

What is the 'Good News' - how does it affect me?

(Article by Jeremy Ley, Bth)

Good news? Beats what you find in the daily newspaper, doesn't it! But how does the 'Good News' of Jesus Christ - the Gospel - affect our lives? Are its benefits automatic or do we need to do something in order to apply it? If the world's our oyster, should we even be bothered about it at all...?

Can't be bothered to read all this information?

My advice is this: be bothered and you will be rewarded. Take it in stages if you have to - but read it. Some things are worth reading all the way through - especially when they are as important as this!

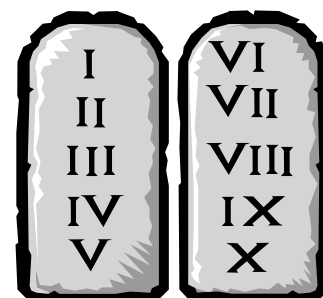
First - the bad news!

Let's be clear: the good news of the gospel isn't going to make any sense to us unless we first realise and admit that there is something radically wrong with the world. More specifically, that there is something wrong *with us!*

Whether we choose to ignore it or not, there is a power in us - a *propensity* (or natural drive) - to do evil. We see it more clearly in the lives of other people. Returning to our daily newspaper, you can read all about it - rapes, murders, thefts, fraud and so on. But if we stop for a moment and take a hard look at our own lives, we may be surprised to find that this propensity towards selfishness - something the Bible calls *sin* - is also present within you and me.

Perhaps the easiest way of proving this is to test our lives against God's Ten Commandments in order to see whether we can really consider ourselves to be a good person.

Start by asking yourself if you have ever told a lie. Truth be told, you have probably told many, many lies over the years. Even if you had lied just once, this fact alone is enough to convict you as a 'liar' (quite simply, someone who has told a lie).



Is it really that bad?

In Gods Word, the Bible, the Ninth Commandment is; 'You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour' (Exodus 20:16). In other words, 'don't lie'!



Okay, so hand on heart, we've all broken that one. Is that so bad? Well consider this. The Bible also tells us that all liars will have their part in the lake of fire at the judgement (Revelation 21:8).

Unfair? Maybe to you. But to God, it's stated clearly as the crime it really is. Breaking His Commandment not to lie puts us firmly, if not rather uncomfortably, in the category of 'all liars'.

If we take a look at some of the other Commandments (and if we are truthful) we'll find that we haven't done so well with those either. Have you ever looked at another with lust? In the Bible, lust is tantamount to having an affair. Jesus tells us that anyone

who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28). If you have ever looked at another woman or man with lust either on the street or on TV or the internet, then you have also broken the Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:14).

Exodus 20 verse 7 says; 'You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name'. Do you recognise the 'text' abbreviation, 'OMG'? Have you ever spoken what it stands for, or expressed 'Jesus Christ!' as a swear word? Commiserations - you've just broken the Third Commandment!

And so on. Again, what we perhaps thought were minor issues compared with the more obvious sins of others are suddenly exposed as serious transgressions of God's holy law. And as much as we may not like it, honesty should compel us to admit that we're guilty!

It get's even worse...

In a court of law, if you stole something, you deserve being convicted as a thief (having broken the Eighth Commandment - Exodus 20:15). How much more then, in God's Holy Court, at the Judgement, should we expect God, whom the Bible declares as just and holy and a righteous Judge, to declare us for what we truly are based on the record of *our* lives?



The Bible confirms this in Acts 4:10 where it says; "For He [God] has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead". Again, in Romans 2:12 and 16, we read; "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law... This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares".

So a day is coming when we will all be judged on an individual basis. Romans 2:5 says; "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed".



How will *you* do on that day? Again, if you are honest, you will have realised by now that you are in deep trouble. In fact, if you take your life and add God's righteous judgement for breaking His Commandments, then you know that when it comes down to it, you don't deserve to enter into Heaven. You are not being reasonable if you assume, like most people do, that you will somehow end up in Heaven when you die. Listen carefully to Jesus' own words in Matthew 7:21-23:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

But the worse news is this - even our good works - the things we have done that are right and good and charitable cannot Help us escape Hell on that terrible day. Once again, the Bible tells us this. In Isaiah 64:6 we read; "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away". In the end, the good we may have done cannot make up for the bad we have done. They don't change the fact that we have broken God's laws and are still condemned as being unrighteous lawbreakers before a righteous and holy God. Quite simply, there is nothing we can do in our own strength to save ourselves from His coming wrath!

Okay, now its time for some good news!

