

## WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

by Jim Andrews

The *Gospel* means *the good news*. Specifically, it refers to the good news of salvation—God’s plan of salvation. Of course, any talk about *salvation* implies some bad news. The bad news sets up the good news. What follows is a simple exposition of the Gospel linked together with supporting biblical texts.

Perhaps you have never heard the Gospel. You should. Your very destiny hangs on it. Then again maybe you have heard it but just never really got it. Hopefully this summary will bring it into focus. Or, you may want to share the Gospel with your friends. This tract can help you.

Let’s start with **the bad news**—the peril we are in and our universal need of salvation.

First a little reality therapy. A lot of folk have a pretty high opinion of themselves. They assume (if God is really there), He must “grade on a curve.” After all, nobody’s perfect. But, hey, (they think) compared to the rest, I’m a pretty good Joe (or Jill). They count up all those ways they see themselves as good or better than the next guy. Especially those “self-righteous Christians!”

If God actually holds people accountable for their actions, these folk see no way they won’t make the cut, so to speak. They also draw huge comfort from the sheer menagerie of “sincere people” practicing other religions. Surely God has to cut them some slack, too. After all, they’re not *bad* people either. So, hey, (the thinking goes) I’m OK, you’re OK, (except of course the *really* evil ones, like mass and serial murderers, child molesters and all those who offend the sacred, but ever changing standards of Political Correctness). This way of thinking is not unlike the comfort students take when an exam proved too hard and nobody passed. They know (or so they imagine) the teacher can’t flunk *everybody*, especially the usually better performing students. So, even if they fall short of a passing grade but beat the norm, they figure they’re safe. The professor has to curve it, doesn’t she? After all, she doesn’t want her peers thinking she can’t teach.

In high school in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, we got a freshly minted biology teacher. He came on like an old wild-west gunslinger bruising to make a quick reputation as the *toughest* teacher in town. The guy set his standard and promised right up front to flunk any and all who failed to meet it. True to his word and his standards, a lot of *unbelieving* students went down for the count. They figured his tough talk was a big bluff. In the end he would cave. He didn’t.

The Bible is quite clear about the fact that God doesn’t judge mankind on a sliding scale. What one must understand about God—this for them is part of the bad news—is that He is a holy God. If an individual is determined to face the bar of God based on his or her moral merit . . . if a person wants to be judged by God on the basis of his or her performance before the Law of God, then there is no fudging. The standard is absolute. If a human being wants to be weighed in the balances of his or her own intrinsic goodness, then they are in trouble . . . deep trouble.

For the judgment of God is according to truth. That means it is without respect of persons; the standard is not other people or the human norm. The standard is the law of God. Any departure from the law of God is called *sin*. Sin is lawlessness, transgression or iniquity. It is rebellion against God and it constitutes falling short of the glory of God . . . failing to be what we were created to be and do.

Now the wages of sin is death. Any sin. All sin. No misdemeanors. Of course that is an academic point. The truth is, our hearts and actions are as full of sin as our mouths are full of bacteria. Human beings are serial sinners . . . inveterate scofflaws.

In the eyes of God we are more corrupt than a septic tank, even the best of the bad.

Now the average person in the street has trouble understanding that. We don't *get* the sinfulness of sin anymore than a dirty pig wallowing in the mire gets the filthiness of filth.

I've seen "trash pickers" who live on and around the dumps in Mexico City. Never had a bath in their lives. Heads full of lice and bellies full of who knows what parasites. Drinking polluted water out of dirty barrels that I would be loath to let my dog drink from. Scavenging food from the garbage. Terrible stench. Revolting scene. Poor wretches have no idea of their wretchedness. They have lived that way so long they don't even blush when well-dressed, neatly groomed people appear on their scene.

An apt metaphor of humankind immersed in the squalor of sin. Ah, we know we aren't perfect and all that. But we have no idea of the depth of our depravity, no idea of the inward squalor, the putrid smell of our sins in the pure air of Heaven. We have lived with shame so long we know no shame. Moral cancer is shrugged off as lightly as a tiny flake of dry skin.

Just because we are ignorant of our true moral condition or in denial about our guiltiness before the divine tribunal doesn't mean that a just God will give the self-righteous a free pass. No. Every sin will be called to account. Every sinner will pay the full price—the *wages of sin is death*—unless, that is, someone else takes the fall for us and we accept the favor. But here we are anticipating the Good News. Let's stay with the bad news for the moment.

Before we can be saved out of this predicament, we must first "get lost." That is, we just have to come to terms with the fact that, however much we would like to think of ourselves as just very fine people, thank you, actually in the sight of God we are all derelicts . . . outlaws . . . bankrupts. For starters, consider these biblical texts<sup>1</sup>, which put the matter pretty bluntly:

- a. As far back as Noah's day, God observed about man "that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time," Genesis 6:5 and that "every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood." Genesis 8:21
- b. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9
- c. "As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. They have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.'" Romans 3:10-12

It's not that we all have a few warts . . . a little mud on our soles. Our corruption is much more extensive and intensive than that. According to the Scriptures, whatever front we put up to society, at heart we are a regular toxic waste dump. We can take offense at that strong statement, but it won't change the strength of the biblical indictment about the moral contamination of the human race.

