



Uniquely

GOOD NEWS



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Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

(1 John 4.8-10)

The uniquely good news of the Bible begins with a God who is love. What does this mean? These verses tell us. Let's start with the very last word...

The word 'sin' refers to all self-centered behavior. All actions, words, and thoughts that offend God or hurt others are sin. Sin dishonors God and harms his creatures.

Because God is love and because sin is poison, God cannot approve sin. Nor can he ignore it. *His love is too great to do anything but hate sin.* It must be stopped. Those guilty of it must be punished.

This is bad news for us, because all of us are guilty of sin.

But there is good news. "God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." Because God is love, he "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The word 'propitiation' means *to turn away God's anger by taking away the guilt.* This word, 'propitiation,' is the key to understanding God's love.

What does it mean to say that "God is love"? It means that *God was personally willing to die for our sins, but he is never willing to lie about them.*

The good news of the Bible is that we are all a lot worse than we think, but that God is a lot better than we imagine. But who exactly is this God of whom the Bible speaks?

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

(Genesis 1.1-3)

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."

(Genesis 1.26)

We have already said that God is love. But what else can we learn from the Bible about who he is? These verses show us four important facts.

The first is that God *is*. “In the beginning,” he is already there. He depends for existence only on himself. One of the most ancient prayers in the Bible puts it like this: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God,” (Psalm 90.2).

The second fact is that God *created*. The “heavens and the earth” refers to everything that is not God. Starting with nothing, God made the universe. The universe continues today only because of God: “he upholds the universe by the word of his power,” (Hebrews 1.3).

The third thing to note is that God *speaks*. He said, “Let there be light,” and so there was. He said, “Let us make man in our image,” and so we are.

The final important fact is that God is *personal*. Earlier we read that God has a Son. In these verses we see that there is also a “Spirit of God.” The Bible tells us that there is only one God, but that he is three persons. It is for this reason that Christians describe God as a ‘Trinity’ (a *tri-unity*).

Because God made all things, all things owe him praise and obedience. But that isn’t how the world is today. What happened? What went wrong?

For although they knew God,
they did not honor him as God
or give thanks to him, but they
became futile in their
thinking, and their foolish
hearts were darkened...

(Romans 1.21)

...they exchanged the truth
about God for a lie and
worshiped and served the
creature rather than the
Creator...

(Romans 1.25)

Why is the world all wrong? Humanity rebelled against God.

The historical side of this rebellion is told in the second and third chapters of the book of Genesis. God created the first human beings, Adam and Eve, to enjoy and praise him. He gave them everything they needed: a perfect home, plenty of food, a satisfying job, and a spouse with whom to share it all.

But in order for humanity to become perfect, Adam and Eve had to learn to trust God perfectly. So he gave them a test. He picked one of the fruit trees in the garden where they lived, and he told them not to eat of it. If they did, they would die.

This test was not about starvation. Every other tree in the garden was available. There was plenty of food to eat. The test was about *trust*. Would Adam and Eve obey God simply because he said so – simply because he is God?

The answer was no. Although they knew God was good, they rebelled against him. Although they knew God was their Creator, they decided to try to be gods for themselves. This is the poisonous root of all sin, *an attempt to be your own god*.

These verses tell us that all of us today do the same thing. We know God, but we dishonor him and refuse to praise him. We have all “exchanged the truth about God for a lie,” and serve ourselves – “the creature rather than the Creator.”

In trying to be our own god, we have twisted our humanity into inhumanity. We are the problem. What will come of it?

God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

(Ecclesiastes 12.14)

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

(James 2.10)

For the wages of sin is death...

(Romans 6.23)

We have said already that a loving God *must* hate sin. We have said, too, that humanity *lives* in sin. What is God going to do about this apparent contradiction? These verses tell us.

The first thing they tell us is that God is going to hold us *accountable*. He will judge us for “every deed... with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” Every crooked thought, every cruel word. Nothing you or I have ever done will be hidden. God will hold us accountable for *everything*.

The second thing we learn is that we have *no escape*. We like to think that we are not that bad. “I’m a pretty good person,” we think. But God’s standard is not *pretty* good. God’s standard is *perfectly* good. Failure to obey God’s law perfectly *even once* makes us “accountable for all of it.”

