

The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration

Lesson 3: The Supposition of the Gospel

“Through the Gospel we learn that we human beings, who were made for fellowship with God, are by nature – that is, ‘in Adam’ (1 Cor. 15:22) – dead in sin, unresponsive to and separated from our Maker. We are constantly twisting his truth, breaking his law, belittling his goals and standards, and offending his holiness by our unholiness, so that we truly are “without hope and without God in the world” (Rom. 1:18-32, 3:9-20; Eph. 2:1-3, 12). Yet God in grace took the initiative to reconcile us to himself through the sinless life and vicarious death of his beloved Son (Eph. 2:4-10; Rom. 3:21-24).”

Statement 3: We affirm that the Gospel diagnoses the universal human condition as one of sinful rebellion against God, which if unchanged will lead each person to eternal loss under God’s condemnation. We deny any rejection of the fallenness of human nature or any assertion of the natural goodness, or divinity, of the human race.

I. On the Sin Nature

A. Quotables

“It is only as we acknowledge the tragedy and feel the misery of our personal ruination through original sin that we shall properly value the Good News of the Savior.”

J. I. Packer, *Telling the Truth*, p. 44

“The doctrine of original sin is the only philosophy empirically validated.”

G.K. Chesterton

B. *A Day in the Life of a Sinner (Gen. 3:1-19)*

1. The very basis for all of truth and knowledge is set into orbit (“What is truth?”)

- a) Whereas God said that Adam and Eve would die if they ate from the tree (Gen. 2:17), the serpent said, “You will not die” (Gen. 3:4).
- b) The result is that we doubt the veracity of God and trust our own wisdom to discern truth (*intellectual relativism*).

2. The foundation for all of moral standards is suspect (“What is right?”)

- a) By actually eating the fruit, Adam and Eve trusted their own sense of what is right and good rather than allowing God’s words to define right and wrong (Gen. 3:6).
- b) The result: We turn in on our own pleasures to define what is good and right for us rather than listen to our Father who knows what is best (*hedonism/moral relativism*).

3. The true nature of humanity is put into question (“Who am I?”)

- a) Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation to be “like God” (Gen. 3:5).
- b) The result: We deify ourselves and displace God rather than see ourselves as fully dependent and subordinate creatures (*relentless denial/psychosis*).

C. *Sinners by Nature and by Choice*

1. Our nature and choices include a bent toward sin/evil:

Ps. 51:5 “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

Ps. 58:3 “Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward.”

Jer. 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

Eph. 2:3 “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”

Rom 7:18 “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”

Tit. 1:15 “to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.”

Is. 64:6 “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”

Rom. 3:23 “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Ps. 14:3 “All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

2. Consequently, we inherit the guilt of our parentage (legal guilt).

Rom. 5:12 “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.”

Rom. 5:18-19 “just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men. . . just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners.” As the representative of humanity, God counted all of Adam’s progeny as guilty. *Original guilt, not original sin.*

D. *The Verdict: Guilty! decree*

1. Is it fair that before we were even born, we are counted guilty by God?

a) Everyone who protests has also voluntarily committed many sins for which God also holds him or her guilty (Rom. 2:6; Col. 3:25).

b) If it’s unfair for us to be represented by Adam, is it not also unfair for us to be represented by Christ as his righteousness is imputed to us? The entire human race is an organic unity (metaphysically, psychologically, relationally, intellectually, biologically) represented by the first human (Adam, cf., Acts 17:26) and all who believe in Christ are represented by His righteous life (Rom. 5:19).

II. On Sin’s Punishment: Hell

A. *Quotables*

“There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment.”

Bertrand Russell, *Why I am Not a Christian*, p. 17

“Is he not a God of boundless mercy? How then can we project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness? Torturing people without end is not the sort of thing the ‘Abba’ Father of Jesus would do . . . What human crimes could possibly deserve everlasting conscious torture?”

Clark Pinnock, *Four Views of Hell*, p. 140

“Hell stands as a horrible witness to human defiance in the face of great grace” and “I doubt if any of us is equipped to assess what is an ‘appropriate’ punishment for defiance of the holy and sovereign God, save God himself.”

D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord*, p. 103

“The infinite horrors of hell are intended by God to be a vivid demonstration of the infinite value of his glory which sinners have belittled.”

John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, p. 127

“Hell will be the place of the eternal ‘I told you so’.”

John Gerstner, *Heaven and Hell*, p. 69

B. *Is Hell for Real?*

1. Biblical references to hell:

Matt. 5:22 “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Matt. 8:12 “But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matt. 25:46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Mk. 9:47 “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.”

2 Thess. 1:8-9 “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [9] They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”

2 Pt. 2:4 “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.”

Jude 6 “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home--these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”

Rev. 14: 9-11 “A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, [10] he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. [11] And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’”

Rev. 20:10 “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Rev. 20:14 “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.”

2. Which “Hell” are we talking about?

- a) *Gehenna* (valley of Hinnom, 2 Kgs., 23:10; 2 Cr. 28:3; 33:6). The valley of Hinnom was infamous for pagan rites, especially child sacrifice. *Gehenna* is the place for final judgment. Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire. *Gehenna* receives both body and soul (Matt. 10:28; Lk. 12:5).
- b) *Hades* (OT = *Sheol*) is the intermediate place where the ungodly await final judgment. *Hades*, most likely, receives only the soul (Acts. 2:27, 31).

C. Observations from Biblical Passages on Hell

1. References to “weeping and gnashing of teeth” indicate that the punishment will be conscious (Mt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; cf. also, Rev. 14:9-11).
2. The contrast between eternal punishment and eternal life indicates that both states will be without end (Mt. 25:46).
3. The notion of *universalism* simply cannot make sense out of Mt. 13:40-43 and 25:32-33!
4. Mt. 11:22, 24 and Lk. 12:47-48 strongly suggests there will be degrees of punishment and torment in hell. “Though all men partake equally of original sin, not all partake equally of actual sins,” and “The damned in hell would give the world to have the number of their sins one less” (Jonathan Edwards).
5. Reuniting of the body with the soul intimates that hell (and heaven) is a spatial place (cf., Mt. 10:28; Jn. 5:28-29).
6. The rationale of hell is twofold:
 - a) Justice entails getting what is deserved and, being sinners by nature and by choice, we deserve nothing less than hell. The justice of God is the holiness of God in action. Hell is the logical expression of God's holiness, majesty, and glory. It is to God's glory that hell be the habitation of the impenitent (Rom. 9:22-23).
 - b) The price of salvation was of infinite worth and to casually dismiss it in unbelief and disobedience requires nothing less than infinite condemnation (cf., Heb. 10:26-31).

D. What Difference Does Hell Make?

1. Because of God's great grace and mercy to us, every waking moment should be governed by unceasing gratitude and admiration for the God of our salvation who has saved us from the wrath to come (Eph. 2:1-10; 1 Thess. 5:9-10).
2. Knowing our just end should prompt us to live holy lives with patient endurance (2 Pt. 3:11-13; Rev. 14:12).
3. Hell should drive us to uncompromising evangelism and passionate prayer for the lost. Not only should we be motivated by the amazing love of God for sinners (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8), but also by the terrible judgment of God (cf., Acts 17:31; 24:25).

4. Evangelism should never be reduced to meeting felt needs. Sin does not fall in the domain of the psychiatrist, social worker, financial counselor, or politician; it falls under the domain of our Savior. It is only when we come to the Savior confessing our sinfulness as outright rebellion that we find genuine peace, joy, and love for our souls. "You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."