

Title: Figuring out the Grid  
Text: 1 Corinthians 15.1-8  
Theme: The priority of the gospel  
Series: Living the Cross-Centered Life pt.1  
Prop Stmt

### 1. In Search of a Grid.

I was raised in a Christian home. Most of my childhood was spent in a middle-class neighborhood in a suburban area of a medium sized Ohio city. I remember playing hide and seek with a bunch of kids one day, and I was running in my next door neighbor's front yard, when the thought struck me. Do I believe in Christ because I believe in Christ, or do I believe in Christ because my parents believe in Christ and I just don't know any different? What if, like some of my friends in this yard with me right now I was raised in a different home, would I believe differently? And if I did, would it really matter? I had always been taught, that our side was right and they were wrong. What if, they were right and I was wrong? What if we were all wrong? Is there really a right and wrong? That thought scared me to death. I did not know if I was allowed to express my questions out loud. I made no radical decision. But, I did assume that I was able to objectively examine the data and arrive at a proper conclusion.

In my search for a grid (I didn't call it that then), I found out, that I was not alone on this quest. Frankly, this is something that every single person has to do.

### 2. Everyone has a Grid.

Your grid is the system by which you view and interpret your life and your world. That grid is your religion. That grid is what you use to either answer or attempt to answer the ultimate questions of life. Humans are incurably religious. That is not a novel concept. We were made in the image of God, and either we accept God's grid, or we reject God and in His place we attempt to put our own system. We never stop being religious, we just exchange gods in an effort to find another ultimate purpose or base or grid or center upon which to hang or view our lives and the world.

**“For the materialist, the ultimate reality is matter, and everything is reduced to material constituents. For the pantheist, the ultimate reality is a spiritual force or substratum, and the goal of meditation is to reconnect with that spiritual oneness. For the doctrinaire Darwinist, biology is ultimate, and everything, even religion and morality, is reduced to a product of Darwinian processes. For the empiricist, all knowledge is traceable ultimately to sense data, and anything not known by sensation is unreal.”<sup>1</sup>**

Whatever you are ultimately committed to or believe in will determine the choices that you make. A false god will produce a false center, a faulty grid (or a faulty worldview). Our world says, there is no absolute grid. Nothing can be known with final certainty.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Total Truth by Nancy Pearcey, p. 41.

Everything is up for grabs. Looking at the history of mathematics is a case in point of this.

With our computers, nuclear power, satellites, cell phones and space travel, we think that we are pretty smart. It is a bit humbling to discover that the ancient Egyptians were engineering geniuses and the ancient Greeks discovered Euclidean geometry. Math is a reflection of order and design.  $2 + 2 = 4$ . It will always = 4. Math is a system that is built on laws. True Science is the study of the laws of nature. You cannot have laws without a lawgiver. In the mind-numbing, brain-blowing, eye-popping infinite study of math you get a little taste of the infinite mind of God. Even the study of math is an opportunity to worship the Creator. I did not know this when I was a sophomore in high school. I was a sophomore with more emphasis on the moron part, than the sophist – wisdom part. One day in geometry class, I challenged my teacher to give us an example of how learning any of these postulates and theorems would have any value or practical use in life besides being able to teach these irrelevant things to someone else. Shame on me for being ignorant and disrespectful. Shame on her for having no answer. Mentally, I closed the door of my mind on math that day. I lost several years worth of opportunity to have my mind stretched by studying these fingerprints of God in His universe.

Today, math, of all things is under attack. Loud voices are telling us that  $2 + 2 = 4$  is sort of like 3 strikes and yer out. It is just a rule that someone made up along the way. It really doesn't matter what the answer is, as long as every participated in the process of working on it and that we all feel good about ourselves. I am not making this up. A popular middle-school curriculum developed by our own Michigan State University says that students should learn that **“mathematics is man-made, that it is arbitrary, and good solutions are arrived at by consensus among those who are considered expert.”** Holy cow – no wonder they can't win a football game. Maybe the coaching selection committee are from the math department. The score doesn't really matter as long as everyone participated. Try telling that to the 75,000 green-painted Spartan fans, crying in the stands year after year.

