



“Understanding the Bible”

Section 3: What is the Message of the Bible?



Unit 3.2 – Grasping the Gospel at Ground Level

I) Setting Our Feet on Solid Ground

- In Unit 3.1, we began exploring the message of the Bible by getting a big picture view of the gospel from 30,000 feet. In this unit, we are going to make a transition from the air to the **ground** so we can get a closer look at this good news of Jesus Christ revealed to us in Holy Scripture. To prepare our minds for this gospel journey on the ground level, we need to consider some important life questions that only the Bible can truly answer. Back in Unit 1.3 we talked about the “College Questions” that we all ask ourselves as we form our own worldview. As we consider the full breadth of the gospel message, we need to revisit some of those questions to see how Scripture uniquely answers them. In his book, *What is the Gospel?*, Christian author Greg Gilbert poses four fundamental questions (similar to our list in 1.3) that only the gospel can resolve. These questions include the following:
 - a) *Who made us, and to who are we accountable?*
 - b) *What is our problem? In other words, are we in trouble and why?*
 - c) *What is God’s solution to the problem? How has He acted to save us from it?*
 - d) *How do I – myself, right here, right now – how do I come to be included in that salvation? What makes this good news for me and not just for everyone else?*

II) God: Our Holy & Loving Creator

- First, to understand who we are, why we are here, and where we are going, we need to understand who made us and who we are accountable to with our lives. In the opening chapter of his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, renown Christian author A.W. Tozer once said, “*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*” The Bible makes it clear in its opening verse that what should come into our minds immediately is that we were created by an eternal, all-powerful Creator God. Genesis 1:1 says, “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” These words teach us that God is eternal because He already existed in the beginning of time, and He is also all-powerful because He created the heavens and earth out of nothing (“*ex nihilo*” in Latin).
- While there are so many majestic attributes of God worthy of our reflection and worship, two dominant qualities of God (in addition to being an eternal, all-powerful Creator) are that God is **holy** and **loving**. Revelation 4:8 tells us that the creatures of heaven gather around the throne of God day and night crying out, “*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.*” God’s holiness refers to His unblemished perfection and His “otherness” or “set apartness” from His fallen creation. But not only is God holy, He is also loving. 1 John 4:8 states, “*Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*” This proves that God is loving because love is not just something God does, but it is a part of who God is.

III) Man: God’s Image-Bearing Creatures

- Now that we know who God is, we need to consider who we are and why we are here. In Unit 3.1 we referred to Genesis 1:27 to highlight the fact that we are living creatures made in the image of God to be a reflection of Him to the rest of the world. Being made in God’s image has given all human beings a great **privilege** but also a great **responsibility**. The privilege, according to Genesis 1:28, is that God has given human beings dominion over all created things on earth. According to this passage, we have the ruling authority “*over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.*” Our responsibility, however, is to perfectly display God’s holiness and love to all of creation so that we are accurately demonstrating who our Creator is. This is something we intrinsically know we have failed at because our fallen nature has tainted our holiness and our love.

IV) Sin: Man's Stain of Disobedience

- We are flawed human beings who have distorted God's image as a holy and loving Creator, and this distortion can be summed up in one word: **Sin**. This concept of sin refers to anything that we say, think, or do that is in direct disobedience to God. What we need to understand about sin is that we are not sinners just because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners by our very natures from birth. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin entered the world and brought a curse upon mankind. Since we are all descendants of Adam and Eve, we inherited this sinful nature before we ever spoke our first words. The book of Romans gives us a progressive picture of the reality and penalty that sin has brought to mankind. Here are four verses that perfectly illustrate how sin has left a stain on God's creation:
 - a) **Romans 3:10** – *"None is righteous, no, not one."* (everyone in the history of creation is a sinner)
 - b) **Romans 3:23** – *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (our sin is not glorifying God)
 - c) **Romans 5:12** – *"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."* (sin came to us from our forefather Adam)
 - d) **Romans 6:23** – *"The wages of sin is death"* (our punishment for this sin is death and separation)

V) Christ: God's Sacrificial Solution to Sin

- If the biblical message ended with sin, then the gospel would not be good news for anyone because death would be the theme of the final chapter. Thankfully, the Holy Scriptures offer us a solution to this horrible problem. The Bible teaches that as sin entered the world through one man, Adam, the good news of redemption by grace through faith also came through one man, Jesus Christ. Romans highlights this free gift of salvation offered through Christ by presenting Him as the second Adam who succeeded where the first Adam failed. **Romans 5:15** says, *"But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many."* In simplified terms, this means the sin of Adam brought the curse of death on all men, but the righteousness of Christ brings the gift of eternal life to all men who place their faith in His perfect life, sacrificial death, and supernatural resurrection.

VI) Response: Repenting & Believing the Good News

- The last question that Greg Gilbert posed in our list at the beginning of this unit centered around how we ourselves can be included in this plan of salvation. Jesus understood the need for everyone to personally respond to His gospel message, so He made the instructions simple and clear. In Mark 1:15 as Jesus was beginning His three-year public ministry, He proclaimed, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* These two commands to **repent** and **believe** are interdependent terms and we have to do both to receive eternal salvation. To repent means to acknowledge our sin and its violation of God's holy will, and then to reject that sin by making a 180-degree turn in the other direction. To believe is to trust, surrender, and obey Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior after we have repented of our sins. So, we have to believe that our sin was bad enough to need salvation, and that Christ's righteousness was good enough to secure salvation.

VII) Considering Our Great Commission Calling

- Now that we know the glorious gospel of Christ, we have no choice but to share it with the rest of the world. Jesus charges us with the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:19-20**, when He says, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Simply put, because He came...we go!

VIII) Preaching the Gospel First to Ourselves

- One final distinction that we need to make concerning the gospel is that this message is not just for our salvation, but it's for our daily **sanctification**. As author J.D. Greear states in his book, *Gospel*, *"The gospel is not just the diving board off of which we jump into the pool of Christianity; it is the pool itself."* This means that once we are swimming in the pool of faith, we need to preach the gospel to ourselves daily so that we can receive the forgiveness, restoration, and strength we need to live the Christian life.