

Whitfield Gospel Message

Psalm 96, A Call to Worship the LORD the Righteous Judge.

- 1 Sing to the LORD a new song;
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the LORD, bless His name;
Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.
- 3 Tell of His glory among the nations,
His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.
- 4 For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised;
He is to be feared above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
But the LORD made the heavens.
- 6 Splendor and majesty are before Him,
Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.
- 7 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- 8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name;
Bring an offering and come into His courts.
- 9 Worship the LORD in holy attire;
Tremble before Him, all the earth.
- 10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns;
Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved;
He will judge the peoples with equity."
- 11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
Let the sea roar, and all it contains;
- 12 Let the field exult, and all that is in it.
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy
- 13 Before the LORD, for He is coming,
For He is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
And the peoples in His faithfulness.

- I. The Person of God
- II. The Personality of Sin
- III. The Person of Christ
- IV. Your Personal Response
- V. Your Personal Destiny

The Person of God

The good news of the gospel is first of all about God. He is sovereign Creator. He is the designer, fashioner, and sustainer of all creation (Ps 100:3; Acts 17:24-31). The universe is not self-existent, self-sustaining, or self-explanatory—He called the universe into existence by His spoken Word and He explains it by His written Word, the Scriptures. As sustainer of the cosmos, He is revealing His mighty attributes by means of the creation and the laws by which He preserves the created order (Rom 1:18-20). The created universe discloses God day by day (Ps 19:1-6).

He is sovereign Ruler and Lord over everything that exists (Is 14:27). He owns everything and He is absolute over all reality (Ps 24:1, 2). This is God's world, nothing can change that; sinners do not create a separate reality by their rebellion, God sees their day coming (Ps 2:1-9).

As infallible Creator, He is infinite in wisdom. He is light; He is love, the source of all truth, wisdom, knowledge, and ethics (1 Jn 1:5 Prov 1:7). He is holy; He made the universe in order to demonstrate His holy character. God is unchanging in His moral majesty, purity, and holiness (Is 6:3). He alone sets the standard for right and wrong—every commandment He has given is the manifestation of His holy character (1 Pet 1:16, Rom 3:19-21).

He is personal Creator. God is a personal Being. He is self-aware, personal, holy, knowable, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient (Ps 139; Rom 11:36). Our personhood and hunger for relationship is grounded in the fact that we are made in the image of a personal God (Gen 1:27) in order to have a love relationship with us (1 Jn 3:1; 4:7-10). We were made for communion with Him. He created us for His glory to take delight in worshipping, serving, honoring, and reflecting Him (1 Cor 10:31; Is 43:7, 21).

God is worthy to be loved. His character is perfect, wonderful and excellent. We were created to be satisfied in Him and all that He is for us. Therefore, it is the creature's duty to live for God's glory—our accountability to Him flows from our being made in His image (Matt 22:37).

Only God knows how wonderful He is in His character, and how worthy He is to be the center of our lives. It is impossible to have a saving relationship with God without knowing Him through Christ as He has revealed in His Word.

In fact we don't really know who we are until we know our Creator. Why one might ask? The answer is that our creational identity is to reflect, represent, serve, enjoy, love and worship Him. So according to Scripture it is impossible to define a human being without defining who we are in relation to God—for we are His image and likeness, created to reflect our Maker. How can we know who we are if we do not know who it is we are created to reflect?

By way of example, I think about our own moon—we define it in relationship to the earth. Its monthly cycle is the basis for our calendar. Its phases, whether crescent or full or quarter, reveal how the moon appears when it is facing the sun directly (from our vantage point) or facing almost entirely away from it. When facing mostly away from our sun, we see a thin crescent or 'new moon'.

Our Creator has given the moon many valuable roles and functions; it flushes out bays and estuaries with tidal movement. It keeps intertidal ecosystems alive and healthy. Its tidal action transports heat to the earth's poles. And, without that circulating action, algae blooms would produce stagnation and deadness in countless lagoons, bays, and wetlands. The moon is also the means by which hundreds of thousands of creatures time their reproduction. And, there is an entire world of nocturnal animals that do their feeding and hunting at night.

The moon has an important role in sustaining our planet's web of life. But what if the moon decided to leave its orbit around planet earth? What if it wandered off on its own, pulling away from, and escaping the gravitational hold of earth and silently moving into the dark recesses of the universe? What if it tired of its servant role and of depending upon our gravity for its predictable course? You see the moon as a light bearer has no glory of its own; all of its glory is reflected glory. Unlike the sun the moon doesn't generate its own light; like us, it is created to be a reflector of another's glory. If the moon moved away from its orbit into the deep recesses of black space it would be a useless dark ball of rock and dust sitting alone in the dark with nothing to define it, and with no valuable purpose.

In some ways this pictures the human rebellion. Our glory is borrowed glory. Our highest glory and honor flows from a true knowledge of our Maker (Ps 89:14-18; Jer 9:23-24; Rom 1:23). God has put us over the work of his hands—our dignity is bestowed by Him who is infinite in dignity (Ps 8). Our creational identity is that of stewards, representatives, and reflectors of our Maker. And, since we are made in God's image and likeness, our purpose and cultural calling is to *BE the image of God*—which means we are to live all of life in a 'God-ward' manner. "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31).

Thus, our rational, reasonable, responsible lifestyle is to value God by trusting and obeying him and finding our highest satisfaction in him. But Scripture tells us that there was a great defection from God, or apostasy in the original paradise of Eden.

The Personality of sin

When Adam and Eve took their cue from Lucifer and broke faith with God, our first parents lost the potential of unbroken fellowship with God and endless life. They also lost their status before God, their righteous covering, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This means that their sudden recognition of nakedness was more than simply having their private parts visible to the light of day. It meant that there was a deeper nakedness exposed—the nakedness of sin and shame brought to light before their Maker (Gen 3:7-10).

As a result of their rebellion, they had no more standing before God and therefore they wanted to hide the very parts of their bodies that would be responsible for reproducing another fallen human being like themselves. Now, so important to understanding human history and the nature of mankind is to grasp the fact that all human beings have inherited this defiled corrupted nature from Adam as a result of the fall in Eden (Rom 3:9-20; 5:12; Eph 2:1-3).

The original sin which we have inherited has produced a great divide, a great separation between God and man. Now this alienation from our Creator has an intellectual dimension to it—the Bible says that the mind of man in its natural state is darkened; it filled with ignorance of God; and it is hostile to God (Col 1:21). And this separation from God is actively expressed in a continual studious suppression of the knowledge of God (Rom 1:18ff.).

So we should not be surprised then to find that mankind in his academic, philosophic, cultural, and religious endeavors precipitates toward world and life views which are antagonistic to God's self-revelation in Scripture. Mankind chooses a life view which insulates him from his accountability to God, for the natural man treats sin and all of its effects as normal. But Scripture penetrates the fortresses of error man raises up against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:3-5).

The Word of God gives us God's infallible authoritative vantage point as to the disastrousness of the human condition by reason of sin. God describes sin as a cruel intruder which produces lust, war, misery, rebellion, victimization, injustice, death, and eternal separation from God (Jas 4:1-4). Now, since man is prone to cover his sin and dismiss its seriousness, a true understanding of the wickedness of sin can only be revealed by Scripture.

The Word of God functions as a divinely empowered diagnostic tool. Scripture exhibits the severity of man's sin predicament—it is a dilemma which is beyond man's ability to correct (Jn 8:34-35). We could summarize man's dilemma as follows: in his natural state he has a bad record in heaven because he continually breaks God's commands. He has a bad heart which is the source of his problem moral problem. He is a 'bad tree' which bears bad fruit making the production of good fruit impossible without a change in his nature. And he has a bad master—he follows the rebellion of the evil one, the god of this world (Eph 2:2). And he is not able in himself to correct or reverse a single one of these. But . . . apart from the Word of God, no man would arrive at this diagnosis.

