

Good News!

Before we talk of the Good News we need to deal with the bad news.

The problem with you and me

As God's creatures, He owns us and has set a perfect moral standard for us—and we are accountable to Him for how we live (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible tells us that we all, like Adam and Eve (the first man and woman), have turned away from God's ways; we have gone our own way, living life in effect as if we were God—in charge. This rebellion, rejecting God's rule over us, is what the Bible calls 'sin' and we have all sinned (Romans 3:23).

The Bible says that God will hold us accountable for our sin. Like Adam, the first man that God created, we all deserve God's judgment for our sin. As descendants of Adam, we all suffer physical death at the end of this earthly life. The Bible calls this death (the result of God's curse—Genesis 3:19) 'the last enemy' (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death had no place in the original perfect creation. It came about because of Adam's sin, when he, by his actions, told God that He was not needed—Adam was going to be his own god. However, each one of us has endorsed Adam's action, in individually rejecting God's rule over us (Romans 5:12).

The Bible also tells us that God will, in the future, judge us for our sin. His judgment will result in terrible consequences (Romans 2:5–11). God is perfectly just, meaning that He will always act justly according to the moral / legal principles that He instituted, so He must punish violations of His law. Since our shortcomings offend His perfect, infinite holiness, the punishment must also be infinite. Because we are finite, it follows that the punishment must be of infinite duration (Matthew 25:46). Further, we cannot earn God's pardon or forgiveness by any deeds we do, for nothing we can do can undo the sin we have done (Romans 3:23, 24; Ephesians 2:8,9). Doing good things to try to outweigh the bad is like painting fresh paint over dry rot in timber—the dry rot still remains.

God's rescue plan

But God has provided a way of escape from the curse of death and the judgment to come. Either we must suffer our punishment, or else a Substitute must endure it in our place (Isaiah 53). The Substitute must be fully human to substitute for humanity (Hebrews 2:14), must be perfectly sinless so He would not have to atone for sins of His own (Hebrews 7:27), and must be fully Divine to endure God's infinite wrath (Isaiah 53:10). To be the mediator between God and Man, Jesus must be both—'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 2:5).

The Bible says, 'For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' (John 3:16) Jesus Christ came into the world to take upon Himself the curse and penalty for our sins. As God in the flesh (Colossians 2:9), the God-man Jesus lived a sinless life (Hebrews 4:15) and willingly gave Himself to suffer death for us, in our place (Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 3:18). He took upon himself the punishment we deserved for our sins. As He was God (as well as man), His life was of sufficient value to pay for all the sins of any number of people. And He rose from the dead, proving that He had paid the price and conquered death. Jesus' death and Resurrection are attested facts of history—many have tried to explain away the events and instead been converted.

A free gift? Is anything truly free?

God offers this free gift of salvation to all who will receive it. He calls upon all to turn away from

their sinful ways and trust in what Christ has done for us. We can do nothing to remove our guilt before God (Romans 3:23). Doing good things does not remove our sin, and since we are all sinners, we can do nothing to undo that; it is only by the mercy of God that we can be saved through what He has done—it is a gift (Ephesians 2:8,9). Those who try to earn their own salvation apart from God's grace (unmerited favour) will fail (Romans 9:32).

The alternative?

On the other hand, whoever spurns God's offer will suffer His wrath in the judgment to come, of which the Bible clearly warns repeatedly. This is a terrifying prospect (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9). Jesus spoke much of this, warning people of the danger they faced. The Bible's book of Revelation uses graphic imagery to depict the dreadful future of those who reject God's mercy now—eternal separation from God, the source of all that is good.

Some might protest that such a sentence is excessive. However, God is giving the rebellious their heart's desire: to be free of God's rule over them forever. The problem is that to be free of God's rule also entails being separated from God Who is the source of all that is good (Genesis 1:31; 1 John 1:5–10).

If you understand that you are an unworthy sinner, deserving of God's condemnation and in need of His forgiveness, then the Bible says that you must have 'repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 20:21). Repentance means a complete change of mind—that you agree with God about your sin and about who Jesus is and what He did for you, and you now want to live a life pleasing to Him. Faith in Jesus Christ entails accepting who He is, 'the Son of the living God', that 'Christ died for the ungodly' and that He conquered death for you in His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:21,22). You must believe that He is able to rescue you, and put your trust in Christ alone to make you right with God.

What now?

If you desire to be saved, then turn to Christ now. Admit to Him that you are a guilty, helpless sinner, and ask Him to save you and be Lord of your life, helping you to leave behind your sinful ways and live for Him. The Bible says, 'If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved' (Romans 10:9). (Note that this promise from God does not depend on your feelings, which come and go; we can simply trust God for what He has promised. That which God says He will do, He will do.) If you have prayed in this way, then you should find some Christians who respect the Bible, God's Word, as authoritative in all matters of which it speaks—such Christians will be keen always to study the Bible's teaching, applying it to their lives. Ask them to help you as you learn to live as God wants you to live.

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