



THE GOSPEL

In this session, we are going to look at the heart of the Bible's message. We are going to delve into what God has done to save us. This message is called the gospel, and it is powerful:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” Romans 1:16

The word *gospel* means good news. This immediately tells us two things about this message:

First, it is news. The gospel is a message about real events that have occurred in history. It is not just principles or religious teachings, but a true story. In the gospel, God proclaims the reality of the way things are.

Second, the Scripture declares that this news is good. It is the declaration of a message that will be a joy and a relief to hear. Satan has often tried to misrepresent the gospel as a message that is condemning, restrictive, and mean-spirited. The truth is that the gospel is just the opposite of this. It is a message of mercy to sinners and liberty to captives.

To truly understand the good news, we must consider the history of God's dealing with mankind. We will do this by looking at three biblical events:

1. CREATION | GOD'S ORIGINAL INTENTION
2. THE FALL | WHAT WENT WRONG
3. REDEMPTION | GOD'S SOLUTION

CREATION

THE VALUE OF CREATION

The first thing we need to understand is that He created everything. The world does not exist by some random set of circumstances. It is the result of the express desire of a good and loving God and, therefore, is in itself good. Just to emphasize this very point, during the process of creation, God paused to acknowledge that what He had made was good. He wanted to highlight the value of what He had created, as well as His own delight in it.

This process builds in anticipation, culminating in the creation of Adam and Eve. They stand as the pinnacle of God's creative genius. Humanity is not a product of evolution that has ascended by chance to dominate the earth. We were created in His own image and bear a unique dignity and capability for good because of this.

It is vital for us to understand the goodness of God's original creation if we are to appreciate how tragic the fall was. If I spilled water on a painting I found in my attic, it may be mildly upsetting. If I discovered it was a priceless Monet, it would be devastating.

In the same way, because God values and loves what He created, He was not prepared to discard it after the fall. Instead, He saved it.

“For God so loved the world [Greek *kosmos* lit. universe or creation], that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” [John 3:16-17](#)

THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

God's creation was not only valuable but also purposeful. This purpose is seen in the commands that He gave to Adam and Eve:

1. REPRODUCE — His purpose was to fill the earth with His glory through the multiplication of men and women bearing His image. In His goodness, God offered all of creation the best thing there is—Himself.

2. RULE — They were placed as God's representatives on earth to rule, subdue, cultivate, and care for it.

To sum up, God had made a creation that was full of value and purpose. At the center of all God had made, He placed men and women as the supreme objects of His love, entrusted with the future of creation.

THE FALL

Though creation was originally good, things did not stay that way. Sin entered through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. This original sin has infected every person since then. The Bible is very clear that every person who has ever lived has sinned and is in need of God's forgiveness.

“We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all.” [Isaiah 53:6 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

To help us understand what sin is, we will look at the main Greek word translated as “sin” in the New Testament, and at two other closely related words.

1. SIN (*HAMARTIA*)

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23

The word literally means to “miss the mark,” e.g., when an arrow misses its target. In failing to fulfill the purpose for which God created us, we have all “missed the mark.” Sin has so marred the value of creation that, in a tragic reversal of God’s declaration, now it could be said that things are “not good.”

2. TRESPASS (*PARAPTOMA*)

“But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”
Romans 5:15 (NIV 1984)

The term *trespass* derives from a verb meaning “to fall.” This is not just an accidental slip, but a falling even though one could and should have remained standing. We have failed to live up to our own understanding of what is right, let alone God’s much higher standards. We were created for noble purpose, but have fallen and been broken in a way that is beyond our ability to fix.

3. DISOBEDIENCE (*PARAKOE*)

“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” Romans 5:19

This word is related to the verb *to hear* and means “to disregard,” in the sense of a refusal to hear and obey. This describes the refusal in our minds and hearts to listen to God when He tells us how we are to live. We disregard Him and His ways and do what we want instead. We express the same sentiment in the popular Sinatra song, “I did it my way.”

THE SINFUL NATURE

As we consider the above definitions, we can see that all of us have acted in ways that can be described by each of these terms. If it were just these actions that were the problem, we would have enough to deal with. However, the problem is compounded by the fact that when humanity sinned, human nature itself fell. In other words, it is not just what we have done, but the fact that we have now become less than God intended.

God’s definition of sin runs deeper than mere deeds of sin, but rather is rooted in our very nature. It is the attitude of our hearts: independence, self-centeredness, rebellion, and going our own way. We do not want to be told what to do or what to believe by anyone, including God. These issues are not only common to all men, but are also glorified in an unredeemed culture.

Like Adam and Eve, we have chosen to decide for ourselves what our lives will be. We may listen to the advice of others, and maybe even consider the teachings of the Bible, but we set our own targets and goals for our lives. In setting our own targets, we show an ignorance or abandonment of God’s target.