Man is helpless and hopeless in himself (Rom 5:6-12). Sin is not what sinners imagine it to be: 'merely the proneness of humans to err'—no, sin is lawlessness according to 1 Jn 3:4. But, sin is also a moral and spiritual disease which hides its true condition. As such, human sin is a very deceptive malady. It hides the real condition and prognosis from those under its influence. The natural man continually tells himself that he is not miserable, that he is not in dire straits, that he has the power to amend his ways, and that he will be able to deliver himself by his deeds, and that his case is not so serious as to merit eternal damnation. Each of these assumptions is a falsehood, for apart from divine grace, sin in every case is a terminal disease (Rom 5:12).

Jeremiah chapter 17 verse 9 states, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" This means that the potential of sin to deceive its human host is beyond our powers of investigation. This is indeed startling. When the sinner first hears from Scripture that he is completely unable to accurately diagnose or remedy his own case, fury rises up in his heart. Sin is very efficient at hiding its insidious nature from those under its rule.

Therefore in our labor to communicate the deadliness of this aspect of sin, we find it useful to employ certain metaphors. Past divines have described sin's deviousness in this manner: Sin is so eager to sustain itself, that if it were possible, it would plunge a knife into the heart of God in order to sustain its activity—Christ's crucifixion is proof of this.

Sin has a certain madness and insanity about it as it pursues its lustful desires. Some shipwrecked individuals have displayed this suicidal compulsion. When thirst tightened their throats, it drove them to slurp down cold sea water which produced an agonizing death—dehydration set in as their tongues swelled and their kidneys failed.

The self-deception produced by sin is filled with pride, the sinner tells himself, "Oh at any time I could turn my life around, I have the ability to pull the pleasure out of sin, stop short of bondage, and evade sin's lasting consequences." Imagine a lollipop that has rat poison at the center, but candy on the outside. The sinner says "I can lick off the candy and stop just short of the poison."

God has given us countless examples of how pernicious sin is as we observe certain behaviors in nature. There is a particular beetle that climbs a tree above an anthill. It lays a single egg which drops onto the ant hill. The egg perfectly resembles a plant seed. So an ant picks it up in its pincers and takes it into its nest and carefully stores it in the pantry. When the beetle larva hatches, it crawls

into the next room (the ant nursery) and begins to feed on the ant larvae until it has fully developed, and since it has the scent from the nursery it is able to crawl out of the ant nest undisturbed by the soldiers. You see sin operates in a covert fashion; it hides its activity and seeks to conceal its consequences.

Sin is very parasitic, but it requires a willing host for its activity. Another example from nature is the cuckoo bird. They have a lovely call but they are entirely parasitic in their reproduction. They lay their eggs in other bird's nests while the song birds are out gathering food. When the song bird parents return, there is a large egg in their nest along with their own eggs. And, since the cuckoo's egg incubates faster than the other eggs, the newly hatched cuckoo chick can eliminate all competition for food from the nest.

The parasite chick has a sensitive patch on its posterior. It puts its little body in reverse and backs the other eggs out of the nest. The parents can't count—they don't notice that their own eggs are missing, so the song birds spend all of their time gathering food for the cuckoo chick. Soon the chick is larger than the song bird parents, and once it is fully fledged, it flies off to repeat its parasitic cycle. The poor song birds have used all of their resources to perpetuate parasitism—all their energy, hard work, and devotion have been used to raise an intruder. They have nothing to show for their efforts. What a picture of sin robbing the soul. It brooks no rivals; it wants sole dominion over the heart. "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (Jas 1:14-15).

The personality of sin is also seen in its tendency to defend itself, cover its deeds, and rationalize its activity. The Lord Jesus Christ condemned His unbelieving hearers as self-justifiers who lived to please men and not God. Self-justifiers order their lives for the praise of man (Lu 16:15). But God tells us that that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in God's sight.

Not only is sin filled with self-deception it also has no fear of God. We certainly see this in the 14 point indictment in Romans chapter 3. The sinner has a greater fear of disapproval from his friends than from God Almighty. He fears the IRS, the CHP, and the possibility of cancer more than God, the Judge of all the earth. Sin puts the conscience to sleep. It produces a growing insensitivity to its corrupting effects. Scripture likens this consequence to cauterizing the conscience into unfeeling scar tissue (1 Tim 4:2).

An accurate diagnosis of sin is so vital to our grasp of man's moral and spiritual condition before God and thus, essential to a true understanding of why man needs a Savior. In terms of the gravity of the issue, one could say it this way, "What you think of your sin and how you regard God as seeing your sin reveals what you think of God Himself."

I think of a little infant who has no concept of germs or filth. Perhaps you have your toddler learning to walk in the backyard as the family enjoys a sunny day. Then you see something that arrests your attention: your little child picks up something the pet has left. You yell, "No, no, no!" she puts it in her mouth, we are immediately disgusted and we run over to wash out the filth. Like that little child, the sinner is oblivious to the polluting power of sin. And, in order to view sin as God sees it requires that our consciences be educated by Holy Scripture, otherwise we will be foolish and complacent as we inch toward the flaming abyss.

Because all sin is against an eternal God, all sin has a kind of endless existence to it. We think of radioactive substances—radioactive isotopes have a half-life. As those materials decay, there is

less of the parent element to bombard its surroundings with sub-atomic particles. The deleterious effects of the substance are gradually reduced over time—they are eventually used up. But sin has no half-life. It keeps producing the ‘fallout’ of shame, blame, degradation, condemnation, and guilt. The reason why is because sin is against God personally. Oh if we only knew what a disaster sin is—its wretchedness involves the hatred it has for God’s righteousness.

We ‘bounded creatures’ designed by God to flourish within the ‘blueprint’ of His good and wise laws. As we keep His commandments, we manifest that we are created to represent and reflect the very moral majesty of our Maker. Therefore, our transgressions of God’s commands constitute a massive misrepresentation of our holy Creator. Thus, our lying is saying that God is dishonest. Our moral pollution is saying that God is impure. Our lusting is saying that God is not enough. And our idolatry is saying that God is not who He says He is.

God’s commitment to the holiness of His Name is absolute; therefore He takes our sin against Him personally. But because men excuse their sinning, they do not see the ‘Everest size mountain’ of iniquity they have committed. As a consequence, mankind has a great quarrel with his Maker over what sin deserves. And, because God is a just and righteous Judge, His holy nature demands that sin be punished. Unbelievers are at odds with the rigor of God’s justice. Sinners take great offense at hearing that they deserve to be eternally miserable apart from Christ the Mediator.

God is an omniscient Judge, and as we have stated, He has books and He has records—and His records reveal that every son and daughter of Adam is racking up a bad record in heaven. Scripture describes man’s sinful impenitence as ‘storing up wrath for the day of wrath’ (Rom 2:5). Therefore since we pronounce ourselves well when God says we are sin sick, we have a huge quarrel with our Creator. And that quarrel cannot end until we say the same thing about our sin that God says about it. The quarrel does not end until we fall at the feet of Christ in faith and repentance and receive pardon and a new heart from Him (1 Pet 3:21). The man who repents finds that the quarrel with God has ended; for that man has faced what his sin deserves in God’s sight. Preachers need to remember this about their hearers; it is nigh impossible for them to exalt God’s justice unless they have received God’s mercy through Christ.

