

What is 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—through the Person of Christ (Psalm 100:3; John 1:1-3; Acts 17:24-31; Heb 1:1-3). God is revealing His mighty attributes in the creation which functions as a kind of stage or theatre for His glory. God's power, goodness, and wisdom are clearly seen in the creation so that all men are without excuse in their unbelief (Romans 1:18-23).

Since God made everything out of nothing; all things owe their existence to God—He is Owner of everything He has made. Everything that God has made belongs to Him including people (Psalm 50:7-12). The desire to know God must begin with knowing Him to be one's Creator. The Scripture begins with these words, "In the beginning God. . ." The Bible constantly affirms that God is our Creator, and we are His creatures. We are accountable to Him and utterly dependent upon Him (Psalm 100). There is no true humility or knowledge without this all-pervasive life-controlling view of God as source of life and meaning (Proverbs 1:6-7).

God is Ruler over His creation; He is King over the works of His hands (Rev 4:11).

God reigns over all; He rules by His holy Law. He is Lord of all. He is Lord of the cosmos and He exercises His providential control of His creation (Psalm 96). A day is coming when every human and every angel will bow before the glorified Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord of the universe (Philippians 2:9-11). All those who remain enemies of His glory and who refuse to take refuge in Christ will be eternally sent out of God's presence. God will destroy those in everlasting perdition who insist upon defying Him in this life (Psalm 52:5-7; John 3:36; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

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). There is no one righteous; there is no one who seeks after God (Romans 3:10-14).

Man is not fit to judge his own case. Man's moral failure is only adequately exposed by God's law which serves as a mirror in which we see our sin and rebellion. The Law (the Ten Commandments) 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—the Law is intended to show us our desperate need of Christ (Romans 3:19). Paul says that the whole world is on 'death row' so to speak—God has 'locked up' the whole human race under legal guilt (Romans 11:32; Galatians 3:22).

All men will give an account of themselves before God (Rom 14:11-12).

God made us for a love relationship with Him—to know Him—obey Him—cherish Him—and enjoy Him—and find our highest satisfaction in 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, Adam and Eve, sinned in the Garden of Eden by rebelling against God’s command (Genesis 3:8-19).

The whole human race was plunged into sin by Adam’s act of rebellion. 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 original sin (Romans 5:12).

What happens at death?

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 their deeds—by the things written in God’s books (Revelation 20:11-15). 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 limbs and hands (Romans 2:16). Have we served God? Loved God and His truth? Made God known by our lives?

Scripture says that the operations of a man’s conscience are proof of God’s inescapable justice.

Every person knows the relative torment of a defiled and 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 and righteous God. According to Romans chapter two, the conscience is at work all day long—evaluating all our ethical decisions. Like a pair of scales the conscience weighs everything—and either defends our actions, or else accuses our actions (Romans 2:15).

For those who have rejected Christ as Savior; the Scripture says that God will someday ‘read’ the consciences of unbelieving men and women publicly (Romans 2:16). What a terror that will be for unbelievers when God exposes the secrets of the sinner’s heart before the watching universe.

The unsaved man’s conscience will be his ‘tormentor’ in eternal hell.

On that final Day of Judgment, God’s books, man’s conscience, and God’s justice will all agree. It will be impossible to stifle or bribe one’s conscience on that Day. Then the man who lived a life of muffling 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 reality as “the worm that does not die” (Mark 9:48). How this truth about the conscience ought to lead us to long for an objective assessment of our case so that we might see our soul’s plight and run to God’s solution in Christ.

Jesus tells us why men do not read the Bible and why they will not welcome God's truth ('light').

In John 3:19-21, Jesus told His listeners that God's judgment on the world is this: "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). Those words represent God bearing witness to the human condition: man's moral and ethical condition have slain his objectivity in the things of God. As a consequence, men love darkness; not light. It is man's defiled conscience and love of sin 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 deceitful heart and sinful deeds.

Apart from the Bible shining God's light upon our behavior, we cannot possibly know what a disaster sin is.

Sin is the cause of death, disease, suffering, selfishness, war, victimization, lust, and dishonesty. God's law finds us in our sinful state of lusting, coveting, dishonesty, selfishness; it finds us uncaring about the precious things of God; it uncovers our love of self; and our love of pleasure more than love of 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 who do good nor any who seek after God. It is God's Law alone which is capable of X-raying the human heart.