People teach math with a bias. People live their lives with a grid. Sadly, many believers have never developed a biblical grid and therefore have no basis upon which to make decisions or a filter by which to sift through life. If you don't have a grid, you will borrow the grid of others. You will be influenced by a godless grid, which is a faulty grid. When you borrow a tool out of the world's philosophical toolbox, you bring the entire assembly line with you. For so many people who call themselves Christians, they live with the exact same values of the world. They have the same idea of what the ideal life really is.

What is your image of the ideal life? What would your life look like if you could be “god”?

For most people, the ideal life is a long way away. They have gone after whatever it is that they think will bring them their perfect slice of the pie, only to find out that they pursued the fake ones that were used for the pictures in the menus. But instead of giving

up, they only set their sights on another piece and then another piece and then another piece after that. The ever-changing finish line keeps them running really, really hard. They work ridiculous hours, fill their days with tons of activity, but in all of their running, have no idea of where they are really going.

The dream for some is, make enough money to retire young enough to be able to enjoy it. Enjoy it! What is that supposed to mean? I worked with a man named Dick. Dick loved ceramics. He and his wife had dreamed of having a ceramic shop in their house. They scraped enough money together and bought a kiln. He did the firing, his wife did the painting. It was going to be a great deal. Every day I worked with him I heard the same story, "I can't wait to retire." My wife and I are going to have so much fun making ceramics. We are going to hold classes, we are going to do shows, we are going to...I usually tuned out about this time. To a young college kid, ceramics were not at the top of my list of interests. Dick used to take naps on company time. One day, he didn't wake up. It was a week before retirement. (wrong piece of pie – wrong grid, wrong center)

Rich and Sara had a little girl. She was bright, cute, and to them, amazingly spiritual for her age. She could do no wrong. I mean, she could and did, but to them, whatever wrong she did, was not nearly as wrong as all other kids. Her parents hung on every word, praised her every action and hovered over every aspect of her life. Since they were such deep Christians, their daughter would obviously attain to great spiritual heights, obvious to all. In fact, their daughter would no doubt become the standard by which all other children should be measured, after all they were the parents that could always give advice and did, to everyone, about everything, all the time. Rich and Sara were convinced their daughter was a spiritual giant because they were so spiritual. In reality, they raised an angry, manipulative and sinful monster. (wrong piece of pie, wrong grid, wrong center)

These true stories are just two examples of the many, many encounters I have had with professing believers who have lived in pursuit of the wrong piece of pie. If you were to ask Dick or Rich or Sara if they were Christians, they would be shocked that you would even ask such a thing! Of course they were. They knew the time, and the place when they prayed to ask Jesus into their hearts. They could tell you everything that you needed to know, especially Rich and Sara.

But Dick and Rich and Sara are like so many professing believers. They see the cross (the gospel) as the truth that saved them, but somehow they have failed to connect the dots on how the message of the cross that saved them from sin is the same message that helps them live unto Christ. They do not realize that the cross represents the entire grid by which we are to make every single decision, all day, all night long. The cross is not a piece of jewelry, or an icon or a landmark for a building. The cross represents the very core, the very center of our lives. Really!

For Dick, the cross was a nice addition to take care of that eternal life thing so he could concentrate on a ceramic-centered life now. For Rich and Sara, the cross was almost like a rabbit's foot from Jesus that shielded them from the normal problems that others would face. Their child-centered life made it obvious to everyone but them that day to day, their

daughter was their savior, not Jesus. Ceramics and kids don't make good saviors. Neither do remodeling projects, college football teams, diplomas or coin collecting.

We were born to grow up to...what? Hold on to your answer for a second. You cannot answer that question in ultimate terms until you come to grips with the message of the cross. We were born again to grow up to become citizens of God's kingdom and participants in Christ's reign. But something happened to the original design. That something is called sin. The totality of creation was matched by the totality of the fall. Sin profoundly affects everything in this world. There is no such thing as a morally neutral person or view. Interestingly enough, in the philosophy of science, we are told that "all facts are theory laden." Everything has a bias, a view. Some are at least admitting it. It is refreshing. Sin affected us so deeply that the challenge of living this life, right now unto God in a matter that is consistent with our calling is nothing less than a war! We should expect to fight, first with ourselves as we seek out and try to root up the idols and false beliefs that our depravity has set into place. We should also expect to fight with a hostile, unregenerate world. The message that strikes at the very heart of a self-made grid is the hated and desperately needed message of grace. We need this message and system of the cross to teach us how to live.