This is inescapably a moral universe because its ruler and Creator is just and righteous. And because He created this universe to be the stage of that moral majesty, there must be a day of reckoning in which everyone who is unrighteous will be judged, condemned and punished. We are told in Romans 2:16 that God will reveal the secrets of the heart publicly. This is a terrifying thought for those outside of Christ. For on that Day of Judgment God’s record, God’s law, the sinner’s conscience, and God’s verdict will all agree in the eternal condemnation of the unbeliever.

At that moment, when God begins to pour out His wrath, the conscience which the sinner has worked so hard to put to sleep will rise up to its full stature and begin to take its eternal revenge. God does not have to invent punishments for sin. In a moral universe sin is its own punishment. This is why Jesus says, “Their worm shall not die” (Mark 9:38). Hell’s ‘best kept secret’ is that the impenitent sinner already carries his own chief tormenter in his bosom, it is the conscience. The conscience (the moral image of God) does not go away after death, not even in eternal hell. No one has ever been able to escape it or remove it. It is impossible to escape from God’s presence (Ps 139; Heb 4:12-13).

Because we’ve replaced the God of Scripture with a benign god in our own image, we cannot

imagine that He, the God of the Bible will consume as a furnace all that is not like him in holiness (Heb 10:30-31; 12:29). There is no salvation unless you come to terms with who God is. And that means coming to terms with His hatred of sin expressed in His holy wrath. God is going to vindicate the holiness of His name in eternal wrath. Sinners may argue back, “Now there is no such thing as eternal damnation”—“it would be too cruel; I would not wish it on my worst enemy.”

To come to terms with who God is involves understanding that God hates sin because it is so contrary to His holy and righteous nature. Let me give you an example: suppose someone you know took a digital image of you off the internet and then photo-shopped it so that you were covered with acne, filth, two hundred pounds overweight with your tongue out, and cross-eyed. You would immediately say, “That’s not me!” “That’s hideous and ugly, that doesn’t represent me.” You would waste little time in doing what you could to remove that image from the web.

No one really knows God until they know really how seriously he takes His own holiness. Since we are so influenced by this evil generation, by the world of the flesh and of the devil, we do not tend to associate love to God and neighbor as the conditions of and true personal freedom. The Ten Commandments were given as a safeguard of love to God and neighbor (Rom 13:8). After their exodus from Egypt, God gave the Ten Commandments as part of the Mosaic covenant. Attentiveness to God’s Law was necessary if they were to stay free from the potential enslavement of idolatry (Deut 5:6).

The Ten Commandments comprise God’s character in a moral code. The moral law reveals the precise obedience that we His creatures owe our Creator. And the law also reveals the condemnation sinners reap by their law-breaking. All transgression of God’s commands amount to lawlessness (1 Jn 3:4).

The great tool to x-ray the heart and show its condition is God’s Holy Law. God’s law shines a probing light onto man’s sin. But sinners live as if they are not fugitives under heaven. They excuse the ugliness of sin—ignoring the fact that all sin is against love. They excuse the fact that sin pollutes defiles and enslaves; it destroys our dignity; it brings us down to the level of a beast (Ps 49).

Sinners love to be in the company of other sinners to salve their consciences and keep their apathy in place. It would be like a man planning to drive on a very dangerous mountain road who asks someone to remove every warning sign and every guard rail the day before his suicidal drive (‘no road signs, then no violations’).

I’m reminded of the story of Joseph Lister, one of the founders of modern antiseptic medicine. In the second half of the 19th century, Joseph Lister was a surgeon. He and his peers were experiencing almost an 80% failure rate in their surgeries. Post-surgical infection was the killer. Often patients would get a distended belly and die in extreme pain. Lister told his peers, “We must begin to disinfect and sterilize all of our surgical tools!” His peers accused him of being a fussy old maid. They merely wiped their scalpels on their aprons, moving on to the next patient. They were oblivious to the fact that they were inoculating each new patient with the previous patient’s bacteria. No wonder there was an 80% infection rate!

Lister was almost driven mad by what he saw. And his findings were not vindicated until a microscope was invented powerful enough to observe bacteria. Once that teeming world of the micro-bios was revealed, surgeons instantly responded with diligent sterilization of their equipment. Like a high-powered microscope that revealed those pathogens, God’s law reveals our sin in its

seriousness. God's law shows us that our love of self, our lusts, our hate, all operate against the love of God and neighbor.

A slight view of the seriousness of sin is deadly because it keeps the sinner in a state of apathy about his eternal destiny. Conviction of sin is viewed as an irritant by unregenerate persons—it is whisked aside like brushing away a pesky insect. Like Samson of old, unbelievers tend to reason in like fashion, “I will deliver myself as I have in the past.” The sinner imagines that he has a soul that cannot be conquered, so he keeps bribing his conscience. He refuses to subject his conscience to the light of God's law. For, the law of God reveals God's holy righteous character and the law reveals the ugliness and nature of sin.

Consider for a moment the conditions which characterized the untamed cowboy west. If an outlaw could choose the county he wanted to live in, would he want a judge who is just, or would he want to live in a county where a judge was easily bribed with a case of whisky? We know the answer, criminals prefer judges that are easily corrupted with bribes. According to Scripture, every unbeliever is a fugitive under heaven at war with the justice of God. Therefore no unbeliever has the ability to exalt the justice of God—the unbeliever regards the strictness of God's justice to be a conflict of interest.

If God left sin unpunished, he would not be just. Unbelieving sinners are at enmity with who God is. They have little idea how comprehensive his judgment will be. Jesus tells us that it will extend to every idle word, every lustful look, every covetous thought, and every abusive statement uttered in anger (Mt 5:20-22). Oh how glorious the gospel is against this backdrop of unbending justice. God's forgiveness for believers is as comprehensive as His judgment will be toward the reprobate. What an incredible gift it is to be in Christ—that God is ready to forgive every single infraction wherein His child has fallen short of His holiness (Col 2:13-14; Heb 10:14-18).

Scripture speaks of God ‘bearing witness’ and the ‘testimony of God’. Romans chapter one declares that God's witness is inescapable: “God made it evident to them and evident in them” (Rom 1:18-20). The problem is not a lack of evidence concerning God speaking authoritatively—the problem is that the light of God's testimony is so bright it exposes the love of sin and self to the brilliant light of day. God's testimony surrounds every person. We are literally bathed in the light of general revelation (Ps 19). The creation proves the Creator, the Son proves the Father, the cross proves the justice and mercy and love of God and the resurrection proves it all. But, sinners love darkness and hate the light because they resist having their deeds exposed (Jn 3:19-21). The unbeliever avoids the light of God's Word for the same reason a burglar operates at night and shuns the presence of a policeman—fear of exposure.

Only a new heart granted by the new birth can alter the sinner's predicament. Christ has proclaimed that this birth from above is what is necessary to be cleansed and made right with God (Jn 3:3). There will be no righteous standing before God on judgment day in one's own person. Salvation involves the perfect representation provided by the Mediator, the High Priest of believing sinners (Rom 8:33-34).

Oh the utter wickedness of unbelief—it is tantamount to making God a liar (1 Jn 5:10). It is casting aside the only hope there is for transgressors. At best we are stewards, all is on loan, borrowed—we must give an account as to how we have utilized our time, talent, and affections. Life is but a vapor and we are but dust and ashes (Ps 90:3). Scripture states that there are but two paths,

two allegiances, and two destinies. The biblical account of Cain and Able reveal that these two mutually exclusive paths are two ‘religions’. One is dependent upon what man can do, the other is utterly dependent upon what God has done and has promised in His Son.

But the hypocrite is on the path to destruction. He does not contemplate what he owes God. The hypocrite is not daily drawn to Scripture meditation, to secret prayer and self-examination. By contrast, the believer continually tastes God’s grace and hunger and thirsts after holiness (Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, pp. 300, 305).

