

The Gospel: A Relationship with God

We have talked in weeks past about the definition of Gospel. I would like to talk about it in detail this week, and how we can understand it. First, however, we must talk about definitions. You remember that we said that the word “gospel” comes from a Greek word that means “good news.” When you come into some money that you needed, that is Gospel, or good news. When you get negative test results from your doctor, that is Gospel, or good news. But the good news is not just good news about anything. When the Bible talks about good news, it has something very specific in mind. When the Bible talks about the Gospel, it is referring to the good news about how mankind can have salvation. The good news is that we can have salvation. The Bible has much to say about the Gospel, but one of the most important facts is that it is for everyone, Jew, Gentile, American, African, Chinese, man, woman, boy and girl. Anyone can be saved. What is the only requirement? The Bible answers that question in the book of Romans in the very first chapter. It says: “The just shall live by faith.”

“But why is the Gospel important?” you might be asking. “I thought everyone was going to heaven.” This is untrue, and the Bible makes this very clear. There are certain people who will not be in heaven. The Bible says that some day the AntiChrist will be thrown alive into the Lake of Fire. Jesus Himself told a story where the main character goes to that place called Hell after he dies. Truth be told, most people who believe the Bible believe that there is a Hell and that there will be people who go there, but only bad people. I read the other day about a bumper sticker that said, “It's God's Job to Forgive Bin Laden - It's [The Marines] Job To Arrange The Meeting” I have to admit that I chuckled when I read it, and I certainly appreciate what our military does to protect us. But there is a fundamental flaw in that statement. It is not God’s job to forgive anyone.

Does the Bible say that God is love? Yes it does. God is love, and He is also good. But God is not just good. God is also angry with sin. What is sin? Sin is the transgression of God’s Law. Sin is breaking God’s rules: rules which, by the way, are based in His perfect moral character. God hates sin, and must punish those who commit sin. The Bible says that God’s wrath comes upon all those who are ungodly and unrighteous. What is so offensive to God about our sins? God is offended by our sins because He has revealed Himself to us through His Word and we as sinners have chosen a lie rather than the truth.

What do I mean, “chose a lie rather than the truth?” I mean that God has revealed Himself to every single human being. What can be known about God is known by each person, and it is evident. The first way that God has made Himself known is through the Scriptures. Hebrews 1:1 says that God revealed Himself to men, who in turn told everyone else about what God wanted us to know about Him. Some of the names of these men are Moses, Elijah, and the Apostle Peter. God is a God who wants to know and be known by mankind.

The second way that God has made Himself known is through the conscience. What is the conscience? Contrary to popular belief, conscience is not a cricket that whispers to you. Conscience isn’t really even the little voice inside your head. Conscience is the ability that God has put into man’s heart and mind that tells him what is right and what is wrong. With the exception of very few, everyone knows what is right and what is wrong. Everyone knows that it is morally wrong to abuse little children and it is morally right to love them. It’s true that there are cultures on the earth that value killing and vice, but those cultures operate while the people who live in them know they are violating God’s laws.

Think about it. If there is no right or wrong, then it doesn’t matter in life what you do. Adolph Hitler is no different than Mother Theresa. Speaking of Adolph Hitler, he said, “Success is the sole earthly judge of right and wrong.” Now, he did not succeed, so he may have conceded that what he did was wrong. But if Hitler had succeeded in his goals, would that have made him morally good? I say no, and I think you do, too. We all know what is right and what is wrong, and the reason we know is that God put it there. Now you can believe God and what He says about morality, or you can believe a lie. But if you call good evil and evil good, just know that you are holding the truth in unrighteousness.

The third way that God reveals Himself to mankind is through His creation. The first thing God ever says about Himself is this: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth.” God made everything, and His Work shows that He is. The stars in the heavens, light years away from us and many millions of times bigger than our own sun were created by God. Their order shows that they were created by an intelligent being. The cells in our bodies were made by God. The tiny workings of a human cell show beautiful design by an Almighty God. Hopefully we can talk about these in the future. For now, suffice it to say that God has made everything, and that by looking at everything, you can know some things about God. They are clearly seen, and if you are honest, you understand that they were made by a higher power, because they show His power. You, therefore, have no excuse to say that you don’t believe in God, or to say that He has never revealed Himself to mankind.

