

WHY IS THE WORLD SO MESSEDD UP?

Why is the world so messed up? In one word, sin. Human rebellion against the God who created us can account for all the misery and heartache and death that the world has ever known. Complex problems all stem from this simple root. There *is* a solution to the problem of sin, but to understand it, we must start at the beginning.

There isn't a person alive who can give us a first-hand account of the history of the universe. Therefore, our knowledge of the world's beginning and our knowledge of human origins is limited to what God chooses to reveal to us. He gives us a glimpse into His existence through the majesty of the universe He's created, but the specifics of who God is and who we are can only be found in the written and preserved record of the Bible.

II Timothy 3:16-17 states that, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." II Peter 1:21 adds, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

The Bible is God's Word to all of humankind and this is the essence of the message it brings.

GOD IS THE CREATOR

Genesis 1:1 tells us that, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

The fact that God created us means that He has authority over us. The apostle Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, speaks of God as being a potter. He asks this of us in Romans 9:20. What right does the pot have to complain to the potter about how it was made? While God was and is free to do with His creation as He sees fit, God placed the first man and woman into a garden paradise and provided for their every need. The authority He exercised over Adam and Eve was not that of an unfeeling slave-master but rather that of a beloved benefactor. There was only one rule in the garden. "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:16-17).

Despite God's explicit prohibition, Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6). They were removed from the garden (to protect them from eternal damnation - Genesis 3:22-24), the first death occurred (as a means of procuring clothes to cover their shame - Genesis 3:21), and the curse of God fell upon humankind (Genesis 3:13-19). Nevertheless, while God had the authority and justification to strike them dead on the spot, He allowed them to live. Even more significantly, the curse which God levied against His creatures contained in it a promise for their redemption.

The New Testament tells us that Adam's decision to disobey God, since he was the representative of all humankind, cast us all under the weight and condemnation of sin (Romans 5:12,18-19). Adam was like a general who, on behalf of his entire army, negotiates a treaty of surrender with a hated enemy. When Adam surrendered to sin, the whole of the human "army" surrendered with him, and we have been in sin's bondage ever since.

GOD IS HOLY

The reason that God cannot tolerate disobedience (sin) in His creatures is because God, Himself, is perfectly Holy. Sin is an absolute contradiction and affront to His entire being. He cannot dwell in the continual presence of sin.

Isaiah 6:3 states, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." The holiness of God demands that He be set apart from all that is sinful. Every thought, characteristic, and action of God is perfect, and this is the same level of holiness that He requires of His creation. His character can allow for nothing less. Leviticus 19:2 issues this simple charge, "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."

GOD IS PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS

While the Lord is slow to anger, He can in no way leave the guilty unpunished (Nahum 1:3). Proverbs 17:15 tells us that "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord."

We know from the biblical account that everyone who has descended from Adam is condemned (Romans 5), and Romans 3:23 tells us that not only are we condemned in Adam, but we are also guilty for our own acts of sinfulness. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Of course, even if there were no biblical texts speaking to the universal reach of sin, the testimony of our own heart would indict us. There isn't a person on the planet who can even live up to the standard of their own conscience.

The greatest commandment ever given, the sum of the whole law, is to love God with all your heart and love other people as much as you love yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). Here's the question, then. Have you ever loved something more than God or failed to love another person as much as you love yourself? If so, you are guilty. If this standard is too vague for you, consider the ten commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Have you ever lied or stolen something? Have you ever disrespected your parents or desired something that wasn't yours? Jesus tells us that we're not just commanded to refrain from the physical manifestations of sin, like murder or adultery, but also (and primarily) from the heart condition which proceeds and accompanies such sins (Matthew 5:21-26, 27-30). If we have hated or lusted, we are guilty.

Add to this reality the just consequence of sin, and you will begin to see just how desperate the situation is. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and the Bible isn't just speaking of physical death, it has in view eternal death (Revelation 20:14-15). It is a spiritual death marked not by annihilation, but rather by eternal torment and suffering (Matthew 8:12, Mark 9:47-48).

The righteousness of God demands that He punish sin justly. Just as it would be a massive injustice for a human judge to let a convicted murderer or a child molester go free, so it would be for God to let a sinner go free.

GOD IS PERFECTLY LOVING

While God cannot just let sin go, His love so moved Him that He orchestrated for us a means of salvation which both restores us to God and satisfies the just penalty of sin. It boggles the mind, but God the Father lovingly sent God the Son, Jesus Christ (who is also God (John 1:1 and John 10:30)), to the

world to spare each of us from the consequences of sin, and allow us the privilege of spending eternity with Him in heaven.

John 3:16, one of the most familiar verses in history proclaims, “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.”

Jesus Christ came to earth as a man, lived a sinless life, and suffered the punishment for our sin by being crucified on the cross and enduring the wrath of God, which we deserved. We know that the punishment Christ received satisfied God’s justice for God raised Christ from the dead to validate the sacrifice and give us assurance that it was accepted. (I Corinthians 15:3-7).

Just as the singular sin of one man, Adam, led all of humanity into sin, Romans 5 tells us that the singular death and resurrection of the one man Jesus Christ offers to all humanity the opportunity to be forgiven and restored. Each of us can escape the consequences of sin by submitting to Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross. The penalty Christ paid is sufficient for the entire human race, but it will only be applied to those who yield their life to Him. The salvation Christ offers is a free gift. It is not a result of anything which we have or could do. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.” Nevertheless, while salvation cannot be purchased or earned, there is a significant “cost” which much be considered. The cost can in no way match-up against that which is gained, but it is real and significant. One of the most controversial statements Jesus ever made, in fact, centered on the cost of following Him.

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

Luke 14:26-30

Jesus says that our devotion to Him, our love for Him, must supersede our affections for everything else in life to such an extent that all these lesser loves could be viewed as hatred in comparison. In other words, there isn’t a relationship in all the world that isn’t worth giving up for the sake of Christ. Those people who set off to follow Christ without considering the cost are just like the man who starts building a house without having the money to pay for it. Their end is failure and ridicule. At the same time, Jesus tells us that no matter what we give up for the sake of His eternal kingdom, the return on investment will make all such sacrifices utterly inconsequential. In a one-verse parable Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44). Selling all of your *meager* earthly treasure (all of it!) simply can’t compare with the worth of the treasure which you gain in so doing. Giving up your allegiance to all your worldly affections and possessions doesn’t earn you your salvation, it simply illustrates that *God* is your treasure, and if God is your treasure, you can rest assured that your salvation has already been granted.

YOUR RESPONSE TO TRUTH

God the Father simply could not have paid a higher price than the life of His only Son for the purchase

of our salvation. When Jesus stood on the brink of his crucifixion He prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." (Matthew 26:42). The cup didn't pass, which tells us that there was no other way than for the Living God to die in our place. John 14:6 tells us that the only way to be reconciled to God is through Jesus Christ. Subsequently, each of us can either accept the payment Christ made for our sin, or we can pay the penalty for sin ourselves. There is no other way.

A failure to respond to this message (the gospel or *good news*) is nothing less than a rejection of the gospel. Knowing the truth about God isn't enough, you must respond to it as well.

Isaiah 55:7 says, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

This turning from wickedness is called repentance. It is the renouncing of your sinful ways and a commitment to seek the Lord and His ways instead. "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" (Romans 10:9).

Salvation results in you becoming a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17). The hatred you had for God becomes love, and the love you had for sin becomes hatred. Sin is still present in the lives of those who have been saved, but it is no longer the pattern of their lives. It no longer has dominion over us and it will be stricken down altogether when we are resurrected at the end of our earthly life. Those whom God has saved will have lives that reflect a change towards increasing obedience to Christ (Acts 26:20).

If you have never repented and placed your faith in Christ, you remain at enmity with God. You could literally be a step away from hell. Today, right now, consider your life, consider the gospel, and consider the cost, but don't resign your soul to eternal damnation for a refusal to give the temporary and passing pleasures of the world! What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but forfeit his soul?! "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).