

# An Apology for the Gospel

VOLUME 1

There's ONLY One  
(The Uniqueness of the Gospel)

What exactly is the  
Gospel?

Milk & Meat  
THEOLOGY

Could Jesus have sinned?

Why Apologize?

Bible Study Methods

Learning how to see



myths and  
misconceptions  
about *Christmas*



Answering Questions About Your Faith



If what I am saying is not true, then Fred Stettler has wasted his life in Switzerland. If what I am saying is not true, then Dave Fox ought to come home from Guatemala. If what I am saying is not true, then Bob and Amber Leland were fools to go to Irian Jaya. If what I am saying is not true, then Dr. Aletta Bell should have stayed in America and made big money instead of working for peanuts in some hospital in India. If what I am saying is not true, then Eva Lodgaard has spent 45 years in the mountains of Kentucky for nothing.

If what I am saying is not true, then why in God's name did we let Sharon Dix go to Nepal last October? If there was some other hope for the people of Nepal, then why didn't we stop her? Sharon going to Nepal only makes sense if Jesus Christ is truly the only way to heaven. If what I am saying is not true, then why is April Jahns going to the hot desert sands of Niger this summer? Why give up a promising career to go to a godforsaken place like Galmi? It doesn't make sense if the people of Niger are okay just the way they are.

But if what I am saying is true, then the question is not, Why is April Jahns going to Niger? The real question is, Why are we staying here?

**...The Unanswerable Argument**

I come at last to my final argument. I realize that some people will not be persuaded by the things I have said. For various reasons, they simply find it impossible to believe that millions and even billions of people are going to Hell. The thought is so terrible, so horrifying, the specter so awful, that they resist that conclusion with all their might. If you fall into that camp, let me offer the one argument that to me is unanswerable:

If there really is some other way of salvation, then why did God send his Son to the earth? Few of us could understand deliberately offering up one of our children to die for the benefit of others. Who among us could ever conceive of offering up one of our children when there was some other way? But if there was some other way of salvation, then the death of Christ was the greatest tragedy in world history. More than that, it was an act of monstrous cruelty—if there really was another way of salvation. In that case, God is not a God of love but a creature of monstrous evil. What else can you say about a God who would let his own Son die in vain?

But thank God, it is not true. There was no other way of salvation. From the bleeding heights of Calvary comes a message for the whole world: "It is finished." The work of salvation is complete. Nothing more needs to be done. Jesus has done the work. There is nothing left but to believe on his name and be saved.

I come now to my final few sentences. Since I know what I have said is considered controversial by some people, I do not ask you to take my word on such an important issue. Study the Scriptures for yourself. Ponder what God has said about the people of the world. Ask yourself, Is this really true? Then pray this prayer: "Lord, if it's true, what should I do?"

Additional Resources:

Anderson, Sir Norman. Christianity and World Religions. InterVarsity Press, 1984.; Boa, Kenneth and Larry Moody. I'm Glad You Asked. Victor Books, 1982. Chapter 9; DeWitt, David. Answering the Tough Ones. Moody Press, 1980. Chapter 6; Geisler, Norm. The Roots of Evil. Zondervan, 1978. Appendix 1.; Lewis, Gordon. Judge For Yourself. InterVarsity Press, 1975. Chapter 2; Little, Paul. How to Give Away Your Faith. InterVarsity Press, 1966. Chapter 5; McDowell, Josh and Don Stewart. Answers to Questions. Here's Life, 1980, pp. 129-132; Sproul, R.C. Reason to Believe. Zondervan, 1982. Chapter 3

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### Why Apologize?

The word "apology" means to give an answer or defense for something.

Paul uses this word several times, most notably when he said...

"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,"

(1 Peter 3:15)

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# Why Apologize?

"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,"

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## What is Apologetics

By Matt Slick (Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry) <http://carm.org/introduction-apologetics>

The word "apologetics" comes from the Greek word "apologia," pronounced "ap-ol-og-ee'-ah." It means, "a verbal defense." It is used eight times in the New Testament: Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Corinthians 9:3; 2 Corinthians 10:5-6; Philippians 1:7; 2 Timothy 4:16, and 1 Peter 3:15. But it is the last verse that is most commonly associated with Christian apologetics.

"...but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15, NASB).

"Apologetics is the work of convincing people to change their views."

Therefore, Christian apologetics is that branch of Christianity that deals with answering any and all critics who oppose or question the revelation of God in Christ and the Bible. It can include studying such subjects as biblical manuscript transmission, philosophy, biology, mathematics, evolution, and logic. But it can also consist of simply giving an answer to a question about Jesus or a Bible passage. The latter case is by far the most common and you don't have to read a ton of books to do that.

Apologetics can be defensive and offensive. Philippians 1:7 gives us instruction on the defensive side,

"For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me."

2 Corinthians 10:5 gives us instruction on the offensive side:

"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

The apologist can and should defend his reasons for believing (1 Peter 3:15). But he can also go on the attack. He can seek out those who oppose Christianity (2 Corinthians 10:5). Of course, he should be prepared to do this beforehand, and all apologetics is to be done with gentleness.

Apologetics is the work of convincing people to change their views. In this, it is similar to preaching because its goal is ultimately the defense and presentation of the validity and necessity of the gospel. It is an attempt to persuade the listener to change his beliefs and life to conform to biblical truth and to come to a saving relationship in Christ.

Basically apologetics can be evidential (often called "classical") or presuppositional. Evidential apologetics deals with the evidence for Christianity: Jesus' resurrection, the biblical manuscripts, fulfilled prophecy, miracles, etc. Presuppositional apologetics deals with the presuppositions of those who oppose Christianity, because presuppositions affect how a person views evidence and reason.

The Lord has called every Christian to be ready to make a defense of his faith. That means you are called to give reasonable answers to questions regarding Christianity. Now, this does not mean that you must have a Ph.D. or that you have to go to seminary. However, it does mean that you should be willing to at least give an answer for your beliefs. If you find you cannot, then prayerfully take it to God and start studying.

ble that the man in Thailand could have responded to God, turned away from his idols, and sought to know the true God of creation? What happens to that man? Wouldn't God accept his sincere repentance based as it is on the light of creation he received?" Two points need to be made in response. First, it's not at all clear from Romans 1 that anyone actually fits into this category. The idea of the "God-seeking" heathen who worships a God he does not know does not seem to fit into Paul's theology at all. But for the sake of argument, let us grant that such a person does exist. That leads me to the second point. Whenever a person responds to the light he receives, God responds by sending him more light. Light received means more light. Light rejected brings only darkness. Those are universal spiritual truths. However, in the Bible whenever a person responded to the light given him, God always responded by sending a preacher of the gospel. Acts 8 (Stephen and the Ethiopian eunuch) and Acts 10 (Peter and Cornelius) offer two clear examples. There is not one single suggestion in the New Testament that anyone can ever be saved apart from the preaching of the gospel. It is not "repentance" in and of itself that God wants. It is "repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ." No one has the slightest biblical ground to suggest that God will accept people apart from personal faith in Christ.

Let me approach this from another angle. How much about God can you learn from creation? You can learn that he exists, that he is powerful, that he is wise, that he is the Supreme Being of the universe. But is that enough to save you? No! No one can be saved by studying nature or even by worshiping the God revealed in nature. They can only be damned. To put this in theological terms: Natural revelation cannot save anyone. It can only condemn. We need special revelation from God if we are going to heaven. That's why the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only hope for the world.

2. Since Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, those who do not believe in him are lost forever.

Consider these familiar verses: Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6) Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Paul said, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11) These are utterly exclusive claims for our Lord.

No other way...No other name...No other foundation

We have no right to water them down. Outside of Christ, there is no hope for the world. Outside of his name, no other name can save. We do the world no favor when we pretend that something else is true.

Therefore, we say with great sorrow and yet with deep biblical conviction, that those who do not believe in Jesus (whether or not they have ever heard of him) are lost forever.

3. Since the church was commanded to preach the gospel to every person, it is our own fault that after 2000 years, so many people have still never heard the Good News.

The discussion must eventually come back to our own responsibility. Many church members resist this point, preferring to endlessly argue about hypothetical cases. It's far easier to dream up reasons why the heathen aren't really lost than it is to face our own guilty consciences.

But if we were told to go, and then we didn't go, whose fault is it that millions die without Christ? You can't blame them for not hearing the message in the first place. The lost of the world are guilty of many things, but they aren't guilty of failing to hear the gospel. But the church of Jesus Christ is guilty before God of not taking the Great Commission seriously. We have sat by idly and let the world quite literally go to Hell. Then we theorize and speculate, hoping somehow that our theories will cover our guilt.

But God is not fooled by our speculations.

## The Critical Question

That brings us back to the ultimate question: How can God send someone to Hell for not believing in Jesus, when that person has never even heard of him? We introduced this question with the comment that it doesn't seem fair for God to do a thing like that. We are now in a position to state the matter in a stronger fashion. We can flatly say that it wouldn't be fair for God to do something like that. We know that God is a God of justice and righteousness. For him to send people to Hell for rejecting Jesus when they've never heard of him would be a miscarriage of justice on a scale that staggers the mind.

The key phrase is "for rejecting Jesus." The biblical teaching is explicit on this point. People don't go to Hell simply for rejecting Jesus; people go to Hell because they are sinners. Not believing in Jesus simply seals their fate. Romans 1:18-20 is telling us that the whole world is guilty before God wholly apart from the gospel of Christ. That means there is no such thing as a truly "innocent" person or a truly "innocent" heathen. People aren't innocent before God; they are morally guilty of rejecting the truth about God. When people who have never heard the gospel die, their eternal fate is not determined by whether or not they rejected Jesus. You can't reject a person you never knew in the first place. Let us say it again: People go to Hell because they are sinners, not because they are unbelievers. Refusing to believe in Jesus simply seals their fate.

## The Cancer of Sin

Perhaps an illustration can make this point clear. Let's suppose that our mythical farmer in Thailand gets sick and goes to the local doctor. After running some tests, the doctor comes to the farmer and says, "I've got some bad news. You've contracted incurable cancer. There's no treatment available that can help you." Let's also suppose that on the very same day researchers at the University of Chicago discover a cure of the precise kind of cancer this man has. But the man knows nothing about the researchers and they know nothing about him. What will happen to that man in Thailand? In a few months he will be dead. Why did he die? He died because he had cancer, not because he didn't get the cure. Not getting the cure simply sealed his fate.

In the very same way, the whole world is dying of the cancer of sin. Some people are in very advanced stages while others will live for many more years. But all of them are ultimately terminal: The cancer of sin will kill each and every person. But a cure for sin was discovered 2000 years ago. It's called the blood of Jesus Christ. It's so powerful that it cures the cancer of sin in all its ugly forms. The sad part about this story is that even though the cure has been known for 2000 years, there are still over 2 billion people who know nothing about it. What's worse, most of them don't even know they are terminally ill with the cancer of sin. They're dying, and don't know it. When they die, what will be the cause of their spiritual death? In each and every case the great Coroner of the Universe will write on the death certificate—"Cancer of Sin." They don't die because they've never heard the gospel. They die because they are sick with sin. Not hearing the gospel simply seals their fate.

## Three Sobering Conclusions

That leads me to wrap up this message with three sobering conclusions.

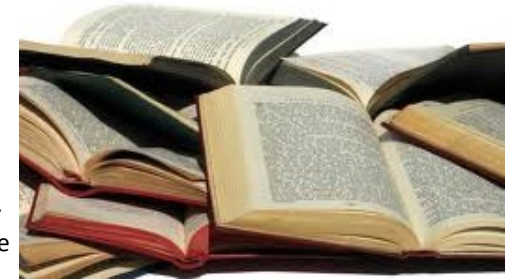
1. Since God has clearly revealed himself to all men, no one is truly innocent in his eyes.

This is the inescapable conclusion of Paul's logic. No one is truly innocent before God. All are guilty to a greater or lesser degree. All mankind stands on death row. It's certainly true that those who hear the gospel and reject it are infinitely more guilty before God than those who never hear it at all. Our God is not capricious in the way he deals with men. The most fundamental principle of judgment is that God judges according to the light men receive. Those who receive only the light of creation will receive much less punishment than those who saw and rejected the bright light of the gospel of Christ. But that principle cannot overturn the larger point—no one is innocent before God.

Light Leads to the Gospel

Perhaps at this point a brief word should be added in answer to the question asked by many thoughtful people. "Isn't it possi-

# OLOGIES



"Systematic" refers to something being put into a system. Systematic theology is, therefore, the division of theology into systems that explain its various areas. For example, many books of the Bible give information about the angels. No one book gives all the information about the angels. Systematic theology takes all the information about angels from all the books of the Bible and organizes it into a system called angelology. That is what systematic theology is all about—organizing the teachings of the Bible into categorical systems.

**Theology** proper is the study of God and His attributes. Theology proper focuses on God the Father. Paterology comes from two Greek words which mean "father" and "word" - which combine to mean "the study of the Father."

**Christology:** The word "Christology" comes from two Greek words meaning "Christ / Messiah" and "word" - which combine to mean "the study of Christ." Christology is the study of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

**Pneumatology:** The word Pneumatology comes from two Greek words which mean "wind, air, spirit" and "word" - combining to mean "the study of the Holy Spirit." Pneumatology is the study of God the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity.

**Bibliology** is the study of the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible is the inspired source of knowledge about God, Jesus Christ, salvation, and eternity. Without a proper view of the Bible, our views on these and other issues become clouded and distorted. Bibliology tells us what the Bible is.

**Soteriology** is the study of the doctrine of salvation. Soteriology discusses how Christ's death secures the salvation of those who believe. It helps us to understand the doctrines of redemption, justification, sanctification, propitiation, and the substitutionary atonement.

**Hamartiology** is the study of sin. Hamartiology deals with how sin originated, how it affects humanity, and what it will result in after death. To sin essentially means to "miss the mark." We all miss God's mark of righteousness (Romans 3:23). Hamartiology, then, explains why we miss the mark, how we miss the mark, and the consequences of missing the mark.

**Ecclesiology** is the study of the church. The word Ecclesiology comes from two Greek words meaning "assembly" and "word" - combining to mean "the study of the church." The church is the assembly of believers who belong to God. Ecclesiology is crucial to understand God's purpose for believers in the world today.

**Eschatology** is the study of what the Bible says is going to happen in the end times. Many treat Eschatology as an area of theology to be avoided. Of course, Eschatology is not as crucial as Christology or Soteriology. That does not mean, though, that it is unimportant to a Biblical worldview. How we understand Eschatology has an impact on how we should live our lives and what we are to expect to occur in God's plan.

**Anthropology** is the study of humanity. Christian Anthropology is the study of humanity from a Christian / biblical perspective. It is primarily focused on the nature of humanity - how the immaterial and material aspects of man relate to each other.

**Angelology** is the study of angels. There are many unbiblical views of angels in the world today. Some believe angels are human beings who have died. Others believe that angels are impersonal sources of power. Still others entirely deny the existence of angels. A good biblical understanding of Angelology will correct these incorrect beliefs. Angelology tells us what the Bible says about angels. It is a study of how the angels relate to humanity and serve God's purposes.

**Demonology** is the study of demons. Christian Demonology is the study of what the Bible teaches about demons. Closely related to Angelology, Christian Demonology teaches us about the demons, what they are and how they attack us. Satan and his demons are fallen angels, true and real personal beings who wage war against God, the holy angels, and humanity. Christian Demonology helps us to be aware of Satan, his minions, and their evil schemes.