Now most people take what little they know about God from these things, especially the things in nature, and they refuse to acknowledge God. Most people instead forget God and live their lives imagining He does not exist. When a person does this, he begins a very dark, desperate cycle. First he becomes unthankful for what God has done. He doesn’t acknowledge that all the good things he has he has from God. He doesn’t acknowledge that even his very breath is from God. Dante Gabriel Rossetti once said, “The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank.” The lives of those people who live as if God never existed also become empty and dark. When God created man, He created him to want relationships. We were created to want to have connections with other persons, and the first person we experienced was God. Therefore, there exists in every human heart a desire to have a relationship with the God of the Universe.

This should come as no surprise. We enjoy relationships with other people. In fact, we enjoy them so much that we make ourselves available to everyone else all the time. We have cell phones with us all the time, and with those cell phones we can access places like Facebook and Twitter, all to have relationships with others. We know that we all need relationships, but not many of us face the fact that we also need a relationship with God. And what happens to us if we don’t have that relationship? Let me ask you a question: If you pull a fish out of a lake, what happens to that fish? He doesn’t behave as he did when he was in the water. In the same way, we do not behave the same way when we have no relationship with God. We may have reasons for not believing, but if we betray our own hearts, we are acting very foolishly.

“So,” you may be asking, “what do most people do instead of have a relationship with God?” Some cultures, needing a replacement, turn to idolatry, or the worship of physical things instead of God. They make statues of man, birds, animals, and the like. “But,” you say, “we don’t do that in America.” No, this is true. But Americans have other idols. We have other ways of replacing the One and True God. We worship our houses or our cars. We elevate luxury and money over God. We worship at the altar of ourselves and making ourselves happy. But the Bible is very clear. There is nothing else that can meet our need for a relationship with God. Only God can meet that need. When we try to find something else that we think can meet our need, we begin another descent.

The truth of Scripture is this: God will sometimes give you exactly what you want. That doesn’t always mean that it’s the best for you, but if you are running from God, he may let you run. If you are trying to find your fulfillment in things other than Him, He may let you try. But since you are not wired for finding your joy in anything but God, you can only end in despair. The phrase that the Bible uses is “Give you up.” And when God gives someone over to their own desires, the wickedness in the heart then comes out.

People turn to pleasure and they destroy their bodies. It begins as chasing a little bit of pleasure and turns to a desire for immorality. The word the Bible uses is fornication, and that can refer to any sexual relationship outside of marriage. Whether you are married or not, having a sexual relationship with someone with whom you are not married is sinful and harmful. But that is not even the worst. Sometimes that then turns to sexual perversion, which includes among other things, homosexuality. This is something that is more plentiful in America now more than ever, and I believe it is a direct result of people following pleasure in their pursuit of something that is not God. These things are wrong, yes, and sinful, but they are also things that wreck lives.

Deviation from God's laws regarding sexual relationships can lead to devastating physical consequences, such as disease, but it often leads to a deviant mind and a darker spirit. This is the cycle for sin, all sin: the more you sin the further you get from God. The further you get from God, the more you sin. The more you sin, the less you want a relationship with God and the further you get from God, and so on. Soon, a person who has gone looking for joy has nothing but sin, fornication, wickedness, wanting things from others, hatred for others, pride, discontentedness, and ultimately a hatred for God. Let me go back to the question I asked earlier: who gets to heaven? Do people who hate God get to heaven? Do people who get to the bottom of this cycle get to go to be with God in heaven? Truth be told, those people who have gotten to the point where they hate God know exactly what God says He will do to them someday, and still take pleasure in wickedness. There is little hope for the person who has begun the slide from not wanting a good relationship with God to hating Him, but in reality, we all are somewhere on this slide. Every single person has begun to slide.

Now, there is a temptation for you to look at someone else who is a little further down the slide and say, "Well, at least I'm not like that person." I hear this all the time from people. "Well, God won't punish me because I haven't killed anyone!" But whether you are closer to hating God or just a little tired of Him, you are still on the slide, and that makes you unable to justly condemn someone else. There is little hope for you to look at someone else and say that his sins are worse than yours, because you still have sin! You still do things that are wrong. Ultimately, God is the judge of right and wrong, and he says that all sin is worthy of punishment in His eyes. So while you are telling God about someone else's murder, all He can do is stare at your covetous heart. And lest you think that God is an unfair Judge, God says that His judgment is according to Truth. Which truth? The truth of His character, and what is accurately right and wrong.

