



Articles and Sermons :: The Greatest Gift Ever Given....

The Greatest Gift Ever Given...., on: 2010/12/3 14:11

Here's the latest thing I've written for my personal blog. (link at the bottom)

The Greatest Gift Ever Given

In my life I am blessed to know many people who do not share in my faith with me. I love the opportunities that the Lord gives me to tell folks about my faith even when they get frustrated at me, or debate with me. I have one friend in particular that I went to high school with who challenges me all the time about matters of faith... and I love it!

Over time it has occurred to me on a number of occasions that with all the preaching and materials available today in America not many people truly understand what it means to be a Christian. Even people in churches today have a complete misunderstanding of God and salvation. And many people form their opinions about what it means to follow Jesus on what they see going on with those clowns masquerading as "preachers" on television and turning faith into a money making circus.

This is to be expected because we are all spiritually blind until our Father in Heaven chooses to reveal His truth to us.

It is my prayer that He will use this article to that end with some people.

First off, by the time this is finished I hope you will notice that not one time do I tell you that being a Christian means going to church all the time, listening to cheesy music, thinking I am better than everyone else, wearing a suit and tie, etc. Being a Christian is not about what we do... it's all about what Christ has done!

If this was based on what I do... game over. Go directly to Hell, do not pass go, do not collect \$200.

And you will notice as well that I will not tell you that being a Christian means all your troubles will vanish and life will be rainbows and lollipops! It's not about what WE get out of it, although there are many benefits that we receive. It is about Jesus Christ, and God's glory.

One thing we must establish first is that God is Holy. There is no sin in God. Jesus, while here on earth, was God in the flesh according to the book of John. Therefore Jesus was holy and sinless.

The second thing we must establish is that we are not holy or sinless. If we are honest with ourselves... we know this is true. Let's use the 10 Commandments as a measuring stick. Ever told a lie? Of course you have, we all have. Therefore you are a law breaker... a sinner.

Now that we have these simple truths established, let's move forward.

At this point two questions need to be asked:

If you were to die today do you know you would go to Heaven? Do you know for certain that you would not go to Hell?

Suppose that you were to die today and stand before God and He were to ask you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say?

There will be a judgment day, and you will stand before the God of the universe and give an account for all that you do. Romans 14:12 "So then each of us will give an account of himself to God."

I know we do not like to think that anyone would go to Hell, or be judged of God, but the simple fact is that God's Word (the Bible) gives warning over and over again that this is exactly what waits for all of us once we step over that threshold called death. And I came near close to stepping over that threshold recently.

If you are not sure if you where you will go after you die I have good news (gospel) for you! The Bible assures us that we

can know for certain that we have eternal life. 1 John 5:13 "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."

How can we know for sure that we have eternal life in Heaven?

To answer that question we need to take a look at the relationship between God and man, much like I did at the beginning of this article. We will begin by touching upon the "attributes" of God (that just means "who is God"), and these truths about God are given to us in the Bible. I'll try to explain what each one means:

God is holy. No one compares to God (1 Samuel 2:2; Exodus 15:11).

God is one. He is the only true God. He has revealed himself as a trinity of three persons – the Father, the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit, each of whom is equally God (Jeremiah 10:10; Isaiah 45:5).

God is eternal. He always has existed and he always will (Psalm 90:2; Revelation 1:8).

God is just. He is our Creator, Sustainer of life and Judge. His justice is perfect (Isaiah 30:18; Psalm 97:2).

God is omniscient. He is all knowing. He knows everything in the past, present and future (Psalm 119:168; Psalm 94:11).

God is omnipresent. He is present in all places at the same time. God is fully aware of everything that happens everywhere. He knows what we do and say and our every thought (Jeremiah 23:24).

God is omnipotent. He is all powerful. He can do all things (Psalm 135:6).

God is sovereign. He is the sole and supreme ruler of the universe (Job 37:23; Daniel 4:35).

OK... so we have established what God has said to us about Himself in the Bible. So this begs the question:

Why did this all knowing, all powerful, sovereign God create us? Why do we exist? What is God's purpose for us?