# An Apology



## There's ONLY ONE Gospel

### Only One Way? The Exclusivity of Jesus Christ and the Gospel

Bruce Ware, Professor, Author, Speaker

<http://www.christianity.com/Christian%20Foundations/Christianity%20Main/11602124/>

#### Two Questions, Three Positions

Three positions abound today on the question of whether Christ is the only way to salvation. All three can be detected by how each answers these two fundamental questions: First, *Is Jesus the only Savior?* More fully: Is the sinless life of Christ and his atoning death and resurrection the only means by which the penalty of sin is paid and the power of sin defeated? Second, *Is faith in Christ necessary to be saved?* More fully: Is conscious knowledge of Christ's death and resurrection for sin and explicit faith in Christ necessary for anyone to become a recipient of the benefits of Christ's atoning work and so be saved?

Pluralism answers both questions, 'No.' The pluralist (e.g., John Hick) believes that there are many paths to God, Jesus being only one of them. Since salvation can come through other religions and religious leaders, it surely follows that people do not have to believe in Christ to be saved.

Inclusivism answers the first question, 'Yes,' and the second question, 'No.' To the inclusivist (e.g., Clark Pinnock), although Jesus has accomplished the work necessary to bring us back to God, nonetheless, people can be saved by responding positively to God's revelation in creation and perhaps in aspects of their own religions. So, even though Christ is the only Savior, people do not have to know about or believe in Christ to be saved.

Exclusivism answers both questions, 'Yes.' The exclusivist (e.g., Ron Nash, John Piper, Bruce Ware) believes that Scripture affirms both truths, first, that Jesus alone has accomplished the atoning work necessary to save sinners, and second, that knowledge of and faith in Christ is necessary for anyone to be saved. The remainder of this article offers a brief summary of some of the main support for these two claims.

It is incompatible with any and all other religious belief. It stands alone.

#### Jesus is the Only Savior

Why think that Jesus is the only Savior? Of all the people who have lived and ever will live, *Jesus alone qualifies*, in his person and work, as the *only one capable* of accomplishing atonement for the sin of the world. Consider the following ways in which Jesus alone qualifies as the exclusive Savior.

1. Christ alone was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38), and as such, he alone qualifies to be Savior. Why does this matter? Only as the Holy Spirit takes the place of the human father in Jesus' conception can it be true that the one conceived is both fully God and fully man. Christ must be both God and man to atone for sin (see below), but for this to occur, he must be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a human virgin. No one else in the history of the world is conceived by the Spirit and born of a virgin mother. Therefore, Jesus alone qualifies to be Savior.
2. Christ alone is God incarnate (John 1:1-18; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:14-18; Phil 2:5-11; 1 Tim 2:5-6), and as such, he alone qualifies to be Savior. As Anselm argued in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, our Savior must be fully man in order to take the place of men and die in their stead, and he must be fully God in order for the value of his sacrificial payment to satisfy the demands of our infinitely holy God. Man he must be, but a mere man simply could not make this infinite payment for sin. But no one else in the history of the world is both fully God and fully man. Therefore, Jesus alone qualifies to be Savior.

testifies to his uniqueness. The changing colors of the Great Smoky Mountains proclaim his creativity.

The galaxies shout out, "He is there." The wildflowers sing together, "He is there." The rippling brooks join in, "He is there." The birds sing it, the lions roar it, the fish write it in the oceans—"He is there." All creation joins to sing his praise. The heavens declare it, the earth repeats it and the wind whispers it—"He is there." Deep cries out to deep, the mighty sequoia tells it to the eagle who soars overhead, the lamb and the wolf agree on this one thing—"He is there."

No one can miss the message. God has left his fingerprints all over this world. Truly, "This is my Father's world," and every rock, every twig, every river and every mountain bears his signature. He signed his name to everything he made. The earth is marked "Made By God" in letters so big that no one fails to see it.

#### E. This Universal Revelation of God in Nature Leaves Everyone Without Excuse. (Romans 1:20d)

Paul's conclusion is simple indeed: The whole world is "without excuse." It is impossible to imagine a more complete condemnation of the human race. The indictment is so complete that it allows for no exceptions, no special cases. Everyone knows God through creation. Everyone suppresses the truth about God. Everyone is therefore without excuse. And that is why everyone stands under the wrath of God.

These words are trans-cultural and trans-generational. They are as true of the 20th-century materialist as they were of the 1st-century pagan. They are true of the Chicago yuppie and of the spear-chucking headhunter in some remote African village. What is true of one is true of the other. Both have known the truth of God. Both have suppressed that truth. Both are guilty before God. Both are under the wrath of God. Both stand in desperate need of the salvation provided in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just in case anyone misses the point, let me state the teaching of this passage very plainly:

1. There is a universal revelation of God in nature which is universally rejected by mankind.
2. That universal rejection of truth by man leaves the human race without excuse before God.
3. The whole human race is therefore under the wrath of God, facing ultimate condemnation and eternal death in Hell.

That, I think, brings us face to face with the key issue in this discussion. Are the people of the world (especially those who have never heard the gospel) basically innocent or basically guilty before God? Paul's answer is that they are basically guilty of rejecting the truth of God in creation. His words admit of no exceptions whatsoever.

Remember, if you take these words of Paul literally, you don't need to know the Bible in order to be condemned. You don't need to go to church or hear a gospel sermon or read the Four Spiritual Laws. You don't have to say No to Jesus Christ in order to be lost. Even though you never heard a sermon, or watched Billy Graham, or read the Bible for yourself, you are already condemned by rejecting the truth of God which has been revealed to all men.

Robert Mounce offers this helpful summary of the biblical teaching (Themes From Romans, p.12):

No one is excluded. No one can get away with saying, "I don't believe in God." As someone has said, "You can't turn out the light by closing your eyes." The heathen who has never heard the gospel or the name of Jesus is as responsible as anyone else. Not for failing to accept a message he has never heard, but for rejecting the knowledge of God revealed in creation. People do not suffer eternal exclusion from God for not having been born to the right parents in the right part of the world, but for rejecting that knowledge of God which is readily available for all. (Italics mine)



closed the cathedrals, persecuted the pastors, and co-opted the priests. In St. Petersburg they turned the huge Kazan Cathedral into a Museum of Religion and Atheism. Three generations grew up learning that God did not exist and that religion was a blight on the face of the earth. But now the truth can be told. Throughout all their hardships, the Russian people maintained their bedrock faith in God. The true believers never gave up their faith, even in the darkest of hours. I have seen with my own eyes how the people of Russia are turning back to God! Now the schools are open to the preaching of the gospel, now the authorities are inviting Christians to minister in the hospitals and in the prisons. Now so many people want Bibles that it's hard to keep up with the demand.

Communism has fallen to the ash heap of history, but the gospel of Jesus Christ is stronger than ever. Why? How do you explain such a startling turn of events? 1. Atheism utterly failed to win the hearts of the people. Atheism is a negation, a purely negative philosophy of life. It has no power to move the hearts of men. 2. There is a hunger for God inside the human heart. When the communists tried to satisfy that hunger with the empty husk of atheism, it only increased the desire for the bread which comes down from heaven.

#### **D. This Revelation Consists of Two Facts About God Every Person Knows. (Romans 1:20b)**

Only one question remains. Exactly what is it about God that is so clearly revealed in nature that no one can miss it? This is a crucial point in Paul's argument because his answer must apply to every person who ever lived. It must specifically apply to the "heathen" who never hears the gospel message. In answering that question, Paul says that there are two facts about God that every person knows.

1. There is an All-Powerful God Who Created the World.
2. That All-Powerful God is the Supreme Being of the Universe.

Those two statements are a rough approximation of what Paul means when he mentions God's invisible qualities—"his eternal power and divine nature." His "eternal power" is evident in the magnitude and grandeur of creation. His "divine nature" may be seen from the variety and design of the world he made.

Do not miss the central point. You don't need the Bible to see and understand those things. You don't need to go to church to figure this out. You don't need the gospel to know there is a God who is the Supreme Being. These truths are so plainly revealed that the man in Thailand knows them even though no missionary has ever come his way. So does the Muslim student at the University of Illinois. So does the former 60s radical who walks by Calvary Memorial Church three times a week. These truths are so obvious that no one can miss them.

#### **Clues From My House**

Let me illustrate. Suppose you were to visit my house while I was not there. How much could you learn about me and my family just by looking around? Well, the moment you walked in you might suspect we were from another part of the country because our living room has a southwestern flavor. If you noticed the painted egg from Russia and the mahogany from Haiti, you would know we have visited other countries. Although you might not know I was a pastor, you would certainly know I studied the Bible from seeing all the Bibles and commentaries strewn around the computer in the corner of our Dining Room. You would know someone at our house makes draperies because we've got a huge drapery table in the basement with fabric samples stacked up on the floor. When you went upstairs you would figure out that we have boys from looking at the baseball cards and the gloves and bats and balls. By counting the beds you would figure out that we probably have three boys. And if you looked for girls' clothing you wouldn't find any. But if you looked in my closet, you'd discover I'm tall just by looking at my suits....

This world is God's house. He's left clues everywhere about what kind of God he is. When you stand at the Grand Canyon, you can't help but be overwhelmed at the mighty power of God to create such magnificence. He must have had a mighty hand to scoop out the Royal Gorge in Colorado. He is as infinite as the dark recesses of the mighty Atlantic Ocean. Each snowflake

3. Christ alone lived a sinless life (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:23-28; 9:13-14; 1 Pet 2:21-24), and as such, he alone qualifies to be Savior. As Leviticus makes clear, animals offered as sacrifices for sin must be without blemish. This prefigured the sacrifice of Christ who, as sinless, was able to die for the sins of others and not for himself. But no one else in the history of the world has lived a totally sinless life. Therefore, Jesus alone qualifies to be Savior.
4. Christ alone died a penal, substitutionary death (Isa 53:4-6; Rom 3:21-26; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:10-14), and as such, he alone qualifies to be Savior. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). And because Christ lived a sinless life, he did not deserve to die. Rather, the cause of his death was owing to the fact that the Father imputed to him *our sin*. The death that he died was in *our place*. No one else in the history of the world has died because he bore the sin of others and not as the judgment for his own sin. Therefore, Jesus alone qualifies to be Savior.
5. Christ alone rose from the dead triumphant over sin (Acts 2:22-24; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:3-8, 16-23), and as such, he alone qualifies to be Savior. The Bible indicates that a few people, other than Christ, have been raised from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24; John 11:38-44), but only Christ has been raised from the dead never to die again, having triumphed over sin. The wages of sin is death, and the greatest power of sin is death. So, Christ's resurrection from the dead demonstrates that his atoning death for sin accomplished both the *full payment of sin's penalty* and *full victory over sin's greatest power*. No one else in the history of the world has been raised from the dead triumphant over sin. Therefore, Jesus alone qualifies to be Savior.

Conclusion: Christ alone qualifies as Savior, and Christ alone is Savior. Jesus' own words could not be clearer: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). And the Apostle Peter confirms, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). These claims are true of no one else in the history of the world. Indeed, Jesus alone is Savior.

#### **Faith in Christ is Necessary to be Saved**

Why think that faith in Christ is necessary to be saved? The teaching of the apostles is clear, that the content of the gospel now (since the coming of Christ) focuses directly upon the atoning death and resurrection of Christ, and that by faith in Christ one is forgiven of his sin and granted eternal life. Consider the following passages that support the conviction that people are saved only as they know and trust in Christ as their Savior.

1. Jesus' own teaching shows that the nations need to hear and repent to be saved (Luke 24:44-49). Jesus commands that "repentance and forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). The people Jesus here describes are currently both unrepentant and unforgiven. To be forgiven they must repent. But to repent they must hear the proclamation of Christ's work in his name. And this is true for all the nations, including Jews who haven't trusted Christ. Jesus does not envision the "nations" as already having saving revelation available to them. Rather, believers must proclaim the message of Christ to all the nations for people in those nations to be saved.
2. Paul teaches that even pious Jews, and everyone else, must hear and believe in Christ to be saved (Romans 10:1-4, 13-15). Paul's heart's desire and prayer is for the salvation of his fellow Jews. Even though they have a zeal for God, they do not know that God's righteousness comes only through faith in Christ. So these Jews, even though pious, are not saved. Whoever will call upon the name of Christ (see Rom 10:9 along with Rom 10:13) will be saved. But this requires that someone tell them. And this requires that those are sent. Missions, then, is necessary, since people must hear the gospel of Christ to be saved.
3. Cornelius's story demonstrates that even pious Gentiles must hear and believe in Christ to be saved (Acts 10:1-2, 38-43; 11:13-18; 15:7-9). Far from being saved before Peter came to him, as some think, Cornelius was a pious (10:2) Gentile who needed to hear of Christ, and believe in Christ, to be saved. When Peter reports about the conversion of the Gentiles, he declares that only when he preached did Cornelius hear the message he needed to hear by which he would "be saved" (Acts 11:14; cf. 15:8-9). Despite his piety, Cornelius needed to hear the proclamation of the gospel of Christ to be saved.

Conclusion: Jesus is the only Savior, and people must know and believe in Christ to be saved. May we honor Christ and the gospel, and manifest our faithfulness to God's word, by upholding these twin truths and living in a manner that demonstrates our commitment to them.

## Thoughts on the Gospel

A while back I emailed my dear brother Scotty Smith (Pastor at [Christ Community Church](#) in Franklin, Tennessee) and asked him to provide me his thoughts on the gospel. What he sent me was by no means exhaustive, but was pure gospel gold nonetheless.

Enjoy...

- The gospel is God the Father's irrepressible commitment to redeem his pan-national, trans-generational family, and restore his broken creation through the person and work of Jesus and the power and presence of his Holy Spirit
- The gospel is the glory-story of how God the Father is redeeming a people from every single race, tribe, tongue and people group for a life of worship service in the new heaven and new earth. All of this is being accomplished through the person and work of his Son, Jesus, and the power and presence of God the Holy Spirit.
- The gospel is the doxological drama in which Jesus, the second Adam, servant-Savior and loving Lord, is redeeming his pan-national Bride and making all things new, to the glory of God
- The gospel is the unfolding story of God's contra-conditional love for an ill-deserving people, and for his beloved and broken creation—a story which has Jesus as its hero, the nations as its characters, the world as its storyboard, and the new heaven and new earth as its goal.
- The gospel is like a great song: It has a lyric to be known (theology), a music to be loved (doxology) and a dance to be learned (mission). Indeed, the gospel calls for informed minds, en-flamed hearts and engaged feet.

The gospel is God's passionate, joyful, covenant commitment to make all things new through the person and work of his Son, Jesus, and by the power and presence of His Holy Spirit. "All things" include both a people and a place—the Bride of Christ, and the new heaven and new earth. We dare not emphasize one of these to the exception of the other.

- <http://www.christianity.com/blogs/Tchividjian/11643853/>

### THE GOSPEL IN COLOR



### B. This Revelation is Always Available. (Romans 1:20a)

In verse 20 Paul takes his argument a step farther. This plainly-seen revelation of God in nature has been available “since the creation of the world.” That means Adam saw it, Cain saw it, Noah saw it, Abraham saw it, Jacob saw it, Moses saw it, David saw it, and every other person who has ever lived since the beginning of time saw it. Don’t miss this point. It has massive implications for the question of whether the people of the world are innocent or guilty before God. Everyone knows something about God! No one has ever lived who missed this revelation. It doesn’t matter whether they consciously thought about it or not. The truth was there for all to see, so plainly laid out that no one could miss it. That means it doesn’t matter whether you were a headhunter on some South Pacific island or an upscale yuppie in downtown Chicago. No one could miss the truth about God ... and no one has ever missed it because God made the truth about himself as plain as day.