So what is the good news and how does it apply to me? Having examined first the bad news, we can now proceed to answer these questions.

We have already established that, according to the Bible, everyone has sinned (see Romans 3:23 and 1 Kings 8:46). We have also seen that we can't avoid God's judgement and that we should expect to be punished for breaking God's laws (Ezekiel 18:4 and Ephesians 2:3). Whether we like it or not or whether we choose to believe it or not, the Bible tells us that we are all, nevertheless, going to have to face God on the approaching day of judgement, having lived a life of sin (1 Peter 4:5).

The picture of God we may have up to this point is possibly a harsh one. We see Him only as Judge, holy and righteous. He doesn't seem very friendly or loving or give us much of a reason to like Him very much.

Even so, He would still be right and just to punish us for our sins. In the end, we have broken His good laws and sinned and deserve punishment. If God is perfect, there must be justice to set things aright. Rather clinical, perhaps, but perfectly fair. He is God and there must be perfect justice for Him to remain a righteous God.

Now it gets interesting as we announce the good news. The message of the good news - the gospel - declares that God so loved this fallen world that He did something about it - He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, so that whoever should believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life (see John 3:16). In other words, instead of sinners going to Hell because they had broken God's laws, sinners could be free from such condemnation, reconciled to God and given eternal life in a loving relationship with Him. This love in action reveals God as a God who cares and who desires to show His mercy and grace as much as His justice and righteousness - even to sinners like us!

How much did it cost?

Sin's penalty is death (Ezekiel 18:4 - 'the soul who sins will die'). How then can there be freedom from the punishment we deserve when we are still guilty of sin? How can God's justice be upheld?



Jesus Christ, whom the Bible reveals as the Son of God in human flesh, came to this earth 2000 years ago to be a sacrifice for all who choose to believe in Him. Jesus was put to death on a cross, a Roman method of execution, accused of subverting both Jewish and Roman authority. Yet He died willingly as an innocent man in whom was no sin (1 John 3:5), in order to bring about a great exchange...

Jesus came to die in our place. He took upon himself the punishment we deserve for our sins so that we might receive upon ourselves His righteousness. See how the Bible puts it in Romans 3:21-26:

"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

Tie all this up and this is what you get: God has secured salvation for sinners through the costly sacrifice of Jesus Christ which, through His divine merits, satisfies God's justice on behalf of the ungodly. This results in the glorious declaration: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1)!

Automatic?

One of the great delusions floating about some churches today is that this salvation, this deliverance from the penalty of sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is something that applies automatically to everyone. In other words, you can assume that you are now right with God because of Jesus and that you can therefore assume that you will end up in Heaven when you die. Sadly there are many churches that will give you this impression.

But the Bible never gives this assurance. The promise of salvation and deliverance from sin is conditional: it is granted to those who believe in what Jesus Christ has done to secure salvation and who come in humility to receive His forgiveness (Acts 2:38). Jesus invites us to come to Him in faith, repenting of our sin, which is a turning about from living an unrighteous life to walking in God's ways. An obedient life to God is one of the evidences that such faith is real and that a relationship with Jesus Christ is truly present, nurturing, encouraging and enabling a person to live as His witness. Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" and "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:31).

No fence to sit on...

If there was a fence to sit on, my guess is that almost everyone would be sitting on it. But the Bible tells us that there is no fence, no middle ground. You are either in Christ or you are outside of Christ. If you are not in Christ, then you do not have the Holy Spirit and you do not belong to Him (Romans 8:9). You either obey the gospel or you don't. For those who do not, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 has this warning:

"He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power on the day He comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed"



It is our sincere hope that after reading this, you will come to see your need of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of your sins. The good news is that you can be delivered from God's wrath. But be sure of this: either Jesus takes the punishment for your sins through faith in what He has done for you or else, through unbelief and a rejecting of the gospel, you will yet take that punishment.

In the end, the justice of God will be satisfied. Yet He is a God who longs to save to the uttermost all those who come to Him through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 7:25). He has opened the way for us to come to Him. Salvation is His gift - a gift that cannot be earned, only received. Will you come to Him and receive that which you need or will you reject His gift by trying to earn your way to heaven and failing in the attempt (see John 10:1; Ephesians 2:8,9; John 14:6)?

God's promise to us is not unclear and it demands an individual, personal response:

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (1 John 1:8-10)

What will your response be?

If you have been challenged by this article and would like to know more about becoming a Christian, please contact us via our website: www.bodmincommunitychurch.com

(Scripture passages quoted in this document are from in the New International Version)