

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

By Jay Wegter

God is Almighty Creator. He made the universe out of nothing (Hebrews 11:3). He called the creation into existence by His Word (Psalm 100:3; John 1:1-3; Acts 17:24-31). God is revealing His mighty attributes in the creation. God's power, goodness, and wisdom are clearly seen in the creation so that all men are without excuse (Romans 1:18-23).

God is Owner of everything in the creation. Everything that God has made belongs to Him including people (Psalm 50:7-12). Our knowledge of who God is must begin with knowing Him to be Creator. The Scripture begins with these words, "In the beginning God. . ." The Bible constantly affirms the Creator-creature distinction. If we are to know God aright—we must begin with the truth and speak the truth that God is self-existent Creator; and we are His dependent creatures (Psalm 100).

God is Ruler over His creation; He is King over the works of His hands (Rev 4:11). God reigns over all. He is Lord of all. A day is coming when every human and every angel will bow before the glorified Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord (Philippians 2:9-11). God will destroy those who refuse to take refuge in Him (Psalm 52:5-7).

God is holy Law-giver and Judge The Law of God; the Ten Commandments is the perfect expression of God's holy and righteous character. But, because all men are sinners—no one is able to keep God's Law perfectly. "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isaiah 53:6). The Law does NOT function as a ladder to climb up to heaven. Instead the Law is a mirror to look into in order to discover our moral corruption in God's sight.

The Apostle says, "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). The present use of the Law is to close every mouth—remove every excuse—present the whole world guilty before God (Romans 3:19). Paul says that the whole world is on 'death row' so to speak—God has 'locked up' the whole human race (Romans 11:32; Galatians 3:22).

All men will give an account of themselves before God. God made us for a love relationship with Him—to know Him—obey Him—cherish Him—and enjoy Him. Because we are God's creatures made in His image, our 'job description' as creatures created in His image—is to *reflect* His righteous character. But our first parents sinned in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8-19). The whole human race was plunged into sin.

Every baby born into the world since the Fall of Adam is born a sinner. The Scripture says that origin of death has a *moral cause*; not a medical cause—that cause is man's sin (Romans 5:12). Death is the great enemy of sinners who die unforgiven. The Word of God says that the "sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56).

The moment each person dies—they will face judgment if they do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior. "It is appointed for men to die once; and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Every person who does not have Christ as Savior will be judged by the things written in God's books (Revelation 20:11-15). Everyone who has sought to be saved by their law-keeping; instead of by the blood of Christ will find that they are under the curse of God (Galatians 3:10-14; James 2:10).

Because we are created in God's image—and because He owns us—He has the right to judge us. And we will give an account to God for how we have used our faculties of thought, speech—our bodily organs, limbs, and hands. Have we served God? Loved God and His truth? Made God known by our lives and our speech?

Scripture says that the operations of man's conscience are proof of God's coming justice. Every person knows the relative torment of an accusing conscience. The reason we have a conscience is because it is God's

moral mark upon us. The conscience is proof we have been created in the image of a holy God. According to Romans 2, the conscience is at work all day long—evaluating our ethical decisions.

Every decision we make that has ethical implications is weighed by the conscience. Like a pair of scales the conscience weighs everything—and either defends our actions; or accuses our actions (Romans 2:15). The Scripture goes on to say that God will someday ‘read’ our conscience publicly (Romans 2:16). What a terror that will be when God exposes the secrets of the sinner’s heart before the watching universe. On that Day, God’s Law, God’s books, and the sinner’s conscience will all be in agreement when God pronounces His sentence.

The unsaved man’s conscience will be his ‘tormentor’ in eternal hell. On that day when God’s books, man’s conscience, and God’s justice will all agree; then the man who lived a life of stifling his conscience will find that his conscience will rise up to its full stature and take its eternal revenge against its ungrateful host. God doesn’t have to invent torments for hell—every man’s conscience will be his eternal tormentor. Jesus refers to this as “the worm that does not die” (Mark 9:48).

Jesus tells us why men do not read the Bible and welcome God’s truth (‘light’). In John 3:19-21, Jesus told His listeners that God’s judgment on the world is tied to the fact that “men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:19-20). It is man’s defiled conscience that keeps him away from the Bible—he doesn’t want to be ‘exposed’ by the bright light of God’s Word shining on his sinful deeds.

