

A GOSPEL "TUNE UP"

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INTRODUCTION

I inherited a weed whip from my father some years ago. As far as I can figure, it's at least twenty years old. I like it. It's built tough, but it was running sluggish. So the other day I went through it and tuned it up – checked spark plug, cleaned the air filter, adjusted the idle and fuel mixture, greased the spindle – and its running like new.

Things we use often need tunes up now and then. Our cars, kitchen knives, our computers, even our relationships – that's why dates and weekends away are a good thing for our marriages.

There is a term that we use quite often that from time to time needs a tune up. By using it so often or hearing it so often its meaning gets a little loose, a little sloppy.

This morning we will be doing a Gospel "tune up" to make sure we're understanding and sharing the Gospel well.

THE GOSPEL

The word "Gospel" means "Good News." The Gospel is the good news of how you and I can have a loving, personal relationship with God that gives meaning and purpose to this life, and also, at the same time, gives us the certainty that we will spend eternity with God in heaven!

Many people today claim that they are preaching the Gospel, yet they all seem to have different messages. We hear invitations to respond to the Gospel like these:

- Say a sinner's prayer
- Invite Jesus into your heart!
- Pray to receive Christ.
- Trust in the Lord!
- Turn from your sins to God.
- Put Jesus on the throne of your life
- Give your heart to God

Why do we hear so many different messages today? Is there more than one gospel? What really is "The Gospel" according to the Bible?

SIN

To understand the good news of how the relationship between God and man must be restored, one must first understand how the relationship fell into ruin.

The Word of God teaches us:

Genesis 2:15-17

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

(English Standard Version)

Adam disobeyed God's command. In the Bible, all disobedience to God's will is called sin. In other words, when we disobey God we are sinning against God.

God told Adam that the day Adam disobeyed God Adam would die. To die in the sense described by God is to die spiritually by becoming alienated from God; it is to become separated from God the Creator. The day Adam ate fruit from the tree forbidden by God, he died spiritually and became alienated from God. Though it was imperceptible that day, Adam also started to die physically. The punishment for Adam's disobedience was that he immediately died spiritually and eventually he died physically.

This is significant to us because Adam, the first and perfect man represented our entire race. What happened to Adam happens to all of us with one major difference. Adam was created sinless and became sinful through disobedience; all of us are born sinful and spiritually dead. That we are sinful and spiritually dead is proven by the fact that we all eventually die physically.

Romans 5:12-14

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man (Adam), and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

(English Standard Version)

We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

(English Standard Version)

SEPARATION FROM GOD

The result of sin is clear:

Romans 6:23

²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(English Standard Version)

Sin creates a barrier that separates man from God

God is both holy (spiritually clean) and infinite. Therefore, He is infinitely holy! Consequently, even the smallest sin is infinitely offensive to Him. Thus, the Bible teaches that even the smallest sin is enough to eternally separate man from God. God cannot allow sin in His presence.

MAN'S EFFORTS ARE USELESS!

Man has always sought a way to cross the barrier that separates him from God. He has tried to break through it by baptism, good works, loving his neighbor, sacraments, joining some particular church or denomination, etc. But the Bible teaches that no work of sinful man can ever tear down the barrier of sin that separates Holy God from sinful man.

The Bible says:

Romans 3:20

²⁰For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

(English Standard Version)

Isaiah 64:6

⁶We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

(English Standard Version)

To attempt to wash away our sins through our own works is as hopeless as trying to wash a dirty face using a dirty greasy rag! There is absolutely nothing that man can do to erase his sins and cross the barrier that separates him from God. (Also see Romans 3:20; 3:27-28; 4:5; Galatians 3:10-11, 21).

THE GOSPEL

The word "Gospel" means "Good News." Since we can never come into God's presence in our sins, God sent Jesus to die for our sins, and then raised Him from the dead on the third day.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

¹Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

(English Standard Version)

Many people truly believe that Jesus died and arose from the dead, but what does the Bible mean when it says that Jesus died "for our sins"? How did Jesus' death tear down the barrier between God and man?

THE PROBLEM: GOD MUST PUNISH SIN

The Bible tells us that since God is holy and just, He must punish sin.

Romans 1:18

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

(English Standard Version)

Ephesians 5:6

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

(English Standard Version)

God's justice requires that man must pay for the sins which he has committed against Holy God by suffering God's eternal punishment. How Christ freed us from God's wrath through His own death can be explained in three steps.

Step 1: IMPUTATION

CHRIST TOOK OUR SINS UPON HIMSELF

The first step in the redemption of mankind was for Jesus Christ to bear the sins of the world in His own body. When Jesus hung on the cross, God took all the sins of the world (past, present, and future), and placed (imputed) them into Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹For our sake He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.

(English Standard Version)

1 Peter 2:24

²⁴He [Jesus] Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.

(English Standard Version)

Since God the Father laid the guilt of all our sin on Jesus when Jesus was on the cross and God must punish sin – whom did God now have to punish?

Step 2: SUBSTITUTION

CHRIST DIED IN OUR PLACE.