### C. This Revelation is Both Known and Understood. (Romans 1:20b)

Now the noose gets a little tighter. In the second half of verse 20 Paul comments that the truth of God in nature has been “clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.” Those two verbs are exceedingly important. “Clearly seen” means that everyone has seen something of God’s handiwork in the world. “Understood” is even stronger. It means that the revelation of God in nature strikes the heart of every man. Please understand that Paul is not suggesting that nature contains a revelation about God which every man may see. That’s not strong enough. To the contrary, Paul is saying that every man actually sees the revelation and every man actually understands it to some degree. Douglas Moo offers this explanation of the meaning of the Greek word translated “understood”:

The reality and basic character of God are known to men because they “perceive” Him through the things He has made. How universal is this perception? The flow of Paul’s argument makes any limitation impossible. Those who perceive the attributes of God in creation must be the same as those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness and are therefore liable to the wrath of God. (Romans 1-8, pp. 100-101)

The point is clear: Something about God “gets through” to every person. No one can ever say, “I didn’t know” or “You didn’t make it clear,” because God made it abundantly and overwhelmingly clear. To summarize:

1. The truth about God is clearly seen in creation.
2. That truth is available to every person.
3. That truth “gets through” to every person.

That explains why every culture on earth has some conception of a Supreme Being—however flawed it might be. Man was made to look for answers outside of himself. He is incurably religious in that sense. The French philosopher, Pascal, said that inside the heart of every man there is a “God-shaped vacuum.” And Augustine said, “Lord, you have made us for yourself. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.” Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has put “eternity in the hearts of men,” meaning that the longing for ultimate answers comes from God himself. God put that longing (the “God-shaped vacuum”) inside the human heart to cause men to look to him.

That explains why atheism has never commanded the interest of a wide circle of people. Atheism is the most unnatural philosophy on the face of the earth. Idolatry is more natural than atheism because at least the idolator acknowledges a higher power outside of himself. For a man to be an atheist he must not only deny the truth about God that he sees in nature, he must also deliberately and repeatedly suppress the truth about God found in his own conscience. As so many others have said, in the end it takes more faith not to believe in God.

Seventy-five years ago a vast revolution swept across Russia, a revolution founded on the view of Karl Marx that religion was the opium of the masses—a drug to which fools turned because they couldn’t face life on their own. For most of this century the communists did all they could to stamp the very idea of God out of public life in Russia. They confiscated the churches,



## II. The Rejection of Truth by Man (Romans 1:18b)

Paul continues his indictment of the human race by saying that God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness and wickedness. The key word is "suppress." It's a word that means to deliberately reject the truth in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. This is an exceedingly strong statement. Paul here charges the entire human race with deliberately, willfully and knowingly turning away from God.

Let me say that in an even stronger fashion. In Paul's theology everyone suppresses the truth about God to a greater or lesser extent. Unless that point be fully grasped, this passage loses its force. Paul is moving toward the conclusion in verse 20 that everyone in the world is "without excuse." But that conclusion cannot stand unless everyone is guilty of some sort of deliberate disobedience. Note the order of Paul's thinking:

- A. Men by nature suppress the truth about God.
- B. That suppression leads to ungodliness.
- C. Ungodliness leads on to wickedness.

The upshot is that Paul is teaching that moral perversion comes from perversion in faith. Or to say it another way, apostasy in doctrine leads eventually to apostasy in lifestyle. What you believe is how you live. And once you decide to turn your back on God, the end result is a river of wickedness flowing out of your life. The only thing damming that river is the constraint of your own conscience or the constraint of circumstances. Left to himself man always turns to wickedness. Always. There are no exceptions.

Notice how it happens: First men reject the truth about God, then they turn away from God, then they turn to immorality. And the shocking truth is that this goes on all the time. Every baby born into this world comes in with a disposition that turns him away from the truth. Each man, each woman, the educated and the illiterate alike, all by nature suppress the truth about God. Left to your own devices, you will always turn to wickedness.

That's why "suppress" is in the present tense. Men by nature always and in every case suppress the truth about God. That's how you can have mass murderers who used to attend Sunday School and prostitutes who once sang in the church choir. This is true in every generation and every culture. It ultimately includes every individual on earth. All of us suppress the truth about God. All of us when left to ourselves will turn to wickedness. As hard as that may be for you to accept, it is exactly what the Apostle Paul is teaching.

But that raises one question: What is the "truth about God" that all men suppress? What truth is so universally obvious that everyone knows it? Paul answers that question in verses 19-20.

## III. The Revelation of God in Nature (Romans 1:19-20)

As these verses make clear, there is a revelation of God in nature that every man sees and knows. It is clear enough so that no one can miss it and universal enough so that no one can claim to be ignorant of it. Nature reveals God in such an unmistakable way that even the most backward pygmy cannot fail to grasp its basic message. Paul basically says three things about the nature of this revelation of God in nature:

### A. This Revelation is Clearly Seen. (Romans 1:19-20)

Verse 19 says it two different times: "Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them." Then verse 20 says it again: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen." There is something about God—a deposit of truth, if you will—which God has made so plain that no one can miss it. When Paul twice says that it is "plain to them," he is referring to the impact on the human conscience. Not only is the revelation clearly seen, but that revelation of God in nature impacts the human conscience. Men know there is a God because their conscience tells them so.

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## Dangers to Avoid

What are the dangers we should avoid when presenting the Gospel?

(Excerpted from What Is the Gospel.com (<http://www.whatisthegospel.org.uk/dangers.html>))

### PROMISE OF A BETTER LIFE

The promise of a better life is NOT an element of the Biblical gospel. The opposite, is in fact, more true. True Christianity has always led to misunderstanding and persecution by the world.

### DECEITFUL INVITATIONS

Inviting a friend or neighbour to a social event which turns out to be a gospel presentation will not endear you to your friends. An invitation to hear the gospel should be given as such, since the Lord does not honour dubious practices.

### A FALSE GOSPEL

So many gospel messages today are "man-centered" rather than Jesus centered. "God has a wonderful plan for your life" is not the gospel. The early Christians who were fed to the lions in Rome would rightly have felt deceived over such an evangelistic message! Indeed, the phrase "God loves you" is not a feature of the biblical gospel either. While it can be appropriate to tell hurting and damaged people that God loves them (I've done it myself with battered wives and other vulnerable, abused people), it doesn't form part of the gospel message in the New Testament. Check it out for yourself, don't accept my word about it. It is true that God draws the sinner out of love for His creation, and that Christ died as an act of love to make it possible for him to be saved. It is not however true that God has a wonderful plan for every lost sinner. His plan for lost sinners who reject Jesus Christ is that they will be cast into Hell. That is not very wonderful!

### TRUE AND FALSE EVANGELISM

The following quotation comes from Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' book "Studies in the Sermon on the Mount". As he prepares to discuss Matthew 5:27-30, Lloyd-Jones pauses to discuss sin and evangelism. Below is what he has to say about true and false evangelism:

*"This doctrine [what sin is], therefore, is absolutely vital in determining our conception of true evangelism. There is no true evangelism without the doctrine of sin, and without an understanding of what sin is. I do not want to be unfair, but I say that a gospel which merely says, 'Come to Jesus,' and offers Him as a Friend, and offers a marvelous new life, without convicting of sin, is not New Testament evangelism. The essence of evangelism is to start by preaching the law; and it is because the law has not been preached that we have had so much superficial evangelism. Go through the ministry of our Lord Himself and you cannot but get the impression that at times, far from pressing people to follow Him and to decide for Him, He put great obstacles in their way. He said in effect: 'Do you realize what you are doing? Have you counted the cost? Do you realize where it may lead you? Do you know that it means denying yourself, taking up your cross daily and following Me?' True evangelism, I say, because of this doctrine of sin, must always start by preaching the law. This means that we must explain that mankind is confronted by the holiness of God, by His demands, and also by the consequences of sin. It is the Son of God Himself who speaks about being cast into hell. If you do not like the doctrine of hell you are just disagreeing with Jesus Christ. He, the Son of God, believed in hell; and it is in His exposure to the true nature of sin that He teaches that sin ultimately lands men in hell. So evangelism must start with the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the demands of the law, the punishment meted out by the law, and the eternal consequences of evil and wrongdoing. It is only the man who is brought to see his guilt in this way who flies to Christ for deliverance and redemption. Any belief in the Lord Jesus Christ which is not based on that is*

*not a true belief in Him. You can have a psychological belief even in the Lord Jesus Christ; but a true belief sees in Him one who delivers us from the curse of the law. True evangelism starts like that, and obviously is primarily a call to repentance; repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."*

John Wesley likewise emphasised the importance of preaching the law:  
(From Sermon XXXIV – The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law):

*"To slay the sinner is, then, the First use of the law; to destroy the life and strength wherein he trusts, and convince him that he is dead while he liveth; not only under the sentence of death, but actually dead unto God, void of all spiritual life, "dead in trespasses and sins."*

*The Second use of it is, to bring him unto life, unto Christ, that he may live. It is true, in performing both these offices, it acts the part of a severe school master. It drives us by force, rather than draws us by love. And yet love is the spring of all. It is the spirit of love which, by this painful means, tears away our confidence in the flesh, which leaves us no broken reed whereon to trust, and so constrains the sinner, stripped of all, to cry out in the bitterness of his soul, or groan in the depth of his heart, I give up every plea beside, — Lord, I am \*\*\*d; but thou hast died".*

#### OTHER MISLEADING PHRASES

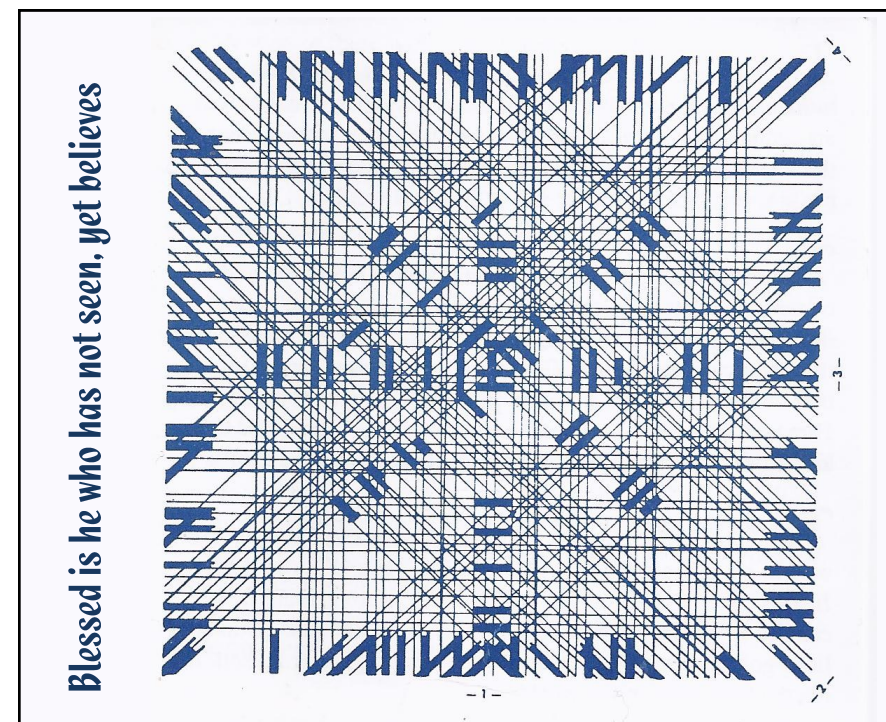
So many unbiblical terms are used today - where do we start?

"Invite Jesus into your heart", "Give your heart to Jesus", "Just say this prayer after me".

The proper response to the gospel is none of the above. An invitation to "invite Jesus into your heart" may simply provoke a fleshly emotional response, rather than a step of faith. A lady of my acquaintance, when a child, was asked "give your heart to Jesus". She explained to me: "I thought: if I gave my heart to Jesus, how could I carry on living?". Furthermore, "give your heart to Jesus" is LAW rather than Gospel. Salvation is not my gift to God but His gift to me.

#### DON'T OVER-COMPLICATE IT!

Using Christian jargon with an enquirer is liable to confuse them and may end up with them walking away. "Do you want to make a profession of faith?" means nothing to an enquirer and is liable to confuse. Telling them to go to Jesus - to confess their sins and receive forgiveness from Him - is both straightforward **and** Biblical!



people group. Think of it. Two billion people beyond the reach of the gospel—and this after 2000 years of Christianity. Thousands of those two billion die every day. What happens to them? Do they go to Hell?

Let me make one brief clarification. I am not talking about the case of those who hear the gospel and then for reasons of their own decide to say No to Jesus Christ. I presume we're all agreed that in such cases the person who deliberately says No to Jesus Christ goes to Hell. Furthermore, I am not speaking of children who die in infancy or those who are so mentally deficient that they are unable to believe. I presume we believe that such cases are covered by the grace of God. Our focus is much narrower: What happens to those who never hear a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ? What happens to them?

#### The Critical Question

That brings me to the critical question, which might be put this way: How can God send someone to Hell for not believing in Jesus, when that person has never heard of Him? My comment to that question is that it does seem unfair for God to do that. If a person has never heard of Jesus, what chance has he had to accept him or reject him? And if he's never had the chance, how can God judge him for rejecting Jesus? That doesn't sound right or fair. Would God really do a thing like that?

Before we go any further, let's isolate the key issue. We're talking about the "heathen" who never even hear the gospel. They may live in Thailand or Brazil or the Ukraine or Singapore. They may be young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, educated or illiterate. But they have one thing in common: They've never heard a clear presentation of the gospel. Here's the key issue: Are such people basically innocent in God's eyes or are they basically guilty? Think carefully before you answer because your answer will eventually lead you back to the larger question. When you look at the teeming masses of the world wholly apart from the gospel, the Bible or Christianity in general, are they innocent or guilty in the eyes of God?

If we can get a clear answer to that question, we can get a firm grasp on the larger question—What about those who never hear the gospel? Romans 1:18-20 touches the key issue we must face. It tells us how God views the people of the world—including those who never hear the gospel.

#### I. The Wrath of God on Sin (Romans 1:18a)

The passage begins with a word that sounds strange and even unnatural to our ears. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven." It's the word "wrath" that grabs our attention. We're accustomed to hearing about the love of God. We know about the grace of God. We sing about the mercy of God. We extol the glory of God. We ponder the holiness of God. But the wrath of God? We hardly ever mention it. There aren't many hymns about God's wrath. We'd much rather sing "Jesus loves me, this I know." But you can't read Romans 1 without coming face to face with the wrath of God.

When we think of wrath, we get the picture of an angry schoolteacher punishing her students or we think of an old man in heaven laughing as he throws thunderbolts down from heaven. But such images are far from the truth. The word translated wrath is the Greek word *orge*. It's not the word used for a sudden angry outburst. Rather, the word refers to a settled hostility that remains constant over a long period of time. Here's a working definition: God's wrath is his settled hostility to everything that contradicts his holiness. As long as God is God, he cannot overlook sin. As long as God is God, he cannot stand by indifferently while his creation is destroyed. As long as God is God, he cannot dismiss lightly those who trample his holy will. As long as God is God, he cannot wink when men mock his name.

Verse 18 adds a crucial fact at this point: God's wrath is revealed in response to man's rejection of the truth. "Revealed" is in the present tense because it describes something that is always going on. The problem doesn't start with God; it starts with man. Man rejects and God responds. It's not as if he's in heaven looking for people he can send to Hell. Such a view of God would be a monstrosity. But it is also true that our God will not overlook sin. He won't wink at it, laugh at it, or pretend it never happened. God's wrath is always being revealed from heaven against those who mock his name and reject his truth. That's a timeless truth that is fulfilled in every generation.



