

Proclaiming the Biblical Gospel

By Jay Wegter

WHAT are the consequences of offending God? The law stops every mouth that all may become guilty before God (Rom 3:19). Man's uneducated conscience cannot be trusted to assess the seriousness of sin and its verdict of death and separation from God. Only by proclaiming the character of God and the immutability of His law will sinners conclude that they are *lawbreakers* in God's sight who deserve *eternal condemnation* (1 Jn 3:4).

The First Commandment: *Have no other gods before Me.* We haven't loved God supremely—we haven't treasured Him and valued Him; and pressed on to know Him. We have chosen things in place of God and disregarded Him—despising His ownership of us. We have regarded His loving rule over us to be an intrusion. We have made *other gods* out of our own will, our own way, and our own cravings.

The Second Commandment: *You shall not make for yourself an idol.* We have set our affections on the world—we have worshipped and served the creature and creation instead of God. We have made idols of our lusts and desires. We have refused to love God by a life of continual thanksgiving to Him.

The Third Commandment: *Do not take the Name of the Lord God in vain.* We have not sanctified and set apart the Name of the Lord—we have used God's Name casually and irreverently. We have dragged His Name into our conversations without reverence and fear; with no thought of His holiness. We have had no passion for His honor and glory. We have been too cowardly to defend His character when others have dishonored His Name in our presence.

The Fourth Commandment: *Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.* Though not a N.T. ordinance; the principle of setting aside time to draw near to God is timeless. We have failed in this by not leaving our pursuits and pastimes to actively seek God. We have not made it a priority to worship God; to serve Him; and make Him known to our fellow creatures. We have not come away from our schedules to give Him the best of our thoughts and conversation. We are by nature *Sabbath-breakers*.

The Fifth Commandment: *Honor your father and mother.* We have disobeyed by dishonoring our parents countless times. We have deemed them unworthy of our obedience and respect. We have talked back to them and undermined their authority. We have promised obedience and withheld it. We have been ungrateful and have disregarded their God-appointed authority in our lives.

The Sixth Commandment: *You shall not murder.* In 1 John 3:15 we are told that to hate your brother is murder because it is a spirit of murder. Have you despised and resented those who have mistreated you? Have you held a grudge and wished for their downfall, misfortune; failure; and destruction? Have you entertained violent thoughts against those who have offended you? Have you lashed out in angry words? (Matt 5:22). Do you harbor unforgiveness? Have you sought your own vengeance by gossip and slander?

The Seventh Commandment: *You shall not commit adultery.* This encompasses all sexual sin. We have allowed lusts to rule us. We have looked upon others as sexual objects of desire in our minds. Jesus said that to do that can be adultery in the heart (Matt 5:28). We have entertained discontent with our marriage partner and allowed imaginary lovers to enter the mind. We have loved our lusts above God's honor. We have not cared to reflect God's purity in our thinking; desiring; and looking.

The Eighth Commandment: *You shall not steal.* We have many times taken what is not ours. We have robbed employers of a full day's work. We have cheated on tests and homework. We have robbed God by using our resources for our pleasures without a thought of giving to His Kingdom and the spread of the Gospel. We have stolen the reputation of others by gossiping. We have borrowed from others and not returned; and we have cheated others out of fairness by our greed.

The Ninth Commandment: *Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.* We have lied and covered our sin. We have altered the truth to protect ourselves. We have exaggerated, embellished, and distorted the truth to make ourselves look more favorable. We have misrepresented the character of others. We have not sought the truth in the inward man; but have lied to ourselves about God's faithfulness. We have allowed dishonesty to enter our speech.

The Tenth Commandment: *You shall not covet.* We have desired what is not ours but another's. We have believed it should be ours and not our neighbor's. We have envied; been jealous of what others have. We have been secretly happy at the misfortune of those around us. We have been secretly saddened by the promotions and prosperity of those around us. We have complained and grumbled—indulging in self-pity and discontentment. We have felt elevated by the moral downfall of others. We have compared ourselves to others instead of living in gratitude to God for grace.

God has born witness to man's moral and spiritual condition. God is just and fair to shut impenitent sinners out of the enjoyment of His glory forever (Mt 10:28). Sinners who reject God's authority; who do not fear God or believe God are liable to death and judgment (Mt 12:36). They will experience God's verdict; the separation of their souls from God forever in eternal punishment (Rom 6:23). Sinners make a 'wager' or 'bet' that God will not judge

I. Know the gospel essentials that are missing today.

The gospel must include both the character of God and the character of the sinner.

