

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The Beginning Place: A Philosophical Exercise

Every human soul on this planet has a distinct view of the world, and his or her place in it. This world view may be held consciously or unconsciously. Many factors control this perception, such as personal opinions derived from experience, postulations from the writings of others, the influence of family members, religious background, peer influence, et al. These are the forces that tend to govern our world view, and form a basis for answering these three critical questions: (1) "**Who am I?**" (2) "**Why am I here?**" and (3) "**Where am I going?**"

At one end of the spectrum is atheistic humanism. It rejects the idea of a personal God Who acts as both Creator and Redeemer, and reckons any perceived need for such a God as evidence of fear and insecurity. Natural selection is embraced as the cause for man's ascension to the pinnacle of the evolutionary hierarchy. There is no absolute truth. Morality and ethics are relative and transitory, and undergo a metamorphosis according to shifts in cultural values. Man is therefore a law unto himself, making the most of his existence until death marks its cessation.

At the other end of the spectrum is Biblical theism. It sees the world as the direct creation of a sovereign and loving God. Man's superiority over all other creatures is the direct result of creative design whereby man bears God's image and likeness. Man is therefore fully accountable to God for his actions. The same God, Who created all things, also inspired sacred writings to reveal Himself to man. The Bible is the preserved collection of those inspired writings. They tell of God's plan and purpose for man in the ages to come. They reveal a message of good news for fallen man. Jesus, the Son of God, was sent to suffer and die for the sins of humanity. Therefore man's only hope of salvation and life eternal lies outside of himself in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Most individuals possess a world view that lies somewhere between these two philosophical bookends. Where does your personal view fit in? It is our conviction that Biblical theism alone reflects true reality. It is the only view that provides satisfactory answers to the questions "Who am I?", "Why am I here?", and "Where am I going?" If you disagree, I encourage you to ask yourself the three questions below, and answer them honestly. All three of these questions deserve a resounding, "Yes!"

Does God Exist as the Creator of All Men?

This is actually two questions in one. However, the existence of God presupposes His creative prowess and wise design. Is your answer yes, or no? If atheistic humanism reflects true reality, then there is no accountability. Any negative consequences to undesirable behavior are strictly temporal, not eternal. When you draw your last breath, it's over! However, if man is indeed the pinnacle of God's creative work, then he is accountable! It thus behooves man to seek out his Creator in an effort to resolve the issues surrounding his accountability, such as the violation of God's law, and the subsequent guilt and spiritual death that he has incurred.

Has God made Himself Known to His Creatures?

This is a question of revelation. It follows that an omnipotent God and Creator—One responsible for the magnitude and vastness of our universe—is fully capable of communicating His mind and will to His creatures. This He did through inspiration. His Spirit moved upon chosen men in such a way that they wrote down on paper exactly what He wanted them to write concerning Himself and His will. It also follows that the God Who provided it was also able to preserve it through centuries of time. If you answered yes to the first inquiry, consistency requires that you answer in the affirmative here as well.

Did Jesus of Nazareth Raise Himself from the Dead as He Predicted?

When Jesus of Nazareth walked on this earth, He made some astounding claims. He claimed to be the only way to the Father, excluding every other approach to God. He said it was impossible to honor the Father without honoring Him. He also predicted that He would be put to death by the authorities in Jerusalem, and then raise Himself from the grave three days later.

It comes down to this. If the resurrection is not a fact, then Jesus was a fraud. Nothing He said is true or believable. On the other hand, if Jesus backed up His claims, and is alive today at the Father's right hand, everything He said is true and believable! He is Lord indeed! Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord! Coupled with the fact that several hundred eyewitnesses saw Him alive after His crucifixion and burial is the absence of a body. Neither the Jews nor Roman authorities could produce one, notwithstanding the tight security measures at the tomb. Great sums of hush money were paid to witnesses in an effort to squelch the truth. Are you prepared to deny the historical reality of the resurrection in the face of such overwhelming and undeniable evidence?

Here is the bottom line! Every philosophical, ethical, and or religious system sinks or swims with the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The burden of proof lies with the gainsayers.

The Four Entrances

Our presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ centers around four significant entrances. They are: (1) The entrance of sin into this world, (2) The entrance of the God's Law as the standard of righteousness, (3) The entrance of God Himself into this world as a man, and (4) The entrance of Christ into the heart of a believing sinner, bringing forgiveness and life. We start with the bad news first.

The Entrance of Sin into this World



The apostle Paul wrote these words in Romans 5:12: "***For as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.***" One man (Adam) was responsible for sin's entrance into this world. That entrance was fatal for mankind and the entire creation. It left both spiritual and physical death in its wake. The words "***passed upon***" depict the permeation of sin's effects throughout the entire human race (much like a drop of cyanide poison placed in a five gallon container of pure water contaminates all five gallons of that water. Therefore all men sinned with Adam according to God's reckoning. Paul had previously asserted that "***the wages of sin is death***" (Romans 3:23). Every person must understand the grave consequences of his or her sin.

The word "***death***" is the Greek ***thanatos***, which speaks of separation. In physical death, the soul and spirit are separated from the body. In spiritual death, the soul experiences separation from God although the body is alive. In eternal (the second) death, the soul is separated from God eternally in a place called The Lake of Fire. The apostle John saw a vision of this ultimate and final separation. He said, "***And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire***" (Revelation 20:14-15).

Dear friend, this is indeed bad news. It is, however, bad news with an antidote. The compassion of God is more than a match for man's peril, as we shall later see.

