

to end whose ultimate author is God Himself. God gave us that revelation in love so that we can know what is true regarding spiritual matters that otherwise are unknowable. The Bible is all truth because God is holy and cannot lie. And in the Bible, we find what God is like. Our Creator is absolutely glorious. He is transcendent and infinitely majestic. He is the most beautiful, the most perfect Being in existence. And He is good, holy, loving, wise and just. (He is much more, but I leave the many attributes of God for another time.) To say, for example, that God is good means that it's His essence, His nature to be good; His attitude toward us, indeed toward all He created is infinitely good. Everything about God is surpassing in excellence. He is an infinitely great, living Being.

There's more we can say. For example, God is mysterious. He has not disclosed everything we might like to know about Him or about spiritual matters. But He has revealed a lot. So, for example, we know that He exists as what we call a Trinity, that is, as three distinct, equal Persons having the same nature and one will. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit exist eternally in loving communion enjoying peace and joy in the presence of each other. Also, God is purposeful; that is, He created this universe intentionally to accomplish certain objectives. And God is sovereign. He rules His cosmos according to His good and holy will. He knows everything that happens, even our thoughts and our motives. He has total and precise control of everything throughout all time.

And God wants us to know Him intimately. In fact not only to know Him but to be with Him, in His presence, to enjoy Him forever. There's nothing greater than this, His gracious desire for us to be with Him. But there's a problem.

2. We're not fit to be with God as we are. We're sinful creatures. This is a disastrous situation. Words fail to convey adequately how serious this is, because God is holy. And so He is dangerous to us. Exceedingly dangerous. To explain, let's back up a bit. God created humanity with a measure of free will. Not absolute or total freedom, but sufficient to respond to Him as He deserves, that is, with love and honor. And as Creator He gave instructions how we're to live in His world according to His standards, with obedience expected. But with moral freedom necessarily comes accountability. Justice requires that. So God

tests us. Like it or not, we're here on probation. Do we take the side of good? Or not. Do we trust Him and obey His revealed will for us? Or not. If not, He will judge us and, worse, enforce His judgments. The Bible reveals that means suffering eternal loss. Tragically, we've used the freedom God gave us to make ourselves offensive to God.

Because of rebellion against God and disobedience to His will, all humanity is enslaved by a sin nature. We sin, all the time. Sin controls us. It affects our thinking, our will, our feelings, all of our being. Sin affects our personality, our relationships, our institutions and society. Sin makes us suppose that we're free to live as we please. Sins can be subtle, such as selfishness, conceit, jealousy, and indifference to God or to others. Or sins can be overt, such as pride, bigotry, violence, hatred, lies, lusts, vindictiveness, greed, idolatries and more. Sin prevents us from thinking clearly about God, about truth, about justice, even about sin. So we mock sin, we celebrate sin, we delight in sin. We need to grasp how exceedingly powerful and pervasive sin is. And sin offends the holiness of God.

Although God loves His human creatures, in perfect justice He must punish sin; He must punish *us*. Death is such a punishment. Death is a separation, a separation of an individual from family and loved ones; a separation of our inner-most being, that is, our soul, from the body; and a separation of the individual from God's presence. Our refusal to love and honor God for who He is and our indifference to His revealed will necessarily means we're going to be forever separated from His loving presence. We're alienated from Him. It means we not only forfeit the blessings He desires to bestow upon us, we experience His fierce indignation and enmity. But this disaster isn't final.

3. In love, God has acted to rescue us from sin and its deserved condemnation. He has done all that is necessary to save His beloved human creatures from His own judgments. He has done all that's needed so that we can know and love Him as intended at creation. We need to understand all that He has graciously done for us.

Early in biblical history, God began revealing that in the future someone unique would come who would deal with sin, with moral failure and disobedience, indeed, with all evil. The

Hebrew Scriptures anticipate this person, and the New Testament documents how God fulfilled all He promised. The Son, the second Person of the Godhead, God Himself, did the most astounding thing imaginable: He entered time and space in human form. He is a unique Person having two natures, divine and human, in perfect union. So Jesus fully demonstrated what God is like. He is lovely beyond comparison. His wisdom is astounding. His humility, compassion, kindness and self-sacrificing love have inspired if not thrilled millions of people for two millennia. He lived the righteous life none of us could (or would) live. He performed miraculous healings attesting to His divine Person and mission.

Of greatest importance, though, is this: In obedience to the Father's will, Jesus did the unthinkable, He willingly gave Himself as an atoning sacrifice for us. He went to the cross deliberately to take upon Himself all human sin and bear the punishment that God decreed that sin deserves, death. Because Jesus is Himself deity, His death has infinite value. His death was sufficient to atone for all sin. And because He's deity, death could not hold Him. So He rose from the dead and lives today in a resurrection body. Taken to heaven, He sits on the throne of God awaiting a return in majesty and power to restore all things on earth. His humiliation over, the now exalted Jesus has all power, honor, glory and authority over all creation.

What the atonement that Jesus effected means is, the enmity and the alienation is over. God is appeased. Reconciliation between man and God has been made. Jesus has done what only God could do, He made it possible for us to have not only the forgiveness of sin but His holiness imputed to us, thereby allowing us to be in God's presence. Don't miss this: The only way we have any hope for a future existence with God is because Jesus does two things for us. He purifies us from all sin by His sacrificial, substitutionary death on a cross and He imparts to us His resurrected life. Thus Jesus said, "**I am the true and living Way; no one comes to the Father except through Me**" (John 14:6). He blesses us with . . . *Himself*.