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## What If Someone Never Hears?

### What if someone dies having never heard the Gospel?

<http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1994-04-10-What-About-Those-Who-Never-Hear-The-Gospel/>

#### The Man From Thailand

There's a man in Thailand, a rice farmer who lives about 85 miles outside of Bangkok. He lives with his wife and four children in a small village. Rice farming is all he has ever known. That's his whole life. From morning till night, year round, he works to grow enough rice to take care of his family. He's Buddhist like his father and grandfather before him. Although he's not educated, he knows enough to put slips of paper in the prayer wheel and he knows enough to go to the shrine and bring an offering for Buddha. That's the only religion he's ever known. Christianity is not even a word to him because no missionary has ever come to his village. When that man dies, will he go to Hell?

There is a student who has come to the University of Illinois from somewhere in Saudi Arabia. He's come to America to study economics and computer science. While he's here, he's learning the ways of capitalism. When he graduates, he's going back home where he will become a prosperous business man. He's going to sit at a computer terminal making deals all over the world. Before he's finished, he'll be a very wealthy man. But because he is a follower of Islam, five times a day, when the muzzin cries out, he will stop what he is doing, kneel with his face toward Mecca and say his prayers according to the Koran. He is a devout person, a moral person. He has many Christian friends although he doesn't really understand Christianity. He knows who Jesus is because Jesus is in the Koran, but to him Jesus is just a great prophet—not the Son of God. When that man dies, will he go to Hell?

He was born in 1947 in another part of the country. His parents didn't have any religious faith. When the 60s came, he was right there in the middle of the all the political turmoil. In fact, he was a flaming radical, calling for the overthrow of the government. Now he's 45 years old and he's not a flaming anything. He lives at 100 Forest Place in Oak Park. He's not a Marxist anymore, he's too old for that. He's become a grown-up Yuppie capitalist. And he's never been to church a day in his life. Jesus to him is what Jimmy Swaggart talks about on TV. Each day he gets up, walks to the Lake Street El, and rides down to his job in the Loop. He's never, ever, not even one time, thought about that big stone church next door to him. He doesn't have any idea what they do there. And he doesn't care. When that man dies, will he go to Hell?

It's a good question, a hard question, and one that thoughtful Christians have pondered for generations. Just think about the numbers. The demographers tell us that the world population is now well over 5 billion people. If you take the most optimistic projections, there may be 1.6 billion Christians of all stripes and varieties. But that leaves 3.4 billion people who aren't Christians by any possible definition. They are Hindus, Buddhists, animists, followers of Confucius, or Muslims, or Jews, or secularists, or atheists, or simply nothing at all. What happens to them?

But let's focus the question even more. The missiologists tell us that of those 3.4 billion people who are not Christians, at least 2 billion of them are beyond the effective reach of any gospel message. Perhaps there is no broadcast in their language, or no Bible for them to read, or perhaps missionaries have never penetrated their culture, or no indigenous church exists in their

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## There's ONLY ONE Savior

### Christ Alone

Philip Graham Ryken, Pastor, Author  
<http://www.christianity.com/11599515/>

If ever there was a man with a one-track mind, it was the apostle Paul. Few men have ever exhibited the singleness of purpose that Paul displayed in preaching the gospel. Paul was not concerned about his own reputation. He cared little for his own comfort and safety. He was not interested in Christianity as a social movement or a political cause. The only thing that mattered to him was the person and work of Jesus Christ. So he said to the Corinthians, "I resolved to know nothing [while I was with] you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul said this in reference to his first visit to Corinth, when he planted the Corinthian church. The first time he went to Corinth, the only thing he talked about was Jesus Christ. His message was Christ alone.

There were many things that Paul might have said about Jesus Christ. He might have said that Jesus was God as well as man, that He was God the Son incarnate. He might have said that Jesus was a perfect example, that He lived a life of sinless obedience. He might have said that Jesus was a moral teacher, that He spoke the true words of God. He might have said that Jesus was a miracle-worker, that He healed the sick and raised the dead. Paul could have spent an entire lifetime speaking about the deity, the perfection, the wisdom, and the power of Jesus Christ. And in fact, Paul did preach about all these things on many occasions.

But of all the things that he could have said about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the one thing that he emphasized was His death on the cross: "For I resolved to know nothing [while I was with you] except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul's only purpose and sole ambition was to preach Christ alone—not as a Greek philosopher or as a Jewish miracle-worker—but as the Savior Who suffered and died for sinners.

The historical records show that Jesus of Nazareth was put to death in or around the year A.D. 30. He was executed in the Roman fashion. After He was stripped and beaten, He was led outside the city of Jerusalem to the Place of the Skull. There they nailed Him to a rough piece of wood and left Him to die a horrible bloody death. These are the facts of history.

But Paul also knew that what these facts meant. Jesus was the perfect Son of God. Therefore He was able to offer His body as a perfect sacrifice for sinners. He took all the sins of his people upon Himself, paying once and for all the penalty that their sins deserved: God's wrath and curse unto death. That is what Paul preached, he preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He preached that Jesus had paid the price of our sin. He preached that everyone who trusts in Christ and in His cross will be saved.

Tonight we are praising God for the great biblical truths that were recovered during the Protestant Reformation: *Scripture Alone, Faith Alone, Grace Alone, and Christ Alone*, all to the *Glory of God Alone*. What these doctrines share in common is that they all find their meaning in Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Start with *Sola Scriptura*, "Scripture alone." When the Reformers said "Scripture alone" they meant that the Bible is the only foundation for faith and practice. No person, no institution stands in judgment over God's Word. Our only ultimate authority is the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture.

Once you accept the Bible's authority, and start to study it, one of the first things you notice is that it is all about Jesus Christ,



that is true not only of the Gospels, which give biographical information about Jesus; and of the epistles, which provide theological interpretation of Jesus; but also of the entire Old Testament, which holds the messianic expectation of Jesus. After His resurrection Jesus, walked to Emmaus with two of His disciples. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted [explained] to them what was said in all the Scriptures [the things] concerning himself" (Luke 24:27 NIV). Salvation in Jesus Christ is the message of the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. When we accept Scripture alone, the Scripture itself points us to Christ alone.

What about *sola gratia*, "grace alone?" Grace is unmerited favor, undeserved blessing. When the Reformers said "by grace alone," they meant that salvation was God's free gift for undeserving sinners. God does not owe us anything except wrath. Nevertheless, He has saved us by his grace. If we ask, *How has God shown us this grace?*-the answer is that He has given us His grace in Jesus Christ, especially in His death on the cross for sinners. Jesus Christ is God's gracious gift to sinners. The reason that salvation is by grace alone is because it is offered in Christ alone.

This brings us to *sola fide*, "faith alone." If there were a way for us to contribute to our own salvation; if it depended on our own merits; if there were something we could do to earn it or deserve it—then we would not be justified by faith alone; we would be justified by faith plus works. But salvation is God's free gift. It is all by grace! There is nothing we can possibly add to what God has already done to save us in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the only thing we need to do or even can do is to hold on to Jesus and His cross, which is what the Reformers meant when they said "faith alone." It is because salvation was accomplished by Christ alone that it is accepted by faith alone, without the addition of any works of our own. Martin Luther said that the cross of Christ is nothing else than "forsaking everything and clinging with the heart's faith to Christ alone."

Christ alone—that is another great Reformation doctrine that finds its meaning in the cross. James Boice explained it like this: "The Reformers taught that salvation is by and through the work of Jesus Christ only, which is what the slogan *solus Christus* refers to. It means that [through the cross and the empty tomb] Jesus has done it all so that now no merit on the part of man, no merit of the saints, no works of ours performed either here or in purgatory can add to his completed saving work."

All of this is for the glory of God alone: *solus Deo gloria*. When we give praise to Christ for his work on the cross, we are giving glory to God, for Jesus Christ is God incarnate. Since we are saved by Christ alone, and not by ourselves, all the honor and glory of our salvation returns to God, and to him alone.

The reason that we are taking the time to talk about these great Reformation doctrines—and also to sing about them—is not because we want to live in the past. We are not holding this hymn festival because we have an antiquarian interest in church history. No, we are celebrating these doctrines because they are biblical truths of eternal significance and perpetual importance. Indeed, these doctrines, which find their meaning in the cross of Christ, are a matter of spiritual life and death. What we need to know is exactly the same thing that Paul resolved to know, and what the Reformers wanted to know, and that is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

We need to know the crucified Christ for two reasons: First, because this knowledge is essential for our own salvation. An example of what it means to trust in Christ alone for your salvation comes from the life of Donald Smarto, a national leader in prison ministry. Before he came to Christ, Smarto was in seminary, preparing to enter the Roman Catholic priesthood. He had developed a fascination with all the trappings of Catholic religion—the sacred rituals and the ornate vestments. One night he went out to the movies, where he saw a scene that shocked him: A bishop dressed in sacred robes was caught by a gust of wind that parted his garments to reveal what was underneath: a rotted skeleton. At that instant, Smarto's conscience cried out, "That's me!" But as he soon as he said it, he tried to deny it. He drove back to the seminary, and the whole way back he was muttering, "That's not me. It can't be me. I'm a good person!"

Frantically Smarto rehearsed his many pious deeds—his fasting, his penance, his prayers—searching for some assurance of his salvation, finding none, he went out into the corn fields, where he wandered for hours. Eventually the moon clouded over and the night became so black that he could not even see his hand in front of his face. He began to panic, and in his fear he cried out for a sign from God. As he waited, panting in the black darkness, he heard a faint humming sound. Slowly he walked toward it, until he bumped into a hard, rough, wooden post. He put his hands out to feel it. "Of course!" he said to himself. "It's a telephone pole!" As he stood there, the clouds parted, and he was able to see again. He looked up, and there, silhouetted against the moon, was the wooden crossbar that supported the phone lines. He was standing at the foot of a giant cross.

In that moment, everything Don Smarto had ever learned from the Bible came into focus, and he realized that all he needed to do to be saved was to hold on to Christ and His cross. He described his experience like this:

a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). This command is moot if the Lordship camp is right and this has already been done as a criteria for salvation. Paul also tells Christians "not to not carry out the deeds of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16) and to "set aside worldly desires" (Titus 2:12). If the Lordship camp is correct then I don't know how to understand the admonishment here. Either I say that these people were not *really* Christians in the mind of the Paul or that unbelievers at the point of their salvation are the most sanctified that they will ever be.

As well, it is hard to see the Lordship position in light of the Apostle Peter's own life and failures. Among the many examples I find his visitation to Cornelius' house in Acts 10 compelling. We all know that prejudice is a sin in the Bible. Yet we find the Apostle Peter living for ten years with this unrepented sin in his heart. From the time of Pentecost to the time of the events in Acts 10 there transpired about ten years. If you remember, Peter was called by God to go to the Gentile Cornelius' house to proclaim the Gospel. Peter, reminiscent of Jonah, admits his reluctance to go do to his own sin of pride and prejudice against Gentiles:

"You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean" (Act 10:28).

It is amazing that the Lord took so long to deal with this sin of Peter. It was not "unlawful" for a Jew to associate with a Gentile. In fact, the law said just the opposite. They were to be a "kingdom of priests" to the other nations! (Ex. 19:6). This is a fact that Peter most assuredly dwelt on after this event (1 Pet. 2:9). However, this was one of those terrible sins that took Peter ten years *after being indwelt* by the Holy Spirit to change. This hardly fits into a Lordship view of salvation.

Time would fail if I were to turn to other Petrine examples, Romans 7, or the curious case of the Corinthian carnality.

### Practical

Finally, I turn to the practical. First, without getting into too much detail (which I do in other posts), there are many sins in my life that I have yet to surrender over to the Lord. Most of these come in the form of attitudes and dispositions, but some are more tangible and habitual. Some are sins of "commission" some are sins of "omission." In short, I don't feel as if I have completed my journey of making Christ the Lord of my life *by any means*. The desire is present, but the will is so often lacking. When I came to Christ, I did not come with any guarantees of giving up this or giving up that, I came to him with all I had to offer: nothing. I simply said with a great deal of sincerity, "Have mercy on me the sinner." I made not promises, deals, and offered no guarantees. Today, I still have no offers or guarantees, only the hope of mercy.

Second, I have never met anyone who is completely surrendered to Christ as Lord in the sense that they have given up all known sin. I have met a lot of beggars for mercy, but none who have made it. Again, this brings up the curious situation that if we require an unbeliever to give up all known sin before they are Christian, then we are setting the bar higher than that of life-long Christians.

I have gone on long enough. I know that there are different nuances that people bring to this issue. I know that there are extremes and strawmen. But this fact does not change what I am ultimately getting at: The Gospel is free. We don't require people to give up all known sin, we require them to call on God for mercy. We are saved by the grace (unmerited favor) of God and the imputed righteousness of Christ. As frustrated as I may become by nominal Christianity, I dare not taint the Gospel do to these frustrations. I will leave the work of sanctification to the Holy Spirit and realize that this is a *life long* process.

**Free Grace:** The belief that salvation involves a complete trust in Christ for salvation. Repentance is the *changing of one's mind* about who Christ is and their *attitude* toward sin (i.e. that I am a sinner and sin is bad). This change of the mind will necessarily bring forth the fruit of a changed life, *but one cannot determine what aspects must change or when the Holy Spirit will bring certain changes about*. Christ is ultimately our "Lord" in the sense that he is our God, not in the sense that we have abandoned all known sins. The abandoning of all sins requires a life long process called sanctification.

**Cheap Grace:** The belief that salvation involves a complete trust in Christ for salvation. Repentance is the changing of one's mind about who Christ is. This change *may or may not* bring change in the life of the believer. Christ is "Lord" in the sense that he is their God, not in the sense that they have abandoned all known sins. The abandoning of all sins requires a life long process called sanctification.

Back to the prayer . . .

Bullet point one: "If you have truly repented (turned away; forsaken) from your sin [you are a child of God]"

### Biblical Rejection of Lordship Salvation

This is where I part ways with the Lordship salvation camp. I do this both practically and biblically. Biblically I depart because I cannot square it with the realization that there are so many of God's people who don't live godly and have not forsaken all sin. One important passage comes from 1 Peter 3:15 where Christians are admonished to make Christ the Lord of the hearts.

"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy" (ESV).

Here are some other translations:

"But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts" (NAB).

"But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts" (NET).

"Simply proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts" (NJB).

The word being used here for "set apart" is *hagiazo*, which means to "make holy, set apart, or sanctify." It is used in the aorist imperative which may imply a decisive action, but could just as well be gnomic (timeless). Either way, this imperative is for *Christians*. The result of this "setting apart" is that we will be ready to tell people why we still have hope in suffering. The command comes to more light when we see that in the Greek syntax *kurion* ("Lord") and *christon* (Christ) is in the emphatic position. An acceptable rendering of this verse might be: "Set apart *Christ as Lord* of your hearts" or, a more stilted version, "Christ as Lord set apart in your hearts." The point is that it is Christ, not anything else, that we are to make Lord. The implication is that it is possible for us, as Christians, to have other things as Lord of our hearts.

There is also one more interesting point to be made about this verse before we move on. There is a textual variant which replaces *christon* (Christ) with *theon* (God). The King James (wrongly in my opinion) follows the Byzantine text here: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." However, the earliest and best manuscripts have *christon* which is why all modern translations have it as such. The reason why the variant was introduced is speculative, but may have to do with the seriousness of what is being commanded here. To set apart Christ as Lord is to set him apart *as master, sovereign, and God*. It could be that one of these scribes had issues with such a lofty designation for Christ. As well, Peter is alluding to Isaiah 8:13, where in the LXX Yahweh is Lord. The point is that this command is serious. We are to set Christ apart as Lord, master, and God. There is to be no other gods in our life. I believe that this is a theological reflection on the first commandment (Ex. 20:2). Christ/God *alone* is to be set apart. We are to put nothing *before* him. And this is a command for Christians who, according to the Lordship camp, have already done this or they are not truly Christian.