1. ***Whom*** has the sinner offended?
2. ***How*** has the sinner offended God?
3. ***What*** are the consequences of offending God?
4. ***What*** are sinners to be saved from?
5. ***What*** has God done about the sinner's dilemma?
6. ***How*** are sinners to be saved from ruin?

A. Whom has the sinner offended?

1. Our gospel message must have at its core the glory and majesty and exaltation of God. He is the offended power. Without the knowledge of the God whom he has offended, the sinner will not see himself in *opposition to God*.ⁱ Why does sin, impenitence, and unbelief separate the unbeliever from God making him an enemy of God? Romans 5:10, Colossians 1:21, and 1 John 3:4.

2. The gospel is about God's moral majesty and righteous justice. God cannot be made to fit the sinner's instincts and carnal ideas of deity. All conviction of sin and remorse for sin begins with the character of God as He is revealed in Scripture. Read 1 Samuel 2:2-3. What does it mean in v. 3, "And with Him, actions are weighed?" God, in His omniscience, sees into our hearts, He knows the motives and the reasons behind our behavior.

3. Begin with God as Creator—who God is in relation to all else—His absolute claims upon His creatures. Don't assume the culture has an accurate view of God. False evangelism tries to attract by focusing solely on divine love while excluding God's holiness, sovereignty, and righteous justice (Rev 15:4).

B. How has the sinner offended God?

1. Man must experience a degree of devastation about personal sin. There must be an awakening in the individual as to the fact that all sin is against God and His holy character. There is no repentance until the sinner says the same thing about his sin that God does: *sin opposes who God is; sin makes one an enemy of God and His glory; and the sinner deserves divine judgment* (Rom 3:23; 5:10).

2. Jesus took the rich young ruler back to the Law of God (Lu 18:18-23). The sinner must be shown how he has specifically offended God. You can't make the cross *personal* without making the sinner's depravity *personal*. The transgressor must be shown that *who he is* in God's sight, and *what he has done* in his person has offended God. The preaching of the law is the tool for identifying sin (Rom 3:20; 5:20).

3. People tend to hear the gospel through a therapeutic 'self-help' grid. They assume that the gospel is about them, about their self-therapy, about the possibility of gaining a better life through personal improvement, not about God who is glorified in judging sin at the cross (Jn 17:1-2). When Christ Jesus laid His life down at Calvary, He did so as an act of obedience. Christ's willing humiliation in

His suffering is the cause of His exaltation, for His death magnified God's justice and mercy (Rom 3:24-26). As the resurrected 'God-man' Christ is Lord of all and King, and is given a Name above every name (Phil 2:9-11).

C. What are the consequences of offending God?

1. God's law stops every mouth that all may become guilty before God (Rom 3:19). Man, apart from the Bible, cannot be trusted to assess the seriousness of sin and its verdict of death and separation from God. Only by proclaiming the character of God and the immutability of His law will sinners conclude that they are *lawbreakers* in God's sight who deserve *eternal condemnation* (1 Jn 3:4).

2. The law is the *identifier of sin*—without the law, how does a person know what to repent of? Apart from the law of God, the gospel is emptied of the essentials of *sin, hell, conviction, repentance, and God's moral authority*.

3. God has born witness to man's moral and spiritual condition. God is just and fair to shut impenitent sinners out of the enjoyment of His glory forever (Mt 10:28). Sinners who spurn God's mercy, who reject God's authority, who do not fear God or believe God are liable to death and judgment (Mt 12:36). They will experience God's just verdict, separation from God forever in eternal punishment (Rom 2:1-12; 6:23).

D. What are sinners to be saved from?

1. Sinners must be told they need to be saved not only from the *consequences of sin, separation from God in hell, but also from the power and rule of sin itself*. This is vital. Deliverance from the reign of sin is a truth inherent in true repentance (Lu 13:5; 24:47).

2. The fact that God will *lay bare* every heart is stated in a gospel context (Rom 2:16). Jesus felt a love for the rich young ruler; then told him that he must be *saved from* his covetousness (Lu 18:22ff.).

3. Sinners must be told that they must be saved from the *wrath of God*. For, the wrath God will justly come upon all who do not believe the gospel and repent of sin (Rom 2:1-10).

E. What has God done about the sinner's dilemma?

1. Without a knowledge of God whom the sinner has offended, and without a knowledge of God's law, which the sinner has trampled—there will be no grasp of what God has done to save. Grace only makes sense to those who see themselves as condemned lawbreakers. In Christ's parable in Luke 18:9-14, the outwardly religious man prayed a 'sincere prayer', but was not justified. Yet the despised tax collector who acknowledged his ruinous sin left the temple justified. Why such a difference?