That's what the Bible says. And what the Bible teaches, God teaches. Of course, no one has to believe that. But then again, no one has to believe in the law of gravity either. But we do have to live with consequences of being dead wrong. We are welcome to our own fantasies, but not our own facts.

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It is quite clear, as you can see from Romans 3:10-11, there are no exceptions to this roundhouse indictment of the human race. It's not a generalization. Every last human being who has ever darkened this planet has literally darkened it, as far as God is concerned. As much as we like to think in terms of white hats and black hats, before God there are no good guys (or gals). We are all dirty before the law of God. All these moral distinctions we make on earth among ourselves fade away before the all-searching eye of a holy God who knows every thought, every motive, the intent of every heart and action. The bar of the law of God is high and we just don't cut it.

You see, we may be blind to our own deficits, but God knows the truth about us. He knows our sinful nature and exactly what the transgression of His law means. And He is the only judge in position to call it what it is. We on the other hand are hardly in any position to argue. It's His call.

God is a holy God. He cannot abide moral mutants in His presence. He will not allow Heaven to be polluted by a corrupted people.

According to the Scriptures, no matter how good a person we think we are and how wonderful others, including your mother, have said you are, the truth is, before God we all are rotten to the core. Oh, that goes down hard. But, according to the Bible, all of us, for all our moral posturing, are spiritually and morally bankrupt in the sight of God. And the last I heard, His is really the only verdict that matters—unless one goes into denial and wants to pretend He's not there (or if He is, is just an oblong blur or some impersonal, morally indifferent force). Of course, denial only works until reality sets in.

But back to the Bible. As I said, one doesn't have to believe it, of course—not any more than one has to believe the earth is round or water is wet. Still, if one is open minded, why not give truth a chance? Why not question popular opinion? Let's just see what the Bible has to say about our human predicament, our profound lostness, before God.

According to the Scriptures we as a race are profoundly messed up. Not only that, but (this may bite) you are no exception to the rule. I know. I know. You do so many good and noble things for so many. You are a good neighbor, a loyal friend, a faithful spouse, a responsible parent and a law abiding citizen.

The problem, you see, is God sees deeper than that. And there is none of us who passes moral muster by His unbending standard.

As the following Scriptures will show, in terms of God's law, the human race is outlaw. And there are zero exceptions to this condition:

- a. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23
- b. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;" Isaiah 53:6
- c. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us . . . If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us." 1 John 1:8,10

Now the liberal idea is that human beings are by nature good; only by nurture do they go bad. Urban myth to the max! Yes, people do some good and even noble things—from my human point of view. But my standpoint counts zero. You see, God knows all our motives, inside and out. And one thing He knows for sure. Unless a person has experienced a new birth, a regeneration on the inside, it is a given that that person has never—not even once—in their entire lives ever done one single thing for the sheer love of God. And that deficit nullifies all his (or her) righteousness in His sight. It's all just filthy rags.

Now there is, according to the Bible, a price to pay for sin . . . for this fallen condition. Because we are found to be transgressors of God's law, we are condemned. A death sentence hangs over us. A sentence of eternal death. Sin is a bit like murder. One does not have to be a serial killer to reap the death penalty. Likewise one sin—just one—is a capital offense against Heaven—though all of us are serial sinners indeed. Any sin is an assault on the whole law of God. All sin is rebellion against God.

Consider what the Scriptures say about this:

- a. “For the wages of sin is death . . .” Romans 6:23
- b. “. . . The one who sins is the one who will die.” Ezekiel 18:4

So then, we see plainly:

- a. that the whole race without exception is declared unrighteous.
- b. that the penalty of sin is death.
- c. therefore, all of us face the death penalty.

Now here's the really good part—the good news. Though God is holy and is not about to grade us on some kind of moral curve, this just God is also a loving God. And He has made a provision for our redemption, our salvation, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Let me explain the tension between God's justice and His love and how God worked out a plan for our salvation that honored both ends of it. We'll talk about God's dilemma, though an all-knowing and all-wise God was never in a quandary. We're just talking here in human terms.

The God of the Bible is a morally perfect Being. To be perfect, He must also be perfectly just. To be perfectly just, God must mete out upon sinners that penalty justice requires. Only God knows the sinfulness of sin and what it deserves. He will not fudge the books or wink at my sin. It must be punished to the limit it deserves.

On the other hand, God loves us and delights to lift the penalty His justice demands. How can these two be bridged? Only if a Substitute can be found. One who is righteous and innocent of all sin. Yet One who is so worthy in His Being that He can lay Himself down as a sacrifice, not for one man's sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:2

And that indeed was God's plan of salvation. That was the solution.