Complacency about sin causes mankind to reject God’s wonderful character. God’s laws and blessings are intended to show us and warn us of God’s loving ownership of us (Rom 2:4). But Scripture says that men will not live for the glory of God (Rom 3:23)—it is because of sin that people are uninterested and are unable to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. God’s testimony of man’s condition reveals that all are in rebellion against God’s rightful rule over us (Rom 8:5-7). This means that none of us have treasured God the way we should. We have sought satisfaction in other things and treated them as more valuable than God (Eph 2:1-3).

Mankind is willfully blind to that fact that he is separated from God because of sin. God has born witness to the consequences of sin (Rom 6:23). Sin produces guilt, death, and separation from God (Rom 5:12). Sin results in separation of our souls from God forever. This is tragic beyond words because God is the only Source of light, life, goodness, and love.

God is just and righteous in shutting us out from the enjoyment of His glory forever (Gal 3:10). Hell is real; it is not a myth. Jesus addressed the subject of hell more than any other speaker in the Bible (Matt 10:28). Man is in bondage to sin and cannot free himself. That is a shocking and scandalous fact to the sinner who is insensitive to his enslavement to sin. It is an infinite mercy of Christ to show us our chains, for that is the initial act of God’s grace by which we are led to the Savior. God’s Word tells us that the human race is dead to the things of God (Col 2:13). Man’s will and choosing are enslaved to sin (Gal 3:22). Man’s thinking is darkened (Eph 4:18). Man is spiritually blind to the glory and knowledge of God (2 Cor 4:4). God’s Word tells us that sinners do not have the power to reverse their habitual breaking of God’s laws (Jn 8:34). Unbelievers are insulted when they hear this—for they assume that self-determination is a fact.

The root problem is not merely with our evil deeds but with our whole being—what we are by nature. We are sinners by *birth*, *practice*, and by *preference* (Rom 3:10-18). God’s Word tells us that man’s soul is eternal (Heb 9:27). Physical death does not destroy the “real you.” Christ solemnly warned that those who refuse God’s provision for the salvation of their souls will experience eternal destruction (Mt 25:30; Mk 8:12). God has given us His Word to show our sin and need of salvation (1 Jn 3:4-6). One of Christ’s offices is that of a Prophet. He searches hearts, minds and motives by His Word (Heb 4:12-13; Rev 1:14). He shows sinners their dilemma that they might turn to Him, the only Savior from sin.

Unbelief in God’s authority is evident in the fact that humans do not take responsibility for their sin. They run their lives as if God does not matter. They attempt to live lives that are self-made, self-sufficient, and self-fulfilled. Only a correct diagnosis of man’s condition, found in the Scriptures, can point man to Christ, the divine cure (Rom 10:1-4; Gal 3:23-24).

The Person of Christ

The Gospel is about Jesus Christ the Merciful Redeemer (Rom 1:1-7). Christ took on human nature in order to deliver us from sin and restore us to God (Heb 2:8-9, 14-18). Jesus Christ is the “God-man.” He is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). He alone can bring a soul to God for acceptance, favor, forgiveness, and adoption (Eph 1:4). Christ’s obedience to the Father was obedience to the point of death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8). Christ’s love for sinners is demonstrated by His willingness to die for us while we were yet enemies of God (Rom 5:8-11).

Christ is the Sin-bearer and Substitute for sinners (1 Pet 3:18). The good news of the Gospel is that Christ died for sinners like us. He offered Himself as the innocent substitutionary sacrifice for sin on behalf of all those who acknowledge their sin. He took the guilt of sinners upon Himself. On the cross, He bore our guilt and endured God’s judgment against it (Is 53:6).

Christ’s payment means that God can acquit sin and still be just (Rom 3:24-26). Christ’s offer of Himself in our place at Calvary has fully satisfied the justice of God. Christ’s death obtained eternal redemption (Heb 9:14-15; 10:14; Jn 17:2). Because of the redemption Christ accomplished, God freely justifies believing sinners. When God justifies He declares a person righteous in His sight (2 Cor 5:21; Rom 4:5-8; 24-25).

Christ has risen from the dead; the empty tomb is proof that Christ’s sacrifice for sinners was accepted by God on their behalf (Acts 17:31; 1 Cor 15:20). Christ rose bodily from the dead. His resurrection validates the saving power of His death and opens the gates of eternal life and joy.

Christ’s resurrection guarantees the resurrection of the believer (Jn 14:2-3). By the Redeemer’s death and resurrection, the sinner may come home to God, where all deep and lasting satisfaction are found (Acts 3:19, 20 ff.; Titus 3:4-7). Christ has ascended on high, He is Lord of all (Heb 10:12; 12:2). Someday every knee will bow to Christ (Phil 2:9-11). All authority has been given to Christ; He is King of kings and Lord of lords (Mt 28:18; Rev 17:14; 19:16). He will personally consummate all history (Eph 1:9-10). Christ is the only One who can give saving mercy to the sinner—He is willing to do so, He bids sinners come (Mt 11:28, 29; Jn 6:37; 7:37). God appointed Him Mediator, giving Him the three offices of Prophet, Priest and King. As Prophet, Christ loves by first shedding brilliant light upon the sinner’s dilemma. He shows a man his state of bondage and slavery to sin (Jn 8:31-36). Christ by His Word exposes the plans of the evil one to mangle the image of God through idolatry. The Lord proclaims the urgency of salvation. Then that man convicted by Christ’s Word flees to Christ as Priest and receives pardon, justification, reconciliation, and adoption. Then that redeemed man in overflowing gratitude gives Christ the honor He is due as King and lives the rest of his life as Christ’s loyal subject.

Christ was in the bosom of the father; He came to make God known (John 1:18). Christ is the perfect image of God the exact representation of His divine nature and character (Col 1:15; Heb 1:1-3). In His crucifixion our Lord satisfied the justice of God against our sins (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18). Divine justice had to be fully addressed before a drop of mercy could be poured out upon guilty sinners.

There is no peace with God, no favor and no adoption without the work of the Mediator. He is perfectly capable of saving even the worst sinner. Countless people recognize the 23rd Psalm even asking for it to be read on their death bed. But, few recognize the content of the two Psalms on either side of the 23rd. In the 22nd Psalm Christ is abandoned by the Father and expires as the curse of God.

In the 24th Psalm, Christ is anointed King. Christ will not be your shepherd (Ps 23) if you are not interested in His blood (Ps 22) or His throne (Ps 24).

The grace of God does not set aside the effable law of sowing and reaping. It's impossible to take a moral holiday despite the slogans that come from Las Vegas. God is not mocked (Gal 6:7-8). The sinner's case is beyond human agency—so much so that God has taken salvation into His own hands.

One cannot be right with a righteous and holy God unless one has a righteousness not of his own making, the righteousness of the Christ, the Mediator (Phil 3:9). The doctrine of the justification of sinners by the righteousness of Christ is a great mystery. It is utterly foreign to natural reasoning that the righteousness of a man in heaven (Christ) is the righteousness whereby the sinner is accepted by God eternally.

Now, taking our inspiration from the letters of R. M. M'Cheyne, let's examine some of the appeals by which this 19th C. Scotsman called sinners to Christ:

The more God opens your eyes, the more you'll see you are lost in yourself. . . Christ died to bear the curse; He died in your place; He obeyed the Law in your place. In order to come to Him as a needy sinner, you must be awakened to know your own heart. You are looking for peace in the wrong places: your duties, in reforming your mind, in striving. The answer is look straight to Christ. . . You are never truly broken until you are really in Christ (Ez 36:25-31; Rom 5:19). . . When God opens your eyes you will see your total depravity and the corruptions of your heart. Only then can you see the glory and truth of the gospel. Jesus stands at your door willing to be your shield, but the truth and glory of the gospel is hidden to our natural understanding (2 Cor 4:3-4ff.) (Andrew Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of R. M. M'Cheyne*, pp. 278-281).

