

How Gospel Renewal Happens

GOSPEL RENEWAL • PRE-READING 03

Gospel renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing the truth of Jesus Christ into the actual patterns of our lives. It does not happen by sheer determination, nor does it bypass our minds, habits, relationships, or obedience. It joins a new understanding of grace to a new way of living.

The renewal framework used in the Gospel Formation training brings together three movements: faith, repentance, and the means of grace. These are not three techniques for earning God's love. They are ways the Spirit reorients us toward the love already given in Christ.

Faith: Set Your Mind on Christ

Colossians 3 begins by directing believers to set their hearts and minds on things above, where Christ is. The Christian life begins with what God has done, not with a list of improvements we must achieve. Believers are united to Christ; their lives are hidden with him. That reality must be remembered and trusted when feelings and circumstances suggest another story.

Faith is more than agreeing with a statement. It involves bringing the gospel to bear on our practical fears and assumptions. When we feel that failure makes us worthless, faith remembers that our standing rests on Christ's righteousness. When we feel that we must control everything, faith remembers the goodness and sovereignty of the Father. When we feel exposed by our sin, faith looks to the cross rather than to excuses.

This kind of remembering is not pretending that life is easy. It is learning to interpret life in light of a deeper truth. We are not trying to persuade God to accept us. We are learning to live as people whom he has received in Jesus.

Repentance: Put to Death What Belongs to the Old Life

Colossians 3 also calls believers to put to death what belongs to the earthly nature. Repentance is therefore essential. But gospel repentance goes beyond feeling bad, making promises, or trying harder. It recognizes both sinful actions and the misplaced loves that sustain them.

We can confess not only that we were impatient, dishonest, or resentful, but also why those responses felt necessary. Perhaps we were defending an image of competence, demanding admiration, or trying to keep control. Repentance brings these motives into the light and

acknowledges that we have sought life apart from God.

The gospel makes this honesty possible. We need not hide from God or construct a defense of our goodness. Christ has borne our guilt, and the Father welcomes us through him. Repentance is not a way to make ourselves acceptable; it is a response to the mercy that has already met us.

The Means of Grace: Put On the New Life

The same chapter commands believers to put on compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and love. The goal is not simply to stop wrongdoing but to grow into the likeness of Christ. The Spirit ordinarily nurtures this new life through Scripture, prayer, Christian fellowship, worship, and the sacraments.

These practices are gifts, not scorecards. Reading Scripture is not a way to prove that we deserve God's attention; it is a means of hearing his voice and seeing Christ more clearly. Prayer is not a performance to earn favor; it is the access of children to their Father. Fellowship is not merely attendance; it is a setting in which we are known, corrected, encouraged, and loved.

In worship and at the Lord's Table, the church repeatedly receives the good news that Christ has acted for us. The means of grace direct us away from self-sufficiency and toward dependence on God. Their purpose is not to create a religious résumé but to deepen faith and affection for Jesus.

Why Moralism Cannot Produce Lasting Change

Moralism places the weight of transformation on human resolve: learn the rule, summon the will, and do better. The gospel does not deny the importance of effort, but it changes the source and direction of effort. We act because grace has claimed us, not to make grace possible.

In Galatians 2, Paul confronts Peter because his conduct is inconsistent with the truth of the gospel. The issue is not simply a breach of etiquette. Peter's behavior contradicts the new family created through Christ, in which standing before God is not determined by ethnic or religious distinction. The gospel corrects both behavior and the beliefs beneath it.

That is the pattern of renewal: we recognize where our lives contradict the gospel, repent of the false trust involved, and return in faith to Christ. From that renewed confidence, we practice the new life God commands.

Renewal Is Both Personal and Shared

Keller emphasizes that the Spirit renews individuals and congregations. As people become more secure in grace, they can grow in humility, generosity, reconciliation, and love. Communities marked by gospel renewal do not need to pretend that their members are flawless. They can tell the truth, seek forgiveness, care for the weak, and welcome those who have little to offer in return.

Gospel renewal is therefore not an extraordinary experience reserved for a few Christians. It is the continuing work of God in ordinary life. We return again and again to the gospel, trusting the Spirit to make the grace of Christ increasingly visible in what we love, how we respond, and how we live together.

Adapted reading for Gospel Formation Cohort. Adapted from Timothy Keller, "The Work of Gospel Renewal," Center Church, chapter 6, with the Gospel Renewal I–II training framework. Original authorship and copyright remain with the respective rights holders. Prepared with permission to repurpose for cohort use.