

A full explanation of the Gospel

Its cause, mechanism and effects

Introduction

There are many excellent presentations of the Gospel call by various teachers and evangelists. These usually take a text and apply it or give a basic explanation of what is needed for an individual's conversion. Some will use strings of related texts, such as the Golden Chain of Romans.¹ These are all well and good.

However, in practice, seekers have a series of questions of a more theological and basic nature that evangelists often ignore. These usually refer to the background of salvation which seekers require answers to before they will consider their own plight. This paper seeks to explain these issues as simply as possible.

The sort of questions that enquirers ask are:

- Why can't I go to heaven if I do good to others?
- Why can I not be saved if I pick the best features out of all the various religions?
- How can all the great religions of the world be wrong except Christianity?
- If God is good, and if I do good works, how can God reject me?
- Why did God create mankind if he just sends people to hell?
- Why is there even a hell in the first place?
- Why is one sacred book better than all the others?
- Why is Jesus unique?

To explain the questions posed by seekers it is necessary to explain multiple theological principles and doctrinal subjects, and this can be off-putting to some. However, here I will strive to be as simple as possible. By explaining all the key issues I can offer a comprehensive explanation to all, even if some people only need to read one or two parts.

The authority of the Bible

The issue of salvation is based on the subjective factor of trust and the objective factor of authority. Why is one means of salvation better than all other religions? Answer: I trust in the authority of the source.

Religions are all very different

All religions have their own sources of authority, usually called a sacred scripture.² They are all very different in content. In fact they are so different as to exclude each other completely. It is thus impossible for a man to try to unite all religions in one pot or to pick bits of each and collate them into a new faith.

¹ Rm 3:23, 6:23, 5:8, 4:5, 10:9-10, 10:13. Expounding this series of texts is a good way to explain the Gospel.

² Hindus have the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and the Vedas. Muslims have the Qur'an and Hadith. Taoists have the Tao te-Ching. Etc.

For example: Buddhism has no God, while Hinduism has 3,000,000 gods - which puts them at complete odds with all monotheistic religions. Buddhism and Hinduism also have no forgiveness of sin; instead they have a doctrine of karma (cause and effect). They also teach reincarnation; which is the opposite of the monotheistic faiths, which teach that there is a heaven.

Taoism teaches that life and death are two aspects of the same reality; but the Bible teaches that death is the result of sin and ends in punishment. Hinduism teaches that the end goal of the enlightened is absorption into the universal soul (union with Brahman) with no individuality; in Buddhism it is the removal of emotions. The Bible teaches that each individual remains a specific character even after death and is either saved or condemned. Most religions demand certain works of man to achieve salvation while the Bible says that man is incapable of doing any work for salvation.

The point is that all religions are vastly different. You cannot unite them; they are not the same; they are not different paths of God. You must pick one religion and stick with it.

This brings us to the matter of trust. Your choice of religion will be down to which saviour do you trust and which scripture is the most trustworthy.

The Bible affirms that only by believing in Jesus is there any hope of salvation. Thus all other religions are mere distractions and do not save. There is only one way to eternal life, and that is by faith in Christ.

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:2

There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. 1 Tim 2:5

The Father has sent the Son *as* Saviour of the world. 1 Jn 4:14

This brings us to the uniqueness of Christianity.

The uniqueness of Jesus

Christianity is the most trustworthy religion because only this religion has a Saviour who proved that he was God's son and was resurrected.

No religious leader is anything like Jesus. Jesus was not a mere man (though he was a real man); he was the Son of God sent to earth to do the work of salvation.

Jesus had a miraculous virgin birth. You can deny this but it is attested by his mother, Mary, who proved to be a trustworthy witness. It was also prophesied by an OT prophet.³ In fact, many events in Jesus' life were predicted in the Old Testament; prophecies about the Messiah include: Ps 22:10+; Mic 5:2; Ps 72:10-15; Isa 53. There are scores of others. No other religious leader had such prophecies going back thousands of years.

³ Isa 7:14, 'Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel'.

Jesus lived a perfectly pure, righteous and holy life. This is attested by multiple witnesses at the time. Even non-Christian historians like Josephus⁴ stated that Jesus was a holy man and the Messiah. Kings, governors and religious leaders feared him.

Jesus performed multiple miracles never seen before or since. Thousands of people witnessed this and Jesus' fame went far and wide. Jesus walked on water, fed thousands of people with a few loaves and fish, gave sight to the blind, gave hearing to the deaf, cured bedridden cripples, healed internal conditions, turned water into choice wine, and many more.

No man in history ever did as many powerful miracles as Jesus and no one ever did some of the things that Jesus did. Just one of these miracles would make a person a powerful historical figure; but Jesus did thousands of them.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? Heb 2:3-4

Most importantly, Jesus was raised from the dead. No other religious teacher, no other supposed saviour, ever did this. The bones of religious leaders are in their tombs but no one has ever displayed the bones of Christ. If the resurrection was fake, then the enemies of Christianity could have destroyed the story by merely producing the dead body.⁵ No one was able to do this. The Jewish religious authorities tried and failed.

Multiple witnesses saw Christ appear after his death in a variety of settings: in homes, by the lakeside, along the road, in a cemetery and so on. Sometimes hundreds of people saw him at once. Remember that the early Christians were bound by God to be holy, to tell the truth; telling a lie would have been unthinkable and worthy of hell. Why would hundreds of such people all lie?

Those who hated Christianity, such as Jewish priests, tried hard to stop the story that Jesus was alive – but they utterly failed. The more they persecuted Christians, the more arose to tell the story. Christians willingly died to testify that Jesus was alive, in their thousands, sometimes in horrible deaths. Men, women and children do not die painfully for a lie.

Something also galvanised the disciples of Jesus and turned them from being scared rabbits to fearless proclaimers of Jesus' godhood. They were willing to be beaten, excommunicated, tortured and die to declare that Jesus was alive from the dead. Men do not do this for a lie.

Furthermore, Jesus made multiple true predictions about events after his death, including detailed prophecies regarding the end of the age, which are taking place before our eyes. Specific predictions included the fall of Jerusalem and by heeding Jesus' warning Christians were able to escape this disaster by fleeing to Pella, while those Jews who ignored him died in their tens of thousands or were sold into slavery.

⁴ Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historian who wrote books on Jewish history for the Romans.

⁵ The Jewish priests made the Romans put a guard over the body and Jesus' scared, weak disciples would have been unable to commit an act of insurrection and steal the body.