1 Corinthians 15.1-8

Who is the audience? "Brothers"- believers!

They have heard this before. They know the gospel. Paul is reminding them of the gospel (v.1). And he says to these believers, that for them, the gospel is of first importance! Hold the phone. Don't you preach the gospel to unbelievers? Yes, but, you have to see that the gospel that saved you from the penalty of sin, is the gospel that is saving you from the power of sin and changing you and keeping you and is the gospel that will save you from the presence of sin. Learning how to carry out my reason for being and seeing my life and my world through God's grid is what I mean by living the cross-centered life.

Jesus said in Matthew 6.33, "Seek first His kingdom." These are not two different concepts. The only way to seek the kingdom is to live a Cross-centered life. If you live according to the gospel, you will pursue His kingdom. But, in order to bring the kingdom of God into your everyday thinking, you have to stay right under the cross. But that is not as easy as it sounds. For many, when you hear about the gospel, or the message of the cross, it is easy to fade a bit, since you think, I already know that. I heard that a long time ago, next point please!

I like to read. Many of the books I read deal with matters of theology. I find that when a writer includes a scripture reference to support a point, I am tempted to scan it quickly since I usually know the verse, the reference, the context, maybe a few good commentaries and perhaps some of the original language of the verse. In other words, "I already know the verse, next point please!"

Stop! Stop everything going on in your brain right now. This truth is the most important truth that you can get the arms of your mind around. God sent His Son to the cross to bear His wrath for sinners like you and me. There, on the cross, God poured out upon His own Son, all of the immeasurable righteous judgment that you and I deserved to have poured out upon us because of our sin. Instead, of pouring that out on us, God poured that out upon His Son, so that having His justice satisfied, God, could pour out upon us all of the favor and the joy and the love that His own Son deserved to have lavished on him. You won't become passionate about sharing that, until you are passionate about that. It is my observation that the cross is being redefined by the very people who are supposed to be promoters of the gospel.

A few months ago, a friend of mine was asked to speak at the funeral for his uncle. His uncle was part of a church that marketed itself as being a very, positive, helpful, practical place to meet all of your needs. And, since most people seem to be more comfortable talking about the weather, sports and the economy, the messages and frankly the ministry of this church never really dealt with substantive doctrinal matters. So, this friend, spoke at the funeral on Christ being our refuge, and of course that is a great message of hope at the occasion of a believer's death, because this death has lost its sting, because Christ bore that sting, when he took upon himself the just wrath of the Father that had to be poured out because our sin is so stinkin' awful. But, Christ did! His death was an enormous price that was paid because of the mess that we had made. Josh, handled this truth beautifully and one of the people at the funeral mentioned to a pastor from the uncle's church (not Josh's) how much that message had meant to her and the pastor remarked that he was rather uncomfortable with the whole thing, since they do not like to express the gospel in terms quite like that. Now, listen carefully, because the potential for misunderstanding right now, is enormous. There are tremendous benefits that come along with the gospel into the life of a believer. But, those benefits are not themselves the gospel. There is nothing wrong with mentioning those benefits, but, if we replace the actual message of the gospel, with the benefits, then we are gutting the gospel.

The ultimate purpose of the cross is not so that I can have a better marriage with well-adjusted kids, and a satisfying career with a fully-funded retirement. But, if we avoid the S-word (SIN) because we are afraid that sin is too offensive, then we end up presenting an incomplete gospel. We fail to appreciate how magnificent the grace of Christ is and how far the power of the cross goes if we don't seek to come to grips with the depth of our own sin.