Do you think, then, that you will escape God's punishment because you think yourself better than someone else. Friend, don't be so foolish. Just because God has allowed you to live a long and somewhat comfortable life does not mean that God is smiling on you. It merely means that He has allowed you live long enough that you might change your mind about your evil deeds and turn and do right. The longer you deny the fact that you yourself are guilty, the more punishment you store up for yourself in that Day of Judgment. What is that? The Bible says in Revelation 20:12 says "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." A few verses later it says, "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

There is a day coming when God will give every man exactly what he has earned. Some have trusted God and seek for God's glory and honor. These will be awarded eternal life. Some have decided to disregard what the truth says in favor of their own wicked desires. These will be awarded God's fury and wrath. God is completely fair. He will open books of people's lives and judge them according to what they have done, irregardless of race, gender, age, health or tax bracket. Everyone who does evil will get suffering and anguish. Everyone who does good will get glory, peace, and honor from God. He judges fairly.

"But," you say, "what about those who have died without ever reading the Bible? How can they be held responsible?" That is a good question. We know what God expects by reading His Scripture, and so how can someone who has never read the rules lose the game, so to speak. Remember that God has also revealed Himself through conscience and Creation, and that is enough for someone to know that something is wrong with them. But let me answer the initial question like this: Those who have never read the Bible will not be judged as severely as those who have read the Bible. Those who have never heard will not be judged as though they have heard God's Laws. Conversely, those who have heard will not be judged as though they have never heard God's Laws.

The truth is this: You will someday be judged not for not reading the Bible, but for not doing what the Bible says. It is possible for an illiterate person to obtain God's forgiveness if He does what is contained in the Bible. Again, it goes back to the fact that we all know what is right and what is wrong. There are people in the world

who do not have access to a Bible who know that certain sins are wrong. This knowledge, in some sense, is like having a Bible with them. This Bible is not written on paper, but is written on their heart, or their mind. The question is not whether someone knows right or wrong. Everyone does. The question is: When a man is faced with a moral dilemma, small or great, does he choose the right or choose the wrong, based on what he knows about God?

“But,” you say, “I am a good person. I go to church. I have been baptized. I read my Bible.” Let me first say that those things are very commendable. You ought to do those things. But those things are not sufficient to save you. Life preservers are good to have on a boat, but I would much rather be on a boat in the ocean than in a life preserver. Again, the issue is not all of the good I have done, but also of the bad that I have done. God, on that judgment day, will judge me according to what is in my heart, not merely on my actions. Being a member of a church is good, but let us examine to see whether it is sufficient enough to warrant salvation.

Let me ask a question: How good of a church member must you be? Is there a number of years you must fulfill? Must you listen very earnestly to the sermons every week, even taking notes? Do you have to be a Sunday School teacher? A pastor? Are you required to give so much of your income? How good of a church member must you be? Friend, the Bible says that goodness is not on a sliding scale, it is pass or fail. You who teach others that they should not steal as one of the Ten Commandments: Do you ever steal? You who tell others that they should not commit adultery: Have you ever committed adultery? Oh, you have probably never committed the physical act of adultery, but Jesus said in Matthew 5:28: “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” God says that you must be absolutely perfect.

No, no amount of church membership can do anything for your spirit. It is a little bit like the Jews of Jesus’ day. They believed that circumcision could save them. They believed that their circumcision made them a part of God’s children. But they were doing wrong. God said at one point that they had done so much wrong that their circumcision was like being uncircumcised. He went further to say that someone who is not circumcised, if they do what is right, is like someone who is circumcised. God says that it is the heart that matters. It is your heart, not where your name is placed.

Now, does that mean that church attendance does not have its place? No. It is important. By going to church, you can learn about God’s character. Saying you believe that God exists is worthless if you don’t know anything about Him. But let us suppose that there are people who go to your church who don’t believe in Jesus. They go because they like the other people, or because their families force them to, or they go because they think going will get them to heaven. If there were such people in your church who didn’t believe in God, would that make it impossible for anyone to believe in God? “That’s ridiculous” you say. I agree. Just because there are some who do not believe in Jesus does not make it untrue. God is true, whether we say He is or not. God is just, whether we say He is or not. Other people’s sin makes no difference on God’s character.

There is a story in the Old Testament where a man named David commits a very serious sin. He finds a married woman, commits fornication with her, and then kills her husband. David is supposed to be a friend of God, and so God confronts Him about the way he has broken their relationship. David then writes a letter to God, in which He says, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” David admits His guilt and says that God was right when He rebuked him. David says that God’s holiness shows how sinful he really is, and his sin shows how perfect and holy God really is.