Man was created in God's image:

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). God created mankind in His own image to be a reflection of His holy character (personality). We have the ability to reflect His character in our love, patience, forgiveness, kindness, and faithfulness. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 5:6). Mankind was a unique creation of God that was set apart from the rest of the created beings. God gave man the authority (rule) over all other living creatures that He created (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:5-8). God has the ultimate rule over all things but He has delegated this authority to man.

God's purpose for man:

God's purpose for mankind is that we honor, serve, and fellowship with Him. "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Revelation 4:11). Adam and Eve were the first man and woman that God created. At the time of creation, man was perfect in nature, reflecting God's character. A perfect harmony existed between God and man because Adam and Eve honored God by obeying His commands (Genesis 2:16-17). In our world today, the image (likeness) of God in man is not clear. The reflection of God's character is dim.

So what happened to the perfect relationship between God and man? What went down? And why do we need salvation?

God commanded Adam and Eve not to "eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17). This was the one thing that God told them NOT to do! Up until this time there was NO sin! When they disobeyed God and ate from the tree (Genesis 3:1-7), sin entered the world (Romans 5:12). Adam and Eve's sin passed to the entire human race, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

So what is sin?

Sin is rebellion against God. It is breaking God's law, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Sin is individual acts of doing what God has told us not to do or not doing what God has commanded us to do. Sin is not limited to our actions but it includes what we think or say (Matthew 5:21-48). Sin can also refer to a general human condition. The perfect nature of mankind from creation no longer exists. We inherited a sinful nature from Adam and we are born with it.

All you have to do is watch the evening news, my friend. You can see that sin has in fact entered the world and that ALL sin.

Is sin serious? Does sin have consequences? Does sin get in the way of our salvation?

SIN'S PENALTY: DEATH

God's holiness demands a penalty for man's sin, "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). Just as YOU demand a judge in court lay down a penalty on someone who has committed a crime against YOU, God lays down a penalty on all for crimes (sins) committed against Him.

The consequence (penalty) of sin is death. The Bible teaches that the death penalty resulting from sin separates a person from God. Spiritual death separates a person from the life of God, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Spiritual death begins at birth, man is born with a sinful nature, and continues to sin throughout life until physical death. Physical death occurs when a person's soul separates from his or her body (Hebrews 9:27). Eternal death separates a person, both soul and body, from God forever in Hell (Revelation 20:15). Hell is a "place of torment" (Luke 16:28b), it is a "fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42).

Do not listen to anyone who will tell you differently about Hell. Hell is real, and it is a terrifying place of torment. That is what Jesus Christ Himself taught. Anyone who tells you differently is a liar. And AC/DC had it right... it is the "promised land" because it is what is promised for all of those who die in their sins. Former lead singer for AC/DC, the late Bon Scott, knows this is a reality.

How can we escape this death penalty for sin? How can we avoid Hell? Do we have to be a good person in order to get into Heaven when we die?

RELIGION: GOOD WORKS (not gonna get it done!)

Are you a good person? Do you go to church? Do you give to the poor? Do you believe in God?

A lot of people think they will "make it on" based on the good things they do here on earth. Kind of like a merit point system. Or that religious activities will get them in. Church attendance, or saying enough repetitive prayers will get the job done. Or they think they will "get it" based on a system of belief (religion) or a moral code.

Let's take a look at some of these misunderstandings (otherwise known as deception).

You say: "I believe in God!"

The Bible says: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (James 2:19). Believing that God exists is a good start but that alone will not get a person into heaven. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him" (Romans 1:21).

You say: "Dude... I'm a good person! I do good deeds. I coach youth football and donate canned food at the local food pantry!"

The Bible says: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6a). Sure, these are good things! But these "things" will not get you into Heaven, nor remove the death penalty hanging over your head as a result of your sin! Remember that we were all born with a sinful nature so it is not what we do but who we are (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:8-9).

You say: "I go to church, I worship God! I donated 3 bails of hay to the church last year for the Christmas nativity scene ! I listen to Christian radio all the time..."