Jesus is unique; he is the only person who said that he was the Son of God and proved it by his life, sayings, death, and resurrection. He is the true Saviour.

The uniqueness of the Bible

There are many sacred scriptures and some have some good things to say. But no scripture has the authority and authenticity of the Bible.

The Old Testament is written in Hebrew (and a very little Syrian) and Jewish scribes also accept the validity of the version used in the west today by Christians. The New Testament was written in colloquial Greek and is also highly attested. The many Bible versions show fads of translation styles and vary in accuracy but the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts are as trustworthy as it is possible to get. Literal translations of these texts provide very trustworthy Bibles.

Best attested text

Firstly, the Bible is the best-attested document in all human history. There are more ancient manuscripts extant supporting the Bible than any other document; literally thousands. Some famous historical literary works have only one or two damaged manuscripts.

More manuscripts nearer the original

The New Testament has extant manuscripts to within a few decades of the original autograph. Very few, if any, historical documents have available manuscripts this close to the origin. Some are hundreds or even over a thousand years later than the original.⁶

Agreement of versions

There are also several early versions of the NT translated into languages other than Greek (Syrian, Coptic, Latin) and these agree essentially with modern versions. Church reading books that contain quotes from the whole Bible agree with modern versions. Writings from the early church fathers (theologians) also contain Biblical quotes that closely agree with our version.

Attacks of critics failed

No book has ever been subject to as much critical investigation as the Bible. Many critics have tried to discredit it for 2,000 years but none has ever been successful. In fact, throughout history very wise scholars have trusted the text from the beginning. When the NT was first written, witnesses of the events recorded in the NT, who were still alive, did not criticise the writings but many became Christians at a time of persecution which meant that many died for this trust.

Consistent internal evidence

Internal evidence endorses the accuracy of the NT. Despite forty different writers, from various backgrounds, over 1600 hundred years, the Bible is in total harmony with itself. As well as being consistent in history, geography, social customs etc., the Bible is consistent theologically. What one writer says about God or salvation, agrees with what is written elsewhere. The Bible never contradicts itself. All other sacred scriptures contain serious contradictions.

⁶ The earliest manuscript for Plato's *Works* is 1300 years after his death. Euripedes' *Works* earliest text is 1600 years after his death. Tacitus' *The Histories* was composed about 100 AD but the two earliest manuscripts are from 850 and 1050 AD. No one questions these texts.

Prophecies fulfilled

The Bible is full of prophecies which all came to pass (apart from a few which still await their time). Prophecies in the OT regarding the life and ministry of Jesus were all fulfilled. No sacred book has ever had such a huge witness to its authority in fulfilled prophecy as the Bible.

On many occasions God declared political events before they happened e.g: the Jewish exile (Isa 39:6); the rise of Cyrus (Isa 45:1); the fall of Babylon (Isa 47) and of Tyre (Ezek 26:7); the destruction of Jerusalem (Deut 28:49-52); the destruction of the second temple (Mk 13:1-2) the dispersion of Israel (Lev 26:33; Deut 28:64) and the pollution of the earth (Isa 24:49+).

Harmony with science

Many scientific issues were predicted by the Bible. No scientific discovery has ever contradicted the Bible. In fact many of the greatest scientists were Christians trying to understand God's world.⁷

The Bible is in complete harmony with science, but it is not a technical manual; it is a book about salvation. Yet it is the only ancient book to state that the world is round (Isa 40:22) and hangs on nothing (Job 26:7). It is 100% medically accurate and is the oldest book to advocate quarantine.

Inspiration by God

God committed all his truth for us into writing by the hands of men. This was done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Inspiration means that God breathed out his ideas into words in men's minds so that they could write them down. (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pt 1:21; Jn 14:26). The writers retained their own characteristics and style, they did not become zombies. God ordained their background to enhance what they wrote. The infinite mind of God was transmitted through the finite mind of men. All the words written down are the words God intended.

Agreement with archaeology

Finds of archaeology have continually proved Biblical statements. Originally, archaeologists tried to prove the Bible wrong and ignored it as a help; now they treat it seriously and study it carefully before they dig.

One example is the Hittites. The Bible mentions them, but originally no one knew anything about them and scholars said that the Bible was wrong. Scholars later dug up finds proving that the Hittites existed.

Several ancient historians back up the Gospel and early church stories, like Josephus (he even says that Jesus was the Messiah), Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal and Pliny.

Apologetic argument

John Flavel wrote that demons and sinful men could not have written the Bible because it everywhere condemns them. Good men or angels could not have written it because it says that it was inspired by God and that would make them liars, not good. Therefore, only God could have inspired it.

Effect in people and history

The effect, in history, of the Bible has been to positively change the lives of those who

⁷ For instance, Michael Faraday [1791–1867] who discovered electricity, benzene, electromagnetic rotation, electromagnetic induction (vital to develop engines and dynamos) and the laws of electrolysis.

believed it to be true. Just look at the Reformation, the first century church, the Great Awakening etc.; whole nations were affected, for the better, when many turned to the God of the Bible. The great social movements throughout history were led by Bible believing people e.g: the origin of schools, orphanages, prison welfare, child reforms, abolition of polygamy, abolition of slavery etc.

In every possible way the Bible has proved itself to be the word of God. It is a text that can be trusted and it shows us the way to salvation by being a witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Christianity has a Saviour like no other religious leader. It also has Scriptures like no other sacred texts. Christianity has a more solid foundation for trust than any other world religion.

The reason for creation

God is a spirit being. He is perfect, holy and righteous. While God fills heaven with his glory, where it is witnessed by angels who praise him, God decreed to create a physical universe that he would fill with his glory as a testimony to the angels. This was a good work. Everything God created was good and perfect⁸ and the glory of the universe was to be filled with the glory of God. All was peace and harmony.

The material universe complemented heaven; both witnessed to the glory and perfection of God. There was divine unity, both in heaven and on earth, where man was created as the crown of creation.

Being in the image of God, and with capacities for rationality, personal expression and spirituality, man would thus become the perfect vehicle for manifesting the character and glory of God to the world. Man was meant to produce offspring to be a race of special people to glorify God.

All the natural world was meant to display the wonderful nature of God in the physical realm.