There is no salvation until you are of the same mind as God is about your soul. You must hide in Jesus. Tears and remorse will not blot it out—fresh resolutions will not cover your sin—you must be hidden in Jesus' spotless righteousness (Ibid, p. 298).

Christ's offices of Prophet, Priest, and King match our 'sinner-ship'. Without Him, at the revelation of the Lord you will shrink back and beg the mountains to cover you (Rev 6:15-17). Christ's glory is that He justifies sinners who have no righteousness and sanctifies souls who have no inborn holiness. The black soul must be swallowed up in Christ as its covering (Ibid, pp. 300-303).

A broken heart alone can receive a crucified Christ. Have you believed God's record concerning the Son? To believe is to be saved, to remain in unbelief is to be damned said our Lord (Mk 16:16). When God makes a saving covenant with you, He brings you to lay hold of Jesus as your perfect representative who answers for your sins in His own Person. Thus, Christ is the soul's only possible hope (Ibid, pp. 307, 309).

To die without Christ is final and fixed; you cannot come back and die as a believer. Pray that Christ finds you before death finds you—there must be a note of desperation in this matter. We are hopeless in ourselves. Jesus said, "I lay down my life—this is the commandment I received from My Father" (Jn 10:18). His short sufferings are more than equal to my eternal sufferings in hell. Eternal agonies are born by Him because of the dignity of His Person—the Creator of the universe has become the Redeemer, the 'friend of sinners'. There is no admittance to glory without a wedding garment. The 'covering' of your works must be completely unraveled before you can receive the

robe of His righteousness woven for sinners. Christ is able to save the vilest. Take of the water if life freely (Is 55; Rev 22) (Ibid, pp. 317, 321).

The gospel invitation is extended to the guilty and defiled. The blade of God's unbending justice was bathed in the side of the Redeemer, now the guiltiest sinner may enter Paradise over His bleeding body and eat of the Tree of Life and live forever. "I am the Way" said our Savior (Jn 14:6). The torn veil is our access. How will you come to the Father? The sword turns every which way blocking the sinner's access to Paradise. The unconverted man does not know the truth; for Christ is the truth (1 Jn 5:20). Christ is the *Logos*—the living Word of God, the keystone that holds all knowledge together. Outside of Him is only darkness and carnal reasoning. Do not trust your own understanding. The great danger is to find self in eternity BEFORE we ever ask, "What must I do to be saved?" Countless souls are eternally lost without this consideration (Ibid, 339-343).

You must consider and take to heart the perfect suitability of Christ to save—He comes to earth to undertake the cause of poor sinners who are lost. The dignity of the preeminence of His Person is our comfort, hope, and refuge. The cost of not looking unto Jesus is this: the soul will be in perpetual doubt of its own state. Consider that God gave the Son freely; the Father is not reluctant to bestow His saving grace. The Son and the Father both are interested in saving lost souls. "The Father sent Me!" (Ibid, pp. 245-347).

Sinners are forever attempting to qualify themselves rather than looking to Christ. "Unto you I call" (Prov 8:4). The Bible encourages sinners to come freely to Christ. We have so little idea of free grace—we cannot believe that God can offer a Savior to us while we are in a wicked, hell-deserving, lost state, while polluted, guilty, vile, condemned, defiled, etc.—God bids us come while we are in this state. Christ is not offered to you because you repent, but because you are a lost sinner. Christ in the bosom of the Father will not save you. Christ manifested in the flesh will save you. The Son of God dying as a man in the place and room of sinners—we declare Him. Look to a 'declared Christ' (1 Jn 1:1-4). The 'lightning and thunder' of God's wrath tore through Christ during the bloody propitiation. The last drops of the vial of wrath were poured out on Him. Now, if you cleave to Him, you have fellowship in His justification, for now He is justified from all the sins that were laid on Him (Rom 4:25) (Ibid, pp. 368, 370, 377).

What are souls to flee from? The answer is the wrath to come. You must see the preciousness of Christ against the backdrop of this coming wrath. We exhort you to cleave to Christ now! Today is the day of salvation (Ibid, pp. 403, 405-406).

The state of the awakened soul (the soul under conviction of sin) is: "fear has torment"—in other words there is the compelling thought that 'my sins justly deserve punishment' (1 Jn 4:18). But, the natural man does not fear God—he does not pray as one who knows God. BUT, when the Spirit convicts, he feels the wrath of God abiding on him—the past sins he excused now make him feel horrible. He sees the enormities he has committed. He sees his sin as against a holy God. The stoutest sinner (the most stubborn and self-righteous) then feels the hell within him. By the conviction of the Spirit, the man becomes convinced of his inability to help himself. His devastation moves to shades of desperation: he tries to change his life; to repent; to pray; but God sees his righteousness as filthy rags (Is 64:6). The soul sinks in gloom. But it is out of this posture alone which comes the cry to the Lord for mercy (Ibid, pp. 409-411).

Christ is the refuge for those oppressed by the weight of their sins (Mt 11:28-29). But, as

long as you remain unbelieving, you are under His perfect wrath. Then the books will be opened on that day. The Christ-less won't stand. The sinner will be revealed as having a stubborn neck like an iron sinew (a cable), and a brow of brass. He will blush as his knees knock in fear. He will enter everlasting shame and contempt. He will give an account of every idle word—he will face endless comprehensive judgment. Dear friends, the good news has urgency with it and overflowing mercy: you cannot be in too desperate a condition for Christ. But as long as you remain unbelieving, you are under perfect wrath—wrath without mixture of leniency. The wrath of God will be as amazing as His love. His wrath will be terrifying—for God will be glorious in judgment (Is 5:6). But for those who have fled to Christ, His love will give the elect boldness in the Day of Judgment (1 Jn 2:28) (Ibid, pp. 412-413).

You are judged by God in accordance with what you surety is (your ultimate object of trust and reliance). The believing sinner has 'consented' for Christ's sake to be loved by God for no good reason in himself. What about your associations and companions? The saved man will make bosom friends of Christ's own—other true believers—this is a key mark of genuine salvation. If you stay away from close friendships with believers, it is because you hate the copy of the original, Christ Himself (Ibid, pp. 414-416).

It is possible to be religious, yet come short of saving faith—you will be tempted to find peace in the world; in self-repentance; in self-reformation; in religious duties, even in your sorrow as you look in the mirror with a sad face—all of this cannot save you. Apathy about God, the soul, and eternity is the human natural condition, but God says, "A sword is sharpened" (Ez 21:9-10; Jn 3:36). God's instruments of vengeance and destruction are quite ready. There is a place in hell for every unconverted soul—for every Christ-less person. God makes no promises to unconverted persons (Ibid, pp. 354, 358, 361).

To the unconverted, I say, "You are always making yourselves better and better until you can lay God under obligation to pardon you. You are always looking within for righteousness. But, sorrow for past sins, prayers, tears, and convictions, and your religious exercises will not commend you to God. You must despair of pardon in that way. Give it up—your heart is desperately wicked, vile, polluted so that you cannot appear in God's sight and presence. Count it all dung—as filthy rags that you may win Christ. Delight in His mercy and in His readiness to forgive (Ibid, p. 419).

Have you seen the glory of the cross—has it attracted your heart? Are you unspeakably pleased with that way of salvation? Do you see God glorified when you are saved? That God is the God of majesty, truth, holiness, inflexible justice—and yet, you are justified? Do you love that phrase, "The righteousness of God?" Does it bring calming pervasive other world peace to your soul knowing that you have righteousness by faith—righteousness without works? Do you sit in sight of the cross? Does your soul rest there? Do you glory only in the cross of Christ (Gal 6:16)? There are no secret Christians—the true believer cannot keep silent. He feels the sweetness of the cross. You will be constrained to confess Christ before men—it causes lips to speak. Do you make it known that you are Christ's? (Ibid.).

