raises important questions but we must be willing to allow who God reveals himself in the pages of Scripture to shape *our* view of God. We can’t pick and choose aspects of God. And in our view of God we must maintain that there may be places we don’t understand how, but God is sovereign. The accent is always on God’s action, not on ours.

Why does this matter practically? Think of the single mom whose family has abandoned her. She feels alone—but she is not alone, God is with her even in her darkest

moments. She feels like no one understands—but God knows and sees all. She feels like she is powerless—but the God of the stars and volcanos is powerful to help.

3) God is holy

Is 6:2-3 records a heavenly vision of God and highlights another important aspect of God's character: "Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Holy literally means "set apart"—he is so much higher than we can fathom. The Bible often uses this to underline that God is morally "set apart" and without sin. In Hebrew you underline something by repeating it. If you fall into a "pit" you're in trouble. If you fall into a "pit pit" you need some rope and some gear to get you out. God is not just holy, or holy holy, but *holy holy holy*.

God's holiness has two important implications:

a) Righteousness

Deut 32:4: "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

So God is *without iniquity* meaning there is no sin or evil in him. And he is full of uprightness meaning there is no good piece of character he does not have. In fact, what we know as good are really those things that reflect God's character. Those things that are evil are deviations from God's character.

b) Wrath

Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

God knows all things. He sees every evil and injustice and will not stand for it. He is just and does not wink at it, he's angry at it. Therefore God's wrath is the result of a holy God who sees all exercising his power to bring about justice.

What's the practical effect? Imagine the cheating husband. He has a good job. He is good looking. There's nothing his wife can threaten to take away—he'll find another good job or another good-looking mistress. He isn't afraid of the pastor or his small group. But he should fear God. God is perfectly righteous and can't be bought or bribed or cajoled or joked with. Those that do evil should rightly tremble. If that man understands God's holiness he would be absolutely insane to continue in his sin.

4) God is love

Yet God is not simply a just judge, he's also a loving God. 1 John 4:8 says "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."

Notice the language there: God *is* love. His essence is love. Love defines who he is and this isn't said of any other aspect of his character in this way.

Elsewhere Scripture speaks of God's "goodness." James 1:17 says "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." This means *every truly good thing* in your life is a reflection of God's goodness.

The Trinity

But how can God love if he's alone or was alone? Don't you need someone to love—an object of love? This is why the trinity is so important. God's love was expressed in trinity before the world began.

Now it's important to remember that the word "trinity" does not occur in the Bible, it's just a term the church uses to encapsulate this. In general all orthodox Christian churches uphold three core truths about the trinity:

- **There are three persons**
 - You see this in Matt 3 where Jesus is being baptized and God the Father's voice is heard, and God the Spirit descends like a dove.
 - You see this in Gen 1 as well when God creates everything from nothing, the Spirit is hovering over the waters, and God's Word (later revealed as Jesus) goes forth to accomplish creation.

- **Each person is fully God**
 - God the Father is clearly fully God throughout the Old Testament.
 - In the gospels the disciples confess, "My Lord and my God" as Thomas did in John 20:28.
 - In Acts Peter says that lying to the holy Spirit means lying to God (Acts 5:3-4), showing us that the Spirit is fully God.

- **There is one God**
 - Deuteronomy 6:4 says it simply and clearly: "The Lord is one." There are not three gods, but one God.

So what does the trinity have to do with God's love? When we say "God is love" we see that love from God is an overflow of the love of the perfect community of the trinity. There is no fighting or selfishness in the trinity—all love and seek the good of the other persons. This is love as it was meant to be. Therefore, when you read "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8)...when you read that, it's an overflow of the love in the trinity. The very *essence* of the trinity is love.

What does this mean practically? Imagine a high school girl who is not popular, isn't skinny or is too skinny or whatever. She feels like no one loves her. This view of God is the best news she could hear. She doesn't need a boy to take her to prom to feel loved. She needs *the source* of all true love—God himself.

5) God is glorious

In Psalm 27 the Psalmist writes, “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.”

Pastor Dave Harvey says we were wired for glory. We are all wired to chase glory. This is why we skydive, and try to see great films, and aim for that one perfect relationship, and build a lasting business, and graduate with a PhD. We were wired to pursue glory. But the psalmist says there is only *one thing* that *ultimately* fulfills that longing for glory—to be with God and to gaze on God’s beauty. All the things we long for here are reflections and glimmers of God’s glory. The good things we love in creation are reflected in the character of God himself. As John Piper has said, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” As we are lost in the glory of God and are excited and satisfied, God is glorified.

What does this mean practically? The college guy chasing girls and booze needs to hear that those things will *never* ultimately satisfy him. He was wired to chase glory, but true glory isn’t found in his next conquest or drunken escapade. He was made for something bigger than that. Only this glory—God’s glory—will satisfy him. He was made for this. He will be frustrated until he finds this.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE AT CROSS OF GRACE?