Not only do we find these type of assumptions from Peter, but from Paul as well. Paul calls on *Christians* to offer our bodies as

*Now I knew, I really knew, that Christ had died for me. It was coupled with the more important revelation that I was a sinner, that I was not the good person I had thought I was a moment before. All at once I embraced the telephone pole and began to cry. I must have hugged that piece of wood for nearly an hour. I could imagine Jesus nailed to this pole, blood dripping from his wounds. I felt as if the blood were dripping over me, cleansing me of my sin and unworthiness. 2*

If you are not yet a Christian, that is what God is inviting you to do tonight: to know Christ and Him crucified, to trust in Him alone for your salvation. He is calling you to admit that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness, and that if you are to be saved, there is nothing else you can do except hold on to the cross of the crucified Christ.

If you have already come to the cross, do not let go! The crucified Christ is the only hope for this fallen world. As a Christian, your purpose is not to get people to conform to your lifestyle or to convince them to adopt your point of view. Your purpose is to point people to Jesus Christ, and to His cross, which alone has the power to save.

It was this great truth of salvation in Christ alone that led Billy Graham to become an evangelist. In December of 1951, Graham was wrestling with God's call on his life: Should he continue doing student work, or should he become a full-time evangelist? As he hiked the trails near his home in North Carolina, Graham searched the Scriptures, reading and rereading every Bible passage on the call to evangelism. In the end, what persuaded him to preach the gospel was "Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Graham thought about Christ's death on the cross. He later understood that the cross of Christ and its irrepressible compassion was the chief motive as a spur to service and as an incentive to evangelism. His decision made, he walked back down the mountain-side, singing the old mission hymn:

*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,  
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;  
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,  
Tell them of Jesus, the Mighty to save. 3*

From that point forward, Billy Graham had "no other desire, no other goal, no other ambition." Like Paul, and like everyone who holds on to the cross, he "resolved to know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).



### What does the Christian fish symbolize?

ΙΧΘΥΕ is a Greek acronym standing for "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior." The letters also make up the word for "fish," the symbol for which has been used throughout the ages, up until today, to represent Christians.

It is said that early Christians, subject to the persecution of the Romans, used this and other code words and symbols to identify themselves to each other and to arrange meetings undetected. The use of the Ichthys symbol by early Christians appears to [date](#) from towards the end of the 1st century AD. Ichthys (ΙΧΘΥΣ, Greek for fish) is an [acronym](#), which is a word formed from the initial letters of the several words in the name. It compiles to "Jesus Christ God's Son is Saviour" or "Jesus Christ God's Son Saviour", in [ancient Greek](#) "Ιησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ"

- [Iota](#) is the first letter of *Iesous* (Ιησοῦς), Greek for *Jesus*.
- [Chi](#) is the first letter of *Christos* (Χριστός), Greek for "[anointed](#)".
- [Theta](#) is the first letter of *Theou* (Θεοῦ), genitive case of Θεός "God".
- [Upsilon](#) is the first letter of *Huios* (Υἱός), Greek for Son.
- [Sigma](#) is the first letter of *Soter* (Σωτήρ), Greek for Savior.

Ιησοῦς  
Χριστός  
Θεοῦ  
Υἱός  
Σωτήρ

# myths & misconceptions

## about *Christmas*

Compiled and Edited articles by:

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[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/493323/three\\_common\\_misconceptions\\_about\\_christmas.html?cat=37](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/493323/three_common_misconceptions_about_christmas.html?cat=37)

and Paul Copan

<http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2010/12/the-first-christmas-myths-and-reality-2/#more-6615>



### Three Common Misconceptions about Christmas

by Sean Rooney

Christmas has become such an important holiday for so many people around the world that it has developed its own traditions far beyond its original scope. Unfortunately, this means that many people have several misconceptions about Christmas and the events of Christ's birth. Here are three of the most common...

#### 1. Christ Was Born in the Stable of an Inn

The only evidence that Christ was born in a stable is in Luke 2:7 where the Bible says that Mary laid Jesus in a manger. Since a manger is a feeding trough for animals, many over the years have assumed that Jesus was born in a type of barn. That is not necessarily the case, however. That misconception has been aided by the end of that same verse where it says that there was no room for them in the inn. Many have inferred from this verse that while some kindly innkeeper had to turn them away, he offered them the use of his barn. The translation is a bit deceiving, however. The only other time that the Greek word used for in Luke 2:7 is used in the New Testament, it refers to a furnished guest room. Therefore, Mary and Joseph may have tried staying with relatives, and ended up sleeping outside their house. If they really had tried to stay at an inn, the manger may have been in a cave, rather than a stable.

#### 2. Three Wise Men Came to See Christ at His Birth

Although most nativity scenes show the wise men present at the birth of Christ, this is inaccurate. Matthew 2:11 says that the Magi saw Jesus as a child in a house. He was not a baby in a manger when they finally found him. He may have been as much as two years old. Further, there were not necessarily three Wise Men. Many have assumed that there were three because they came bearing three gifts. That does not mean that there were only three! We can assume that there were at least two because the Bible uses the plural, but there could just have easily been 30 as there could have been 3.

#### 3. Christ Was Born on December 25th

There is no evidence that Christ was born on December 25th or in December at all. In fact, the evidence would seem to indicate that this was not the case. The scriptures say that the shepherds were in their fields, so that would restrict the time of Christ's birth to the Spring, Summer, or Fall. Shepherds generally did not have their sheep in the fields during the winter. Many have suggested that Jesus was born during September during the Feast of Tabernacles. That would mean that, instead of celebrating Christ's birth in December, we should celebrate the miraculous conception.

Why do we celebrate Christmas on December 25th? Because no one can say for sure on what day Christ was born. It could have been December 25th or it may have been April 28th. We cannot know for sure, so it seems reasonable to celebrate it on

An  
Apology



## Lordship Salvation?

### Question 1: Does One Have to Forsake all Known Sins Before they Are Saved?

By Michael C Patton

<http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2011/01/does-one-have-to-forsake-all-known-sins-before-they-are-saved/>

I was watching a Gospel presentation on the web the other day. You know, one of those dynamic slide presentations that have a nice piano playing in the background, warm colors, and leaves you wishy-washy at the end. Well, this site walked people through the Gospel telling what Christ did and how it is we can have eternal life. At the end of the presentation people were called upon to say this prayer:

“Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner and don’t deserve eternal life. But I believe you died and rose from the grave to purchase a place for me in heaven. Lord Jesus, come into my life; take control; forgive my sins and save me. I repent of my sins and now trust in you to save me. I accept the free gift of eternal life.”

So far so good, right? Well, yes . . . but . . . I am not going to pick the prayer apart with a theological fine tooth comb, but I do want to show you what the next slide in the presentation said.

Here it is:

- If you have truly repented (turned away; forsaken) from your sins
- Placed your trust in Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death
- And received the gift of eternal life
- You are now a child of God forever

I don’t know about you, but that first bullet point has me concerned. Now I am not sure *I* am a child of God. Has *anyone* forsaken their sins? I have and continue to try, but no luck yet.

Yes, this is the infamous (and often nauseating) Lordship salvation debate. How much does one have to do, believe, and change to be saved? No, I am not a proponent of Lordship salvation. Neither am I a proponent of its opposite extreme labeled “easy-believism” or “cheap grace.” I hold to a more mediating position called “Free Grace.”

Let me give you some brief definitions:

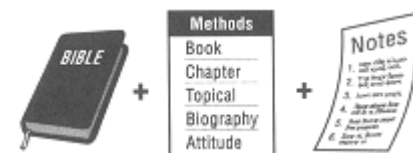
**Lordship Salvation:** The belief that salvation involves both a belief and repentance of one’s sins. Repentance is the “turning away” from all known sin, giving complete (not partial) “Lordship” of our lives to Christ. Without this full commitment, one is only a nominal Christian and has yet to experience *true* conversion.



# Living by the Book

By Howard Hendricks and William Hendricks

- Why People don't study the Bible:
  - Truths in the Bible are de-emphasized or ignored.
  - "Folk religion"- popular belief based on misperceptions, misinterpretations, stereotypes, sentimentality, and wishful thinking. None of these are Christianity.
  - The only way to experience authentic Christianity is through 1<sup>st</sup> hand acquaintance with the Word.
  - We can't just be taught; we need to dive in ourselves.
  - Reason we don't study the Bible:
    - Relevance: Bible is archaic (out of date)
    - Technique: confused by inability to understand
    - "I'm just a layperson": the "I can't study the Bible without training" type of mentality/belief
    - Priorities: lower on the list or time is short
    - Reliability/Authority: hard to believe
    - Boring: isn't important/applicable to life
- Why Study the Bible:
  - 3 Essentials to reading the Bible:
    - Essential to growth. 1 Peter 2:2
      - Attitude to grab bottle of milk to sustain life.
      - Appetite to crave (what we get out of it). There are 3 types:
        - Nasty medicine (scripture is yuck!) but good for what ails you.
        - Shredded wheat (scripture is nourishing, but dry).
        - Strawberries and cream (can't get enough of it!)
      - Grow to Christ's image.
    - Essential to spiritual maturity. Hebrews 5:11-14
      - Maturity comes through constant use of scripture over time.
      - Not measured by how much that's understood, but used
    - Bible Study is essential to spiritual effectiveness. 2 Timothy 3:16-17
      - Jesus was effective against temptation (Matt 4:1-11) by using scripture
      - Scripture is useful for 4 things:
        - Doctrine (teaching): structures your thinking for structuring behavior.
        - Rebuke (our wrongs): tells us what God wants for us.
        - Correction (purifier): helps clean out sin and conform to God.
        - Training in righteous living: gives positive guidelines.
  - The Bible is a Unit that's bound together with mankind.
  - Revelation means "reveal" or "unveil." Whatever is behind it is truth that cannot be speculated, conjectured, or hypothesized.
  - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that the Word of God is "inspired" which means "God-breathed." The word "breath" also means "Spirit" (links Holy Spirit into revealing truth to Authors).
  - The Bible must either be 100% true or 100% false — no middle ground.



some arbitrary day. The Roman Catholic church chose December 25th soon after the Empire converted to Christianity as a way of replacing the festivals for the Winter Solstice.

## The First Christmas: Myths and Reality

by Paul Copan

Here's a true-false quiz:

1. Mary and Joseph had to travel as quickly as possible to Bethlehem because Mary could have given birth at any moment.
2. The Bethlehem innkeeper was fully booked, and so Mary had to give birth to Jesus in the barn/stall nearby/behind the inn.
3. Initially, this experience must have been frightening and lonely for Mary and Joseph.
4. "The little Lord Jesus no crying he makes."
5. The angels who appeared to the shepherds had wings.

How'd you do on the quiz? Check your answers below. (Some of these thoughts are taken from a talk I gave on what really happened that first Christmas.)

Marcus Borg, a member of the liberal Jesus Seminar, claims that the Gospels are in serious conflict: Jesus was born "in a stable" in Luke but in a home in Matthew (Marcus Borg [and N.T. Wright], *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* [San Francisco: HarperSF, 1999], 180). As it turns out, this isn't really a conflict at all. Contrary to the traditional Christmas story, *Jesus was indeed born in a home!* Borg's claim is based on the notable King James Version's mistranslation of Luke 2:7: "there was no room for them in the inn." But the KJV rendering goes against Luke's in(n)tention.

Over the centuries, the Christmas story has been re-cast and romanticized into a kind of Christian "mythology." But what do the Scriptures really tell us about Jesus' birth?

1. There would have been no inns in a backwater town like Bethlehem. They would be found along main roads or in cities.
2. The word for inn (katalyma) is the same one as the "guest room (of a private home)" mentioned in Mk. 14:14 and Luke 22:11—the room where the last supper was eaten.

Mark 14:13-15: "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My \*guest room\* [katalyma] in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there."

Also, this word in Lk. 2:7 ("guest room") is different from Lk. 10:34 (pandocheion = inn), where the beaten man was taken by the compassionate Samaritan. This inn had an innkeeper (pandocheus), and such inns would unquestionably located on a main thoroughfare between Jerusalem and Jericho. One commentary puts it this way, "The traditional picture of a surly innkeeper refusing admission to the needy couple is somewhat dubious." (I. Howard Marshall, "Luke," in *The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition\**, eds. R.T. France, D.A. Carson, et al. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 984).

3. Joseph, no doubt being a considerate husband (cp. Mt. 1:19), would have taken ample time to find Mary a place to give birth, which is what Luke 2:6 indicates: While they were there [in Bethlehem], the days were completed for her to give birth. Mary gave birth after she had "fulfilled her days"—a duration of time. Although people seem to miss this, the passage clearly indicates ample passage of time in Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus.
4. In a culture that so valued hospitality, Joseph would have insulted his relatives by going to an inn. Rather, he would stay with his relations, who would readily have made room for his expectant wife—even if the guest room was crowded and the birth had to take place in the main living area. It would seem ludicrous, given the importance of hospitality in the Middle East, that Joseph would have no place to stay among his relatives—especially if he was "of the house and line of David" and if his wife was expecting. And if Joseph could not find a place for Mary after a few weeks or so, they could have gone back to Mary's relative Elizabeth, who lived in the same region.
5. In Jesus' day, animal sheds were typically attached to houses. In Palestine a manger was not normally found in a separate stable; rather, it was "in the main living room of a peasant house, where animals are brought in at night" (R.T. France,

\*The Evidence for Jesus\* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986], 159). New Testament scholar Kenneth Bailey (from whom I borrow heavily in this blog) notes that the manger Christ was laid in was “built into the floor of the raised terrace of the peasant home” (Kenneth Bailey, “The Manger and the Inn: The Cultural Background of Luke 2:7,” \*Evangelical Review of Theology\* 4 [1980]: 201-17). This stall-next-to-the-house arrangement is what Luke 13:15 presupposes: “. . . does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him?”

6. When the wise men show up in Bethlehem, they come to a house. Matthew 2:11 states: “After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

These gifts are highlighted as indicating the fulfillment of what the Old Testament scriptures anticipated. A new covenant was in the making—one involving Gentiles (cp. Zech. 14:16: “all those who survive of the nations . . . shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts”). So when the Gentile wise men/magi come from afar to visit the newly born king Jesus, they bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Of course, there were probably other gifts, but these are highlighted because of certain Old Testament references anticipating the coming in of the Gentiles to worship the true God and to honor his Messiah/King. Isaiah 60:6 speaks of the dawning of the restoration (when the “glory of the Lord has risen upon you” [60:1]). It mentions exiled “sons” coming “from afar” (4) and “the wealth of the nations will come to you” (5). Camels from Midian, Ephah, and Sheba (the south) will come: “They will bring gold and frankincense” (6). In the kingship/messianic Psalm 45 (cited in Hebrews 1), the king’s garments are fragrant with “myrrh” (45:8). This psalm speaks of Israel’s king as being over the “princes in all the earth” and “all peoples [Gentiles] will give you thanks forever and ever” (15-16). The magi’s coming signals the coming in of the Gentiles because the day of the Messiah has dawned. The end times have arrived.

Furthermore, the magi saw Jesus’ star rising in the east (Mat. 2:2). We anticipate this from Balaam’s prophecy of “the days to come” (Num. 22:14)—that “a star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel” (Num. 24:17).

