

Church Membership

The Gospel



Introduction

No person is born a Christian; it is something we become. Prior to becoming a Christian, the Bible describes each of us in several ways: children of wrath, separated from God, enemies of the cross, children of the devil, sinners, transgressors (law breakers), spiritually dead, unbelievers, condemned to eternal punishment, in need of God, etc. All these descriptions are expressive of the fact that apart from Christ we are without hope in this world, alienated from God, and doomed for eternal destruction. The good news is, that despite these circumstances, God has made a way possible for us to be saved and rescued from His wrath and an eternity in Hell. . .that way is called the Gospel.

We know that the Gospel is good news! It is good because it is the message of what God has done for us to deliver us from our sins and His wrath against our sins. However, before we look at this good news, we must first look at the bad news, the situation that all of us are in apart from Christ. Looking at the bad news first is crucial because no one can gain a true understanding of the gospel without first recognizing his/her own rebellion against God and the severe consequences justly deserved as a result. Once we see our own sinfulness and God's just anger and judgment, then we will be able to embrace the gospel with joy, gratitude, humility, and awe as our only hope for salvation.

The Bad News

Salvation means to be made whole; to be delivered; made safe; preserved from destruction. But what do we need to be saved from? The answer is twofold: (1) we need to be saved from our own sin, and (2) we need to be saved from God's wrath against our sin.

1. Sin Defined

Sin is the personal act of turning away from God and His will, and violating His command, and it is rebellion against His right to rule our lives.

In Scripture, there are two primary ways that sin is defined: (1) it is missing the mark; falling short of the

"Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature."

Wayne Grudem

"Sin is therefore fundamentally opposition to God, rebellion against God; which roots in hatred of God."

Anthony Hoekema

standard that God has set for us; and (2) it is described as transgression – rebellion against God’s standard.

2. We all Have Sinned

We know from Scripture that the first man, Adam, brought sin and death to all of humanity, and we know that every human being sins because he/she is a sinner by nature.

Romans 5:12 – “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way came to all men, because all sinned – “

Romans 3:23 – “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Isaiah 53:6 – “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”

3. We are Utterly Depraved Because of Sin

We live in an age when most believe in the inherent goodness of humanity. The Bible, however, presents a dramatically different picture. It describes humanity as being utterly depraved (corrupt).

By saying that man is utterly depraved, this doesn’t mean that man is as bad as he could be. It simply means that sin’s corruption has affected man in every part of his being: mind, emotions, will, and body. There is nothing in man that has been left unaffected by sin. Everything he does, even what would be considered good by human standards, is tainted by sin in some way.

Romans 3:10-12 – “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.’”

Genesis 6:5 – “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was evil all the time.”

Isaiah 64:6 – “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”

The result of this depravity is that we are incapable of pleasing or obeying God and uninterested in doing so.

Romans 8:7-8 – “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

Romans 3:11 – “There is no one . . . who seeks God.”

Ephesians 2:1 – “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”

4. We Have Sinned Against God and We Are Accountable to God

Proverbs 19:3 – “A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.”

Ecclesiastes 7:29 – “This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.”

Isaiah 65:12 – “I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in My sight and chose what displease Me.”

John 15:22 – “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now however, they have no excuse for their sin.”

Romans 14:12 – “So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”

5. God’s is Holy and Angry at Our Sin

Wrath is God’s settled opposition to sin. It is the only right and necessary response to sin by a perfectly holy God. God hates sin and all who practice it.

Habakkuk 1:13 – “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; You cannot tolerate wrong.”

Psalms 5:4-5 – “You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with You the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in Your presence; You hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.”

Many do not ever consider the thought that God is angry or wrathful towards sin. This is largely due to the fact that we don’t understand the holiness of God and the seriousness of our sin. That is partially because we are not angry at our own sin, and we don’t believe God should be either. The problem is, we forget that God is not like us.

Psalms 50:21 – “You thought I was altogether like you.”

Psalms 36:2 – “For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.”

Genesis 18:25 – “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

6. Our Sins Have Consequences

A. A broken relationship with God

This is the first and worst of all of sin's consequences, and the one from which all others follow.

Isaiah 59:2 – “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

B. We are under the dominion of Satan and sin

We are enslaved and unable to free ourselves from the dominion of Satan and sin.

