

The Gospel Challenge

Wednesday, 04 October 2006

Are you offended by the Christian gospel? Does it make you mad or, at the very least, uncomfortable? Good! I say "good" because that means He is calling you...you just haven't realized it as yet. Did you ever wonder from where that visceral reaction is coming? If you don't believe, why should you care?

If you're like me, you hate it when somebody asks, "Do you know where you're going when you die?" You know who they are, right? Evangelical Christians! Like, who are these people, anyway, to presume that their way to God is the only way to God? And the way they talk about their God, you'd think they've actually had Him over for High Tea!

What is Heaven, anyway? If it means sitting around in a white robe, playing the harp and preening my wings all day for eternity, well, they can have it.

Humor me. For the sake of argument, pretend there is a God. Further pretend that this God is exactly who the Christians believe He is. You might say, "Great, so? What kind of God would turn away a good person?" I mean, you're basically a good person, right? Sure you are. Most of us are.

The question is, does our good make us good enough to live forever in the presence of a completely Holy God?

That's a mighty fine question, if you think about it.

Whether you believe in original sin; that through Adam all mankind has inherited a sin nature, or you believe that people can choose not to sin, but always make the wrong choice — the point is that God is completely and utterly holy and we are...well...we are not. As a consequence, God has separated Himself from mankind.

Sadly, there is no way for you, or me, to work our way up to God's standards. It's just not possible. No matter how good we are, how many good deeds we do, we will never be good enough to be holy. We simply miss the mark. That's what Sin means, literally, to miss the mark.

Before time began, the challenge was put before God and it was determined that the wage of this sin is death. It's not just physical death. If it were simply physical death, there'd be no need for mankind to plod along, day in and day out for millenia into millenia. We are not simply physical beings. We are spiritual beings and the truth is that we are spiritually dead.

Consider a plant. A plant must be cared for, watered regularly, in order to thrive. This water sustains the plant – gives it life. We are like plants, and God is the ‘living water.’ God cannot be in the presence of anything unholy, so He has withdrawn the living water and left us to our own devices. This results in spiritual separation from God (Hell).

But, that's why the Good News (gospel) is so good! God created mankind and is in love with His creation. He knew before our creation what would happen, and planned a way for us to be reunited with Him. Since the wage of sin is death, He arranged for a substitution, a person who would not have this sin nature, who would live a completely sinless, holy life, to die in our place. One perfect man could pay the ransom of all mankind. This was Jesus. He called himself the Way and the Light; the Living Water – Son of God. In fact, he was God manifest in human form to pay our ransom. His life on Earth provided a model by which we all should live. His death and resurrection provided the way to eternal life. His propitiatory sacrifice is a love gift to us, which we are free to either receive or reject. No greater love has a man than to lay down his life for his friend. John 15:13

Here's the urgency. Once you receive God's grace, you unlock the Kingdom of Heaven and begin a spiritual transformation that, for some includes an immediate revelation and, for others like me, involves years of gradual heart change. This transformation causes a desire to live the way Jesus lived, to love the way Jesus loved. It leads to that peace which passes understanding. Right here, right now, in this life.

If you reject the gift, there will come a day when God will allow you to completely withdraw from His presence. No matter how bad you may think the world is today – as long as there is some good, there is God. Forget about your preconceptions of Hell. If all good things come from God, as the Bible teaches, then absence of God means absence of all good things. That will be your eternity. Nothing good. Nothing beautiful. Are you prepared for that?

If you receive this gift, God has sent another helper, the Holy Spirit, who takes up residence in you, and feeds you with the living water. Your spiritual health is restored; you are credited with righteousness from God. Even though you will continue to miss the mark, God has credited you with righteousness by your obedience in faith and claimed you as His own.

It's true, all paths lead to God, for God has promised, in Philippians 2:10-11, that every knee will bow - in Heaven and on Earth and under the earth - and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. You see, there will be those who confess in joy, and others who are forced to "Say Uncle." Which are you? The acceptance of the gift of Christ is the only way to be redeemed by God; the only way to enjoy fellowship with Him for eternity – even after this world and all that is in it passes away. Reunion with God requires an active decision.

The decision is all yours.

I promise you that if you decide to accept this gift, and believe with all your being, you will experience a peace that surpasses logic. It is amazing. It is amazing grace.

If you still have trouble with the gospel, I challenge you to put it before God. God is the one who grants us faith. Perhaps you don't believe, but wish you could believe? Ask God for the faith – He will not hold back. Then let Him speak to you through His Word, the Bible.

Like C.S. Lewis -and me - and countless other skeptics who took the challenge, may you, too, be surprised by joy.

From the Scripture:

For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross so that all who believed will not perish, but have everlasting life. – John 3:16

The wage of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. – Paul, Romans 6:23

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. – Paul, Romans 3:23

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel righteousness from God is revealed; a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. As it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” – Paul in his letter to the Romans, circa. 57 A.D., Romans 1:16-17