#### Lessons from the Christmas Story

Let me summarize some lessons from this retelling of the Christmas story. Keep on reading and examining the Scriptures (cp. the Bereans in Acts 17). Let us make sure that we don’t let tradition prevent us from gaining fresh insights from Scripture or from adjusting our theology when this is called for.

#### More articles on the Misconceptions about Christmas:

- What are some of the most common misconceptions about Jesus Christ’s birth? (<http://www.christiananswers.net/christmas/mythsaboutchristmas.html>)
- Misconceptions about Christmas (<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/12/28/miscellaneous-misconceptions-about-christmas>)
- Common Misconceptions about Christmas (<http://midwestapologetics.org/blog/?p=244>)
- More Christmas Misconceptions – Part 1 (<http://midwestapologetics.org/blog/?p=255>)
- More Christmas Misconceptions—Part 2 (<http://midwestapologetics.org/blog/?p=267>)

fore my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid. "Look, look, look," was his repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had -- a lesson whose influence was extended to the details of every subsequent study; a legacy the professor has left to me, as he left it to many others, of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we cannot part.

-- from *American Poems* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1879): pp. 450-54.

## What is Hermeneutics?

The etymology of hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word ἐρμηνεύω (*hermeneuō*, 'translate' or 'interpret'). Biblical hermeneutics is perhaps summarized best by 2 Timothy 2:15,

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**"

Biblical hermeneutics is the science of knowing how to properly interpret the various types of literature found in the Bible. For example, a psalm should often be interpreted differently than a prophecy. A proverb should be understood and applied differently from a law. This is the purpose of biblical hermeneutics - to help us to know how to interpret, understand, and apply the Bible.

The three steps to Biblical interpretation are:

- **Observation**
- **Interpretation**
- **Application**



Remember:

- There is only **ONE TRUE** interpretation of Scripture. (God’s Truth does not **change**. What was true **yesterday** will be true **tomorrow**.)
- Interpretation is not **subjective**. (“It means this **to me**.”)
- Interpretation is based on **Observation** and determines **Application** (What we **learn** influences how we **respond**. )
- The **best** tool for interpreting Scripture is **Scripture**. (We believe that Bible is **inerrant**. It will not **contradict** itself.)

"That is right," said he, "a pencil is one of the best eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked."

With these encouraging words he added -- "Well, what is it like?"

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknown to me; the fringed gill-arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshly lips, and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fin, and forked tail; the compressed and arched body. When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment:

"You have not looked very carefully; why," he continued, more earnestly, "you haven't seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself. Look again; look again!" And he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish? But now I set myself to the task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor's criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and when, towards its close, the professor inquired,

"Do you see it yet?"

"No," I replied. "I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before."

"That is next best," said he earnestly, "but I won't hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish."

This was disconcerting; not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be, but also, without reviewing my new discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.

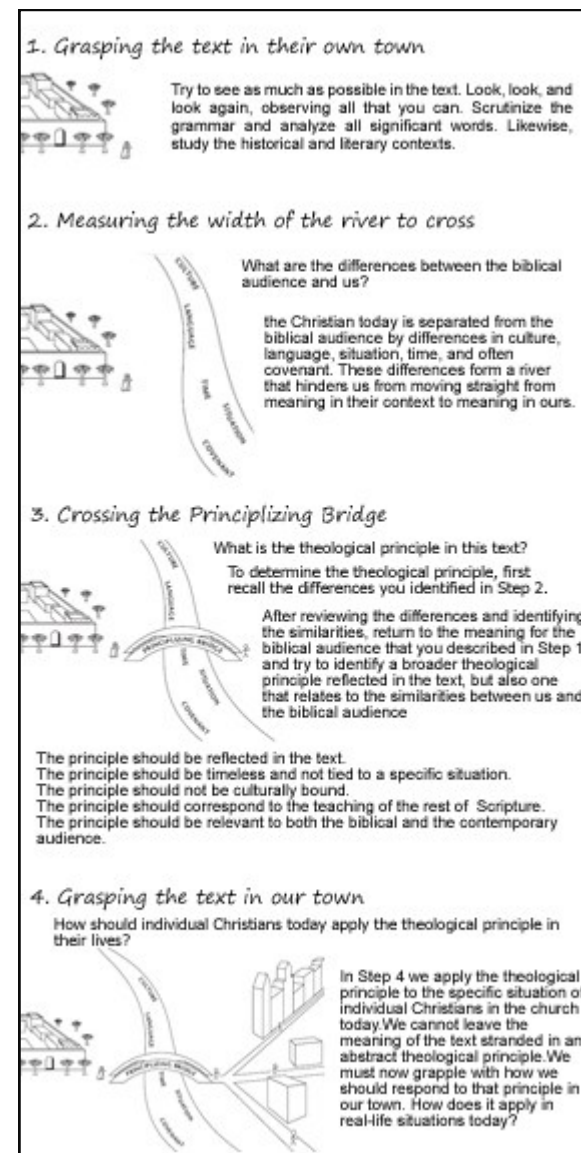
The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

"Do you perhaps mean," I asked, "that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?"

His thoroughly pleased, "Of course, of course!" repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically -- as he always did -- upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.

"Oh, look at your fish!" he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned and heard my new catalogue.

"That is good, that is good!" he repeated, "but that is not all; go on." And so for three long days, he placed that fish be-



# An Apology



## What exactly IS the Gospel?

### What is the Gospel?

Study By: J. Hampton Keathley, III

#### Introduction

In a day of depressing headlines and uncertainty all around us, good news is very welcome. What better news could there be than as the old hymn says: "The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives?" When Christians refer to the "Gospel" they are referring to the "good news" that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sin so that we might become the children of God through faith alone in Christ alone. In short, "the Gospel" is the sum total of the saving truth as God has communicated it to lost humanity as it is revealed in the person of His Son and in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. If you aren't sure whether or not you are God's child, you might want to read *God's Plan of Salvation* before you read on in this lesson.

#### The Basic Meaning of the Term

The term *gospel* is found ninety-nine times in the NASB and ninety-two times in the NET Bible. In the Greek New Testament, *gospel* is the translation of the Greek noun *euangelion* (occurring 76 times) "good news," and the verb *euangelizo* (occurring 54 times), meaning "to bring or announce good news." Both words are derived from the noun *angelos*, "messenger." In classical Greek, an *euangelos* was one who brought a message of victory or other political or personal news that caused joy. In addition, *euangelizomai* (the middle voice form of the verb) meant "to speak as a messenger of gladness, to proclaim good news."<sup>1</sup> Further, the noun *euangelion* became a technical term for the message of victory, though it was also used for a political or private message that brought joy.<sup>2</sup>

That both the noun and the verb are used so extensively in the New Testament demonstrate how it developed a distinctly Christian use and emphasis because of the glorious news announced to mankind of salvation and victory over sin and death that God offers to all people through the person and accomplished work of Jesus Christ on the cross as proven by His resurrection, ascension, and session at God's right hand. In the New Testament these two words, *euangelion* and *euangelizo*, became technical terms for this message of good news offered to all men through faith in Christ.

*The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* summarizes the gospel message this way:

The central truth of the gospel is that God has provided a way of salvation for men through the gift of His son to the world. He suffered as a sacrifice for sin, overcame death, and now offers a share in His triumph to all who will accept it. The gospel is good news because it is a gift of God, not something that must be earned by penance or by self-improvement (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8-11; II Cor 5:14-19; Tit 2:11-14).<sup>3</sup>



#### The Gospel in a Nutshell

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, the apostle Paul summarizes the most basic ingredients of the gospel message, namely, the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of the resurrected Christ. Note the four clauses introduced by **that** in bold type in verses 3-5 below:

**15:1** Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel that I preached to you, that you received and on which you stand, **15:2** and by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. **15:3** For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received—**that** Christ died for our sins



according to the scriptures, **15:4** and **that** he was buried, and **that** he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, **15:5** and **that** he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...<sup>4</sup>

These verses, which were an early Christian confession, give us the heart of the gospel and show that the resurrection is an integral part of the gospel. Note that Paul described this as “of first importance”—a phrase that stresses priority, not time. The stress is on the centrality of these truths to the gospel message.

Actually, the central ingredient of the gospel message is a two-fold confession: (1) Christ died for our sins and (2) He was raised on the third day. The reality of these two elements can be verified by the Scriptures (cf. [Ps. 16:10](#); [Isa. 53:8-10](#)) and by such awesome historical evidence as the empty tomb and the eye witnesses. Thus, the other two elements mentioned here accomplish two important facts regarding the gospel. The fact that He was buried **verified His death**, and the fact that He appeared to others **verified His resurrection**.

### Modifying Terms

While *gospel* is often found alone, it is very often modified by various terms that focus on a particular aspect of the gospel.

It is modified by various descriptive phrases, such as, “the gospel of God” (Mk 1:14, ASV; [Rom 15:16](#)), “the gospel of Jesus Christ,” (Mk 1:1; [1 Cor 9:12](#)), “the gospel of his Son” ([Rom 1:9](#)), “the gospel of the kingdom” (Mt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14), “the gospel of the grace of God” ([Acts 20:24](#)), “the gospel of the glory of Christ” ([11 Cor 4:4](#), ASV), “the gospel of peace” ([Eph 6:15](#)), “an eternal gospel” ([Rev 14:6](#), RSV). Although distinctive aspects of the message are indicated by the various modifiers, the gospel is essentially one. Paul speaks of “another gospel” which is not an equivalent, for the gospel of God is His revelation, not the result of discovery ([Gal 1:6-11](#)).<sup>5</sup>

In the New Testament, the various modifiers bring out some aspect of the gospel that is being stressed in the context and is a part of the good news of what God offers us in Christ.

1. **The gospel of Jesus Christ** ([Mark 1:1](#); [1 Cor. 9:12](#)) and **the gospel of His Son** ([Rom. 1:9](#)). These two descriptions speak of the good news of salvation that comes through the person and work of Jesus Christ who is the very Son of God in human flesh. Again, this is a good news of deliverance from sin’s penalty, power and presence through the two advents of Christ.
2. **The gospel of the grace of God** ([Acts 20:24](#)) emphasizes that salvation in all of its aspects is on the basis of grace rather than on some meritorious system of works.
3. **The gospel of the kingdom** ([Matt. 4:23](#); [9:35](#); [24:14](#)) is the good news that God will establish His kingdom on earth through the two advents of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. **The gospel of peace** ([Eph. 6:15](#)) describes how this good news of salvation in Christ brings peace in all its many aspects (peace with God, the peace of God, peace with others, and world peace) through the victory accomplished by the Savior.
5. **The eternal or everlasting gospel** ([Rev. 14:6](#)) expands our perspective of gospel as we normally think of it. This gospel as proclaimed by the angel has several key elements of gloriously good news that are developed in three commands and two reasons:
  - **Command #1: “Fear God.”** This refers to a holy reverence that recognizes the sovereign authority and power of God to deal with man in His holy wrath and thus, to bring an end to the world of sin as we now know it. To fear God is to recognize Him as the true God who can destroy the soul and not just the body as God will do with the beast of Revelation and His anti-God system.
  - **Command #2: “Give Him glory.”** This refers to the praise and honor that should accrue to God from mankind due to our recognition and high estimation of God as the sovereign Creator of the universe.
  - **Command #3: “And worship Him who made ...”** The word “worship” means to show reverence or respect. This word emphasizes the external display as seen in our obedience, prayer, singing, and formal worship. The word “fear” emphasizes the reverential mental attitude behind the worship. In the Tribulation people will be forced to fear and formally acknowledge the beast and his image. In this message the angel is demanding that mankind reject the beast and formally turn to God to worship Him (cf. [Rev. 14:11](#)).

## The Art of Observation—Learning to see

Learning to see details is a skill that does not come naturally, but one developed through practice. The following story is a classic tale about one student’s education in the art of observation.

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

"When do you wish to begin?" he asked. "Now," I replied.

This seemed to please him, and with an energetic "Very well," he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.

"Take this fish," he said, "and look at it; we call it a *Haemulon*; by and by I will ask what you have seen."

With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me.

"No man is fit to be a naturalist," said he, "who does not know how to take care of specimens."

I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray, and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly. Those were not the days of ground glass stoppers, and elegantly shaped exhibition jars; all the old students will recall the huge, neckless glass bottles with their leaky, wax-besmeared corks, half-eaten by insects and begrimed with cellar dust. Entomology was a cleaner science than ichthyology, but the example of the professor who had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish was infectious; and though this alcohol had "a very ancient and fish-like smell," I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts, and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water. Still I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. My friends at home, too, were annoyed, when they discovered that no amount of *eau de cologne* would drown the perfume which haunted me like a shadow.

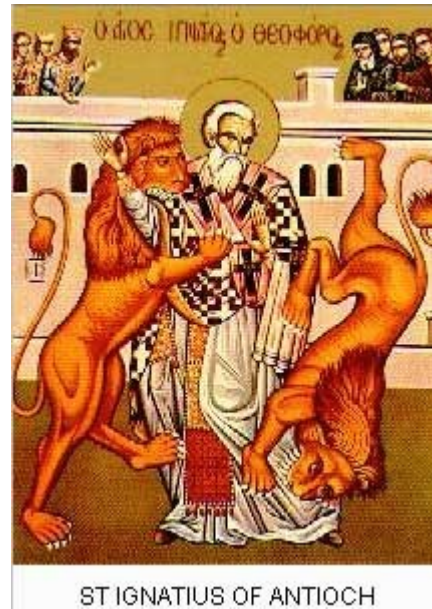
In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the professor, who had, however, left the museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting-fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of a normal, sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face -- ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters view -- just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour, I concluded that lunch was necessary; so with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the museum, but had gone and would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my fingers down its throat to see how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me -- I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.



His letter to the Romans is probably the best known, and in it, he exhorts the Roman congregation not to make any efforts to secure his release, to not deny him this act of dying for God. He wrote: "I am writing to all the churches to let it be known that I will gladly die for God if only you do not stand in my way. I plead with you: show me no untimely kindness. Let me be food for the wild beasts, for they are my way to God. I am God's wheat and bread. Pray to Christ for me that the animals will be the means of making me a sacrificial victim for God...The prince of this world is determined to lay hold of me and to undermine my will which is intent on God. Let none of you here help him; instead show yourselves on my side, which is also God's side...Rather within me is the living water which says deep inside me: "Come to the Father."

As stated earlier, Saint Ignatius was the first to use the word "catholic" in describing the Church. In his seven Epistles, he speaks of Church Doctrine and teachings. He was the first writer to emphasize the virgin birth, and viewed the mystery of the Trinity as a doctrine of faith, he said the only way to fight heresy, is the Church united under a bishop. All the core beliefs of Christ's Church, the Roman Catholic Church, can be found in Saint Ignatius' seven epistles.



<http://faithofthefathersearlychurchfathers.blogspot.com/2005/08/saint-ignatius-of-antioch.html>



## It's Γρεεκ to you

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be **pure** and blameless for the day of Christ, (Philippians 1:9-10)



Paul uses the Greek word "helikrineis" (εὐκρίνεις) which is a compound word meaning sun-judged. While the ESV translated this word as pure, it is also translated as "sincere". The image comes from a practice of holding pottery up to the light of the sun to check for impurities. The light would shine through imperfections such as small cracks in the pottery that the potter would cover up by applying wax. (The Latin word from which we get our English word sincere literally means "without wax")

Paul was telling his readers that when people hold us up to the light of "the Son" may they not find any impurities in us, but instead may we be found "pure" and "without wax"

### Reason #1:

"The hour of his judgment has come" is a reference to the final judgments of the Tribulation—the bowl judgments—which are about to occur that will put an end to the system of the beast and bring the rule the Lord Jesus, the King of kings. These will conclude with the return of Christ Himself ([Rev. 19](#)) and lead to the removal of all unbelievers from the earth. The emphasis is to not delay because the time is short.