I hear another argument then: “So if my sins make God look more holy, then why does He promise to punish me for them?” My answer is this: Your sins don’t really make God look more holy. If so, then someone evil like Osama bin Laden would be like a huge spotlight, showing how great God is. Obviously, few people think this. No, God has over and over again said that He hates sin and must punish sinners. Psalm 7:11 “God is angry with

the wicked every day.” God must punish people who sin, especially those who live their entire lives committing heinous crimes.

But does that mean that we are better than they? Does the fact that we haven’t committed the same crimes as a Jeffrey Dahmer mean that we will be OK on Judgment Day? No, it does not. We have already proved that everyone is a sinner. Psalms 14:2-3 say “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” The truth is this: Since we are all sinners, there is no one who is righteous. Nobody on the earth truly has an understanding of how holy God is. No one is of themselves seeking for God, as long as they still love their sin. We have made ourselves worthless before God.

We don’t see ourselves this way, but this is exactly the picture that God paints for us. God sees sin as much more serious than we do. We call it gossip, but God calls it slander. We call it “a strong dislike,” but God calls it hatred and murder. We call it “just being human,” but God calls it rebellion. We call it fun, but God calls it sin and death. There is no one who truly fears God enough to hate their sins the way they should. The Bible is very clear. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” God gave the Ten Commandments to show that we break at least one of them every day. And before you can argue that just one sin can’t hurt anyone, let me read this verse: “James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” It only takes one lie to make you a liar, one murder to make you a killer, and one sin to make you a sinner.

The Bible exists to let people know how guilty they are before God. So no one can look at the things that are commanded in the law and tell God that they are righteous because of them. Knowing the commandments doesn’t help us keep them; knowing the commandments helps us know we are not keeping them. But now I would like to answer the question I asked at the beginning: “How can we have salvation?” You may have salvation when your record is clear. God needs to see that you have absolutely no sins on your record. You need to be completely righteous. “But how can I be totally righteous” you are asking. The answer is this: Jesus Christ. Romans 3:21-22 say: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.”

Let me explain what that means. Everyone in the world has sinned, and have fallen short of God’s standard of holiness. That has been explained at length. It is our sin that makes us guilty. But God Himself came to Earth and lived as a perfect human. Jesus never lied, stole, cursed or had an evil thought. He lived a perfect, or righteous, life- something that we cannot do and have not done. But the Bible says that God punished Jesus. How could God punish Jesus when He did nothing wrong? The Bible says that God made Jesus a propitiation for our sins. That is an old word that means “substitute. Jesus was our substitute. He took our place on the cross. That means that He took our sins upon Himself. Isaiah 53:6 says “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

That same chapter, Isaiah 53 says, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Jesus took our punishment on the cross. What happened to Jesus’ righteousness then? The Bible says that we can get Jesus’ righteousness, or perfection, for ourselves by faith. If you by faith believe God’s promise, you can have Christ’s righteousness applied to yourself. You can have a clean record.

There is therefore nothing you can do. You cannot work your way to heaven. No amount of prayer, money, water, or church attendance can guarantee your passage into heaven. It comes only by repentance of your sins and faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. If you today will believe that what Jesus did, he did for you, you can

be saved. Jesus died for you: in your place and on your behalf. Therefore, we can conclude that you can be justified by faith, not by works. In fact, you must be justified by faith, not works. It is the only way.

Friend, it is our hope that you will have heard what has been said this morning and will believe in Jesus. If you have any questions on how to have a relationship with God, please contact us. First Baptist Church exists to glorify God and to see people be saved from their sins. If you would like to contact us, you can do so in the following ways:

You can stop by our church building, which is located at 909 W. 8th St., by the softball diamonds. You can call us at 732-3321. You can E-mail us at church@fbcpr.org. That's CHURCH at F B C P R dot O R G. Or you can log on to our website, which is www.fbcpr.org. If you would like to have a copy of this broadcast, either in audio or transcript form, you can find it on our website tomorrow. I would like to once again invite you ladies who are interested to our ladies Bible study. It meets every Monday for the next several weeks at our church building from 11:45 to 12:30. Feel free to bring a lunch with you and study the book of Ruth with us. Please join us again next week for the Way of Truth Radio Broadcast, brought to you by the First Baptist Church of Park Rapids, Minnesota.