The God-awakened soul shows the hatefulness, vileness of self. He sees that his heart's imaginations have been evil. His body members have been used to serve sin. He has treated Christ in a shameful manner. He has sinned against law and love. He has kept the door barred against Christ. He sees himself as a lump of hell and cries, "How shall I come before the Lord?" But, what

will be the state of the unsaved soul on judgment day—you will be speechless in your guilt before the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11-15). There is nothing in a man that can bring him justly before God. The natural man is always striving to bring something to be a robe of righteousness before God. There is nothing a man can do—yet nothing he won't attempt to try to cover himself before God. But all of his righteousness is filthy rags (Ibid, pp 423-424).

The natural man hates the law of God for its purity, for its breathing out of the holy mind of God. He hates the law for its opposition to the love of sin. He hates the law for its breadth and rigor (Rom 8:22; Ps 19). The law is so comprehensive, so invasive, so searching, so inflexible! He hates the law for its strictness. That the law exposes the secrets of the mind and heart—it exposes secret thoughts and desires—sinful cravings and desires I cannot prevent (Heb 4:12-13). Thus the law exasperates. The law cannot change though unless God Himself changes; and He won't. We must be changed by the new birth (Titus 3:5-6).

There is no way to depart from that fear of judgment but by effectual grace. The fear of judgment and the fear of the law combine on judgment day (1 Cor 15). When you look upon the soul of Christ scarred with the God's thunderbolts of wrath and His body pierced by sin—can you say, “He was made a curse for me, why should I fear Thy holy law?” Do you delight in the thought of how wonderful it would be if the whole world came under the pure rule of the gospel? Test yourself by these questions. If you can't answer in the affirmative from the heart, it is absurd to think that you have substantive hope in God's favor when you reject the sacrifice the Father has made of His only begotten Son for the guilty (Ibid, pp. 428-430).

The gospel, by means of the cross of Christ, ‘undoes a man’ of his imagined merit in order to make him complete in Christ (Gal 3:27). Consider the paradox of knowing you are a wretched man in order to know joy. To know the plague of your own heart is pivotal in a grace awakening. It is joy to look upon Christ crucified amidst your corruptions. The gospel is the preaching of Another's righteousness, which you must have or you will perish. The law of bondage to sin speaks of chains too strong to sever. Once a man gets a sight of the supreme excellence and sweetness of Christ, he sees the fullness for pardon, peace, holiness—he will never draw back (Ibid, pp. 433-436, 440).

To see clearly then the turpitude and ugliness of your sin is to cry, “O wretched undone, vile sinner, I am bankrupted in my own indebtedness to the law of God.” Be warned, those who have rejected the gospel for years have developed an ‘instinct’ of heart closure. Like an eyelid which instinctively closes when an object comes near; so also the heart of the hardened man manifests those years of hardening when the gospel comes near, the heart closes (Ibid, pp. 447-448).

While you have life and breath will you consider afresh the urgency of Christ's call to sinners? In hell the attributes of God are against a man—that is a horrific thought. When the Spirit removes constraining grace from a reprobate and the doors of offered mercy close; how terrifying to be a castaway, to be unable to repent. The conscience in hell as a castaway will forever condemn and be filled with rage and remorse (Ibid, pp. 462, 464). As C. H. Spurgeon said, “Until you have humbled yourself before God and sought and found mercy, God is at war with you and you are at war with Him. There can be no peace where there is no purity. God has no peace with sin, and never can have.”

Remember that faith in Christ is a most self-renouncing act; it looks away from self to the sufficiency of the Mediator whom the Father has sent. Apart from the blood of Christ on the

conscience, there is no peace, no rest, and no assurance. No one will be in heaven who is not righteous by faith. God reckons the believing sinner righteous because Christ his representative is righteous. Thus, in Christ alone is a God-approved righteousness (Rom 10:1-4; 2 Cor 5:21). Christ has promised that His sheep will hear His voice in the message of the Word of His grace, the gospel and He has promised that those who believe in Him shall never perish (Jn 10:28).

The Personal response to be united to Christ

The gospel is about our necessary response to be united to Christ. The glorious benefits of Christ's death belong only to those who repent and trust Him (Mark 16:16). The person who savingly believes, trusts solely in Christ's Person and finished work on Calvary. 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 alone. Saving faith is reliance upon Christ to be our necessary and sufficient payment for sin (Rom 10:13). Faith and repentance toward God involves casting oneself upon Christ as the only hope for right-standing before God.

Christ alone is the One who pays for sin and provides power over sin (Rom 3:21-26). The sinner who believes commits his life to Christ for obedience (Jn 3:36; 10:27). Christ is willing to save even the worst sinner. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Saving sinners is the mission for which Christ came to earth (Luke 19:10). Your sin is not a barrier to salvation!

God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). To repent is to agree with God that we have wronged Him and deserve judgment. Repentance is not only a change of mind about our sin, it is a turning from sin toward God in humble obedience (Ez 18:30-32; Luke 13:5).

To repent is to determine to turn from our rebellion in order to serve our Redeemer and Creator with our whole selves (and to be ruled by His Word). Repentance involves turning from the deceitful promises of sin so as to despise the sin and our sin natures (Matt 10:38-39; 16:25-26).

Have you ever placed your guilty hands upon the forehead of the innocent Lamb of God and transferred all your sin and guilt to Him? There is no peace with God until you know precisely what has been done with your sin. Your quarrel cannot end until you say the same thing about your sin as God does—that you deserve to be terribly miserable, for the cross is proof that all men deserve to die and be separated from God.

There is no coming to God without coming to Christ and there is no coming to Christ without repentance. Have you ever seen your sin as utterly ruinous as against God Himself? Scripture describes our iniquity as an abscessed sore that oozes corruption (Is 1:6; Jer 6:7; 30:12). We are morally deformed in God's sight. Oh the horror and terror of standing without a mediator! What a withering thought that you shall exist as long as God does. You'll find no refuge in Darwin on that day. His religion of the elimination of the weak is the very opposite of the gospel. For Christ the perfectly fit One lays His life down for the unfit. Darwin supposed tree of life is a tree of death, for it normalizes all the consequences of sin such as war, disease, victimization, epidemic, etc.

The original tree of life in the Garden has been shut off from sinners. The only possible access back to life and Paradise is Calvary's tree. For in His bloody death Christ answers all the effects of sin and He does so in His own Person (those effects being alienation, shame, corruption, death, decay, damnation). Let your conscience behold what the Father's done in giving Christ for

sinners. Relinquish your false hopes that you have the ability to placate God.

How we see the heart of God in giving the blood of the atonement! This is foreshadowed in Leviticus 17:11. This passage says that the life is in the blood. God allows it to cover sin because it is life for life. It is substitution. My friends if your sins are not covered by the death of Christ, they shall be uncovered in great detail publicly before the watching the universe (Rom 2:16; Rev 20). The most prolific speaker about the doctrine of hell in the New Testament is Christ Himself. If He is not your suffering substitute bearing your penalty, you will have to bear your own penalty in your own person. But there is no need for that to take place. Leave off your rebellion and your unbelief. Look again at the perfect Lamb of God slain for sinners (Jn 1:29; 10:11).

God's grace comes to us at an infinite price (1 Pet 1:17-19). You must abandon your natural religion, for you cannot successfully make an atonement out of your tears, your remorse, or your resolve to do better. There is no pardon or cleansing apart from the Mediator. Countless religionists go wrong by assuming they have salvation because they have some remorse for their sins and they are willing to ask God for compassion. But God will turn a deaf ear to your cries for mercy if you reject the Mediator.