God be merciful to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us.
Selah That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Ps 67:1-2

'You *are* My witnesses', says the LORD, 'that I *am* God'. Isa 43:12

You *are* My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed *there is* no other Rock. Isa 44:8

I ordained you a prophet to the nations. Jer 1:5

The reason man is in sin

However, there was a war in heaven because one angel (a being created by God to serve him as a messenger and proclaimer) became proud and rebelled against God seeking to

⁸ Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

glorify himself. This being is called Satan ('adversary') or the devil ('slanderer')⁹ and other names.¹⁰

Satan managed to convince a third of the heavenly angels¹¹ to join him in an insurrection against God. He was so proud that he thought he could defeat his own creator. In judgment, God cast these fallen angels (now called demons)¹² out of heaven to reside in the area above the earth. Thus the devil became 'the prince of the power of the air' (Eph 2:2). The final condemnation and judgment of these angels was reserved, in the decree of God, for the future and the place of their judgment is called hell.¹³ It is symbolically stated to be a lake of fire (Rev 20:10, 14), figurative of eternal torment. Such punishment is entirely fitting to satisfy the justice and honour of an eternal God (see later).

The devil, filled with hatred of God, and thus of his creation, approached the first man, Adam, and tempted him through his wife Eve. The details of this are explained in Genesis 1-3. The writers of the NT, and Jesus himself, accept these events in Genesis as fact.¹⁴ The devil successfully tempted man to disobey God and this changed everything.

Man was the peak of God's creation and, unlike the natural order, man was created in the image of God and given stewardship over the natural world on God's behalf. This image was more than a mere likeness and consisted essentially of holiness, moral rectitude and rationality. Man had a spirit (Zech 12:1) as well as a soul¹⁵ and could thus represent God personally. The soul is the seat of personality, the real you, while the spirit is even deeper than the soul and is the vessel of communication with God.

When Adam and Eve rebelled in sin against God, they came under God's judgment, as did Satan through the serpent he possessed. Not only were Adam and Eve changed, the world changed.

This is called the Fall, and it is a very important Biblical doctrine. It explains the state of mankind in sin against God today and the need for salvation.

Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, a place of beauty and perfection and dependence upon God's provision, into the world today where man has to work hard in

⁹ 'Devil' derives from the Latin, itself from the Greek *diabolos*, meaning 'accuser, slanderer'. This was used by Hebrew scribes when they translated the Hebrew OT into Greek (the 'Septuagint' translation). *Diabolos* was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew *śātān* 'Satan'.

¹⁰ **Beelzebub**, late Latin *Beëlzebub*, translating Hebrew *ba'al zēbūb* 'lord of flies', the name of a Philistine god (2 Kings 1:2), and Greek *Beelzeboul* 'the Devil' (Matt. 12:24), the lord of demons (fallen angels). **Abaddon** late Middle English via Greek, from Hebrew *ʾābaddōn* 'destruction', **Apollyon** in Greek, (Rev 9:11) – the angel of the bottomless pit etc.

¹¹ Rev 12:4; 'stars' is symbolic of angels in this allegorical book. The fiery red dragon is symbolic of Satan (v3).

¹² An evil spirit. Middle English, from Medieval Latin, from Latin *daemon*, from Greek *daimōn* 'deity, genius'; in sense also from Latin *daemonium* 'lesser or evil spirit', from Greek *daemonion*, diminutive of *daimōn*.

¹³ Old English *hel, hell*, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *hel* and German *Hölle*, from an Indo-European root meaning 'to cover or hide'. In the Bible there are three words translated as hell. The first is the Hebrew *sheol*, which is rather the place of departed spirits, or the grave, not the place of final condemnation. The second is *Gehenna*, a Greek word for the place of final punishment. Some Bible translations wrongly translate another Greek word (*Hades*) as 'hell' but *Hades* equates to *sheol*, the grave. [2 Pt 2:4 'hell' here is *Tartaros*, the Greek deepest abyss of Hades, but *Tartaros* is used here for the realm of demons, i.e. earth's atmosphere where they are reserved for judgment in hell.]

¹⁴ Thus any theory of creation by evolution is a fallacy. Matt 19:4-5; Mk 10:6-9; Rm 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22; 1 Tim 2:13-14.

¹⁵ Gen 2:7; 'being' in the NKJV is really 'soul' (Heb. *Nephesh*).

order to survive. Since Eve was the means of Adam's temptation (she was deceived and led Adam astray)¹⁶ women were condemned to suffer in childbirth (Gen 3).

Man was also condemned to die. If Adam had not sinned he would have been immortal, but he lost all his privileges as a son of God and became mortal and sinful. In that day his spirit died in the sense that it ceased to be able to fellowship with God and sank beneath the soul, to be dominated by the soul (the will, emotions and intellect). Thus man naturally cannot commune with God at all. This is important; without the grace of God, natural men cannot communicate with God at all; any religion or cult that says otherwise is lying.

The Bible explains that man was thus totally depraved; every area of his life was tainted with sin.¹⁷ It does not mean that all men are fully depraved in expression; clearly some people are quiet while others are vile brutes. What it means is that every area of man's personality was beset with inability to do perfect good works, being tainted with sin in every department. No longer could any man please God and do God's will perfectly. No man could be righteous before God's eyes.

Because all men and women came from Adam and Eve, all people are tainted with total depravity; no one is able to do good and please God. The very best of human works are still unrighteous in comparison with what God desires.¹⁸

The Bible thus explains that no one pleases God or does good:

There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Rm 3:10-12

What *is* man, that he could be pure? And *he who is* born of a woman, that he could be righteous? If *God* puts no trust in His saints, And the heavens are not pure in His sight, How much less man, *who is* abominable and filthy, Who drinks iniquity like water! Job 15:14-16

There are hundreds of verses like this.

So the results of the Fall of man could be summarised like this:

- Man was cast out of Eden and a barrier placed between the physical world and the heavenly world.
- Man ceased to have fellowship with God or to have any kind of communion with him.
- Man's spirit is dead in God's eyes since it does not function to fellowship with God (who is spirit).
- Man was condemned to physically die at an appropriate age.
- Women were condemned to suffer in childbirth.

¹⁶ 1 Tim 2:14.

¹⁷ Gen 6:5, 'the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually'. Ps 53:2, 'Every one of them has turned aside; they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one'. Rm 1:29-32, 'being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.'

¹⁸ This includes religious works: Prov 15:8, 29; Amos 5:21; Jn 4:24.

- The natural world was affected. Before the Fall all animals were vegetarian; after the Fall some became carnivores (Gen 1:29-30). The natural world longed for recovery from the damage that sin had done to it (Rm 8:19-22).
- Man became subject to the deceptions of Satan, who began to reign like a prince in the world due to man's sin.
- Man needs a deliverer from this evil world and the control of Satan.
- Man needs salvation and hope for a better world.