Colossians 1:13 – “For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.”

John 8:34 – “Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.’”

2 Corinthians 4:4 – “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

3. Our sin has brought about temporal curses

All the sorrow, pain, suffering, sweat, tears, strife, sickness and death we experience were not part of God's original creation. They are here because of sin.

4. Eternal Punishment

The ultimate, final and irrevocable punishment for all who die in sinful rebellion against God is hell. It is in comprehending hell that we comprehend the full magnitude of our sinfulness and God's wrath.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 – “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power.”

“There is nothing between you and hell but air. It is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.”

Jonathan Edwards

“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

Note: *Because of our sinful rebellion against a holy God, we are by nature objects of His justifiable wrath.*

The “Good News” in Light of the “Bad News”

The good news is, even though we have sinned and are objects of God's wrath, God has provided a way for us to escape this wrath and to have our sins forgiven. This message of good news is called

the Gospel, and because we have done nothing to contribute to it, it is a message of God's saving grace.

At the heart of the gospel is the truth of substitution. Jesus Christ came and lived a perfect life, died in our place for our sins, and was raised to life for us that we might be declared not guilty before a holy God. In other words, He did everything that we could not do as sinners. As the Apostle Paul put it in *1 Timothy 1:15b*, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..." What He did is what saves us, and what He did for us is the good news of the Gospel!

1 Corinthians 15:3 – "...Christ died for our sins."

Isaiah 53:4-6 – "Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

2 Corinthians 5:21 – "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Romans 4:25 – "who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

To sum it up, the Gospel consists of all that Jesus did on our behalf, which includes Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return.

Saved Through Faith in the Work of Jesus Christ Alone

1. His Birth

Jesus is God, yet He was born into the world as a man, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin named Mary. Jesus is thus born fully God and fully man.

John 1:1, 14 – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Matthew 1:20-21 – "But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.'"

Hebrews 2:17 – “For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

Philippians 2:5-8 – “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”

Because of Christ’s death in our place, God’s justice is now completely satisfied. God can now, without violating His justice or His moral law, forgive us freely, completely and absolutely.”

Jerry Bridges

2. His Perfect, Sinless Life

Even though Jesus was subject to all the same temptations that any other human being is subject to, He never once sinned in any way. Even His worst enemies had to remain silent when Jesus asked them, “Can any of you prove Me guilty of sin?” (John 8:46).

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

1 Peter 1:19 – “Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

3. His Death on the Cross

The cross is the center point of human history. All that comes before it looks forward to it and prepares for it. All that comes after it looks back on it and proceeds from it. It is the most important and glorious event in redemptive history.

The cross is the ground upon which God saves sinners. The key concept of the cross is that of satisfaction through substitution. Jesus Christ meets the righteous demands of God the Father through both obedience and punishment, and thereby, God’s holiness is upheld or satisfied.

A.) Jesus’ death was substitutionary in nature. He died on our behalf, receiving the legal penalty for our sins, and satisfying God’s wrath toward us.

Isaiah 53:4-5 – “Surely, He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for

our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.”

2 Corinthians 5:21 – *“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

1 Peter 3:18 – *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”*

1 Peter 2:24 – *“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.”*

B.) Jesus’ death provided atonement for us. Atonement is the ransom price that covers an offense, not by sweeping it out of sight, but by making an equivalent payment. The offense has been actually and exactly paid for. It removes an offense so as to bring the offender and the offended together (i.e., reconciliation).

Romans 3:25-26 – *“God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished –He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”*

1 John 2:1-2 – *“Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*

Colossians 1:20 – *“. . . and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”*

Ephesians 1:7 – *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”*

4. His Resurrection from the Dead

The resurrection demonstrates that Jesus’ death was an acceptable and effective sacrifice on our behalf. Death is the penalty for sin, and if death is overcome then sin, too, must be overcome.

Romans 6:23 – *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Romans 4:25 – *“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”*

1 Corinthians 15:17 – “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”

Colossians 2:15 – “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

5. His Ascension and Return

The ascension marks the beginning of Jesus’ reign. He sits at the Father’s right hand building His Church, defeating its enemies, advocating, and interceding for the saints. At the time that God has determined, Christ will return to consummate His work. We will reign with Him for eternity, experiencing the full fruits of His saving work.