2. The good news of the gospel is that the Son of God has taken on flesh and dwelled with mankind. Christ the *God-man* died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1-4). His substitutionary death fulfilled the long-awaited promise of perfect redemption (Heb 10:10, 14). He established the new covenant in His blood (Mt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:25).

3. The atonement Christ has made exalts divine justice. Because of the cross, God is glorified in extending forgiveness full and free to believing sinners (Rom 3:23-26). For Jesus' resurrection from the dead conquered sin, Satan, and death (Col 2:11-15). His rising from the dead is proof that the Father has accepted the Son's sacrifice on behalf of all who believe. God is ready to receive even the worst sinner who believes and repents, because Christ has provided the all-sufficient sacrifice for sin (Heb 9:14).

F. How are sinners to be saved from ruin?

1. The promise of eternal life is offered to all who believe and repent. Christ receives sinners! (Lu 15:1-2). "Turn from your sins and follow Christ—take hold of eternal life!" (Rom 1:16-17). The good news is that man may have certainty about forgiveness of personal sin and about eternal life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (Jn 3:36; 5:24, 25; Jn 10:27-29).

2. God desires you to be saved; He even commands you to come to Him and be forgiven; be reconciled to Him based on what He has done in Christ Jesus (Is 45:22; 2 Cor 5:19-21). There is no need to remain an enemy estranged from Him—He has promised to receive all those who come to Him by faith in His Son (Jn 1:12, 13; Acts 17:30-31).

3. Christ is calling sinners to repentance and faith. The twin graces of faith and repentance are present in the regenerate person; they enable the sinner to flee to Christ, taking hold of Him as Savior (Phil 1:29; Eph 2:8-10; 1 Tim 6:12).

II. Learn to use God's moral law in evangelism.

Modern evangelism offers a false diagnosis of the sinner's dilemma. Without a correct diagnosis, men will resent and resist the gospel. Apart from the Spirit's use of the Law, people hide from the exposure and judgment of their sin (Jn 3:19-21). By God's Law sinners come to understand that God is Moral Governor of the universe (Mt 12:36-37).

A. Can man understand the gospel without grasping the economy of God's Law?

1. The Law now has both a precept role, the commandments of God, and an evangelical role—the conviction of sin. Its gospel role is to make sin exceedingly sinful (Rom 5:20; 7:7). We are to therefore preach the law “killingly” to the end that the sinner loses all hope of contributing to his own salvation. There is the danger of “short-cutting” the gospel by offering free grace, *before* the conscience was afflicted by the Law.ⁱⁱ

2. The moral law is an unchanging expression of the holy majesty of God's Person. Since God's moral government is founded upon His Law, the principle of moral cause and effect (crime and punishment) reveals God's righteous character. The moral Law, which is ‘God's character in a moral code’ is built into the very fabric of the universe and creation.ⁱⁱⁱ God's character is the law of the universe.

3. Under the new covenant, the evangelical role of the Law in eliminating self-righteousness is summarized in Galatians chapters two and three. The moral law can be likened to a “bulldozer” that removes human merit from the earth. Thus, the Law as a strict ‘tutor’ prepares the sinner for the gospel (Rom 10:4; Gal 3:24). The Galatians passages systematically refute self-righteousness and human merit: (Gal 2:15-21; 3:10-14; 3:23-29; 4:8-10; 5:1-9).

B. What is the use of the Law in apologetics and evangelism?

1. There are four aspects related to God's Moral Majesty which must be grasped before the gospel can be understood: a.) the existence of God's Law, b.) man's sin against God's Law, c.) the guilt of sin incurred by breaking God's Law, d.) the eternal wrath of God poured out in judgment against sin.^{iv}

2. The Holy Spirit utilizes the preaching of the Law to produce a state of conviction of sin (Jn 16:8-11). The awakened sinner under conviction recognizes the guilt of his sin and the authority of the moral government of God—he comes to

understand the hopelessness of reforming himself in order to work his way out of condemnation.^v Read John 16:8-11.

C. A suggested procedure for using the Law in evangelism.

1.) Establish the very concept of moral law. Our culture separates the Person of God from moral law. But, when ethics are “orphaned” from the Person of God, they are easily debauched.^{vi} We see vices legislated as if they are virtues: homosexual partnerships become accepted as *marriage*, abortion on demand is cast as *reproductive care*, and transgenderism as *gender-affirming care* (see Isaiah 5:20, calling good ‘evil’ and evil ‘good’).