The necessity of hell

I need to say a few more things about hell.

For light to be understood, one must appreciate darkness. For good to be understood one must see the comparison with evil. Positive things are always expressed in reaction to negative things. The righteousness of heaven is set in opposition to hell.

God is the greatest good, the most perfectly holy and the most just being in any realm. The world he created was perfect and good. Mankind was created holy and good. When the devil rebelled he brought darkness and evil to heaven and had to be expelled. When man succumbed to the devil's lie he brought darkness and evil to the world. God now has darkness and iniquity in his creation and this needed to be dealt with. This will finally be expelled and contained in hell.

Sin must be punished

Any rebellion and sin against God automatically brings with it judgment and punishment. God is holy and just and cannot ignore punishment of sin; if he did he would cease to be just.¹⁹ Justice demands punishment.²⁰

Punishment must be eternal

Now God is infinite and his honour is infinite. Rebellion against God insults the infinite honour of God and offends the infinite justice of God. Rebellion also brings sin upon sin. A totally depraved person commits hundreds of sins every day in thought, word and deed. He commits sins of commission and many more sins of omission. His thoughts are evil, his plans are evil and his actions are evil. These sins mount up to an innumerable weight of wickedness. Furthermore, a man cannot change his nature to become righteous, he is always sinful. Finally, as a creature originally made in the image of God and for the glory of God, any sin at all is of infinite rebellion to God. Man was made to be immortal and his sins continue to reverberate in creation.²¹

Human courts sentence a man who commits one murder to perhaps thirty years in prison. This is a thirty-year sentence for one sinful action. God has to sentence men for millions of sinful actions in a lifetime.

So a place of condemnation is as necessary in God's universe as heaven, a place of righteousness. This place is called hell.

¹⁹ Job 34:12, 'God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice'. Job 37:23, 'As for the Almighty ... He is excellent in power, in judgment and abundant justice; He does not oppress'. Ps 37:28, 'The LORD loves justice'. Ps 89:14, 'Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne'.

²⁰ Ezek 18:4, 'The soul who sins shall die'. Heb 9:27, 'And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment'.

²¹ Gen 4:10; Lk 11:51.

This place of condemnation needs to be eternal for the reasons explained. God establishes hell as a place of eternal punishment to deal with the eternity of sin that needs to be punished. So hell is a real, not figurative, place of eternal punishment. Jesus used figurative terms to demonstrate that hell was eternal.²²

Hell is torment

Now we are not told exactly what this punishment is but we are told that it is torment.²³ The symbolical description in Revelation of it as a lake of fire shows this. Jesus also mentioned fire.²⁴ This means real suffering.

The first torment will be knowing what you have lost when you understand the joy and glory for Christians in a new earth where heaven and God dwell with men. Then there is the torment of finally understanding the beauty and glory of God and being separated from that forever. Then there are specific torments and guilt associated with your specific sins and understanding the damage they caused. Those who committed genocide on earth will face a far more severe torment than those who lived an ordinary life.²⁵

Hell has always been accepted until today

This doctrine is highly unpopular today, but that doesn't change the reality. The Bible explains the doctrine of hell very clearly and it is real. Those who deny it are lying. In fact for most of history most men believed in a hell despite their differences in religion. The Greeks had a doctrine of hell; the Romans had a doctrine of hell. The Norsemen had a doctrine of hell. Islam teaches hell and so on.

The key point is that Jesus spoke about hell more than any other Bible writer. The question is, can we trust Jesus? If Jesus is the most pure, perfect, holy person who ever existed, then his word must be accounted as true. We can, therefore, accept that hell is real; it is as Jesus explains. Those who deny hell as a real place accuse Jesus of lying.

What hell is not

What we can ignore is the medieval picturesque portrayals of hell being like an inquisition torture chamber where the devil and his demons rule over the place tormenting men with pitchforks. This is rubbish. The devil will be as much a subject of punishment as men in hell; he will have no power over others. Neither will the punishments be perversely cruel because God is good, not perverse. The punishment will be severe but it will not be grotesque.

Hell is a real place and is mentioned by Jesus in the Gospels many times. We cannot read the Gospels and ignore hell. Though few talk about hell today, the Bible demands that we explain it because it is real.

Man's vital need is to escape from hell. He needs a Saviour to provide that escape for him.

²² Mk 9:42-48.

²³ Rev 14:11; Lk 16:28; strictly the rich man was in Hades (v23) not hell, but he was awaiting being placed in hell and that was enough to cause torment.

²⁴ Mk 9:43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49.

²⁵ Jesus explained that some people face a more severe punishment than others (Matt 11:22; Lk 10:14, 12:47-48).

The patience of God

Now here we have the situation where God created a wonderful natural world that was filled with beauty, harmony, peace and goodness. But this was plunged into chaos and sin as a result of man's disobedience to God and submitting himself to Satan.

A holy God who seeks a holy creation after himself would be entirely just and righteous, faced with this collapse of the world, to destroy everything and start anew. To wipe man out, destroy the devil and restore the natural world would have been appropriate and just.

But God who, being perfect is filled with long-suffering, decreed not to destroy his creation. In fact, being all-wise and all-powerful, he knew that this would happen and planned accordingly. God is sovereign over history and predetermines all things.

God used this situation to develop a people that were called to his glory who would obey him and love him out of this mess that man had made. God would restore all things after he had gained a people from all cultures of the world.

God is patient, and this patience has continued for thousands of years but is now coming towards a crescendo when he will wind things up. Throughout the centuries, God has been gathering a people for his family; people who serve him faithfully. The Bible calls these people by various names: the elect (chosen), the church (a people called out of the world), the bride of Christ, sons of God, God's own people, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, the beloved, the family of God and so on. Each title demonstrates an attribute of the character of God's people.

The means of these people coming to be a son of God with eternal life is the Gospel.

The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth. Exod 34:6

You, O Lord, *are* a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth. Ps 86:15

God ... endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath. Rm 9:22

The God of patience. Rm 15:5

Patience of Jesus Christ. Rev 1:9

What is required to save man

The need for a saviour

Man is in trouble. He is estranged from God and all goodness. He is under the power of the devil and is bound by sin. His life is short and he faces death and then not oblivion but eternal punishment for his sin and offending his Creator.²⁶ Man needs a deliverer.