Ephesians 1:19-23 – “. . . and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.”

“The gospel is not only the most important message in all of history; it is the only essential message in all of history. Yet we allow thousands of professing Christians to live their entire lives without clearly understanding it and experiencing the joy of living by it.”

Jerry Bridges

Matthew 24:30-31 – “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heavens to the other.”

Revelation 21:3-4 – “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

***Salvation is all of God, so He receives all the glory- “not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”**

The Priority of the Gospel

Building on the foundation of the gospel means more than just understanding the content of the gospel. It also means giving priority to the gospel as the Scripture does. For example:

1 Corinthians 15:3 – *“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures...”*

- Paul makes clear elsewhere that his entire ministry is defined by and built upon the priority of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 – *“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”*

Built on the Gospel- What Difference Does It Make?

The following distinctives characterize a local church that is built upon the foundation of the gospel:

- 1. A church built on the gospel promotes the gospel as vital for Christian growth and not just for evangelism.**

The gospel is central for all we teach and practice. The gospel is not to be relegated to an entry point for unbelievers. To be sure, it is the entry point for the Christian life, but we do not exchange the gospel for the duties of discipleship after our conversion. We grow in holiness (sanctification) through the gospel, and so we must wholeheartedly affirm that the gospel is for Christians, too.

- 2. A church built on the gospel will spotlight the gospel as the centerpiece of the Sunday worship service.**

On Sundays, we gather for God. We assemble and worship God because of what he has done for us. We come before him based on his work and not ours.

Isaiah 61:10 – *“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”*

Hebrews 4:15-16 – *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

A gospel-centered worship service will display reminders of His work throughout the meeting in prayer, song, exhortation, spiritual gifts, offering, announcements, sermon, the Lord’s supper,

serving, and fellowship. A primary quality of a people engaged in gospel-centered worship is joy (see Isaiah 61:10 above).

3. A church built on the gospel will ensure that no other agendas (no matter how noble they are) eclipse the focus of the gospel.

The gospel foundation is an anchor that keeps a local church from being tossed about by the wide array of theological and methodological “fads” that regularly blow through modern evangelicalism.

We must clearly define our foundation, give priority to our foundation, draw attention to our foundation and never allow the church to shift and build on another foundation even if that foundation may represent something that is biblically sound.

4. A church built on the gospel will vigorously promote what God has done for us over what we do (or fail to do) for him.

The gospel-centered church will be far more impressed by the work of God in Christ than it will the work of men.

Galatians 6:14 – “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

When the church gives pre-eminence to the gospel, it will guard against giving pre-eminence to a leader, ministry, church, organization, or a cause.

Building on a gospel foundation promotes humility because it fixes our attention on the work of God and gives us a sober assessment of the work of man.

1 Corinthians 3:5-9 – “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.”

5. A church built on the gospel will have the gospel mission permeate its life and culture.

As we begin to personally grasp the overwhelming grace of God, our response should be to share that good news with those who do not know God.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 – “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,

not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

If we are built upon the foundation of Christ and Him crucified, a natural overflow of our experience of reconciliation to God will be to communicate that message in all that we say and do. If our focus is the gospel, we will always be communicating a message that is relevant for believers and unbelievers alike. The church’s call to reach the lost and build the church is a singular call that finds its expression in our commitment to building on the foundation of the gospel. Thus, evangelistic mission is not an isolated ministry of the church; rather, this mission is in the very DNA of the church because the church is built on the good news that “Christ died for our sins.”

Questions for Application

(Please take time to answer the following questions)

1. How did this teaching affect your understanding of the gospel? How did it affect your understanding of the priority of the gospel?
2. In what ways does better understanding the “bad news” enable us to better appreciate the “good news”?
3. If the gospel is necessary for our growth in Christ, what area of struggle are you currently facing where you need the “good news” to empower you for change? In the midst of your struggle, how is the gospel “good news” to you?
4. Re-read Isaiah 61:10 and Hebrews 4:15-16. How should these verses inform and guide our approach to corporate worship? What do these verses communicate to you personally about your current approach to the Sunday worship gathering? What encouragement do these passages bring you?
5. Consider our gospel mission as a local church. In what ways, did this teaching broaden your understanding of mission? How can you personally participate in our church’s mission to reach those who don’t know God?