Since God must punish sin, He poured out His wrath upon Jesus in our place. Jesus became our "substitute." He was punished for our sins and died in our place.

Isaiah 53:5

⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

(English Standard Version)

Matthew 27:46

⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

(English Standard Version)

Step 3: SATISFACTION (PROPITIATION)

CHRIST'S DEATH PAID IN FULL FOR OUR SINS, THEREBY SATISFYING GOD'S ANGER AND JUSTICE.

Since Jesus died in our place for our sins, God's justice was satisfied. Jesus paid for all man's sins, so any man who chooses to accept that payment will never have to experience the eternal wrath of God which must come upon all sin. Jesus paid in full for all man's sins!

John 19:30

³⁰When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

(English Standard Version)

The phrase "it is finished" was actually an expression used in Rome in the time of Christ when a debt had been paid in full.¹ When Jesus shouted "it is finished" just before He died, He was indicating that He had made a perfect, complete and final payment for sin.

Colossians 2:13-14

¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

(English Standard Version)

Jesus has torn down the barrier between God and man by paying for our sins through His own death. How can Jesus' death be so valuable that it can pay not only for all of your sins, but for all the sins of all men of all ages? It is because ...

Jesus Is God

Jesus is God! He is eternally equal in every way to the Father! He simply became a man so He could die for our sins, but He never stopped being God!

John 20:28-29

²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

(English Standard Version)

Why Did God Become A Man?

We have learned in previous pages that because God is infinitely Holy, even the smallest sin is infinitely offensive to Him. As a result, an infinite payment must be made for the sins of each and every person. Now there are two ways by which an infinite payment can be offered: a finite person could suffer God's wrath for an infinite period of time, or an infinite person could suffer God's wrath for a finite period of time. Both yield an infinite payment for sin.

¹ Kittle, VIII pp. 57, 60

Man, who is finite, would therefore have to suffer God's wrath for infinity if he were to pay for his own sins. That is why hell is eternal.

Jesus Christ, the infinite God in human form, would only have to suffer God's wrath a finite amount of time to provide an infinite payment for sin. Since He is God, the suffering He endured on the cross was a sacrifice of infinite value. Therefore, His death made available the infinite payment necessary to pay for the sins of all men throughout all ages.

An infinite payment must be made for every man's sins. God allows each person to decide which payment plan he prefers . . . Jesus Christ, or eternity in hell.

Faith: MAN'S RESPONSE TO CHRIST

Jesus did all the work necessary to save man from his sins. However, before we can experience the benefits which God has provided through Christ's death on the cross, God requires that we believe (trust) in Jesus and what He has accomplished.

Galatians 2:16

16yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

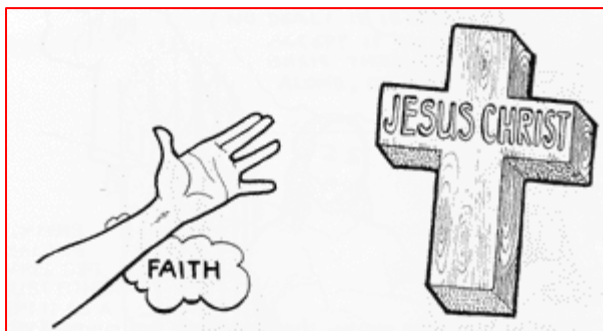
(English Standard Version)

John 3:16

16For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

(English Standard Version)

There are over 160 verses in the New Testament which make clear that the only condition for receiving eternal life is faith in Jesus Christ.



Faith (Trust) Is The Hand By Which We Reach Out And Accept The Eternal Life Offered Freely In Jesus Christ.

Grace: A FREE GIFT

The word "grace" means something which is given freely . . . without cost or obligation. For example, if your best friend offered you a gift and you tried to pay him for it, could you still call it a gift? Of course not! It becomes a debt which he owes you the moment he accepts your money! Your friend would probably even be insulted, withdraw the gift and say: "I'm not giving this to you because I have to. It is a gift. Do you accept my gift or not?"

A Gift: The Moment You Offer Something In Exchange For It, It Is No Longer A Gift. It Becomes A Debt!

The same is true with God's offer of eternal life. People try to purchase eternal life by obeying the Ten Commandments, living a good life, going to church, or some other religious work. But God will not make Himself a debtor to any man! He does not "owe" eternal life to anyone. He will offer it only as a gift!

Grace: IT MUST BE FREE

When man attempts to gain eternal life through his works, he is no longer accepting God's offer to eternal life as a free gift, that is, by "grace."

Yet it is only by His "grace" that God will save us!

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

(English Standard Version)

Therefore, scripture teaches that God withdraws the offer of eternal life from anyone who tries to earn it through his works, thus degrading God by seeking to make Him a debtor to sinful man.

For you have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace. Galatians 5:4

Therefore, to attempt to gain eternal life through the works of the law is to reject the only way in which God offers eternal life, that is, by His grace! And when a man rejects God's gracious offer of eternal life he is freely choosing to face eternal condemnation.