The need for new life

Since man's life is tainted by total depravity and inability to please God due to the Fall of Adam, man needs a new life. There needs to be a great change take place within man that

²⁶ Hell is real: Matt 10:28, 23:33; Lk 12:5.

replaces the fallen nature derived from Adam and gives him a new nature that is godly and eternal.

The need for a restored relationship with God

Man's relationship with God was irretrievably broken and ruined by the Fall of Adam. Man cannot please God, cannot do good in God's eyes, cannot worship God properly, cannot communicate with God and cannot live with God.

Since God is the purpose behind the whole created universe, man's broken relationship with God is a serious problem. Man has no place in the natural world since he is in rebellion to the Creator of that world. Man needs to get right with God urgently.

The need for liberty from the deception and dominion of Satan

Man is currently in sin and under the dominion of Satan because of that sin which binds him to Satan. Satan is God's enemy and this puts man in opposition to God by nature, whether he opposes God outwardly or not.

The world, as it is under the usurped rule of Satan,²⁷ is God's enemy also (Jm 4:4), thus man who is committed to the world needs to escape from this world and live in a different realm, a different kingdom.

The need for forgiveness of sins committed

Man's chief problem can be summarised as needing forgiveness of sin and a new start. Man needs an experience whereby something cleanses man from the stain of his sin and changes his nature to be free from sin.

The root of the Gospel

The promise of the Gospel of God is that all these problems are solved by the Good News of Jesus Christ's message. No other religion even comes close to addressing these problems. How was this done?

The Gospels and the book of Acts are the historical narratives which explain the life, death, resurrection, ascension, glorification and testimony of Jesus Christ. The basis of the Gospel's salvation is in the life of Jesus and everything related to Jesus is explained in these historical books.

To make sure that people get the whole information about Jesus, the Son of God and his mission from God, the Lord provided four separate accounts²⁸ by four contemporaries of Jesus written from different perspectives and each with a key theme. For example Matthew emphasises Jesus as the fulfilment of OT prophecies about the Messiah while John highlights the spiritual teaching of Jesus.

Jesus' trusted delegates (the apostles) oversaw these accounts. Matthew was an apostle. Mark was not an apostle but his narrative was written under the direction of his mentor Peter the apostle. Luke was not an apostle but his story was written under the influence of

²⁷ Satan has no rights to the ownership of the world, which was created by God and is fully owned by God. But under God's patience, Satan is currently allowed to control the world through controlling the sin of men. In due time God will stop this and terminate the world completely to initiate a new age. Only Christians will survive this.

²⁸ The Gospels of Matthew (an educated Jew), Mark (a Gentile influenced Jew ['Mark' is a Roman name; his Jewish name was John]), Luke (a Gentile doctor) and John (a working class Jew).

the apostle Paul. John was Jesus' most beloved apostle and wrote his version later than the others.

The life of Christ

Jesus lived a life of perfect and pure obedience to God's law and thus became the standard of God's requirement for human behaviour. The standard for every man is to live a life as pure as Christ's. This is, of course, impossible for human beings without the aid of God.

Jesus lived this perfect life, fulfilling all God's law, in the face of continual attack, slander, persecution, affliction, hunger, thirst and weakness. Jesus was not a superman but of flesh like you and me; yet he lived fully compliant to God's law. This is the righteousness of Christ, which we will come back to later.

As a perfect man under the law, Jesus inherited all the promises God gave in the law to the righteous man. The OT is filled with promises that the righteous man can claim. Jesus owns this inheritance.

The death of Christ on the cross

Being a sinless person, Jesus should not have died but lived forever. The sinless man is not subject to death but is immortal; it is sin that causes death. In Jesus' case, he willingly gave up his life for others.²⁹ Jesus' death was not for himself (he committed no sin) but for the sin of others.

Thus Jesus' death is a penal substitute for other people; he took the legal punishment due for our sins upon himself.

Now Jesus is God as well as man³⁰ and thus the person of Christ is of infinite value in God's eyes because the person of Jesus is God. This means that the death of Jesus has infinite value and thus the Bible states that Jesus blood is 'precious' and beyond price.³¹ The blood of Jesus represents his life given up as a sacrificial death for others. This blood has spiritual power to forgive sins.³²

The phrase 'the cross of Christ' is often used as a synonym for all the factors that secure salvation (e.g. atonement, redemption etc.).

The resurrection of Christ

This is the crunch issue of salvation by the cross of Christ. If Jesus had just died he would be a mere mortal man and his perfect life would have been non-transferable.

But Jesus did rise from the dead and this proves that Jesus was the Son of God. It also means that his sacrifice was accepted by God as a propitiation for sin and that all the effects of salvation can be given by God to the elect.³³

The triumphant defeat of Satan

Jesus not only defeated Satan at the cross and overpowered him, but he also destroyed his kingdom and removed the power of death over the elect.

²⁹ Jn 10:15-18; 1 Jn 3:16; Matt 20:28; Gal 1:4; Eph 5:2.

³⁰ Jesus has two natures: God and human, but he is one person not two.

³¹ 1 Pt 1:19.

³² Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1 Jn 1:7.

³³ Acts 17:31, 'He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead'.

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. Col 2:15

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Heb 2:14

The ascension of Christ

Christ did not merely rise from the dead like any of those Jesus raised (like Lazarus, who later died); Jesus was resurrected and stayed resurrected. After appearing to his disciples and proving that he was the promised Messiah by being raised from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. He was given all authority under heaven, becoming Lord of the universe.³⁴

This means that there is a glorified man in heaven sitting in the glory with God. Here Jesus sits in authority interceding for those he loves, the elect. He acts as a High Priest actually in heaven praying for the church. Thus Christians have an advocate with the Father, one who pleads for them in their time of need.

He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Heb 7:25

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit

As a result of his ascension and glorification to rule, Jesus was able to send the Holy Spirit to the church to apply all the effects of salvation to the elect.³⁵ Without the Holy Spirit's work salvation would be a mere potential. In fact, the Holy Spirit takes the work of Jesus in redemption and applies it to those that God calls.

The Spirit does not just apply salvation to individuals, but he gathers Christians into a body prepared by God.³⁶ This body is called the church.³⁷

He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Titus 3:5-6

Addressing the needs of man: aspects of salvation

If we refer to a previous section we see that man has several needs that must be addressed if he is to be saved and get right with God. These needs are catered for in the Gospel by the following actions of Christ.

³⁴ Matt 28:18, 'Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth"'.