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Ephesians 2:1-3

THE WRATH OF GOD

The problem of humanity's separation from God is made far worse by the reality of God's wrath against sin and sinners. It is not only our sin that stands in the way of our relationship with God, but also His wrath.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Romans 1:18-20

Despite this, people still try to excuse or justify their sin. We live in days when people use positive-sounding terminology in an attempt to disguise or soften the harsh realities of sin, but this does not alter the reality of God's holiness or His judgment. *Holy* means “set apart” or “other than”; God's standards are wholly different than ours.

The wrath of God against sin demands justice for the wrongs we have done. His wrath is not like human fits of rage; it is a reasoned demand for justice, resulting from His righteousness.

“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’” Romans 2:5-6 (NIV 1984)

“All this is evidence that God's judgment is right...He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power” 2 Thessalonians 1:5a, 8-9 (NIV 1984)

It is a dire situation. Our actions, our nature, and God's wrath all stand against us. Where can we turn for help?

REDEMPTION

How can God's wrath, toward sin and sinner, be reconciled with His love for what He created? In Christ. The good news is that God has done something about the fall in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He proved His love, not by setting aside His wrath, but by satisfying it. God showed Himself to be both just and Justifier. All who are in Christ:

“...are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” Romans 3:24-26 (NIV 1984)

He is the One who releases us from our sins by paying the price for us. Forgiveness is not just God “letting things go” or “letting bygones be bygones.” Since Christ paid the price for sin, God would now be unjust to hold sins against those who trust in Christ. Christ was our substitute, taking away the wrath of God. What God has done in Christ is powerful enough to undo all the damage that sin has caused.

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. ”

John 3:16



In the Bible, we find various analogies to describe the problem of sinful humanity, and God's solution in Christ:

1. ECONOMIC

“knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

1 Peter 1:18-19

Humanity was sold into slavery to sin. Christ came and purchased our freedom, paying the full debt that we owed. He redeemed us from bondage to sin.

2. RELATIONAL

“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Romans 5: 9-11

Sin broke our relationship with God. Our opposition to Him made us His enemies. We stood divorced from Him and under His wrath. However, Christ loved us and died for us. He satisfied God's wrath and won our hearts again. He reached across the divide, removing all the obstacles between us and God. He reconciled us back to Him.

3. LEGAL

“by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he [God] set aside, nailing it to the cross.” Colossians 2:14

Paul's reference here is to the Roman practice of nailing to the cross a list of the crimes committed by the person being crucified. In sinning, we have broken God's holy Law. We are guilty and should receive the punishment for our crime, namely an eternity in hell. However, Christ paid the penalty for us instead. He was innocent, but suffered for the guilty. When we look back in faith, we see the list of our own sins nailed to the cross of Christ. Christ died as our substitute.

4. MILITARY

“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” Colossians 2:15 (NIV 1984)

Through sin, we surrendered to the enemy and came under his dominion. But Christ crushed Satan and stripped him of his power. Now, Christ has all authority, even over death and Hell, and can transfer those who trust in Him from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light. He has triumphed for us.

God accomplished all this in the mission of Christ. Let us look at Him, God's only begotten Son, the Author and Perfector of our faith:

1. He was fully God and fully man.

“Who [Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

Philippians 2:6-7 (NIV 1984) (see also John 1:1&14, Isaiah 9:6)

2. He perfectly revealed to us the will, power, purpose, and nature of God.

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” Hebrews 1:3a (NIV 1984) (see also John 14:9, Colossians 1:15)

3. He was tempted and tested in every way and therefore is able to identify with all of mankind’s difficulties.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15

4. He lived under the scrutiny of heaven and earth and was found to be completely sinless.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,” 2 Corinthians 5:21a (NIV 1984)

“Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, ‘I find no guilt in this man.’” Luke 23:4 (see also vs. 13-16)

5. He fulfilled every just requirement of the Law.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17

6. He willingly suffered on our behalf, satisfying God’s wrath by dying on the cross.

“In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him, ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” Matthew 27:41-46 (NIV 1984) (see also Isaiah 53, Romans 5:9-10)

7. He was raised from the dead, proving God’s acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice and His victory over death.

“and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,” Romans 1:4 (see also 1 Corinthians 15:6)

8. He ascended and has been exalted over all things.

“[Christ] has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” 1 Peter 3:22 (see also Ephesians 1:18-23, Mark 16:19, Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:9-11)

Christ did all of this for the glory of the Father and out of love for us. He did it because we could not do it for ourselves. We contribute nothing to our salvation. The joy for the Christian remains that our life rests securely in what God did in Christ. This is good news indeed.



WHAT SHOULD OUR RESPONSE BE?

“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.’” [Acts 2:37-39](#)

RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Romans*
2. *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott
3. *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* by J.I. Packer and Mark Dever
4. *A Gospel Primer* by Milton Vincent