1. **We fit our lives into God’s story, we don’t try to fit God into our story**— We are a God-centered church. We don’t start here with “How does God fit into my life?” but “How do I fit into God’s story?”
2. **We love and promote good theology**— Theology just means “the study of God.” To us that is not vain, it is beautiful and is powerful and life-giving. It changes everything.
3. **We are building a church for God’s glory, not ours** — Too many churches are built asking the question, “How can we make people happy?” We believe the first question is this, “How do we make God happy.” And the joy is that in delighting in God we ourselves find what makes us truly joyful.

Session 3: God Creates

“Why do people become terrorists? Who should be allowed to get married and why? Should laws assume people are basically good or bad? How do we stop wars from happening?”

Nearly all the controversial questions of our time hinge on some very simple but profound questions: “What are we as human beings? Are we good or bad and why? Who am I? Am I a good person or a bad person?”

Understanding who we are as human beings shapes our entire lives. The Bible itself answers the question this way: *We are created in the image of God to image God*

1) God creates

Gen 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Poetically the author of Genesis records how God creates and shapes each part of the universe. And we “the heavens and the earth” means everything—every atom, every molecule, every star and pulsar. Col 1:16 says “In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...”

According to Scripture, blind chance created the universe. Rather, this universe was created by an intelligent creator who shaped and fashioned everything in it. It was created with purpose—created to reflect God and proclaim the glory of God. Isaiah 43:7 refers to: “. . . everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for my glory”

But this purpose of the universe is a good thing for the universe and for us. God created us to find our fulfillment and joy in his glory. We are meant to allow creation to point us to God. In Psalm 73 the writer says “There is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you.” As we join the universe in glorifying God we find our own good and true satisfaction.

So what does this mean practically? It means we love and appreciate all things God has created, but we are pointed to the Creator, not the creature. We love sunsets and snow and beaches, iPods and classical sonatas and gospel-proclaiming rap, but we worship the Creator, not the creation.

2) God created us in his image

Genesis 1:26-27 tells us about the creation of humanity: “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them... then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Gen 1:26-27, 2:7)

There are a variety of Christian positions on how God made the universe—over eons, in literal 24 hour periods, in a different order, etc. There is some debate about those things, but there should be no debate that God specially and intentionally created Adam and Eve. Gen 2:7 says God formed Adam from the dust of the ground instantly and clearly. This was a unique creation pointing to the uniqueness of humanity. No other created thing is “in the image” or has the “breath of life” from God himself.

What does “in the image of God” mean?

- It means we *resemble God*—there are certain aspects in which we are like God. (our ability to know things, to speak and have relationships, to love, to show mercy, to do justice, etc.)
- It means that we *represent God*—humanity was given charge of the Garden and was to rule God’s creation under God.

What does this look like practically? We believe that every life has value—whether the person has learning disabilities, or whether the person is unborn and can’t fend for themselves, or whether they’re old and can’t remember things, whether they are rich or poor, US citizens or not. Each life has value because they are made in the image of God.

3) God created us male and female

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” Gen 2:18-25

There are several things to notice:

God Created Us Equal in Value: The first thing we loudly affirm is that both men and women are equal in value and in God’s sight. Subjugation and oppression of women is sick and deplorable. In Christ there is no distinction in value—jews, greeks, men, women, slaves, free (Gal 3:28). In the 1st Century the Bible was controversial because it had such a high view of women.

God Created Us With Differing Functions: This is what’s controversial in our day. We see simply that men and women are not the same. Their bodies are not the same. They were each created with divine intention. Adam is doing some things in Genesis, Eve is doing other things, and that’s okay.

God Created Us for Community: We were not created to be alone. Now, this doesn't just apply to marriage—Jesus and Paul weren't married—but every human being is created for community, for relationships with other human beings.

God Created Marriage: We believe that in Genesis 1 and 2 God sets out marriage as a good thing. If you get married the rules for marriage are set by God. This is why adultery grieves us. This is why broken homes grieve us. God created a good in thing in marriage.

- *God designed our sexuality for marriage*—God is pro-sexuality. He wants people to exercise their sexuality freely, but within the context of marriage.
- *God creates men and women for marriage*—God is clear here that marriage should exist between one man and one woman.

God created men to function uniquely in marriage

In Genesis Adam is given certain particular functions: He was given the first task by God, he was later given responsibility for Eve, and later when God comes to hold them to account for their sin God addresses Adam first (even though Eve had sinned first).

Given first task

What does this mean for marriage then? According to Scripture, men bear the responsibility to lead in marriage: “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:3). Men are to leaders in their homes, feeling the weight of responsibility for their family. But men should never take this responsibility lightly or abuse this or use it as an excuse. Instead men, in marriage, should imitate Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 5 men are commanded to love their wives as “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” So while men have responsibility to be spiritual leaders of their families, their leadership is exercised in self-giving love for their wife.

God created women to function uniquely in marriage

In Genesis Eve was created to be a “helper” to Adam. The ESV Study Bible notes helpfully point out that a ‘helper’ in the original language is “one who supplies strength in the area that is lacking. She is also created to be a helper “fit for him”—meaning that she’s not exactly like her husband but is meant to “complement” him. But Eve is also held to account by God for her part in sin.