We don't understand the seriousness sin until we see how God punishes it.

Regarding sin, we live like the proverbial goldfish in his bowl immersed in water. The fish does not know he is 'wet'—he doesn't know the difference between wet and dry because water is his world. He swims through it—it has him suspended in its medium—he peers through it—it passes through his gills. That's like us with sin—we are permeated with it, thus we are desensitized to it. But 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 awaiting judgment under God's moral government. God cannot excuse sin; transgressors are awaiting God's justice and eternal condemnation.

Man's sin draws down God's wrath upon him

Sinful man cannot live with a holy God. The Scriptures tell us that our sin draws down His just wrath upon us (Romans 1:18-20). God's wrath is His settled anger—which will flow from His throne like white-hot lava forever. The response of God's holiness to human sin is divine wrath. God views our sin as a slight against His character; as contempt for His moral majesty; and as utter disregard for 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 comfortably with a dead animal decomposing under your bed.

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 (John 16:8-11).

This is how God meets a man—He ‘shows’ the sinner his predicament and dilemma by reason of sin. God finds the unbeliever in the ‘slave market’ of sin—unable to cut the chains, and unable to pay for freedom—or exchange something for release. At first the sinner thinks that getting to God is an easy matter—just a prayer, a word of confession, a little personal reformation, perhaps some church attendance. But then the Holy Spirit shows the sinner that only God's mercy can save.

The Holy Spirit convicts the sinner of his bondage to disobedience and of his wretched unbelief (John 16:8-11). When the Holy Spirit's 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 divine 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 pull his soul toward eternal destruction.

Only when the sinner has lost all faith in *what he can do* is he ready for 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 has a diagnosis that must be accepted before the ‘cure’ can be administered. The Gospel brings the cure to the sin disease. The Gospel is the power of God to those who believe (Romans 1:16-17).

No one falls at the feet of Christ unless they have received His diagnosis about their sin and have thereby seen the peril in which their soul lies. Have you come to terms with the God's diagnosis? Can you say it and mean it that: *my sin separates me from God; my sin is so serious that it places me under God's wrath; my sin is so wretched in God's sight that I deserve to be eternally miserable. Can you say that your efforts will not remove the condemnation of God and that your only hope is salvation through Jesus Christ?*

Only Christ can give you a new heart; cleanse you of sin; and bring you to heaven.

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 bad fruit and a bad record in heaven. Nothing can avail in my case but a new heart and a new record in heaven—and that is only found in Christ (Heb 9:12-14).

The enemies of my soul are too strong for me. I cannot defeat even one of them (the world, flesh, devil, sin, death, hell, and the condemnation of God's law). I receive the glorious news of the Gospel: Christ, born of a virgin, born under the Law—lived a perfect life in my place. He died as the Perfect Substitute for sinners like me.

His death frees me from the guilt of sin. “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). God in His love gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

God does not compromise His unchanging justice when He forgives sin.

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—He willingly spilled His life blood for dying sinners so that we could have life through Him (Philippians 2:6-8).

When Christ died; He took upon Himself the guilt of all who would ever believe (1 Peter 2:24; 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 tells us in the Gospel about our necessary response to be united with Christ.

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 of sin and trust Christ as Savior (Mark 16:16). The believing sinner trusts in nothing he can do—only in Christ's offer to receive and cleanse the those who know themselves to be guilty (Acts 3:19; 16:31).

The person who truly believes *transfers* his trust away from self to Christ. It would be like a man changing chairs. One chair has your name on it—that is where you sit if you are trusting in what you can do. The other chair involves resting in Christ alone. Saving faith takes faith out of myself and places it in Christ. Faith that saves rests in Christ alone for righteousness—trusting that Christ is willing and ready to receive the believing sinner (Romans 10:13).

Through faith in Christ and repentance from sin, God is restoring sinners to Himself.

Saving sinners is the reason Christ came to earth (Luke 19:10). He is mighty to save. His cross has purchased forgiveness full and free for the guilty. But coming to Christ is our necessary response if we are to know God. We come to God by coming to Christ; the merciful Redeemer. And we come to Christ by acknowledging that our sin is ruinous. 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). God grants a personal love relationship with Himself to all who come to Him in Christ. To know Him is to have eternal life (Jn 17:3; 1 Jn 5:11-13). To receive Christ's free pardon is to be brought into an eternal love relationship with God as His adopted child (Galatians 4:3-7).