Jesus summarized God’s law like this: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself,” (Luke 10.25-28). This may not seem too hard. But notice all the times Jesus uses the word ‘all.’ None of us loves God with *all* our heart, *all* our soul, *all* our strength, and *all* our mind. None of us *always* loves our neighbor as ourselves. But *all* of us try to be our own god.

The last thing we see is the *punishment* for our rebellion. Death. God said it would happen, and as it was in creation so it will be in judgment. What he says always comes to be.

Are we doomed? Is there any hope? Can anything be done?

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

(1 John 4.9)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

(2 Corinthians 5.21)

Can anything be done to rescue humanity? No – and yes.

On the one hand, there is *nothing* you or I can do to rescue ourselves. We rebel against God every day in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions. We are guilty. Besides this, the Bible says that “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment,” (Isaiah 64.6). Even our good deeds stink.

Yet on the other hand, there is *something God has done*. He “sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” But how does this work?

The answer is *substitution*. The Son of God became the Son of Man. Jesus lived the perfect life you and I could never live. Unlike us, he *always* loved both God and his neighbor *perfectly*. Jesus obeyed where Adam failed. He obeyed where you and I fail every day. He is the only man in history who actually earned eternal life. He *lived as a substitute*.

But there’s more. Jesus also *died as a substitute*. Death is payment for sin. But since Jesus had no sins of his own to pay for, his death could pay for the sins of others.

This is what the Bible means when it says God made Jesus “to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus lived and died not for himself, but for others. He is a double substitute.

God will never change his mind about sin. But *he will accept substitution*. What is the proof that this substitution works? God raised *Jesus himself* from the dead. Jesus is alive today.

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

(John 6.40)

And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...

(Romans 4.5)

This is what makes the good news of the Bible utterly unique. Every other religion tells you to do the impossible. Regardless of what they mean by words like 'God' and 'salvation,' every other religion in the world tells you the same thing. They all say you must do it. They all tell you to save yourself.

The Bible's message is the exact opposite. The Bible says *you cannot save yourself – and you do not have to try!* Instead, Jesus' life and death can count for you.

God loves to save sinners. He is not a cruel tyrant who takes delight in our destruction. "As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live," (Ezekiel 33.11).

Look at what Jesus says. "This is the will of my Father," he said, "that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." God desires and delights to rescue rebels.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? Notice what the next verse says, "to the one who does not work but believes in him." Believing in Jesus is not a work. Rather, it is trust. It is surrendering to him as God, and relying on him alone as your Substitute.

Your rebellion *can* be forgiven. Your self-centeredness *can* be changed. Your Creator *is* willing to welcome you into his family, the church. You *can* have new, eternal life today. All you have to do is trust in Jesus Christ. Take Jesus' word for it.

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

(Psalm 62.8)

And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

(2 Corinthians 5.15)

The moment a person starts trusting in Jesus, everything begins to change. This total transformation is what the Bible calls 'salvation.' What does this transformation look like in everyday life?

One of the first marks of Christian transformation is *prayer*. Prayer is pouring out your heart to God. It is talking to God as your adopted Father on the basis your new relationship with Jesus his Son. Jesus himself commanded those who trust him to speak to God this way: "Our Father in heaven..." (Matthew 6.5-13). Prayer is how faith breathes.

A second mark of Christian transformation is *personal reformation*. Instead of living for yourself as god, you begin to live for Jesus as God. Instead of doing things to make yourself look good, you do things because they are good – because Jesus says they are good, and because doing them well makes him look good. There is no better way to live: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God," (1 Corinthians 10.31).

The third mark of Christian transformation is *community*. When you join yourself to Jesus in trust, you also join yourself to his body – the church. "So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers," (Acts 2.41-42). This can be a struggle, because the church is full of people who still sin. Yet the struggle is worth it. Why? Because the church belongs to Jesus. It is the community of the resurrection.

Resurrection Orthodox Presbyterian Church believes that the purpose of human life is to glorify and enjoy God, and we exist as a church to do these things together: to worship God, to walk in love, and to witness to the uniquely good news of Jesus.

If you are interested in Jesus, we would love to meet you. Please contact me at **jeremiah@resurrectionopc.org**.

– Pastor Jeremiah Montgomery



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