2.) Establish that God’s moral law is a direct reflection of God’s unchanging moral character. It is impossible to love God without submitting to, and valuing His commands as the expression of His righteousness (Deut 30:19-20). Only the man or woman who “imitates God” in righteousness will enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Eph 5:1-6). God’s standard never evolves because the Lawgiver never changes.^{vii} The moral law is no longer a covenant, but it is the shape of godliness and the safeguard of love to God and neighbor (Rom 13:8-10).

3.) Establish the existence of God’s moral government. Moral cause and effect are administrated by God (Deut 10; 11; 13; 27; 28). By obedience to God’s commands believers manifest that they are God’s possession and are willingly subject to His moral government. Paul preached the gospel against the backdrop of the coming universal judgment by means of God’s moral government (Acts 17:30, 31; 24:15, 16; Rom 2:16).

D. Questions promoting the recognition of God’s moral government.

1. Upon what basis can we know right from wrong? By cultural norms and standards, or by God’s laws? **2.** Is right from wrong based upon the constant immutable standard based upon the holy character of the one, true, and righteous God? **3.** Has God revealed His standard of right and wrong in the Ten Commandments found in the Bible? Is God’s standard absolute, universal, and unchanging? **4.** Does God rule over His moral creatures by means of His righteous laws in the Ten Commandments? **5.** Does God’s righteous character require that He thoroughly punish all evil? Will God someday judge every person by this righteous standard of His commandments? Does He have a record of people’s sins?

E. The Word of God states that the human condition is made known by God's Law.

1. Romans 1:18-32 is God's indictment upon man as a creature in sin. Paul is describing God's attitude toward His creatures that find themselves in sin and outside of Christ. Creation by God's hand demands conformity to God's law. The sins listed in Romans chapter one are violations of the Ten Commandments.^{viii}

2. Man is responsible to God for his behavior and is held to a standard of conduct even if he has never read or heard of the Bible. God's testimony in creation and conscience means that man has *an innate knowledge* of God's attributes (Rom 1:20), *an innate knowledge* of God's Person (Rom 1:21), *an innate knowledge* of God's law (Rom 1:32; 2:14-15), and *an innate knowledge* of God's judgment (Rom 1:32).^{ix}

F. The conscience of man must be reached before the sinner is ready to abandon his cherished intellectual fallacies and his false hope.

1. Arguments against Biblical theism come from the unbeliever's fallen intellect—expressed as truth suppression. The ungodly mind is like a brick wall. It has been built to keep God out.^x It is at enmity against Him (Col 1:21). It refuses to bow to the Law of God, "because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be" (Rom 8:7).

2. The unregenerate human mind spins off arguments and attacks against God. The carnal mind is the place of *battles against God*; it is a place of great opposition against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:5). The carnal mind forges 'weapons' against the knowledge of God. The wall of antagonism is hard and immovable, so make it a habit of going around it—How? Learn to speak directly to the conscience.^{xi}

3. The conscience is the part of human nature that isn't an enemy of God. The conscience is God's ally and speaks for the law of God. It bears witness (Rom 2:15). As God's witness it points out the guilty party in the courtroom. Bring out our star witness of conscience and give it a voice. The law stops the mouth of the criminal (Rom 3:19; 1 Tim 1:7-11). It condemns the guilty and drives him to give up his defense, so that he will be forced to look solely to the Judge for mercy.^{xii}

III. Preaching the Law of God and repentance toward God is joined to the Holy Spirit's preparation of the sinner.

A. Only the person prepared by the Spirit takes God's side against sin, and goes to war against his own sin.

1. The sinner prepared by the Holy Spirit takes God's side against himself. To be brought to repentance, a man must be taken beyond the fear of punishment to hatred of sin and love of Christ. Repentance begins with sobering thoughts of eternity then proceeds to conscience-crushing contemplation of personal sin laid bare in the sight of God.^{xiii}

2. The sinner will come willingly if the Spirit of God has prepared him by crushing his conscience over sin and by bringing him to the end of self.

Unbelievers stop short of saving faith and repentance when they place their trust in their efforts of personal reformation and improvement. Therefore, it is the Spirit's convicting role to bring the sinner to utter bankruptcy of soul—despairing of all self-help.