Sadness about your sin is not the same as your faith in Christ. Looking to Christ alone for righteousness is beyond the power of nature. A work of the Spirit is required, for the natural man does not know what salvation and does not know what eternal life is. As a consequence, unbelievers trust their natural instincts; namely that they can do something to placate God. Man's efforts to mollify God are doomed to failure because they are based upon an ignorance of God's character.

Thus all men naturally look to their own efforts to contribute to salvation all the while remaining strangers to divine grace. For, the slightest self-righteousness causes the heart to be locked shut to the offices of Christ. Consider for a moment this question, what is it about God that requires the death of His Son to put away our sin? The answer has to do with the two great prongs of His holiness, justice and mercy. At the cross of Christ, justice and mercy were reconciled.

The satisfaction of divine justice was the cost of eternal mercy. This is why God refuses to be known except by the gospel and because God redeems for His namesake. His character, attributes and nature are made known by the work of Christ. This why salvation cannot possibly be man-centered or humanly engineered and this is why those who are depending upon their works will perish forever (Gal 2:16). Salvation is about God revealing His righteousness in the recovery of sinners. (Rom 3:24-26).

God's righteousness is revealed in the cross-work of Christ because God wants the world to know He has a legal basis for pardoning the wicked who believe upon Christ (Rom 3:25-26). No one knows God savingly unless they know Him as the Just and the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. God has determined that His Son and His blood and His cross and His covenant are the means of knowing God. Apart from these things God remains hidden.

To rejoice in the fact that God has reconciled His justice and mercy at the cross is to take refuge in Christ—when Christ's death alone is the sinner's plea, God takes that person as His child forever. Like the cities of refuge in the Old Testament, the manslayer is guaranteed safety if he flees to the refuge provided. In the New Testament the imagery in Hebrews 6:18 is as follows: we have fled to Christ as our city of refuge. But, from what are we fleeing? We are fleeing from the rigor of the Law which is avenging God's wounded honor. The Law is there to vindicate God's holiness. It's

not a ladder to climb to heaven. It is a mirror to show us our predicament and it is also there to prosecute every lawbreaker who remains outside of Christ, the ‘city of refuge’.

The law has shut up all men in disobedience (Gal 3:22). The law came with a curse which it pronounces upon all who attempt to be saved by law keeping (Gal 3:13). The law way to eternal life is forever shut because of man’s sin. But, the law has an evangelical use; it drives the sinner to Christ—to take refuge in Him alone.

Sinners imagine that their guilt consists solely in their misdeeds, whereas Scripture reveals that man’s condemnation is bound up in what he is, a child of wrath (Eph 2:1-3). The Law x-rays our heart to the point of revealing motives and intentions—showing that our natures are corrupt. The great need today in our pulpits is for an accurate diagnosis of the sinner’s condition. As the southern preacher said, “you must get them lost before you can get them saved.”

In commenting on Christ our refuge, R.C. Sproul notes that ‘only God can save you from God’. This is why Christ has so many titles associated with salvation: Surety, High Priest, Covenant, Rock, Robe of Righteousness, God’s Lamb, and so on. The Psalms are filled with promises to those who take refuge in the Lord (Ps 5:11; 18:2). But, only those who fear God will do so. There is great urgency in fleeing to Christ our City of Refuge. Today is the day of salvation.

The Puritans warned that the hardest work in the world is repentance. The only work harder is repentance that is overdue. Sometimes we forget that it is a traumatic thing to have your soul searched by God. It’s incredibly invasive. Sinners cannot exalt God’s justice, for they sincerely believe it to be a conflict of interest. Christ exasperated His listeners when He preached the Sermon on the Mount, for He said that God’s judgment will extend to every idle word, every lustful look, every covetous thought.

Who would exalt a justice so comprehensive? Only those who know they have tasted pardoning mercy. All others regard that justice to be too severe. This is why the cross alone gives the knowledge of God. Impenitent sinners prove that they follow the usurper (the evil one) because they have no sentiment for the glory of God and the knowledge of God. But, Christ tells us in John 16 that the ruler of this world and his works have been judged (Jn 16:11; 1 Jn 3:8). Christ is rightful Lord. He is worthy to be King (Acts 2:32-36; Phil 2:9-11; Heb 1:8-9; Rev 5:9-14). He was anointed with the oil of gladness above His brethren. The Father will give Him the nations as His inheritance (Ps 2:8-9). He will rule the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 2:26-27). Through Christ God will make all of His enemies the footstool of His feet (Ps 110:1; 1 Cor 15:25).

The verdict is out—“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:1-3). God has appointed a day in which He will judge all men through a man having furnished proof by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

This is every man’s crossroads. Therefore to have salvation from one’s sin is to fall at His feet as rightful Lord of the cosmos. All who refuse to do so demonstrate that they have cast their lot in with the usurper, Lucifer himself. The lake of fire was not made for people, but for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41). But, those who oppose the knowledge of God, who have no sentiment for

God's purpose to glorify Himself, and who those who reject Christ and by default follow the god of this world, there can be no other destiny for them.

Sinners imagine that God's view of their sin doesn't differ much from their own view of their sin (Ps 50:16-22). They pretend that the Word of God is vague, as if God has stuttered. But why is it that sinners do not wish to retain the knowledge of God in their thoughts? It is because of original sin. We love our imagined autonomy from God. Jesus expressed this as the love of darkness (Jn 3:19-21). Lost men prefer their own ideas and their own opinions. They worship their own minds. They prefer their religious instincts over the truth of the Word of God.

The natural man entertains false claims—he believes that his works form a claim upon God. He believes that he is a respectable fellow and God must think the same of him. He imagines his good deeds will outweigh his bad. He believes that personal reformation will obligate God to be gracious. But in His Word, God cancels all the erroneous claims of men. In Scripture there is mutual exclusion going on, God cancelling the claims of men while establishing His own claims.

God has made unbreakable oaths to His Son (Ps 110). The salvation of sinners is grounded upon the oaths the Father has made to the Son, that in the giving of Christ's life He shall see His seed (Is 53:10-12). He will redeem His people. The Father has given Him a people, the church shall be His spotless bride, Christ shall be Mediatorial King, and that all judgment shall be given to the Son (Jn 17:1-9; Eph 5:25-27). Therefore, as Peter announces in Acts 2, this Jesus whom you crucified, God has made Him Lord, all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth, and He has the power to subjugate all things to Himself (Phil 3:20-21).

What you think of Christ is inseparable from what you think of God, for Christ is the very glory of God made manifest to us (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:15; Heb 1:1-2). All of God's purposes are embodied in Christ. Consider just how far reaching it is that God has made Christ Lord. And that Christ is both redeemer and judge—thus He alone will bring every single facet of creation back in line with God's holiness. But mark this well, there are but two great functions of this consummating work of Christ; *salvation* (redemption and mercy) and *condemnation* (judgment and wrath).

This is why the cross of Christ is the apex of human history. Oh how tragic that there is so little in today's preaching that instills a proper reverential fear of Christ. Today He has become a spiritual mascot—the unbiblical 'different Jesus' Paul spoke of who characterizes an impotent cultural Christianity (2 Cor 11:4). How different is the Christ of Scripture who will subdue all things to Himself.

So listen carefully, know for certain that your puny will is no match for God the Son. You may think now during the apparent delay in Christ's return that you have taken Him on, and successfully fought to retain your independence. No, every knee will bow to Him. So we plead with you, we beg of you on behalf of God, be reconciled to God now while you have breath and life. I tell you, a day is coming when men shall see the sign of the Son of man in the heavens and every tribe of the earth will mourn (Rev 1:7). A day is coming when men of every class of society will retreat into caves in the rocks and prefer annihilation to (facing His wrath, for who can stand?) the coming outpouring of the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:15-17).