### Reason #2:

This is seen in the reference to God as the Creator in verse 7b. Here we are called to pay attention to the ageless and universal message of the creation itself. Age after age creation has called mankind to recognize God's existence and to seek after Him (cf. [Acts 17:26-27](#) with [Psalm 19:1-6](#)). This means people are without excuse and that, when the angel proclaims this gospel, the hour of the Creator's judgment is about to fall (see [Rom. 1:18f](#)). Though this is the essential and primary element of the angel's everlasting gospel, perhaps he will say more than this for from age to age a person's capacity to reverence, glorify and worship God has come only through believing and knowing Christ (cf. [John 14:6](#) with [Acts 4:12](#); [John 4:23-24](#)).

### Popular Notions - Limit the Meaning of the Gospel

Popular notions about the term 'gospel' tend to limit it to the message of how one may receive eternal life through faith in Christ, but it is much broader than that. For instance, Paul says in [Romans 1:16-17](#),

"For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in the **gospel** from faith to faith, just as it is written, "**the righteous by faith will live.**" But by using the term "gospel" here, Paul is not

...limiting his thoughts to those central truths by which a person is given eternal life. For Paul, his gospel included such matters as justification by faith (3-5), sanctification through the Spirit (6-8), and God's future for Israel (9-11). In fact, the gospel gathers together all the truths that are found in Romans. Therefore, we can conclude that in [Rom 1:16](#), Paul is expressing his confidence that the truths of justification, sanctification, and even glorification provide God's power to deliver us from enslavement and bondage to sin.<sup>6</sup>

In a footnote to the above statement, Hart adds the following explanation.

[Romans 16:25](#) demonstrates that sanctification truth ([Romans 6-8](#)) was part of Paul's gospel"; "Now to Him who is able to *establish you according to my gospel...*" (italics added). In Romans, Paul is defending the gospel he preached. While the apostle preached "the gospel of His [God's] Son" (1:9), the "gospel of God" (1:1; 15:16), and the "gospel of Christ" (1:16, MajT; 15:19), Paul also found it necessary to use the phrase "my gospel" ([Rom 2:16](#); [16:25](#)). Paul's use of the term "gospel" is very broad, including all the truths about Christ in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The gospel (1:1) concerned Old Testament revelation about Christ (1:2), his Davidic lineage (1:3), the Holy Spirit's role in the resurrection (1:4), and Paul's apostleship to Gentiles (1:5).... It is more adequate to see Paul as using the term "gospel" in a wider scope than popular notions about the word.<sup>7</sup>

### Reception of the Gospel

One of the important issues about this gospel message has to do with how one receives the salvation offered in the gospel. The fact that God offers us salvation from sin's penalty and power with the glorious promise that this will one day result in the glorious reign of Christ on earth with sin, death, and Satan as vanquished foes is glorious news to be sure. However, the fact that God offers us salvation as a free gift through faith in Christ is good news beyond description. Paul clearly links the gospel with faith in [Galatians 3:6-9](#).

**3:6** Just as Abraham "**believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,**" **3:7** so then, understand that those who believe are the sons of Abraham. **3:8** And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel to Abraham ahead of time, saying, "**all the nations will be blessed in you.**" **3:9** So then those who believe are blessed along with Abraham the believer.

### ROMANS ROAD

Romans 3:23

Romans 6:23

Romans 5:8

Romans 10:9

Romans 5:1

(see page 28 for more on the Romans Road)



If the salvation offered to us were dependent on our merit or our ability to keep the law, it would not be good news because of our sinfulness and complete inability to keep the law or any kind of righteous principles as a means of our justification or right standing with God.

**19** Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; **20** because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin ([Rom. 3:19-20](#) NASB).

**16** yet we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified ([Gal. 2:16](#) NASB).

Why is this element of grace such wonderful news? Because it guarantees justification with God and the reason is that justification is based on the accomplished work and merit of Jesus Christ.

**4:13** For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. **4:14** For if they become heirs by the law, faith is empty and the promise is nullified. **4:15** For the law brings wrath, because where there is no law there is no transgression either. **4:16** For this reason it is by faith that it may be by grace, with the result that *the promise may be certain* to all the descendants—not only to those who are under the law, but also to those who have the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all ([Rom. 4:13-16](#), emphasis mine).

### Warnings About ‘Another Gospel’ Which is Not a Gospel

One of the beautiful and joyful aspects of the message of salvation in Christ that makes it such good news is the element of grace ([Acts 20:24](#)). Salvation is the free gift of God to be received by faith alone in Christ alone ([Rev. 21:6](#); [22:17](#); [Rom. 4:4-5](#); [Eph. 2:8-9](#); [Tit. 3:4-5](#)). But the message of grace goes contrary to the heart and thinking of man who intuitively thinks in terms of merit. After all, you can’t get something for nothing—at least not if its worth anything. Man has always had a problem with grace and this is easily seen in the book of Acts. From the very early days of the church, it has faced the problem of those who wanted to add some form of works to the message of grace.

In [Acts 15:1](#) we read these words: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Verse 5 tells us that these were men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed. From within its own ranks (they were members of the church) a controversy broke out concerning the exact nature and content of the gospel message. Later the apostle Paul had to deal with a similar controversy in the book of Galatians. Writing regarding those who wanted to deny the gospel of grace, Paul wrote, “Now this matter arose because of the false brothers with false pretenses who slipped in unnoticed to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves. But we did not surrender to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you” ([Gal. 2:4-5](#)).

So, the apostle warned of those who offer a gospel of works for salvation rather than grace. We should remember, as Paul teaches us in [Romans 4](#) and 11. If it is by grace, it is no longer by works and if by works, it is no longer by grace (see [Rom. 4:3-4](#); [11:6](#)). So in reality, any time someone offers a gospel of works, it is not the gospel—a message of good news. Instead it is bad news, it is false, and a terrible distortion.

**1:6** I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and following a different gospel— **1:7** not that there is another gospel; but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. **1:8** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell! **1:9** As we have said before, and now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell! **1:10** Am I now trying to gain the approval of people or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ ([Gal. 1:6-10](#)).

Therefore, if distorted by rejection of the truth that all God does for us in Christ is by grace alone through faith apart from works or by a denial of who Jesus is, then the “gospel” is a “different gospel, which is in fact, no gospel at all ([Gal. 1:7](#)).”



History tells the story of God’s plan.

History is all about HIS STORY

# Spotlight

# on Ignatius

Saint Ignatius of Antioch was born in Syria circa 35 AD and died circa 107 AD in Rome, martyred by being thrown to “the wild beasts” (lions). Saint Ignatius is probably best known by most Catholics for his being the first of the writings of the Early Church where the word Catholic is used in describing the Church.

Saint Ignatius, like Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, had been a disciple of Saint John the Apostle. Saint Ignatius was also known as Theophorous, meaning God-Bearer. One reason given for this name is that many of the early writers declared that Saint Ignatius was the infant that Jesus took in his arms and sat in the midst of His Disciples in Mark 9. With Saint Peter being the first Bishop of Antioch, Saint Ignatius was the third, having been appointed bishop by Saint Peter himself.

Saint Ignatius was a learned and courageous leader of his flock. During the persecutions under the emperor Domitian, Ignatius worked diligently to encourage the weaker members of his flock, and did all he could to protect and defend his flock of believers. With the death of Domitian, the persecutions ended for a brief while, and in truth, Saint Ignatius was disappointed that he had not been martyred for Christ. He did not have to wait long, as the persecutions soon began again under the emperor Trajan. According to “*The Martyrdom of Ignatius*”, Trajan “*being lifted up [with pride], after the victory he had gained over the Scythians and Dacians, and many other nations*”, saw the Christians as the only obstacle “*to complete the subjugation of all things to himself*”. He then threatened to renew the persecutions against the Christians unless they began to worship and offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome. Trajan made his way to Antioch, and Saint Ignatius once again worked tirelessly to protect his flock, and in so doing brought attention to himself and his successful efforts from the emperor Trajan.

He was taken before Trajan, who called him wicked for refusing to obey the commands of the emperor and for encouraging others to disobey. According to “*The Martyrdom of Ignatius*”, Ignatius replied “*No one ought to call Theophorus wicked; for all evil spirits have departed from the servants of God. But if, because I am an enemy to these [spirits], you call me wicked in respect to them, I quite agree with you; for inasmuch as I have Christ the King of heaven [within me], I destroy all the devices of these [evil spirits]*.” Trajan asked him many other things, and made other accusations against Saint Ignatius, and when Saint Ignatius proclaimed Christ in his heart, Trajan commanded that Ignatius be carried from Antioch to Rome to be fed to “*the beasts*” for the “*gratification of the people*”. The trip from Antioch in Syria to Rome, was a trip that would take months to complete.

How did Saint Ignatius react to this command from the emperor? Again, according to “*The Martyrdom of Ignatius*”, Ignatius cried out with much joy, “*I thank thee, O Lord, that Thou hast vouchsafed to honor me with a perfect love towards Thee, and hast made me to be bound with iron chains, like Thy Apostle Paul.*”

Soon, the other Church’s in Asia Minor heard of Ignatius, bound in chains being taken captive to Rome, and many of the Church’s either went out en masse, or sent representatives, to encourage and talk to Saint Ignatius as he passed. Among those who came to encourage and strengthen him, was Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna.

In response, Saint Ignatius wrote seven Epistles. To the Church’s that came or sent delegates, he wrote five: Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Philadelphians, and Smyrnaeans. He wrote one to Saint Polycarp, and one to the congregation that would meet him at the end of the journey, Romans. In his letter to the Romans he mentions the hardships of his journey and compares the ten soldiers accompanying him to leopards, “*From Syria even to Rome I fight with wild beasts, by land and sea, by night and by day, being bound amidst ten leopards, even a company of soldiers, who only grow worse when they are kindly treated.*”



# The Romans Road



The Romans Road to salvation is a way of explaining the good news of salvation using verses from the Book of Romans. It is a simple yet powerful method of explaining why we need salvation, how God provided salvation, how we can receive salvation, and what are the results of salvation.

## Romans 3:23

The first verse on the Romans Road to salvation is Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." We have all sinned. We have all done things that are displeasing to God. There is no one who is innocent. Romans 3:10-18 gives a detailed picture of what sin looks like in our lives.

## Romans 6:23

The second Scripture on the Romans Road to salvation, Romans 6:23, teaches us about the consequences of sin - "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The punishment that we have earned for our sins is death. Not just physical death, but eternal death!

## Romans 5:8

The third verse on the Romans Road to salvation picks up where Romans 6:23 left off, "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 5:8 declares, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus Christ died for us! Jesus' death paid for the price of our sins. Jesus' resurrection proves that God accepted Jesus' death as the payment for our sins.

## Romans 10:9

The fourth stop on the Romans Road to salvation is Romans 10:9, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Because of Jesus' death on our behalf, all we have to do is believe in Him, trusting His death as the payment for our sins - and we will be saved! Romans 10:13 says it again, "for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins and rescue us from eternal death. Salvation, the forgiveness of sins, is available to anyone who will trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

## Romans 5:1

The final aspect of the Romans Road to salvation is the results of salvation. Romans 5:1 has this wonderful message, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Through Jesus Christ we can have a relationship of peace with God. Romans 8:1 teaches us, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Because of Jesus' death on our behalf, we will never be condemned for our sins. Finally, we have this precious promise of God from Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

<http://www.gotquestions.org/Romans-road-salvation.html>

## Conclusion

In summary, what is the gospel? It is the message of the good news of salvation, the word of truth offered to mankind by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. It is a message not only of eternal life, but one that encompasses the total plan of God to redeem people from the ravages of sin, death, Satan, and the curse that now covers the earth.

The world is blinded to the gospel by Satan who wants to keep people from seeing the glorious nature of the gospel of Christ ([2 Cor. 4:3-4](#)), but the Christian should never be ashamed of the gospel nor reticent to share it because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes for the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel ([Rom. 1:16-17](#)).

Furthermore, the gospel does not come simply in words. "For our gospel did not come to you merely in words, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (in much assurance) ([1 Thess. 1:5](#)).

Of course, the gospel is a message of words since words are basic to the intelligent communication of God's truth. As a message, the gospel is a witness to the historical work of God in the person and work of Christ for which the right words are crucial. However, this message is not merely a message of words. Words can be very eloquent, persuasive, and entertaining and they may move people emotionally and intellectually, but such can not save them and bring them into the family of God (see [1 Cor. 2:1ff](#)). Thus, the apostle added, the gospel came "also in power."

In contrast to mere words, the gospel came "with power." Some would like to relate this to miraculous works as authenticating signs, but normally, the plural, "powers," would be used if that were meant (see [Matt. 13:54; 14:2; 1 Cor. 12:10; Gal. 3:5; Heb. 2:4; 6:5](#)). Others would relate it to the inward power in the messengers as a result of the filling of the Spirit, but this important characteristic is brought out by the next prepositional phrase mentioned in [1 Thessalonians 1:5](#), "with" or "by the Spirit." Rather, could it not refer simply to the inherent power of the gospel as the "Word of God which is alive and powerful" ([Heb. 4:12](#))? It is not just a message of words, but a message which is living, active, powerful and able to bring people into a saving relationship with the living God for one simple reason: It is God's Word and it is truth. It is the true revelation of God's activity in Jesus Christ. See also the apostle's comment in [1 Thessalonians 2:13](#).

But Paul quickly adds, "and in the Holy Spirit." This takes us to the second of the positive elements that gave these missionaries their boldness in presenting the gospel. Paul and his associates knew they were indwelt by the Spirit as their helper or enabler for ministry ([John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7f; Acts 1:8](#)). The Spirit of God, as the third person of the Trinity, is called "the Spirit of Truth" because of His role in taking the truth of the Word and revealing it to men (see [John 14:17; 15:26; 16:8-13; 1 John 4:6; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:6-16](#)). Because of the blindness and hardness of men's heart, they are powerless to even desire, much less grasp the life-giving truth of the gospel (cf. [Rom. 3:11](#)), but by the powerful pre-salvation ministry of the Spirit who led the missionaries (see [Acts 16:6-10](#)), who prepares hearts ([Acts 16:14](#)), and who convicts and draws men to God ([Rom. 2:4; John 12:32; 16:8f](#)), some will listen, grasp, and believe the gospel and experience its saving power (see also [2 Thess. 2:13](#)).

Thus, the apostle added a third positive element concerning the gospel which they brought to the Thessalonians—"and with full conviction." This points us to the faith and confidence of the missionaries. It was not in their looks, in their beaming personalities, in their eloquence or oratorical skill, nor in their methodology that they trusted. They preached the gospel with conviction resting in the fact they were preaching the powerful, life-giving truth of God fortified by the powerful ministry of the Spirit of God who worked both in the missionaries and in their hearers.

May we realize with Paul that the gospel is a sacred trust ([1 Tim. 1:11](#)). Thus, may we with the apostle be under divine compulsion to proclaim it ([1 Cor. 9:16](#)), and seek the prayer of others that we may carry out the task of sharing the gospel with boldness ([Eph. 6:19](#)). This will often involve us in opposition ([1 Thess. 2:2](#)) and affliction ([2 Tim. 1:8](#)), but the gospel of salvation is "the word of truth" ([Eph. 1:13](#)).