To bridge the gap between His justice and His love and relieve the necessity of imposing the death penalty on us, God provided a Substitute though whose atoning death for my sins all the requirements of His justice would be satisfied: God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to take my death sentence for my sins upon Himself. Here it is in the language of the Scriptures:

- a. “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:5-6

- b. “He [Christ] himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24
- c. “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit [i.e. resurrected].” 1 Peter 3:18
- d. “God made him [accounted or reckoned Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, [in our place, that is] so that in him [in union with Him] we might become [accounted or reckoned as having] the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21
- e. “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” 1 John 2:2

This provision however is not automatic. A string is attached. Salvation is free, but God’s free pardon must be accepted. And that is where many balk.

For our sins to be pardoned, for us to be given a righteous standing (called justification), for the death penalty to be lifted (as is now possible for God to do justly), He attaches one stipulation—that we put our trust in Christ as our personal Savior and Lord:

- 1. “For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life . . . Whoever believes in him is not condemned; but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” John 3:16, 18
- 2. We remain condemned if we reject the one and only basis of pardon.
  - a. “Whoever believes in [i.e., trusts in] him [Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in [put their trust in] the name of God’s one and only Son.” John 3:18
  - b. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects [does not put his trust in] the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.” John 3:36
  - c. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

So where do things stand? Let’s summarize the situation:

- 1. Regardless of our own opinion of ourselves, in the opinion of the only Judge who counts neither you (nor me nor anyone else) is a good person in God's sense of the term.
- 2. When we do not avail ourselves of God's means for pardon, we are condemned and the wrath of God abides on us this very minute.
- 3. So we need to be saved and thereby become a Christian and a child of God.

#### IV. How We Can Be Saved?

##### A. God Made a Gracious Provision For Our Pardon

1. God found a way to forgive us our sins without mocking His justice.
2. God sent His own Son to bear for us the death penalty for all our sins.
  - a. “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:5-6
  - b. “He [Christ] himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24
  - c. “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit [i.e., resurrected].” 1 Peter 3:18
  - d. “God made him [accounted or reckoned Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become [accounted or reckoned as having] the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21
  - e. “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” 1 John 2:2

##### B. God's Stipulates a Firm Condition For Our Pardon

1. God's forgiveness and the promises of eternal life are subject to one and only one condition—that we put our trust in Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior.
  - a. “For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life . . . Whoever believes in him is not condemned; but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” John 3:16, 18
  - b. “Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.” John 6:47
  - c. “He [Christ] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Acts 10:42-43
  - d. “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free [pardoned or acquitted] from every sin . . .” Acts 13:38-39
  - e. In Philippi of ancient Macedonia, a jailer asked the Apostle Paul this question as recorded in Acts 16:30-31: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” and they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved—you and your household [i.e., both you and your house can be saved in this manner].”

2. The Scriptures are emphatically clear that our salvation is not based upon our good works, but strictly by God's grace and through our faith exclusively.
  - a. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast [i.e., that he had earned his salvation by good behavior].”  
Ephesians 2:8-9
  - b. “. . . he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit . . .” Titus 3:5
3. Faith in Christ is an absolutely final condition of salvation.
  - a. “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6
  - b. “Salvation is found in no one else [than Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12
  - c. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,” 1 Timothy 2:5
4. So then, we see that:
  - a. God in His great love found a way to satisfy His justice and yet lift the penalty of our sins from us by providing His Son as a substitute to suffer my sin penalty in my place.
  - b. Before validating Christ's death as a substitute for our death sentence God requires that we receive Christ by faith as our personal Savior and Lord.
  - c. There is absolutely and unconditionally no other way except Christ or no other condition except faith. For Jesus himself declared, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6
5. This provision for our salvation God intended to be absolutely secure forever to those who trust in Christ. For its foundation rests on His work on the Cross, not our works in trying to secure it. What follows is a litany of Scriptural passages verifying the eternal security of our salvation.

PASSAGES CONFIRMING  
THE ETERNAL SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER

1. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me [true sheep follow Him]. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” John 10:27-30
2. “All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away . . . And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.” [Here Christ affirms that his Father's will shall be done.] John 6:37, 39
3. “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged [a pretty plain promise here] but has crossed over from death to life.” John 5:24
4. “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.” Romans 14:4
5. “He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 1:8
6. “I thank my God every time I remember you . . . being confident [Paul was inspired] of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:3, 6
7. “. . . for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith . . . I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. [How is this assurance possible if we could still lose our salvation?] . . . We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin [does not continually practice sin—NT Greek in present tense]; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them.” [Again pretty clear that true believers don't go to Hell.] 1 John 5:4, 13, 18
8. “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.” 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 23-24
9. “. . . because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.” 2 Timothy 1:12
10. “And by that will [referring to the will of God], we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all . . . But when this priest [Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God . . . For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy [set apart, i.e., them that believe].” Hebrews 10:10, 12, 14



11. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:3-5
12. ". . . if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment." 2 Peter 2:9
13. "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ . . . To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy . . ." Jude 1, 24