³⁵ Jn 7:38-39, "'He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified'. Jn 14:26, 16:7; Acts 1:4-5; Rm 8:9; Eph 1:13.

³⁶ 1 Cor 12:13, 'For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit'.

³⁷ Eph 1:22.

Atonement

In simple terms atonement means satisfaction and refers to the appeasing of God's wrath by dealing with the sin that causes God to be angry.

In the OT, atonement was symbolised by a priest taking a sacrificial offering and killing it for the sinner. The sinner laid his hands on the offering whereupon the priest slaughtered the animal in the place of the sinner. Atonement was thus by the shedding of blood. Without blood no sin was remitted.³⁸

This is figurative of the death of Christ, which provided atonement for all the people that God gives grace to. Atonement means that your sin is remitted by the sacrifice of Christ.

As for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them. Ps 65:3

'I provide you an atonement for all you have done', says the Lord GOD. Ezek 16:63

Propitiation

Propitiation means 'to turn away wrath' and refers to the fact that the blood of Jesus turns away God's anger at sin.³⁹

It is similar to atonement but is the preferred NT term regarding the sacrifice of Christ; 'atonement' is the preferred OT term.

Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith. Rm 3:25

He Himself is the propitiation for our sins. 1 Jn 2:2

Redemption and ransom

These words are closely connected but have a slightly different nuance.

'Redemption' means to buy back; securing a release by the payment of a ransom. 'Ransom' is the payment price of redemption.

In salvation of sinners, the ransom price is the life or blood of Jesus (Matt 20:28; 1 Tim 2:6). 'Redemption' is the transaction that secures the release of sinners from God's wrath, the curse of the law and judgment (Gal 4:4-5).

God is the person satisfied by this transaction. The people that are redeemed are the elect, those God called, the church of God.

The church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Rm 3:24

[Jesus] in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Col 1:14

³⁸ Heb 9:22.

³⁹ Some Bible translations wrongly use the word 'expiation', which means 'to turn away sin'.

Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people. Titus 2:13-14

Justification

Justification means the placing of forgiven sinners in a legal state of righteousness before the throne of God. It is getting rid of condemnation and establishing pardon for sins.⁴⁰

The spiritual transaction of this is twofold: first it is the placing of the sin of the sinner upon Christ who died for that sin in the place of the sinner. Second, it is the giving of the righteousness of Christ (which he secured by his obedience in life and death to the law) freely to the sinner.

This is the most amazing aspect of salvation. God places man's sin upon his own perfect Son, who then died for that sin as a penal substitute. God then places the righteousness that is Christ's, and is infinite (able to cover a multitude of people), into the sinner so that he stands righteous before God.⁴¹ Thus all the work of justification is by Christ and nothing is by man (Rm 5:18).⁴²

Though justification is stated to be faith, this faith is a gift of God's grace to those he calls; it is not a work of man.⁴³

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Rm 3:24

You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor 6:11

Having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:7

Adoption and sealing

Adoption is a corollary of justification and springs from it. It is also connected to the sealing of the Spirit, which guarantees our adoption and gives us assurance of it.⁴⁴ Those sealed are guaranteed redemption.⁴⁵

Adoption is a Roman legal term for placing a person to be a son and legal heir of someone; it is not a mere adoption as in English law to bring a child into a family. The Romans often adopted an adult into the family to be the legal heir of the head of a household.

In salvation the elect have sonship through regeneration (see later) but they have adoption through justification.

⁴⁰ Rm 4:25, 5:16-18.

⁴¹ Rm 10:4; 1 Cor 1:30.

⁴² Rm 4:5-6; 5:17.

⁴³ Eph 2:8; Acts 14:27, 16:14; Phil 1:29.

⁴⁴ 2 Cor 1:22, 'who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee'. Eph 1:13-14, 'having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance'.

⁴⁵ Eph 4:30, 'the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption'.

You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Rm 8:15-16

Sanctification

This is the work of the Holy Spirit to set apart justified people as a possession of God. The justified are sanctified legally when they are justified (1 Cor 6:11; past tense of salvation). They are gradually progressively sanctified as they are changed in practical character throughout their life (Heb 2:11, 10:14; present tense) and they are finally fully sanctified when Jesus returns (1 Thess 5:23; future tense) and changes his people forever by giving them a new immortal body.

To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. 1 Cor 1:2

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is when the sins of a guilty person are forgiven by someone above them. As a result of the previous items, sinners can have forgiveness of all their sins, past, present and future so that they are sanctified (made separate and holy).

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses. Col 2:13

Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 1 Jn 2:12

Reconciliation

Reconciliation refers to bridging the gap between the sinner and God, making the two one. The effects of the cross of Christ bring man and God into perfect harmony. The cross-work of Christ has removed the alienation of man to God; believers are no longer God's enemy.

We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. Rm 5:11

You, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled. Col 1:21

The kingdom of Christ

The work of the cross takes believers out of the kingdom and dominion of Satan and transfers them into the kingdom of God, or kingdom of Christ. Christians are in a completely different world to ordinary men. They are subjects of God and not Satan; citizens of heaven, awaiting a new world.

Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Matt 25:34

He [God] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Col 1:13

Salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. Rev 12:10

This kingdom is experienced in part and potential at this time before the end of the world, but the fulness of its operation is the future. Thus there are texts affirming that Christians are in the kingdom now (Col 1:13, 4:11), and others affirming that they are waiting for its consummation (1 Cor 15:24; 2 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 4:1, 18; 2 Pt 1:11).

Grace

What is amazing in all this is that God does all the work of salvation and gives the fruit of it to the elect freely; man does nothing to earn it, either by strength or will. This is grace; a free gift of God.

As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Jn 1:12-13

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. Jn 6:44

'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Rm 9:15-16

At this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. Rm 11:5-6

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. Eph 1:7

By grace you have been saved. Eph 2:8

But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us. Titus 3:4-5

The grace of God that brings salvation. Titus 2:11

Summary

Through these factors of salvation all the pressing needs of man have been secured. Nothing is left out. Man that was lost and facing an eternal punishment for sin is now perfectly restored to an even greater place than Adam was in before he fell.

Addressing the purpose of God

Man was created to be the vehicle for divine expression in the universe. Angels are spirit beings and can only manifest God in the spirit but man is able to impact the material world.

Man lost this ability to represent God when he fell into sin. However, through the work of Christ this ability is restored. The elect of mankind are given new, eternal, divine life when they were regenerated⁴⁶ and unified with Christ by the Holy Spirit when they were baptised into Christ.⁴⁷ The church thus becomes the body of Christ on earth (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:24).