This evil generation encourages its members with lies and false hopes. Friends, music, media, entertainment, academia are all promoting the lie that you are an autonomous being and that may be spiritual without being biblical and that you may choose right and wrong for yourself—all without

eternal consequences. The proud sinner clutches his imagined independence and won't let go.

Nothing can slay the sinner's imagined sovereignty but the gospel. Nothing can cancel the sinner's faulty claims about personal merit but the gospel. Nothing can penetrate and reverse your natural darkened state but the light and power of the gospel (Rom 1:16-17). Salvation bursts into the sinner's darkened faculties giving the knowledge of God. We come to God through Christ. He is like a prince, the son of a king who takes a wicked traitor by the hand and leads him to the king who grants him pardon because the prince who brought him has befriended him and is holding his hand.

The saving knowledge of God comes by means of how God deals with the filth of sin and depravity and rebellion through His Son's cross. Our saving knowledge of God comes by way of the massive guilt transfer which took place at Calvary. And only those who have tasted this blood-bought grace can exalt and affirm and praise heartily (even as an act of worship) the justice of God.

Why is this so? The answer is that the carnal religionist turns grace into divine leniency. Though the carnal religionist uses Christian terms, he is a stranger to the propitiation won by the shedding of Christ's blood. Thus, he secretly opposes God's justice, therefore he cannot love the holiness of God which is made manifest at the cross of Christ. The religious unbeliever downplays the gravity of sin; he covers the sin, discounts its severity, excuses the sin and abides as an inveterate self-justifier. He has never departed from self-righteousness and consequently he is a stranger to the mediatorial work of Christ.

All Scripture affirms the utter seriousness of sin. The gravity of sin is measured by the holiness of God. Thus the affront to God by creatures made in God's moral image cannot be measured by the finite standards of mortal beings. Man's ignorance of the disaster of sin is a willful ignorance compounded by spiritual blindness ('nature's night'). Mankind is oblivious to just how seriously God takes His own holiness.

That is precisely the point at which sinners quarrel with God—it is a grievance over what their sin deserves. The quarrel rages on in the impenitent. This is why there is an infinite difference between those who know God and those who do not—between those who love Christ and His cross and those who do not. The true believer knows God through Christ and therefore loves to daily have his conscience educated by the gospel of Jesus Christ. From the safety of that vantage point of being hidden in Christ, the true believer may view the holy perfections of God Almighty (knowing that his justification and adoption are safe with the Son). Slavery to Christ is the only true freedom.

So pervasive in the soul of the natural man is the autonomy lie, that nothing is easier than to sell one's soul to the world's highest bidder. Is it any wonder that the love of the world and the love of God are entirely antithetical? Believers are commanded to 'stay free'—to guard their freedom in Christ (Gal 5:1, 13). What a seemingly paradoxical command, "stay free." But in a world that lies under the power of the evil one, there is multitude of idols waiting to enslave.

The evil one casts idolatry as liberty. The offer of ever greater autonomy is a function of the devil's own self-deception. To gain ever greater chunks of what the world offers is still to treat one's eternal soul like dirt, for Christ has told us that even if one gained the entire world and cast away his soul, the loss would be immeasurable.

What is your view of Christ's authority? Have you ever come to terms with what you owe God? Do you understand anything about the dignity of Christ's Person? Do you grasp that the Creator has become the Redeemer and the Judge? All of God's purposes are in Christ. Your

disposition toward God's purpose to glorify Himself is a shrewd revealer of the state of your eternal soul. For as long as the Edenic lie has its residency in your mind and heart, you will not see that your ultimate happiness is bound up in God as He is revealed in Christ.

Those who come to faith in Christ have the light of God's glory burst upon their souls (2 Cor 4:6). They understand for the first time that God has brought them into His Kingdom plot. For, the God of the universe is going to restore all things and He is reproducing His own character in the church. This is why Christ says that He gives His followers His glory (Jn 17:21-24; 2 Thess 2:13-15). God will present the glorified church before principalities and powers. "This is My work through My Son!" (Rom 8:18-19ff.). The manifold wisdom of God will be revealed to angels through the church (Eph 3:10).

We who are believers stand only because of our faith in what God has done in Christ (Rom 11:20). The things which reveal the only true God are: His Son, the cross, the blood, the covenant, the righteousness of God. These bring the saving knowledge of God, newness of life, reconciliation, sanctification, justification, and honor to God. But there will be unmixed wrath for those who wish to stand in themselves and not in God's appointed Mediator.

How absurd for the depraved creature to take on the self-existent transcendent holy God of the universe. This is why a man's fear of God or lack thereof shows itself so clearly in his choice of refuge. What is salvation? God has inseparably joined the redeemed creature's happiness with His plan to glorify Himself in Christ. For in Him we are made fit to glorify God and enjoy Him forever in a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The perfection of beauty and the restoration of paradise will be the environment of the people of God. Our regenerated sense of aesthetics will behold the perfect union of physical and moral order. Central to God's glory is this restorative work in which the true, the real, the beautiful and the good are joined—no more to be severed by sin. We may designate this "cosmological holiness" because everything is in its proper place, restored to its created order.

In our glorified state, we will exalt God magnifying His grace for manifesting His glory to us by imputing and imparting Christ's righteousness and holiness to us so that we are capable of glorying and enjoying God in all things. Those cherish God and His infinite gift of comprehensive forgiveness will not sell themselves to sin—they love God and revolt against the original revolt.

You can't keep your sin and have heaven too. Human history and the cosmos is a stage for the display of moral majesty and righteousness. Where do you line up with His rectitude, His transcendent holiness? Christ came to give men the knowledge of God, of His goodness, love, holiness, and grace. But these great blessings are only communicated by the Mediator whom God has chosen and sent. To know Christ and Him crucified is to have God as one's own Father—whom to know is life eternal (Jn 17:3).

In our culture, ownership is connected with status. But God reveals in Psalm 49 that much of we think of ownership is actually a myth. Everything is actually on loan. Every cell, every molecule, God has given you faculties, senses, a body with limbs and organs, a mind, a conscious, affections, faculty of speech. The Scriptures indicate that we are constantly employing these faculties in activities of sewing, building, serving, worshipping, treasuring, guarding, exalting. You see, how you use these faculties is a clear revealer of what you worship and serve. On Judgment Day, what you have built will be examined, and your functional God will be revealed to the watching universe.

For some of you who have heard the sound of my voice today, you are still oblivious to the fact that your unsaved friends, your coworkers, and the media have all lied to you. Therefore you were complacent about the incredible danger you were in. You don't see your sin as ruinous, God says it is a great disaster and you say that it is no big deal; it's just part of being human.

Think with me for a moment, about the creatures that dominate the African savannah, almost every night the top predators kill and steal. In the African savannah, whatever has might (physical power) has right (the ability to dominate other creatures). But not so with God's creatures which are made in his image, what is right has might (a place of influence and power). We are accountable to the one who formed the eye and the mind and the heart. We are sustained by him every moment.

Part of our identity as the image of God is that men and women are utterly dependent upon their Maker for all life, love, good, and blessedness. But, sinners love their imagined independence. They fly the flag of autonomy over the castle of their heart. And they have erected an 'electrified fence' that says 'God keep out'. You see the conscience must be enlightened, or men will never see that they are self-deceived, and self-justifiers, and that there are under the wrath of God.

George Whitfield said it well, "Apart from the Holy Spirit, the gospel is dead." It finds no point of contact in spiritually dead rebels.