But, apart from the Bible; we cannot possibly know what a disaster sin is and how serious it is in the sight of God. Sin is the cause of death, disease, suffering, selfishness, war, victimization, lust, dishonesty. God’s law finds us in our sinful state of lusting, coveting, dishonesty, selfishness; it finds us profane and apathetic about the precious things of God; it uncovers our loving self, idolatry, and pleasure more than God.

God’s law exposes our bitterness; our hidden hatred, anger, and resentment toward others. “Let God be found true and every man be found a liar” (Romans 3:4). Romans 3:9-18 records God’s 14 point indictment of the human race. This indictment pictures God looking down the corridors of time to ‘see’ if there is even one righteous person—none are found—“no not one.”

But we do not really understand how serious sin is until we see what the Bible says about God’s response to sin. You see we are like the proverbial goldfish who does not know he is ‘wet’—he doesn’t know because water is his medium. He swims through it—it passes through his gills. That’s like us with sin—we are permeated with it—thus we are desensitized to it. The sin behind all other sins is idolatry. But idolatry does not necessarily mean bowing down before an image carved in stone. Idolatry involves *rejecting the knowledge of God*. Sinners live this way—they use their minds to shut out the true knowledge of God which is revealed in His infallible Word. They “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” They use their minds to put something in the place of God. They hate the knowledge of God—and have chosen to worship and serve the creature and the creation instead of God.

The Bible calls this idolatry (Rom 1:18-23). God warns in no uncertain terms that our sin—every bit of it, is regarded by Him as lawlessness (1 John 3:4). As lawbreakers—it makes us criminals and fugitives under God’s moral government. We are guilty—awaiting apprehension and eternal condemnation.

Man’s sin draws down God’s wrath upon Him. But that is not all. God tells us that His response of His holiness to our sin is His wrath (Romans 1:18-20). God’s wrath is His settled anger—which will flow from His throne like white-hot lava forever.

Many of our ‘instincts’ about God are wrong. We assume that God cannot be a God of love and wrath. But God sees our sin as a slight against His character and a disregard and a trampling of His Law. No wonder Scripture says that our sins *separate us* from God forever. Our sins are a great offense to God. He cannot live with sinners in heaven anymore than you could live with a dead animal decomposing under your bed.

When sinners first hear about the seriousness of sin from Scripture they are alarmed and jarred out of their spiritual ‘slumber’. When an unbeliever first hears what God thinks of their sin and what God threatens—they become alarmed. And may seek to remedy the situation by doing the best they know how. This can mean turning to religion. It can mean seeking self reformation; good works; turning over a new leaf; beginning to pray, or go to church, or read the Bible.

But God’s Word shakes us up even further — for it tells us that man in his sin is helpless to reverse his own condemnation and guilt before God. There is no program to work one’s way out of condemnation. There is nothing you can do to ‘patch things up’ with God. This part of God’s preparation of the soul in order that the unbeliever might begin to see how desperately serious things are.

When God first begins doing a work of conviction in a man’s heart; He begins by showing the man how desperate his situation is—and how awful his dilemma is. Yes this is how God meets a man—He ‘shows’ the sinner his chains. God finds the sinner in the ‘slave market’ of sin—unable to cut the chains, and unable to pay for his freedom—unable to exchange something for release from his bondage.

At first the sinner thinks that getting to God is an easy matter—just a prayer, a word of confession. But then the Holy Spirit shows the sinner that only God’s mercy can save. The Holy Spirit convicts the sinner of wretched unbelief (John 16:8-11). When the conviction has done its work—only then is the man brought to the end of himself to see his moral bankruptcy—to see his helplessness—that only mercy can save him.

He discovers that the enemies of his soul are much larger than he imagined: sin, death, hell, the world, the flesh, the devil, the condemnation of God’s Law all drag man’s soul toward the pit.

Only when the sinner has lost all faith in *what he can do* does the Holy Spirit reveal the freeness of the offer of Christ in the Gospel. The Gospel is only good news to those who have come face to face with the bad news. Like an appointment with a trusted physician—so is a man’s dealing with Christ. The Lord Jesus is the ‘Physician of souls’—He has a diagnosis that must be accepted before the ‘cure’ can be administered.