3. True turning from sin has a desperateness about it. The prepared sinner longs for forgiveness and deliverance from sin. The cost of discipleship lived out under the lordship of Christ appeals only to the person desperate to be delivered from sin. The prepared person will pay any cost and part with anything in order to have Christ and deliverance.^{xiv}

4. The man who is genuinely converted never outgrows his amazement at divine forgiveness. The mind and affections are now a servant and instrument of God's Word and grace. He continues to glorify God for His grace as he considers what he deserves outside of Christ (Eph 2:1-16). This is why we preach the Law—it is the beginning of understanding our legal guilt before God, it prepares the sinner to appeal to the throne of grace for mercy. (on legal guilt, see Col 2:14)

B. God's law is His means of "X-raying" the human heart—penetrating and exposing man's moral center.

C. The gospel produces conviction of sin; which is the condition gained by God's Spirit for the new birth.

1. Without exposing the human condition so that conscience is afflicted, people have little idea what they are to be saved from. The modern gospel tends to emphasize the benefits of salvation rather than the character of God and the sinner's condition.^{xv}

2. When Christ preached the gospel, He removed all middle ground. He eliminated all gray areas. He emphatically stated that there is no territory between truth and lies, between heaven and hell. Christ's words made a clear division between men (Jn 3:19-21). If a person is not following Christ with all his heart, seeking to build His Kingdom, and gathering souls, then according to Christ, that person is *scattering*, and is "*against Me*" (Lu 11:23).

3. Christ and the Apostles preached: the Law of God, original sin, the need of repentance, and the need for a new nature. When the gospel is preached biblically, the soil of the heart will be "plowed up" to receive the good seed (Mt 13:1-23). Before a man can be converted, he must be convinced of his sin. Before he can find rest through the gospel, he must be mortally wounded by the law.

Questions for review:

1) What does God say about the consequences of sin? (sect. one, part C, 3). God is just and fair to shut impenitent sinners out of the enjoyment of His glory (Mt 10:28). Sinners who reject God's authority, who do not fear God or believe God are liable to death and judgment (Mt 12:36). They will experience God's just verdict, the separation of their souls from God forever in eternal punishment (Rom 6:23). Sinners who reject Christ's role as merciful Redeemer and rightful King will face Christ as their Judge (Phil 2:9-11).

2) What is the sinner to be saved from? (sect. one, part D, 1-3). Sinners need to be saved not only from the *consequences* of sin (death and separation from God in hell); but also, from the power and practice of *sin itself*. That is true repentance (Lu 13:5; 24:47). The wrath God will justly come upon all who do not believe the gospel and repent of sin (Rom 2:1-10).

3) What is the value of preaching the law of God 'killingly'? (sect. two, part. A, 1). The law's gospel role is to make sin exceedingly sinful (Rom 5:20; 7:7). We are to therefore preach the law "killingly" to the end that the sinner loses all hope of contributing to his own salvation. Without the law's tutorial work of 'killing' one's hopes of personal merit, the sinner will retain his imagined self-righteousness.

4) What does it mean that the Spirit produces 'conscience-crushing' conviction over personal sin? (see sect. 3, part. A, 1-2). The sinner prepared by the Spirit takes God's side against himself. To be brought to true repentance, he must be taken beyond the fear of punishment, to hatred of sin and love of Christ.

Repentance begins with sobering thoughts of Judgment Day and eternity, then proceeds to conscience-crushing contemplation of personal sin. The sinner will come willingly if the Spirit of God has prepared him by crushing his conscience over sin. In His preparatory work, the Spirit brings the sinner to bankruptcy of soul and to despair of all self-help.

End Notes:

ⁱ Joseph Lo Sardo, "Errors in Modern Evangelism," www.sermonaudio.com, 5/7/06

ⁱⁱ Robert Bolton, *Afflicted Consciences*, p. 175

ⁱⁱⁱ C. H. Dodd, *Gospel and Law*, pp. 70, 71, 79

^{iv} Ernest Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, pp. 91, 92

^v Ibid.

^{vi} John O. Anderson, *Cry of the Innocents*, p. 135

^{vii} Douglas W. Phillips, Esq., "Do Laws and Standards Evolve?" *Impact* #303, *Institute for Creation Research*, 1998

^{viii} Richard C. Barcellos, *The Ten Commandments*, p. 19

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Ray Comfort, *Avoiding the Wall of Antagonism*

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ray Comfort, *Conversions True and False*

^{xiii} John MacArthur, *Exposition of Luke 3:1-18*

^{xiv} Ibid.

^{xv} Jim Elliff, *The New Gospel: Appealing but not Revealing*, p. 3