

## **The Ontological Root of the Gospel** (with content from Michael Ramsden)

In this session we explore the fact that God has created us as beings; the gospel is not simply on the level of thinking, feeling or doing. In salvation, God takes our very being and changes us.

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*The biggest difference between Jesus Christ and ethical and moral teachers who have been deified by man. Is that these moralists came to make bad people good. Jesus came to make dead people live. Ravi Zacharias*

### **A. Struggles with finality and transformation**

- Our culture struggles with the idea of finality. In an age of tolerance, everyone is expected to have a non-committal attitude when it comes to religion.
- This is seen clearly in the nature of science and in the religious pluralism that surrounds us. In Science, all conclusions are tentative as they are simply the starting blocks for further scientific research. With religious pluralism the final version of something is to speak of its obsolescence.
- Yet, each worldview, even Naturalism and Secularism is deeply concerned with transforming, controlling and changing people. There is something in us, that needs to be changed. This is what people refer to as the human condition or struggle. And we are all involved, whether atheist, agnostic or theist, in a strategy to deal with that condition.

## **Human Predicament**

- **Glorious**
- **Broken**

**"...At one time a mere scion [grafted root stock] of the evil principle, and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike"**

There is also confusion about who we are. Philosophers and theologians spend a lot of time thinking about big questions. And they call this question "Who am I?" - the Problem of Identity. The problem of identity is actually very important at our present moment in history and culture. Loads of things in our society are raising the question "Who am I?". We live in a time when for many different reasons the question 'Who am I?' has become a universal question. Technology and biotechnology is also raises questions of 'What is a human being?' There is also massive manipulation through advertising, culture and the media.

## The root of other worldviews and the root of the Christian worldview

- As we analyse other worldviews and systems of thought, we see that they are rooted in one of three ways. They are either rooted epistemological in thinking, existentially in feeling, or pragmatically in doing.

### Thinking (EPISTEMOLOGICAL)

- **Systems which are rooted in thinking say:**
  - Master this idea
  - Manipulate this principle/idea
  - Understand this problem
  - Analyse this situation

### Feeling (EXISTENTIAL)

- **Systems that are rooted in feeling say:**
  - You must have this experience/feeling
  - Have some kind of mystical experience
  - Know this peace/love/feeling
  - If I can find/have true love...
  - If I can feel purposeful...
  - If I can feel positive and make a difference...

### Doing (PRAGMATIC)

- **Systems which are rooted in doing say:**
  - Don't ask big questions
  - The answers are irrelevant anyway
  - Just get on with the practical realities
  - We need to do the best we can with what we have

- But the Christian worldview is different. The Christian Gospel is not rooted in any of these three. Christianity is ultimately rooted *ontologically*, in being.

## Jesus' solution to the human predicament is unique...

- It is not rooted in thinking, feeling or doing
- It is rooted in

# being (ONTOLOGY)

‘..Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person’ (2 Cor 5:17)

### B. Where we see this

- Words are the tools of thought. Through words we express our thoughts to others. Yet in the beginning of the Gospel of John we read that the Word *became flesh and dwelt amongst us*. Feelings and our emotions are part of the dynamism in life. Many are seeking for that moment in life that will help them reference everything else from then on. Christ defined life in terms of knowing Him. *To know him is to have life*. Not to know Him is not to see life at all. This is not a moment in life, it is the moment of life itself.
- Christianity is unique in all systems of thought and world religions. It is not primarily a set of ideas, experiences or instructions on how to live. Nor is its ultimate authority found in any of those three. **The Gospel is rooted in the person of Christ**. That is why in 2 Timothy we do not read, “I know what I have believed,” “*I know whom I have believed...*”

### C. Christianity's ontological root

- *Christianity is rooted in being in its method of revelation*. To have seen Christ is to have seen the Father. Jesus did not come to tell us about God. He came as God.
- *Christianity is rooted in being in salvation*. It is through Christ's physical death and bodily resurrection that we are saved. It is because of what he took on in his being that we are saved.
- *Christianity is rooted in being in transformation*. Jesus said that anyone wanting to enter heaven must be born again. It is only as our very beings are restored that we can truly begin to learn how to think, how to relate to the world around us and how to live.

### Resources

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Act and Being* (You must get the 1961 Harper version trans. Wolf)  
Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart/Character*