## Footnotes

1. Colin Brown, general editor, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1976), Volume 2, 107.
2. Colin Brown, 107.
3. Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975), electronic media.
4. Unless otherwise note, all quotations are from the NET Bible [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).
5. Charles F. Pfeiffer, electronic media.
6. John Hart, "The Use and Abuse of [Romans 10:9-10](#)," *Journal of Grace Evangelical Society*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin, Vol. 12, no. 23, Autumn (1999) : 17.
7. Hart, 17.

Jesus was a perfect sacrifice, having never sinned. (but could he have?)

### Milk

When Jesus is called the Lamb of God in John 1:29 and John 1:36, it is referring to Him as the perfect and ultimate sacrifice for sin. In order to understand who Christ was and what He did, we must begin with the Old Testament, which contains prophecies concerning the coming of Christ as a “guilt offering” (Isaiah 53:10). In fact, the whole sacrificial system established by God in the Old Testament set the stage for the coming of Jesus Christ, who is the perfect sacrifice God would provide as atonement for the sins of His people (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 10).

One of the wonderful themes of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice for the sins of men. He lived as a man, suffering temptation as we do, and yet never forfeited His perfect life by sinning (Hebrews 4:15). In His death on the cross, He offered His life as an unblemished lamb (1 Peter 1:19) on our behalf, suffering the penalty which was due each sinner. With His own blood (representative of the life He gave) Jesus “obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:11-15, 24-28). No wonder Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he preached Christ crucified – that perfect sacrifice is at the core of the gospel!

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

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

### Meat

Orthodox theologians generally agree that Jesus Christ never committed any sin. This seems to be a natural corollary to His deity and an absolute prerequisite to His work of substitution on the cross. Any affirmation of moral failure on the part of Christ requires a doctrine of His person which would deny in some sense His absolute deity.

A question has been raised, however, by orthodox theologians whether the sinlessness of Christ was the same as that of Adam before the fall or whether it possessed a peculiar character because of the presence of the divine nature. In a word, could the Son of God be tempted as Adam was tempted and could He have sinned as Adam sinned? While most orthodox theologians agree that Christ could be tempted because of the presence of a human nature, a division occurs on the question as to whether being tempted He could sin.

#### Definition of Impeccability

The point of view that Christ could sin is designated by the term *peccability*, and the doctrine that Christ could not sin is referred to as the *impeccability* of Christ. Adherents of both views agree that Christ did not sin, but those who affirm peccability hold that He could have sinned, whereas those who declare the impeccability of Christ believe that He could not sin due to the presence of the divine nature.

The doctrine of impeccability has been questioned especially on the point of whether an impeccable person can be tempted in any proper sense. If Christ had a human nature which was subject to temptation, was this not in itself evidence that He could have sinned? The point of view of those who believe that Christ could have sinned is expressed by Charles Hodge who has summarized this teaching in these words: “This sinlessness of our Lord, however, does not amount to absolute impeccability. It



**Our sin separates us from God. We cannot get rid of our sin by our good works.**

“but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” (Isaiah 59:2 )

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)



**If we pay for our sin, we will have to pay for it by death and hell.**

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)



**Let this hand represent the Lord Jesus Christ. He had no sin. He was perfect.**

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



**Christ voluntarily took our sin upon Himself.**

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)



**He paid for our sin by dying in our place on the cross. Our sin is no longer on us, because He took it and paid for it. He gives us His righteousness**

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



**You can know you have eternal life when you by faith accept that payment Christ made for you.**

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)



# An Apology



## The Gospel Illustrated

There are many ways to illustrate the message of the gospel, but one very simple illustration that makes it very easy to understand is "The Hand Gesture". Developed by Dr. Ray Stanford and widely used in the ministries of Florida Bible College, the hand gesture makes it easy to share the gospel with anyone. The "visual aid" gesture, pictured step-by-step below, has been found EXTREMELY VALUABLE in making the plan of salvation clear and understandable to the lost - especially on the point that the Lord Jesus Christ has made a complete payment for sin.



**Let this hand represent you and me...**



**Let this represent sin. The Bible says we all have sinned**

"as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one;"  
(Romans 3:10)

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"  
(Romans 3:23)



**God Loves You**

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."  
(John 3:16)



**...But hates our sin**

was not a *non potest peccare*. If He was a true man, He must have been capable of sinning. That He did not sin under the greatest provocations; that when He was reviled He blessed; when He suffered He threatened not; that He was dumb as a sheep before its shearers, is held up to us as an example. Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect and He cannot sympathize with his people."

The problem that Hodge raises is very real, and, judging by our own experience, temptation is always associated with peccability. Hodge, however, assumes certain points in his argument which are subject to question. In order to solve the problem as to whether Christ is peccable, it is necessary, first of all, to examine the character of temptation itself to ascertain whether peccability is inevitably involved in any real temptation and, second, to determine the unique factor in Christ, i.e., that He had two natures, one a divine nature and the other a sinless human nature.

### Can an Impeccable Person Be Tempted?

It is generally agreed by those who hold that Christ did not commit sin that He had no sin nature. Whatever temptation could come to Him, then, would be from without and not from within. Whatever may have been the natural impulses of a sinless nature which might have led to sin if not held in control, there was no sin nature to suggest sin from within and form a favorable basis for temptation. It must be admitted by Hodge, who denies impeccability, that in any case the temptation of Christ is different than that of sinful men.

Not only is there agreement on the fact that Christ had no sin nature, but it is also agreed on the other hand, that as to His person He was tempted. This is plainly stated in Hebrews: "For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (4:15).

It is also clear that this temptation came to Christ in virtue of the fact that He possessed a human nature, as James states: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man" (1:13). On the one hand, Christ was tempted in all points except through that of a sin nature, and on the other hand His divine nature could not be tempted because God cannot be tempted. While His human nature is temptable, His divine nature is not temptable. On these points all can agree. The question is, then, can such a person as Christ is, possessing both human and divine natures, be tempted if He is impeccable?

The answer must be in the affirmative. The question is simply, is it possible to attempt the impossible? To this all would agree. It is possible for a rowboat to attack a battleship, even though it is conceivably impossible for the rowboat to conquer the battleship. The idea that temptability implies susceptibility is unsound. While the temptation may be real, there may be infinite power to resist that temptation and if this power is infinite, the person is impeccable. It will be observed that the same temptation which would be easily resisted by one of sound character may be embraced by one of weak character. The temptation of a drunken debauch would have little chance of causing one to fall who had developed an abhorrence of drink, while a habitual drunkard would be easily led astray. The temptation might be the same in both cases, but the ones tempted would have contrasting powers of resistance. It is thus demonstrated that there is no essential relation between temptability and peccability. Hodge's viewpoint that temptation must be unreal if the person tempted is impeccable is, therefore, not accurate.

As Shedd points out, temptability depends upon a constitutional susceptibility to sin, whereas impeccability depends upon omnipotent will not to sin. Shedd writes: "It is objected to the doctrine of Christ's impeccability that it is inconsistent with his temptability. A person who cannot sin, it is said, cannot be tempted to sin. This is not correct; any more than it would be correct to say that because an army cannot be conquered, it cannot be attacked. Temptability depends upon the constitutional *susceptibility*, while impeccability depends upon the *will*. So far as his natural susceptibility, both physical and mental, was concerned, Jesus Christ was open to all forms of human temptation excepting those that spring out of lust, or corruption of nature. But his peccability, or the possibility of being overcome by those temptations, would depend upon the amount of voluntary resistance which he was able to bring to bear against them. Those temptations were very strong, but if the self-determination of his holy will was stronger than they, then they could not induce him to sin, and he would be impeccable. And yet plainly he would be temptable."

The question of whether an impeccable person can be tempted is illustrated by the example of the elect angels. This is brought out by Shedd in his continued discussion on the matter of impeccability: "That an impeccable being can be tempted, is proved by the instance of the elect angels. Having 'kept their first estate,' they are now impeccable, not by their own inherent power, but by the power of God bestowed upon them. But they might be tempted still, though we have reason to believe



that they are not. Temptability is one of the necessary limitations of the finite spirit. No creature is beyond the possibility of temptation, though he may, by grace, be beyond the possibility of yielding to temptation. The only being who cannot be tempted is God: ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἀπείραστος, James 1:13. And this, from the nature of an Infinite Being. Ambition of some sort is the motive at the bottom of all temptation. When the creature is tempted, it is suggested to him to endeavor to 'be as gods.' He is incited to strive for a higher place in the grade of being than he now occupies. But this, of course, cannot apply to the Supreme Being. He is already God over all and blessed forever. He, therefore, is absolutely intemptable."3

#### Were the Temptations of Christ Real?

If the temptation of an impeccable person be considered possible, can it be said of Christ that His temptations were real? If there were no corresponding nature within to respond to sin, is it true that the temptation is real?

This question must also be answered in the affirmative. In the case of the human race, the reality of temptation can be easily proved by the frequency of sin. While this is not true in the case of Christ, it is nevertheless evident that Christ's temptations were real. While Christ never experienced the inner struggle of two natures deadlocked as in Paul's case in Romans 7, there is abundant evidence of the reality of temptation. The forty days in the wilderness at the close of which He was tempted marks a trial to which, no other human frame has ever been subjected. The temptation to turn stones into bread was all the more real because Christ had the power to do it. The temptation to make a public display of God's preservation of Christ by casting Himself from the temple was also most real. No other has ever been offered all the glory of the world by Satan, but Christ was so tempted, and did not sin. While, on the one hand, it is true that Christ did not experience the temptations arising in a sin nature, on the other hand, He was tried as no other was ever tried. Added to the nature of the temptation itself was the greater sensitivity of Christ. His body being without sin was far more sensitive to hunger and abuse than that of other men. Yet, in full experience of these longings, Christ was completely in control of Himself.

The final test of the reality of His temptations is found in the revelation of His struggle in Gethsemane and His death on the cross. No other could know the temptation of a holy person to avoid becoming the judgment for the sin of the world. This was Christ's greatest temptation, as evidenced in the character of His struggle and submission. On the cross the same temptation is evident in the taunt of His enemies to come down from the cross. Christ willingly continued in suffering and of His own will dismissed His spirit when the proper time came. No greater realm of temptation could be imagined. While Christ's temptations, therefore, are not always exactly parallel to our own, He was tried in every part of His being even as we are tried, and we can come to Him as our High Priest with the assurance that He fully understands the power of temptation and sin, having met it in His life and death (Heb 4:15). The temptations of Christ, therefore, possess a stark reality without for a moment detracting from His impeccability. A proper doctrine of the impeccability of Christ therefore affirms the reality of the temptations of Christ due to the fact that He had a human nature which was temptable. If the human nature had been unsustained as in the case of Adam by a divine nature, it is clear that the human nature of Christ might have sinned. This possibility, however, is completely removed by the presence of the divine nature.

#### The Proof of the Impeccability of Christ

The ultimate solution of the problem of the impeccability of Christ rests in the relationship of the divine and human natures. It is generally agreed that each of the natures, the divine and the human, had its own will in the sense of desire. The ultimate decision of the person, however, in the sense of sovereign will was always in harmony with the decision of the divine nature. The relation of this to the problem of impeccability is obvious. The human nature, because it is temptable, might desire to do that which is contrary to the will of God. In the person of Christ, however, the human will was always subservient to the divine will and could never act independently. Inasmuch as all agree that the divine will of God could not sin, this quality then becomes the quality of the person and Christ becomes impeccable.

Shedd has defined this point of view in these words: "Again, the impeccability of Christ is proved by the relation of the two wills in his person to each other. Each nature, in order to be complete, entire, and wanting nothing, has its own will; but the finite will never antagonizes the infinite will, but obeys it invariably and perfectly. If this should for an instant cease to be the case, there would be a conflict in the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ similar to that in the self-consciousness of his apostle Paul. He too would say, 'The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?' Rom 7:19, 20, 24. But there is no such utterance as this from the lips of the God-man: On the contrary, there is the calm inquiry of Christ: 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' John 8:46; and the confident affirmation of St. John: 'In him was no sin.' 1 John 3:5. There is an utter absence of personal confession of sin, in any form whatever, either in the conversation or the prayers of Jesus Christ. There is no sense of indwelling sin. He could not describe his religious experience as his apostle does, and his people do: 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh,' Gal 5:17."4

The question of the impeccability of Christ therefore resolves itself into a question as to whether the attributes of God can be harmonized with a doctrine of peccability. The concept of peccability in the person of Christ is contradicted principally by the attributes of immutability, omnipotence, and omniscience.

The fact of the immutability of Christ is the first determining factor of His impeccability. According to Hebrews 13:8, Christ is "the same yesterday, today, yea and for ever," and earlier in the same epistle Psalm 102:27 is quoted "Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail" (Heb 1:12). As Christ was holy in eternity past, it is essential that this attribute as well as all others be preserved unchanged eternally. Christ must be impeccable, therefore, because He is immutable. If it is unthinkable that God could sin in eternity past, it must also be true that it is impossible for God to sin in the person of Christ incarnate. The nature of His person forbids susceptibility to sin.

The omnipotence of Christ makes it impossible for Him to sin. Peccability always implies weakness on the part of the one tempted. He is weak to the extent that He can sin. On the part of Christ, this is clearly out of the question. While the human nature of Christ if left to itself would have been both peccable and temptable, because it was joined to the omnipotent divine nature the person of Christ was thereby made impeccable. A careful distinction should be made between omnipotence, which has a quality of infinity and therefore would sustain impeccability, and the concept of sufficient power or grace. Impeccability is defined as being not able to sin, whereas a concept of sufficient power would be merely able not to sin. A moral creature of God sustained by the grace of God can achieve the moral experience of being able not to sin as is illustrated in every victory over temptation in the Christian life. All agree that Christ was able not to sin, even those who affirm His peccability. The contrast, however, is between the idea of sufficient power and omnipotence. The infinite quality of omnipotence justifies the affirmation that Christ is impeccable.

It is foolish speculation to attempt to decide what the human nature of Christ would have done if not joined to the divine nature. The fact remains that the human nature was joined to the divine nature, and while its own realm was entirely human, it could not involve the person of Christ in sin. On the ground of omnipotence, then, it may be concluded that Christ could not sin because He had infinite power to resist temptation.

The omniscience of Christ contributed a vital part of His impeccability. Sin frequently appeals to the ignorance of the one tempted. Thus Eve was deceived and sinned, though Adam was not deceived as to the nature of the transgression. In the case of Christ, the effects of sin were perfectly known, with all the contributing factors. It was impossible for Christ having omniscience to commit that which He knew could only bring eternal woe to Himself and to the race. Having at once infinite wisdom to see sin in its true light and at the same time infinite power to resist temptation, it is evident that Christ was impeccable.

It is rationally inconceivable that Christ could sin. It is clear that Christ is not peccable in heaven now even though He possesses a true humanity. If Christ is impeccable in heaven because of who He is, then it is also true that Christ was impeccable on earth because of who He was. While it was possible for Christ in the flesh to suffer limitations of an unmoral sort—such as weakness, suffering, fatigue, sorrow, hunger, anger, and even death—none of these created any complication which affected His immutable holiness. God could have experienced through the human nature of Christ these things common to the race, but God could not sin even when joined to a human nature. If sin were possible in the life of Christ, the whole plan of the universe hinged on the outcome of His temptations. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God would forbid any such haphazard condition. It is therefore not sufficient to hold that Christ did not sin, but rather to attribute to His person all due adoration in that He could not sin. While the person of Christ could therefore be tempted, there was no possibility of sin entering the life of Him appointed from eternity to be the spotless Lamb of God.

By John F Walvoord

<http://bible.org/seriespage/person-and-work-christ-%E2%80%94part-vii-impeccability-christ>

