

THE CROSS CHART

THE PROBLEM

The Christian gospel deals with the fundamental human problem each of us experiences: Things in this life are not the way they're supposed to be. According to the biblical narrative, we have all rebelled against the authority of our Creator God, the Righteous King of the cosmos. This rebellion caused a rift in our relationship with God, which in turn injected distortion into every other relationship we have. We need holistic restoration.

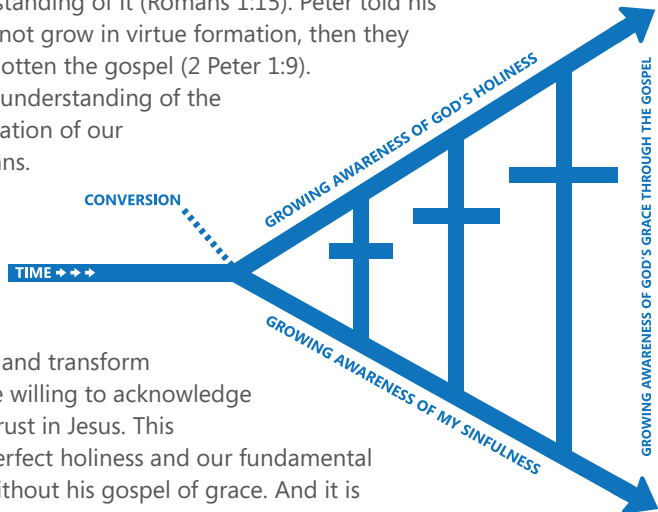
THE GOSPEL

The good news of the gospel is that the holy and righteous God has come to sinful humanity in order to deliver us from our sin and brokenness, initiating the reintegration of the created order. Jesus Christ gave his perfect life over as a sacrifice on the cross and was raised up from the dead to restore all things according their original design. By trusting in his person and work, we are brought into right relationship with God, thus beginning the process of our reintegration.

THE GOSPEL CONTINUED

What God initiated with the gospel in reconciling us to himself, he intends to continue to unfold in our lives, recreating people and relationships through reconciliation. Yet our mistaken tendency is to see the gospel as the mere entry point into the Christian life, assuming that our own moral effort becomes the basis of our ongoing growth. The Bible tells us something different. Paul insisted that it is the gospel that "is bearing fruit and increasing" (Colossians 1:5) in the lives of Christians. His desire for the church in Rome was that they would again hear the gospel preached, though they already had a cognitive-level understanding of it (Romans 1:15). Peter told his readers that if they did not grow in virtue formation, then they had fundamentally forgotten the gospel (2 Peter 1:9). Indeed, growing in our understanding of the gospel forms the foundation of our continual life as Christians.

At its essence, the gospel is the good news that the holy and righteous God has come to dwell with and transform humble people who are willing to acknowledge their sin and put their trust in Jesus. This gap—between God's perfect holiness and our fundamental sinfulness—is infinite without his gospel of grace. And it is precisely this grace that compels God to provide salvation for us. God continues his good work in the lives of his people as we again and again recognize his perfect character and our deep brokenness, looking to the grace of his gospel to deliver once more.



The details of THE CROSS CHART get fleshed out on the back of this card.

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1. CONVERSION: God saves people. Through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, by grace and through faith, all who trust in him are **converted** from the kingdom of death to the kingdom of life. When we are initially humbled by God's holy nature and our own sinfulness, and we put our trust in Jesus, we are brought into God's family.

2. GOD'S HOLINESS & OUR SINFULNESS: God is absolutely righteous; there is no whisper of imperfection in his character. This fact never wavers or ceases to be true. However, our own understanding and awareness of **God's holiness** is weak and often confused. To grow in our Christian life, our awareness of who God is—in all his perfections—must increase. Further, without God's grace in our lives, we are fundamentally rebellious, *incurvatus in se* as the ancients used to say, literally meaning, "bent inward on oneself." Even our seemingly good works are tainted by the impure motivations of pride and self-centeredness. In order to grow in holiness, we must be increasingly honest and aware of **our sinfulness** against God.

3. GOD'S GRACE: As we grow increasingly aware of God's holy character as well as our own tendency toward sin and rebellion, we must look to the work of Jesus in the gospel to save us. In the person and work of Jesus, we see the fullness of the **gospel of grace** on display. And as the functional distance between our awareness of God's holiness and our own sinfulness grows, so does our capacity to receive this grace.

SHRINKING THE CROSS:

1. Performing: One of our tendencies is to minimize God's perfect holiness, thinking of him as something less than his Word declares him to be. In so doing, we begin to live as though we can earn God's approval through our own **performance**.

2. Pretending: Another of our tendencies is to elevate our own righteousness, thinking of ourselves as someone better than we actually are. This leads to dishonesty, comparison, excuse making, and false righteousness as we **pretend** we are better than we are.

3. God's Grace: Both of these tendencies functionally shrink our experience of God's salvation in the gospel. The work of Jesus becomes less effective in our lives as joy is replaced with wearisome striving. The remedy is to recognize God as he has revealed himself and to be honest about our own sin and brokenness. This allows our appreciation and love for Jesus and his **gracious work** on our behalf to increase.