What does this mean for marriage then? Women are to be a “helper” in marriage. Kostenberger writes “...The woman is placed alongside the man as his associate or assistant....He role is distinct from the man’s yet unique and exceedingly significant. While assigned to the man as his “helper” and thus placed under his overall charge, the woman is his partner in ruling the earth for God.” As a “partner” in God’s work wives must learn to bring strength to areas where there is weakness, to support and uphold.

Some object and say “You can’t have people equal in value and yet they have different roles.” But Scripture says you can and we have a wonderful example—God himself. In the last lesson we covered how the Father, Son and Spirit are all God. Yet the son does

some things and the spirit does others. And in Scripture the Son even says he is submitted to the father, and the Spirit is submitted to the Son. And God seems to have no problem with this.

4) God's creation was corrupted

Gen 3:1-16 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate." Because of their sin, a curse falls on all creation.

So what is sin anyway? Sin in Scripture basically means "law-breaking." But the law is there to reflect God's character. So really sin is violating the moral character of God. We can do this in two ways:

- We do things God says not to do, or God does not do (murder, lie, etc.). Adam and Eve sinned because they did something God said they should not do.
- We don't do things God says to do, or God does (show mercy, compassion, etc.). Adam was meant to protect his wife and he did not. Eve was meant to supply strength where Adam lacked it and she did not.

So those things are sin. But what causes sin? What's going on in our heart that we sin? Gen 3 shows us. The devil serpent promises, basically, "You'll be more like God...maybe you'll *be* God if you eat this." We sin when our hearts desire to take God's place as the sovereign ruler. We say, "You're not in charge! I am!" As R.C. Sproul says, sin is "cosmic treason" as humanity rebels against the good and just king of the universe.

And Adam and Eve's choice to sin results in the entire human race being corrupted by sin and the whole creation being ruined. We call this "inherited sin." We all inherit Adam's bent toward sin. And we also willingly choose to follow in his steps:

- Psalm 14:3: "They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."
- Eccl. 7:20: "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."
- Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
- Eph. 2:3: "Among them [sons of disobedience] we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

And what is the effect of our sin?

a) Sin breaks our relationship with God

When God says "do this" and we don't do it, we're sinning. It also means that when God says "don't do this" and we do it, we're sinning.

Sin meant that the relationship with God was shattered—The text says “the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

b) Sin breaks our relationships with each other

Having composed a love song in the previous chapter after sin’s corruption Adam blames his wife: “It was the woman you gave me! It’s her fault!”

c) Sin affects every aspect of our nature

Theologians sometimes call this “pervasive depravity” — that sin’s corruption extends to our minds and our minds are darkened, it extends to even what we think are “good deeds” because our motives are mixed with sin.

What does this look like practically? It means that this is what is fundamentally wrong with the world. Treaties won’t give us world peace. Better laws won’t stop murders. Unless we deal with the promise of sin we’ll only be treating symptoms, not the disease.

6) God re-creates

Scripture paints this picture of us as amazing and made in God’s image...and yet completely twisted and bent out of shape. And further it shows us that none of us seek God and our hearts are twisted away from God. But that is not the end of the story.

God creates, but there’s something else about God: God loves re-creating too. The entire story of Scripture is God’s plan to re-create all things. It ends with Revelation 21 and his pronouncement “Behold, I am making all things new.” So the Bible starts with creation and ends with re-creation. It starts with a God where God’s people enjoy God and his creation with no tears and no war; it ends with a garden city where God’s people enjoy him and his creation with no tears and no war.

Our entire message is going to be spent on the middle of the story, and how Jesus is the central focus of the Bible because he is means by which God renews all things. But I can state who Jesus is and what he did very simply right now:

- Jesus came as the perfect man, the perfect image of God. He never sinned. He always did right. He was the true Adam.
- Jesus was treated as if he were the sinful Adam, he took God’s wrath and was cut off from God. He bore the penalty of death as Adam did *and* the spiritual penalty of death as Adam should.
- Jesus did this so that if you believe in him, your sins will be wiped away and you can find new life in him.
- Jesus rose from death. God the Father raised him to new life. This is picture of what will happen for all who believe when they die. And right now in *this life* new life is progressively coming into our hearts.
- Jesus re-creates a community we can belong to—the church.

Now here's what's happening to us as Christians: Colossians 3:10: "and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him." Because of Jesus there's hope for humanity.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE AT CROSS OF GRACE?

- **We believe every life God creates has value**—We believe every single human being has value because they bear the image of God.
- **We believe God as creator writes rules for gender and for marriage**—If he is the creator we want to read what he says we should do. He will be glorified and we'll be much happier.
- **We believe God's creation was corrupted and that this is the fundamental problem with the world**—We believe this is the root cause of our misery.
- **We believe God's re-creation is the hope of the world**— It is the hope for every broken marriage, every broken relationship, every hurt and pain