The Bible says: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12). Going to church and taking part in religious things or ordinances (i.e. communion) again are "good" things but they do not remove the death penalty that has resulted from your sin. Churchgoing folk may even fool a lot of people, including themselves, into thinking they are "good". On the outside people may even appear to be Christians but God knows the heart of all men. "He (Jesus) said to them (Pharisees) "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight" (Luke 16:15).

You say: "Well... I've never killed anyone. I'm not a thief. I've never even been in trouble with the cops. I'm pretty good compared to a lot of people I know! I've done anything... uh... really wrong!"

The Bible says: "Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin" (Proverbs 20:9). God is perfect and therefore all sin is deadly serious in His sight. The Bible teaches that sin is not limited to just actions but also includes thoughts and words. "He (Jesus) went on "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (Mark 7:20-23).

Friend, God closes the doors at every turn when it comes to man attempting to save himself from God's wrath. There is nothing you can do. You have sinned against God, as we all have. And just like everyone else you have already been judged guilty, and the penalty for your guilt is death and hell.

And I know compared to what you hear coming from so-called preachers today... this sounds pretty harsh. But how evil and harsh would it be if I did not share the TRUTH with you? Time is short, and there is absolutely an urgency in my message. Death comes quickly, as I recently learned. I used to be caught up in so many things that I thought were do important until the day I almost died. Now getting this message out to the world is the most important thing to me. It's from a heart of compassion that I share this... there is nothing YOU can do to save yourself from what awaits you.

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death" (Romans 7:24)

So... what has been done to save us, since we can not save ourselves?

Jesus Christ paid the death penalty for us!

"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" (John 3:16). God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross in our place. Jesus, who is God, became a man and lived the life (without sin) that we cannot live. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21) (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus died the death that we could not die. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). We have learned that our best efforts, all of our righteous acts, cannot restore our relationship with God. When Jesus died on the cross, He provided a way for us to have a right relationship with God here on earth and in heaven. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

It's as if you got a speeding ticket and you are now standing before the judge in court. He levies a \$250 fine on you. Someone suddenly bursts into the court room and pays your \$250 fine! The penalty has been paid... YOU are free to go!

How can Jesus Christ become your Savior? How do we receive salvation?

TRUST IN CHRIST

If you want to enter into a right relationship with God and have eternal life in heaven you must receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Jesus said in John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In order to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you must repent of your sins and put your trust in Jesus Christ alone as the only hope of eternal life.

REPENT

The Bible teaches us that all people "must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21b). When we repent of our sins, God forgives us and wipes our slate clean. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19a). Repentance is more than just asking God for forgiveness, it is also changing our attitude toward sin. We must now live in a way that is pleasing to God.

BELIEVE

"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Romans 10:9-10). When you put your trust in Jesus Christ, it means that you believe that He is the Son of God, who died for you on the cross and rose from the dead. It is a transfer of trust from your own good works or religion to Christ as the only way of salvation. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

What are the results of salvation?

GOD IS GLORIFIED

Salvation is all of grace. God's grace. He looked down through the corridors of time and saw you and chose YOU! Rejoice, and give Him the glory.

GOD'S PROMISE: ETERNAL LIFE

Jesus said in John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." What an awesome promise for those that put their faith in Christ alone! Jesus tells us that the believer: 1) will have eternal life, 2) will not come into God's judgment (not be condemned), and 3) has passed out of death into life—no longer being separated from God but living with Him forever in heaven.

How do you receive God's salvation?

Admit that you are a sinner, confess that you have sinned against God and ask Him for forgiveness.

Believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for you on the cross, rose from the dead, and is Lord.

Call upon Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior enabling you to turn from sin and to live for Him.

Think on these things. Open up a Bible and seek God. He has promised in His Word that if you seek Him... you WILL find Him. If you have any questions at all please leave a comment below and I will answer as soon as possible!

Discipleman

Re: The Greatest Gift Ever Given...., on: 2010/12/4 6:01

If anyone has any suggestions to improve this article I would greatly appreciate it!

Already had someone send me a message telling me it was way to long. I struggled with that when I was writing it... but after reading it over about 10 times I really felt compelled to leave everything in there that I wrote.