So Christians are the vessels God uses to manifest his character to the world and to the heavens (angels). This fulfils God's original purpose in creating man.

We who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. Eph 1:12

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Eph 2:10

The fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Eph 3:9-11

[Jesus] Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people. Titus 2:14

The ministries of salvation

The work of God

All the Godhead is fully involved in the work of salvation and thus it is denominated by each name of the Trinity.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mk 1:1

The gospel of God. 1 Thess 2:2

Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit. 1 Thess 1:5⁴⁸

God is a Trinity, a community of love in the Godhead. The Trinity comprises of God the Father (the first person of the Trinity), God the Son (Jesus Christ, the second person) and the Holy Spirit (the third person).

Each member of the Trinity has a distinctive work to bring the elect to salvation.

The Father initiates salvation in eternity by the decree (counsel, plan) of God. He orchestrates redemption by covenanting (pledging friendship and repairing the broken relationship) with the elect through Christ. To initiate salvation God chooses all those who

⁴⁶ Jn 3:15, 'whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life'.

⁴⁷ 1 Cor 12:13, 'By one Spirit we were all baptised into one body'.

⁴⁸ The phrase 'the Gospel of the Holy Spirit' does not appear because the whole ministry of the Spirit is to glorify Jesus not himself. However, multiple texts show that the Holy Spirit is a key part of the Gospel.

will be saved in eternity by his own good pleasure and not by anything the person may do in the future.⁴⁹ These people are then called by God in time.⁵⁰

Jesus agrees to the covenant God planned and performs the actual work of salvation in his life, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. He also sends the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit then applies the work of Jesus to the elect, guiding and safeguarding the elect throughout their life and ensuring that they are progressively sanctified.

The doctrines of Grace

These teachings of the Bible start with the fact that man is hopelessly lost and totally depraved. [Total Depravity.]

Then they teach that those whom God chooses are unconditionally elected to salvation in eternity. [Unconditional Election.]

Then the provision for the elect for salvation is wrought by Jesus to provide a limited atonement, or a particular redemption. This means that salvation is procured for the elect alone. Nothing of God is ever wasted. Jesus' blood pays the exact price for the elect. [Limited Atonement.]

Then the elect are called with an effectual call. This is also called irresistible grace because the work of the Holy Spirit applied to the elect cannot be stopped. None of the elect are lost. [Irresistible Grace.]

Finally the Spirit oversees salvation in the elect who are preserved by grace so that they are safeguarded to the end with the support and protection of the Holy Spirit. [Perseverance of the saints.]

The presentation and application of the Gospel

Everything so far has been a preparation for getting individuals saved. Here we look at how individuals receive the benefits of redemption.

Provision of salvation is not enough, God must ensure that individuals are converted and saved.

Preaching

God chose to get individuals saved by the means of preaching the word of Christ as found in the Bible.⁵¹

'Preaching' is the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and a testimony to the work of Jesus. Disciples of Jesus, upon conversion, become the next generation of Gospel

⁴⁹ Eph 1:4-5, 'He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will'. Eph 1:11, 'being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will'.

⁵⁰ 2 Thess 2:13-14, 'brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

⁵¹ Rm 10:14-15, 'How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"'

preachers. They bear witness to the resurrection of Christ and explain his teaching about salvation. To ensure that this is effective, God the Father sends the Spirit to apply the words of the preachers to the heart of the elect so that when they hear the message they apply it to themselves.⁵² This involves the conviction of sin and a desire for guilt to be removed.

Examples of Gospel preaching are found by the apostles and their delegates in the NT, such as in Acts and elsewhere. There are various ways of doing this but the essential elements must be met: explaining that man is lost in sin and hopeless. Explaining that God requires judgment and accountability of that sin. Explaining that Jesus is the only Saviour from that sin. Applying these truths to the conscience.

Having received the word in their heart, the seeking sinner wrestles with the truth that is presented to him and the Spirit oversees this heart work. In time, sometimes slowly often very quickly, a series of events occur that are all related. We can analyse them successively but they often happen all at once together.

Activity

Regeneration

First, the heart of the seeker is changed. This is called regeneration or being born again. God takes away the stony heart and gives a new heart that is receptive to Christ. This is the new nature that the believer has to replace the old Adamic nature that is full of sin. It is the seed of eternal life that will flower in the believer finally.⁵³

Faith

The regenerated heart then applies itself to the Gospel doctrine. With regeneration comes the gift of faith, given by God to the elect in time. With this divine faith, the seeker puts his full trust in Christ as his Lord and Saviour.⁵⁴

Repentance

Regeneration also provides the gift of repentance from God. This is the ability to turn away from sin and selfishness to follow Christ as Lord, determined to fully obey him in all things. Repentance is a change of mind and behaviour. It is a denial of self and a commitment to obey Jesus' commandments. Once this has been acted upon there is a noticeable change in behaviour of the seeker who is now a believer.⁵⁵

The beginning of repentance is godly sorrow for sin, conviction of sin and offence to God leading to a desperate desire for forgiveness. Without this desperation there is no conversion.⁵⁶

These two gifts of grace, faith and repentance, together form the act of conversion; becoming a Christian.

Confession

Following from repentance is a confession of faith in Jesus.⁵⁷ This is a public announcement (not formal) of trusting in Christ. It is a refusal to keep conversion quiet

⁵² Acts 16:14, 'The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul'.

⁵³ Jn 3:3; Titus 3:5.

⁵⁴ Jn 20:31; Acts 8:36-37, 15:11, 16:31; Rm 10:11; Gal 3:22; 1 Tim 1:16.

⁵⁵ Acts 3:19, 17:30, 26:20; Rm 2:4.

⁵⁶ 2 Cor 7:10. 'Sorrow' here really means 'grief, affliction'; it is a heavy sorrow.

⁵⁷ Rm 10:9-10.

and an open confession that one is a Christian whenever the occasion demands it. It is a refusal to deny that you are now in Christ.

Baptism

Following this, a Christian must be baptised in water to demonstrate confession of faith.⁵⁸ Some churches insist on various methods, such as full immersion and a large public meeting, but sprinkling with water in a small public situation is sufficient.⁵⁹

‘Public situation’ does not necessary mean a large public gathering (though it might) but it means doing it front of witnesses; so the meeting may be small, but it cannot be done alone; people cannot baptise themselves. A mature Christian, often a church leader [but not always] should baptise the new convert soon after repentance.