The Gospel (the ‘Good News’) brings the cure to man’s sin disease. The Gospel is the power of God to those who believe (Romans 1:16-17). But no man falls at the feet of Jesus in trust and repentance until he has come to terms with God’s diagnosis of his heart.

Have you come to terms with the God’s diagnosis? Can you say and mean it that: *your sin separates you from God; your sin is so serious that it places you under God’s wrath; can you say that your efforts will not remove the condemnation of God; my only hope is salvation through Jesus Christ.*

Only the man convicted by the Holy Spirit can say, Yes, the Bible is true—it has found me out. I have a bad heart and a bad record in heaven. Yes, nothing can avail in my case but a new heart and a new record in heaven—and that is only found in Christ. Apart from receiving God’s diagnosis; the message of the cross (the Gospel) remains a ‘stumbling stone’ (Rom 9:33; Gal 5:11).

Only Christ can take you past the enemies of your soul and bring you to heaven. The enemies of a man’s soul are too strong for him—every one of them. You are not strong enough to defeat even one of them (the world, flesh, devil, sin, death, hell, and the condemnation of God’s law). But the glorious news of the Gospel is that Christ was born of a virgin—He lived a perfect life in the sinner’s place. He died as the Perfect Substitute for sinners so that His death frees the believer from the guilt of sin and its condemnation.

The Word says, “And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you are healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Christ is the sin-bearer and Substitute for sinners. God in His love gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Christ's payment for sin on that cruel cross means that God can forgive you freely and He remains just in doing so (Romans 3:24-26). Christ was willing to be the Perfect Sacrifice for sin. Scripture says that He obeyed to the point of death—even death upon a cross (Philippians 2:6-8).

When Christ died; He took upon Himself the guilt of all who would ever believe (1 Peter 3:18). God raised Him from the dead the third day. Christ's resurrection is proof that God the Father has fully accepted Christ's payment on behalf of guilty sinners. Christ demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners; He died for us (Romans 5:8-11).

God's diagnosis is intensely humbling. Sinners do not want to believe that they are 'helpless'—so they make an effort to build a bridge to God through religious efforts. The Lord Jesus Christ died for sinners “while we were still helpless” (Rom 5:6). Christ is the only One who can give saving mercy to a sinner.

He is willing to save even the worst sinner if that person will bow before Him in faith and repentance. The glorious benefits offered freely in the Gospel belong only to those who repent and trust Christ as Savior (Mark 16:16).

The Scriptures tell us about our necessary response to be united with Christ. The believing sinner trusts in nothing he can do—only in the Savior (Acts 3:19; 16:31). The person who savingly believes *transfers* his trust away from self to Christ. It would be like a man changing chairs—taking faith out of self and placing it in Christ.

One chair has your name on it—if you are trusting what you can do. The other involves resting in Christ alone. Remember who it is that God justifies (declares righteous). It is the “ungodly” whom God justifies; not those who think that they are a good person (Romans 4:5). Those who define themselves as ‘ungodly’ have a right to Christ.

God has ‘built’ the bridge of salvation from Christ to the sinner; and not the other way around. He came to seek and to save. He finds us; it is not us finding Him. Do you believe what God has said about your bad heart and your bad record in heaven; that you are ungodly? God only justifies those who have been stripped of personal righteousness.

Saving faith turns from self trust and rests in Christ alone for righteousness—trusting that Christ is ready and willing to save the one who comes to Him for mercy (Romans 10:13).

By His Holy Spirit the Lord ‘raises up’ spiritually dead sinners from their helplessness and slavery to sin and self. “But God being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

“But when the kindness of God or Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).

Saving sinners is the reason Christ came to earth; it is the reason the eternal Son of God became a man (Luke 19:10). God is now commanding men everywhere to repent and turn to Christ (Acts 17:30). To repent involves a radical change of mind and life—it is to whole-heartedly agree that we have wronged God and sinned against Him. To repent is to be sorry for our sin and turn from it in order to serve God with gratitude (Luke 13:5). Christ promises to receive those who come to Him in faith and repentance (John 1:12; 6:37).