**“There are professing Christians who can speak of themselves in terms of admiration; but, from my inmost heart, I loathe such speeches more and more every day that I live. Those who talk in such boastful fashion must be constituted very differently from me. While they are congratulating themselves, I have to lie humbly at the foot of Christ's Cross, and marvel that I am saved at all, for I know that I am saved. I have to wonder that I do not believe Christ more, and equally wonder that I am privileged to believe in Him at all – to wonder that I do not love Him more, and equally to wonder that I am not holier, and equally to wonder that I have any desire to be holy at all considering what a polluted, debased, depraved nature I find still**

**within my soul, notwithstanding all that divine grace has done in me. If God were ever to allow the fountains of the great deeps of depravity to break up in the best man that lives, he would make as bad a devil as the devil himself is. I care nothing for what these boasters say concerning their own perfections; I feel sure that they do not know themselves, or they could not talk as they often do. There is tinder enough in the saint who is nearest to heaven to kindle another hell if God should but permit a spark to fall upon it. In the very best of men there is an infernal and well-nigh infinite depth of depravity. Some Christians never seem to find this out. I almost wish that they might not do so, for it is a painful discovery for anyone to make; but it has the beneficial effect of making us cease from trusting in ourselves, and causing us to glory only in the Lord.” (CH Spurgeon – Man’s Depravity)<sup>2</sup>**

A true Cross Centered Life will be evidenced in humility because the cross reminds me of how much my sin costs. The enormous price was paid because of my enormous guilt. But, a true Cross Centered life will also be evidenced in a Christ-driven joy and confidence. The bearing of my wrath is an important part of the gospel, but the offering of a perfectly righteous life that satisfied God is also an important part as well. This perfectly righteous life that was offered is the reason why I can be credited with a righteousness that is not my own. We know that the offering of Christ on the cross was perfectly accepted by the Father because He raised Christ from the dead, and raised Christ on High to sit at His right hand and will send Him back to rule from David’s throne.

That is why, everything that we are and everything that we do, has to be centered upon the cross of Christ and the throne of Christ. The cross and the crown are one in the same, because since He humbled himself, God exalted him to the highest place (Phil. 2).

CJ says, “Everyday, we all face the temptation to move away from the gospel, to let it drop from our hands and hearts. Three main tendencies in particular tend to draw us away:

- 1. Subjectivism, which means basing our view of God on our changing feelings and emotions.**

The cross is an emotional event. This was abundantly clear in the movie that Mel Gibson released a couple of years back. But, the fact that people left the theaters crying or silent did not mean that they understood the gospel. They understood that a man suffered enormously. They understood that there was rejection, sorrow, grief, betrayal, a mother’s broken heart and great anguish of soul. But while a complete picture of what a crucifixion entails is a mind-numbing thing to endure, a strong emotion is not the heart of the message of the cross. My emotions are stirred and I am not afraid of that, but I do not put my trust in my emotions, or think that simply because I cry that my has been changed.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in “A Fight to the Death” p.21-22 Wayne Mack who quoted it from AW Pink.

- 2. Legalism, which means basing our relationship with God on our own performance.**
- 3. Condemnation, which means being more focused on our sin than on God's grace.**

We go to battle everyday with these enemies. On our own, we are no match for their subtle instruments of war. Everyday until glory, we must live in the shadow of the cross, or we step into unprotected ground. David Prior said, "We never, therefore, move on from the cross of Christ – only into a more profound understanding of the cross." But, for crying out loud – how much more is there to know about the cross? I mean, really, I have heard about this since a child. I know this stuff!! I need the deep stuff man, I want to dive into Revelation or Ezekiel's visions, or Daniel's prophecies. The cross is important an all that, but I've been there, believed that, and bought the t-shirt.

But, is your life characterized by joy? Do you live with the nagging feeling that life is passing you by, and you are living by the wrong set of rules? Do you fight the same old sins without any measurable progress? Is your worship more of a duty than a delight? Is God more like a set of theological axiomatic truths instead of a person? Are you tempted to find out the secrets, some new experience that will finally provide you with the missing spiritual link? Do you have different rules for life outside of the church? Do you treat waitresses different than the members of your ABF? Do you have a "church is church and business is business" view?

We are not saved from sin, and now we just sit around waiting for the rapture, or wait to die. We are saved from a life that is a slave to the decaying grids of the world, to the liberating, freedom-finding, life-giving hope of Christ, that affects everything that we do. This 10 week study is a journey to discover how.