The Entrance of God's Law



In Romans 5:20-21, the apostle Paul wrote these words concerning the law: "***Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.***" We are told here that the entrance of God's law multiplied the chargeable offences of men. They abounded! The introduction of God's righteous standard exposed the degree to which man was unrighteous and sinful in his conduct. This does not mean that man became more sinful. It simply means that his sinfulness was exposed for what it was. This purpose was clarified in Romans 7:13, where Paul affirmed "***that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.***" The law was given to teach man the exceeding sinfulness of his sin; that is, the degree to which God's standard of righteousness was being violated.

In Romans 3:19-20, Paul confirmed the sense of guilt imposed by the law upon its subjects: "**Now we know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall be no flesh justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.**" Again, we are told that the law produces a knowledge of sin. Sin is exposed for its exceeding sinfulness. The result is a condition of guilt before a righteous God. The verdict is in! The irrefutable evidence of this guilt stops the mouths of the guilty, and leaves them with no defense.

Therefore it is impossible that the law could ever provide salvation, or justification, for a sinner. In other words, no amount of good deeds can eradicate our sin and guilt before God. The law serves as a "**schoolmaster**" (Galatians 3:24). It educates us regarding our sinful state, in order that we might cast ourselves upon the mercy of God, and be drawn into the loving embrace of Jesus Christ. He is the antidote for our sin, guilt, and spiritual death. This is good news indeed!

The Entrance of the God-Man



The apostle Paul offered this word of personal testimony. He said, "**This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief**" (I Timothy 1:15). God entered into this world in the person of Jesus Christ. His purpose was to save sinners. Paul claims that Jesus went to the bottom of the barrel to save him. The conclusion that Paul wanted us to draw from his testimony is that no sinner is beyond saving. God has already rectified the worst case.

Fundamental to His entrance into this world was His love and compassion for sinners. This love would manifest itself in His suffering and death on their behalf. The scripture says: "**For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**" (Romans 5:6-8). The righteous man is one of moral rectitude. The good man is one who goes beyond personal integrity in showing benevolence toward his fellow man. It would take this caliber of man for another to consider dying in his place. This rarely happens. In contrast to such a rare event is the death Jesus Christ. His love for sinners was put on open display on a cross outside of Jerusalem. It was for His enemies He died, not for His friends.

God's need to extract a penalty for sin, and the violations of His law, was satisfied in Jesus His Son. He paid that penalty in our stead. What we could not do for ourselves, God did for us in Christ. Jesus is the full satisfaction. All that remains for man is to acknowledge his sin and guilt before God, and to receive by faith the provision that Jesus made for him.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead proved that He was the sinless Son of God. His death was substitutionary in nature, and God was completely satisfied with what it accomplished. Jesus is both the complete satisfaction for sin with respect to God, and the perfect substitute with respect to sinful man. This is why Paul could say, "**For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time**" (I Timothy 2:5-6). Jesus is the one Person, both human and Divine, who can bridge the gap between a holy God and a sinful man.

The Entrance of Jesus into the Believer's Heart



The first three entrances in this presentation have laid the foundation for this the fourth. Once a lost sinner acknowledges his or her spiritual peril because of sin, and understands the provision that God has made through His Son Jesus Christ, it is time to believe in Him for salvation.

Jesus illustrated the simplicity of salvation by faith in these words to Nicodemus: "**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life**" (John 3:14-15). Jesus made reference to an Old Testament event recorded in Numbers 21 where a great number of Israelites had been bitten by fiery serpents, and 23,000 ultimately died. God instructed Moses to make a fiery serpent of brass and set it upon a pole, so that all who were snake-bitten might look upon the serpent, and live. In like manner, the Lord Jesus was lifted up upon a cross to suffer and die for our sins. The promise of salvation and life is for all who will take a

look of faith! Salvation is not a matter of doing something, but rather trusting someone. That someone is Jesus, who promised salvation and eternal life for a look of faith!

The apostle Paul described it in this manner: "**That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart believeth unto righteousness, and with mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, 'Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed'. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved**" (Romans 10:9-13). God's promise of salvation is to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is the one and only condition. The act of calling upon the name of the Lord is an expression of faith, not another condition for salvation! In a jail cell at the city of Philippi, the same apostle offered these words of instruction to a Roman jailor who asked, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**" Paul answered, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house**" (Acts 16:30-31).

Perhaps a personal invitation from Jesus Himself would encourage you to open the door of your heart to him. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus said, "**Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me.**" This invitation was extended to a lukewarm church. It was, however, clearly intended to be received on a personal, one-on-one basis. The entrance of Jesus into the heart of the believing sinner is the event that brings salvation. This is what the Bible describes as being "born again". It is the result of believing in Jesus Christ, and brings spiritual life—everlasting life! Again, the act of opening the door of one's heart is an expression of one's faith, not another condition for salvation!

An Invitation to You!

Does the following prayer express the desire of your heart? "Dear Jesus, I know I am a sinner, and I know that without you I will go to Hell. Dear Jesus, please come into my heart, take away my sins, and give me everlasting life. Thank you, Jesus, for dying for me. In Jesus name, Amen!" It was in response to this prayer as an expression of faith that Jesus saved me. I want to be clear! It was not the words of this prayer that brought salvation. These words came from my heart—a believing heart! It would have made no difference whatsoever how I phrased them. The Spirit of God had convicted me of sin, and brought me to a place where I knew was lost, and perishing without Jesus. I called upon Him in faith, trusting Him to save me, and He did. Will you trust Him for salvation and everlasting life?

I close this presentation with the verse of scripture that God used to bring me to Himself. It is perhaps the most familiar text in the Bible: "**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life**" (John 3:16). He loves you, my friend. I encourage you to respond to His love by taking a look of faith. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved!