

## God: The Foundation of Good News: *Part 2*

### *Various Passages*

**Introduction:** We continue our study in clarifying the gospel of Jesus Christ, which will breed convictional realities for all true believers, which will lead to boldness to share with others. The gospel is open for anyone, since God could save wretched sinners like us, and we understand that He has provided the means to do it, which is revealed in His Word and brought by His servants as ambassadors to the nations. To the degree that we truly believe this is to the degree that we will engage, knowing that the message itself is foolish but powerful, and simple but not simplistic. In the same way that the realities of **love and forgiveness** are simple to understand but complex in how they play out is the same way we understand the height and depth of the gospel itself.

The gospel is both **broad and narrow**. As believers we are equipped to **destroy strongholds and arguments** and **every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God** (2 Cor. 10:4-5), both in culture around us and individuals we strive to reach. When we understand the cultural realities around us, we are better equipped to communicate the truth and beauty of the gospel. The plight of any culture is trying to come up with **godless solutions to spiritual or sinful problems**. Our culture is no different. Here are a few ways our culture believes solutions will come:

- **More money will breed more happiness** – Materialism masks our real need. Just as the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-31) could not relinquish his wealth for the sake of following Christ, our Western thinking has believed that economic thriving and advantage alone will be satisfying. Historically we know that our country has a past of taking advantage of humanity for the sake of expansion and growth, whether it was the slave trade at the inception, taking land from native Indians, or using labor from Asia to build railroads to the West coast. The underlying philosophy is that money will breed the happiness we crave. The plight of people in the U.S has been the lack of perceived need: *why do we need a Savior when we have money in checking, a robust retirement fund, and financial freedom and independence?*
- **More pleasure will solve our search for meaning** – Lust masks our real need. Believing that God's plan is prohibitive to our happiness, our culture has made it their goal to rebel against God's design in every conceivable way. Desiring physical intimacy without responsibility, marriage has been belittled and abortion has been promoted. Unsatisfied with the way we were born, people have sought radical means to change gender, exchange natural function (Rom. 1:26) for unnatural, and become "inventors of evil" (Rom. 1:30). In search of pleasure, our culture has rebelled against the only source where true satisfaction can be found (Psalm 16:11).
- **More self autonomy will elevate the rightful lord of life** – Recently we have seen a push by culture to protest against any type of authority they do not agree with, trying to tear down what they perceive to be system of oppression. This has lead to a godless attempt to create anarchy by diminishing any type of governmental yielding of the sword (Rom. 13:4) through local police, and to replace existing systems with ones made in their own image. In search of self-autonomy, many in our culture believe they are god-like in their ability to be just and fair on their own, based on their own view and paradigm of thinking.

Our culture continues to move ominously toward one thing: ***man has become the measure of all things.*** We have declared that we don't need, believe in, or trust God (unless we are in really bad shape, then we reserve the right to cry out to Him or blame Him). This leaves us with two undeniable realities: *we are all in need of being reconciled to God, & we need to understand the true God as He displays Himself in Scripture.*

### GOD AS SUPREME:

#### DISPLAYING SOVEREIGN GRACE IN REDEEMING HIS PEOPLE

The Bible presents God as ultimate and supreme over all the Creation. We talked last week that in being Creator, He sets the rules of His creation, and for any of His created beings to shake their fist is equivalent to a Play-doh creation shaking its stub at one of us. He does all things for His glory, not as one needing anything but willingly sharing His glory with His creation. There are standards that He sets, morality that He creates, and authority that He possesses. If not for His determination to redeem mankind, we would have no hope and would justifiably be judged for our falling short of His glory.

We also said last week that there is a rise in ***secularization***, which does not reject all religion but DOES reject belief in a personal God who **holds and exerts authority**. Man becomes the measure, and since he has no one greater than himself by which to compare, he believes his own delusion. The new rules in our culture are the fact that God, any god, does not and cannot speak to us in words like "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not". *"The fact that Christians enter every conversation as believers in the LORD Jesus Christ who are bound by biblical revelation means they cannot begin without breaking the rules. And we must remember those who break the rules are not welcome by those who MAKE the rules."*<sup>1</sup>

So we will look at **4 indispensable** qualities of God which help us not only understand who He is, but also why mankind must interact with Him according to His rules.

**Sovereignty:** If you have been around this church at all over the years, you have undoubtedly heard about God's sovereignty. Sovereignty is a logical and necessary extension of God's supremacy over all things, that since He created all things, He also extends control over all things. The Bible presents God as totally, utterly, and wholly in control of everything, from working all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11), does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3; 135:6), kills and makes alive (1 Sam. 2:6), makes poor and makes rich (1 Sam. 2:7), brings well being and calamity (Isa. 45:7), and has the ability to limit the work of Satan himself on this earth (Job 1:12). God does not make excuses for Himself but glories in exercising free choice over His creation.

There are several aspects of His sovereignty and the gospel that we have to wrestle with:

- **The depth of His sovereign mystery is good for us** – To figure out God makes us God. That's why Deuteronomy 29:29 says *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."* Is there tension in our heart, mind, and soul to why God does certain things and not others? Is there frustration at times that we can't figure out why He doesn't give us our desires, even when those desires are good? The answer is yes to all of this, but we also know He is good and wise, and we can trust He does all things for His ultimate glory and our good, even if (or especially if) we cannot figure it out on our own.

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Mohler, *"The Gathering Storm"*, p. 12.

- **God is sovereign over Satan and our suffering** – Satan has only the rope God gives him to operate, so he can deceive, spin, lie, cheat, steal, and make life miserable, but he cannot do one thing that God does not allow. Not only this, but our very suffering is ordained by God, either in the form of **persecution** (Acts 9:15-16; 2 Tim. 3:12) or **pain** (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Because He is sovereign over these, there is always a purpose behind it, whether we can see it clearly or not. Paul knew his suffering and persecution was to reach the nations with the gospel, and his pain was to reveal his weakness, keep him from pride, and force him to trust in God's grace.
- **God is sovereign over salvation** – Perhaps one of the hardest truths to get our mind around is the fact that God is in control of salvation. We are autonomous in our flesh and do not like the idea of someone else making any kind of decisions for us. But **Ephesians 1:3-5 is clear**, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.*"  
Notice a few things here: He chose and predestined us like He did with Israel in the OT (Deut 7:6-8) unqualified by our goodness or additions. He made a **free choice** of us before the world began. He did it out of love. He made us sons. He fulfilled His will. He willingly did the work. Far from being a blight on our personhood and knock to our decision making ability and perceived independence, God's sovereign choice of His own is the best news for lost people (see also John 15:16)

**Holiness:** God's Holiness is basic to every aspect of God's goodness, the overarching attribute by which all other attributes are understood and defined, the fundamental and foundational attribute. Holiness defined means *separated, marked off, placed apart, and withdrawn from common use*. This means that God, by nature, is **transcendent**, meaning He is both greater than His creation and completely different from it. He is set apart from the moral corruption of creation since He is pure, light (1 John 1:5), the Father of lights (James 1:17) and both cannot be tempted by evil nor tempt anyone with evil (James 1:13).

There are consequences or implications to God's holiness. He calls and expects His people "*to be holy, for I am holy.*" (1 Peter 1:16; Lev. 11:44). Because He is holy, evil repulses Him and He has to break fellowship with the wicked. And His **righteousness, or moral excellence**, means He actually must **judge the wicked, exercising His justice**, and satisfying His **wrath**. **God hates sin, and thus His anger is seen in His dealing with it.**

As we understand His holiness, we need to unpack a few aspects and how it affects us:

- **God's anger and wrath are completely different than ours** – When was the last time you were angry? I mean, so angry that you did or said something that you regretted? When we get angry, we tend to be irrational, overly emotional, and uncontrollable in the moment, as anger that has brewed below the surface erupts in a volcanic explosion. But God's wrath (Rom.2:5, 8) and anger are completely different, and are a direct result of Him being holy, righteous, and loving. Listen to how the Bible describes this:

**Nahum 1:2** – The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for His enemies.

**Psalms 7:11** – God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation (*righteous anger*) every day

**Psalm 76:7** – *But you, you are to be feared! Who can stand before you when once your anger is aroused*

- **Does God hate sin or the sinner?** - When we frame this question, its imperative that we use a complete context. If we only took a snapshot of a parent disciplining their child, it would seem like they were violent and mean rather than loving and thoughtful. We know God loves, and particularly loves the world, so we naturally reject the fact that He would **hate a sinner, even if we agree He hates sin**. However, the Bible frames it differently.

**Psalm 5:5** – The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you **hate all evildoers**.

**Psalm 11:5** – The LORD tests the righteous, but **His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence**.

In other words, God hates sin but also will exercise His anger against the sinner in divine judgment, holding all accountable for their actions and sin against His glory (Rom. 3:19).

- **How do we reconcile the seemingly incongruous attributes of God** – How do we handle the fact that God is holy, righteous, and glorious, as well as angry, wrathful, and just? There are two answers: First, we take God's attributes as a whole, not just one at a time. Have you ever experienced only knowing one side of a person (at work, or as a teacher/preacher, or when they were on the job) only to discover they are completely different off the job? They may be serious and all business (appropriately so) in one arena, but get them in a social or relaxed setting, and a whole other side comes out. With God, we must see Him as a whole. To truly understand His grace, we must understand His wrath. To understand His mercy, we have to understand His anger. To understand His love, we have to understand His justice. In seeing all of these working together, we see the **immensity** of His nature, as well as the **enormity** of our salvation.

**Love: God is love** (1 John 4:8). It is what defines Him. To only speak of His holiness, wrath, and anger would give us a stilted view of Him, making Him seem angry and vindictive. Yet, to understand those only enhances our understanding of God's love, and particularly His love toward us. Jesus said it about the *sinful woman* who approached Him at a Pharisee's house. The Pharisee's were the epitome of self-righteousness and self-perceived holiness. They did not need Jesus, and saw Him as a threat. This woman, who was known around town, cleaned Jesus' feet with her tears, hair, kisses, and oil. She came to Jesus with deep shame because of her sin, but a deep love of Jesus knowing He was a Savior. She left with her sins forgiven. Jesus said these words:

*"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven --- for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little loves little." And He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'*

Luke 7:47-48

Jesus made the point clear. Those who know the debt they have been forgiven will understand the love God has, and in return love more (Luke 7:42-43). Today we could say it this way. There is a difference between getting money that will help you maintain a lifestyle vs. one who gets money that will sustain life itself. Or, one who takes medicine that gets rid of a headache and one who gets medicine that gets rid of cancer. To understand the immensity of our situation, we must understand the enormity of our God, and understand His greatness, goodness, and love that He gives us. Most think about the love of God in terms of earthly love: emotional, feel good, even based on merit. But God's love is categorically different:

- **God's love is vast, like trying to count the stars, and incomprehensible** - *"so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ---that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* (Eph. 3:17-19) Did you catch that?! To be filled with the fullness of God we have to understand the massive love that God has for us in Christ!
- **God's love is proactive** - *"In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation of our sins."* (1 John 4:10)
- **God's love is relentless** - *"but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Rom. 5:8) - This love was not based on our response, goodness, or potentiality, and did not mean He waited until we drew near to Him. He is love, and demonstrates that in taking our place on the cross
- **God's love is foundational** - *"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13)
- **God's love is shown toward us in grace and mercy** - In His love, God is willing to be patient and long-suffering, not wishing anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9). He waits to be gracious and exalts Himself to show mercy (Isa. 30:18). He easily could wipe us out now and be righteous for doing so, but treats us according to His own kindness and compassion, rather than our righteousness. He withholds what we deserve in His mercy, since He is a God full of mercy (Psalm 145:8; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 2:4). And it the demonstration of His **immeasurable riches of grace and kindness** toward us that He would save us through faith in Jesus Christ, itself a gift of grace (Eph. 2:7-8)

This is a slice of the love of God, who loved this world so much He sent Christ, not because we deserved it, but because He chose to. What we talked about in terms of wrath, holiness and anger help us understand the **immensity and enormity** of God's love toward us in terms of our sin. It reminds me of the last scene in *Saving Private Ryan*, where the soldier who was saved by a Company of heroes and his Captain in particular, reflected on his life while standing at the Captain's grave. Even though it was a works based life ("earn this"), the old soldier understood that he lived because others did not, and gave themselves up for him. It was a debt he could never pay, but a love that he understood.

Because God is supreme and sovereign over salvation, we should be all the more **confident in our mission** to **PRAY ---PLAN ---- RISK** in terms of sharing the message of the gospel with others.

*"The good news is that the one and only God, who is holy, made us in his image to know him. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him. In his great love, God became a man in Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of all those who would ever turn and trust him. He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ's sacrifice and that God's wrath against us had been exhausted. He now calls us to repent of our sins and to trust in Christ alone for forgiveness. If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into new life, and eternal life with God."*

**Digging Deeper in Further Reading:**

*"Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God"* by J.I. Packer - Our world lost a Theological giant a few weeks back as J.I. Packer went to glory. One of the first theology books I ever read was given to me by my Uncle Jeff in high school called *"Knowing God"*, which shaped much of my thinking about God. His book on evangelism helps us wrestle with the fact that we should be **more** motivated to evangelize based on God's sovereignty, rather than sitting back and just letting Him do it.

**Digging Deeper in Personal Reflection:**

- What do you observe about our culture in terms of how mankind tries to take the place of God? Where do we see rebellion? What do people try to do and believe so they do not NEED God?
- Why is God's sovereignty over suffering and salvation so hard for us to comprehend? What problems come up in our mind? What assurances do we gain? (Read Eph. 1:3-14 again)
- Read Romans 2:1-11 - Do we typically view God in terms of wrath and anger? What is difficult of seeing this side of God?
- How do people typically define the love of God? What comfort do you take knowing the true Biblical definition of God's love in your life?