In many cases, and there are examples in the NT, all these events occur on the same day or even in the same hour.

Grace

The key thing to note in the basis of the Gospel and the application of it is the sovereign work of God. Man is acted upon and does not control these events.

The word for this is grace, which means: unmerited kindness, divine provision, divine favour and acceptance, loving-kindness, undeserved favour, merciful kindness.

Grace is the free gift of God providing and applying salvation to the elect when they don’t deserve it. Everything in salvation is a gift: the sending of God’s Son to be the Saviour, the sending of the Spirit to apply salvation in time, the preserving work of the Spirit, the giving of faith and repentance, the giving of the righteousness of Christ in justification, being adopted as a legal heir of Christ in God’s family, being given eternal life, and so on.

The grace of God that brings salvation. Titus 2:11

In truth grace is where God gives the will inside and the strength to do what is necessary:

It is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Phil 2:13

This is what is both amazing and unique in world religion. No other religion has this amazing grace of salvation freely given. It is why Christians want to praise God constantly for his wonderful grace and undeserved kindness.

The hope of the Gospel

Walking in the Spirit

Once the seeker has been converted he has peace with God. He knows this peace and freedom from guilt immediately and this gives the new believer assurance before God.⁶⁰ He

⁵⁸ Acts 2:38, 41, 8:12, 38, 9:18, 10:47-48.

⁵⁹ The blood that covered sins in the OT was sprinkled in application (Ezek 43:18; Heb 9:13, 11:28) The blood of Jesus is said to be sprinkled in the NT (Heb 12:24; 1 Pt 1:2). Baptism is a statement that Jesus blood has been sprinkled on the convert for remission of sins. In the NT people were baptised wherever they were, by a river, in the desert, in a prison, in a home etc. Often there was insufficient water for immersion. Even large-scale baptisms by John used spring water not immersion in rivers (Jn 3:23; ‘much water’ can be translated as ‘many springs’).

⁶⁰ 1 Thess 1:5, ‘our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance’. Heb 10:22, ‘let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith’.

also has the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside, helping him to pray and guiding him into truth.⁶¹

The Holy Spirit teaches the believer to study God's word, the Bible, which becomes like food for him. It is spiritual nourishment enabling the believer to learn more about the character of God and how to please him.⁶² He also shows the believer that he should join with other believers in a local expression of the church.⁶³

The believer then has hope that the Holy Spirit will help him to overcome weakness and to learn more about the faith he has entered into. He hopes that he will progress in sanctification as the Spirit leads him into victory over sin, and he learns how to deny himself.

But there is more.

The Second Coming of Jesus, judgment and the new world

Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Titus 2:13

The Bible explains that the Christian hope is for a new and better world where there is no sin, no Satan, and only God. The beginning of this hope rests in the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

At the coming of Jesus, Christians will be changed in an instant to have a new spiritual yet material body to hold the glory of God.⁶⁴

Jesus will come back to earth but this time in glory, when the decree (plan) of God comes to fruition. In the right time, God will bring forth the Day of Judgment, which will be preceded by Jesus coming in the air⁶⁵ with a loud trumpet sound of God's glory, accompanied by the host of angels.⁶⁶

At the appearance of King Jesus in glory, all men will die and the earth will be burned with fire to purify it from all the taint of man's wickedness and destruction.⁶⁷ God will create a new restored earth which will be recognisable but with the beauty and harmony of the Garden of Eden. No work or edifice of man will remain, only the beauty of creation.

⁶¹ Rm 5:5, 8:15-16; 2 Cor 5:5; Eph 1:13-14.

⁶² Rm 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12.

⁶³ Acts 2:42; Rm 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Heb 10:25.

⁶⁴ 1 Cor 15:51-53, 'Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed -- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.' 1 Jn 3:2, 'Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is'.

⁶⁵ 2 Tim 4:1, 'the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom'.

⁶⁶ 1 Thess 4: 16-17, 'For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord'. Matt 25:31, 'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory'.

⁶⁷ 2 Pet 3:7,10, 'But the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ... But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.'

All men will be raised from the dead to face God and give an account of their lives; no one will be excepted.⁶⁸ Christians will be spared the condemnatory judgment of sinners but will be subject to an assessment of their lives to be rewarded or not by Christ for serving him.

For sinners, every thought, word and deed will be assessed by God and judged. Every hidden spoken word will be recorded and accounted for.⁶⁹ The judgment of sinners who rejected Christ on earth will be severe. They will be condemned to eternal punishment suitable to their deeds, with grades of punishment and severity.⁷⁰

The greatest suffering, however, will be the eternal separation from God and all good, all peace and the great wonders of heaven and earth that will be enjoyed by Christians. No sinner will complain. With his eyes opened he will fully agree with God that his punishment is just and appropriate.

Christians will be separated from the mass of sinful humanity at the Second Coming of Christ and will, after a brief tribunal for rewards, be placed on the new earth in fellowship with Christ. Here there will be no tears, no sickness, no sadness, only joy and bliss in fellowship and communion with God.⁷¹ Heaven will be on earth; God will dwell physically with men;⁷² Jesus will reign over all.

Conclusion

This is the explanation of the Christian Gospel. It is a great and glorious Gospel; it is good news of great joy.

No other religion can compare with this. No saviour or avatar⁷³ can compare with Jesus the Saviour. No god can compare with the God of the Bible. No claim of salvation (such as there is) can compare with the eternal plan of God for the redemption of man. No sacred text has the authenticity and authority of the Bible. No religion in history has done so much good to people of all nations. In many cases primitive tribesmen were turned from cannibalistic savages living in huts, to civilised people doing good works.

You should consider what I have written, check out what the Bible says for yourself, and seek God's mercy. Those who seek will find.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Matt 7:7-8

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. Ps 50:15

⁶⁸ Rev 1:7, 'He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him'.

⁶⁹ Matt 12:36, 'I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment.'

⁷⁰ Lk 12:5, 'Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him'.

⁷¹ Rev 21:4, 'God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away'.

⁷² Rev 21:3, 'I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God"'.

⁷³ The manifestation of the divine on Earth in Hinduism.

For You, Lord, *are* good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You. Ps 86:5

The LORD *is* near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. Ps 145:18

Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Isa 55:6

You will seek Me and find *Me*, when you search for Me with all your heart. Jer 29:13

I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. Rev 21:6

Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. Rev 22:17

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