

The Gospel | Week 5: Gospel Misconceptions & Myths

- **How our Culture _____ the Gospel**

- Jesus has a _____ for your life.
 - Inherent lie: God's here to _____ me.
- Christianity, like other religions, is about being a _____.
 - Inherent lie: Grace is for the _____.

- **How the Church _____ the Gospel**

- When Jesus isn't _____ to us
 - "I don't want to be THAT serious about it."
 - Inherent lie: Christ is not _____ - _____ in the end
- The way we forgive and the way we seek _____
 - Inherent lie: I'm _____ than that person

- **Other Narratives Vying for _____**

- _____ is subservient to the gospel.
 - You will never engage these issues biblically until you own up to the fact that the greatest societal ills pale in comparison to your own rebellion against the Lord himself.
- Your _____ is subservient to the gospel.
 - My conservatism and/or my liberalism always take a back seat to what the Lord wants accomplished in the world. (John 18:36)
- Your self-actualization and _____ are subservient to the gospel.
 - The gospel is not about _____.

The Church in America, as I — at age 69 — have watched her now for a long time, is slowly awakening from the distortion of about 350 years of dominance and prosperity in America. Let me say that sentence again — a paradigm determining for me. The Church in America — and I am just thinking right across the board — no particular denomination, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox — the Church in America today is slowly awakening from the distortion of about 350 years — namely, the length of our country — of dominance, distortion of dominance, and prosperity.

What I mean by dominance is that in most American history until recently, being a Christian has been viewed as normal, good, patriotic, culturally acceptable, even beneficial. And what I mean by 350 years of being prosperous is that, by and large, being a Christian has generally resulted in things going well for you, especially in the South. I grew up three hours from here in Greenville, South Carolina. I am a Southerner by birth. I grew up in the horrors of some of the stuff I am going to be talking about in a minute. We are Christian in the South. We are Americans.

And what I mean by the distortion of 350 years of dominance and prosperity is that this 350-year history of our dominance and prosperity has created a massively, deeply unbiblical mindset; namely of at-home-ness in the world. It hasn't been good for us. We are suffering from it, prosperous though we be. So we have been dominant culturally and prosperous materially, and we have come to feel at home. Our land, our culture. And the assumption is that it will go well for us here. This is our place. It is the way we do things. It is the way we think about things. We are Christian here. And we very much enjoy being thought well of for that and we expect things to go well.

And poverty and sickness and suffering and death are the worst things that can happen. And there isn't anything much worse. We expect this Christian land to be wealthy and for us to be wealthy, to be healthy, at ease, upbeat, success-oriented. And we have developed a form of Christianity to support those ingrained expectations. To be a Christian is to be accepted. To be a Christian is to be comfortable. To be a Christian is to be secure and to be prosperous. And that form of Christianity has focused mainly on how we feel and whether our needs are getting met. And then we sell this — we offer this to people. "Come to Christ, and life will go better for you."

By and large in America for 300 years the call to be a Christian has not been the call to be an alien. By and large it hasn't been the call to be a sojourner or an exile or to be out of step. It is the call to be a respected citizen in the community, and we get angry — really angry. Watch it. It is still true. We are only slowly awakening from this. People get angry if you treat my Christianity as though it is not the norm. My views of things as not the norm. I get angry. You are taking away my culture. You are taking away my land, my history. I am getting mad at you, because I have developed a Christianity with assumptions that assume dominance and prosperity and normalcy and fitting in. This is our way here. If you don't like it, go somewhere else.

There is enough truth in that to give it some traction, right? If you live like a Christian and you don't get drunk every weekend, you will probably be more successful in life, right? You can keep your job. Your marriage will probably go better if you don't come home drunk every Sunday night. It is true, and the Bible says don't get drunk. And so if you do what the Bible says, life goes better. The Bible says work hard. If you don't work, you don't eat. So if you work hard then you are probably going to prosper in your business a little more.

So being a Christian obviously brings success. There is just enough truth in this that it gets traction. The problem is that this mindset is just totally out of proportion. We have come to take all of those relatively minor spin-offs of devotion to Jesus and elevated them above the massive, real pleasures of knowing him, loving him, and dying and being with him forever, because everything is out of proportion in typical American Christianity. And this text fills me, it has for so many years, with a longing not to be a domesticated, comfort seeking, entertainment addicted, prosperity loving, security craving, approval desiring Christian. I don't want to be that. It is abominable to me to be that. I don't want to waste my life just fitting in. So low. I want to be set free from this distortion. I want to be biblical. I want to have real spiritual, other-worldly power on my life. I want to have stunningly counter cultural, other-worldly hope driving this engine.¹

¹ John Piper, "The Plundering of Your Property and the Power of Hope," January 18 [2015]. <https://youtu.be/453qtq7INfs>