4. We're responsible to respond to what God has done for us. "**God has commanded all men everywhere to repent**" (Acts 17:30). We need to change our minds about Jesus and believe in Him. The Gospel, that is, the good news that's on offer, is that

everyone is invited to respond to what God has done by entering into a trusting, loving relationship with the living Jesus. Jesus takes us to God to experience blessing greater than anything we can imagine. God places us *in Christ*, that is, we so intimately identify with Him it's as if we're joined to Him in a corporate unity. His resurrection life becomes ours. His righteousness becomes ours. We participate with Him in His death so that we're dead to sin; our sin nature no longer has dominion over us. We have free access to God in prayer. And we will one day be transformed into the very likeness of Christ Jesus and dwell with God as an adopted son. We will have fellowship with God, communion with the Persons of the Trinity, able to partake forever of the joy, love and peace of the Godhead. God also empowers us to pursue godly lives in the here-and-now, power to overcome selfishness and sin. The Holy Spirit indwells us to enable our obedience to Jesus' teachings and commands so that we can become like Jesus. So that we can become godly and thereby glorify God.

But all this is for those who respond to the Gospel invitation by loving trust in Jesus. Reading and reflecting on the life and work of Jesus in the New Testament enables us to know Him, and to know Him is to love Him. And to be thankful to Him for saving us from what we really deserve, which is eternal condemnation. The Gospel is indeed good news, and it's freely offered to all who understand it and want it. Not to want it would be tragic; it would be, in essence, rejecting God's goodness.

"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1, also John 3:18)). If all that Christ Jesus has done is repudiated (or even simply ignored), the deserved condemnation for sin remains. There's no hope for blessing, for access to God, for forgiveness of sins, for eternal life. All that remains is sin and God's just indignation. The test God now places before everyone is, What will you do with Jesus? **"God made Him who had no sin to become sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Corinthians 5:21). God did this supremely stupendous thing in human history to save His beloved human creatures, to reveal His goodness, and it's all centered on Jesus.

Religious rites don't save anyone. Nor do good deeds or living a clean life. Only Jesus is able to save and that is by

entering into a personal relationship with Him by trusting Him and through prayer. We either receive Jesus, and all that God by grace freely offers in Him, or we reject Him. There are only those two options.

I need to conclude. Three thoughts: (1) God is Creator. He gave us life and He owns us. We must exercise great care in our thinking about God and our response to all that He has done for us in surpassing grace. He is a good God, worthy of our glorifying Him by loving and honoring Him as He deserves. The most meaningful life we possibly can live is one that reflects God's glory. God doesn't need us, nor our faith in Him, nor our worship or our gratitude. He is an infinite, transcendent Being, sufficient in Himself. It's in goodness, wisdom and love that He offers Himself to us as the greatest and most ultimate blessing anyone can experience. God made us to be complete by being in relationship to Him, and without that relationship we have an emptiness that nothing else in life can satisfy. The resurrection of Christ proves the truth of all that I'm saying, which is simply what Scripture states about the Person and work of Jesus. He is the greatest reality there is. He is all that is good, in Person. (2) Merely agreeing with certain information isn't saving faith. Information doesn't save, Jesus does. Church attendance doesn't save either. The Gospel is an invitation to enter into a committed, intimate relationship with the living and resurrected Jesus, to be united to Him, eventually glorified and forever in the presence of the infinite Triune God. It's something we should want more than anything else in life.

(3) Read your Bible! Everything stated here comes from the Bible. It's called the Word of God because its source is God. It has God's authority, and it's where we encounter God. The Bible is like a love-letter to us from God. It reveals yet more truths we otherwise couldn't know. It teaches us, for example, how things are in this world and in life from God's perspective. And it instructs us with God's wisdom how to live in a way that pleases Him. It's how we get to know God more and more so that we can grow in love of Him. The Gospel of John is a very good place to begin.

Dear Neighbor,

The awareness of God's existence is disappearing from modern life. It seems that this fiercely secular world we live in doesn't want us even to think about God. So I'm writing and sending this because God has built into His creation certain truths everyone must know. I'm sending this in love; I have no other motives. The truths we all need to know are these:

1. God exists. His existence is plainly evident to everyone, although we can deliberately ignore the evidences if we wish. Consciousness, creativity, moral awareness, abstract and logical thought and problem-solving are just a few of the characteristics God built into us that cannot be explained naturalistically. In the physical world we encounter butterflies, rainbows, murmurations, flowers and a host of other lovely things to delight us and cause us to praise our Creator. In their foolish rebellion against God, scientists try to explain the world we live in without God. But that effort is in vain. Science cannot explain, for example, the most basic of all phenomena such as gravity, light, magnetism, and the origin of life. Darwinian evolution is really nothing but speculations and imaginative scenarios cloaked with scientific jargon. Their deliberately anti-theistic interpretation of physical findings can, as a host of Christian scientists have demonstrated, be equally interpreted in light of creation. Evolution is a fairy tale for grown-ups. It's a clever one for sure, but a fantasy nevertheless.

"In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). We have life because God created us. Only God can make something come from nothing. Time, space, matter, life itself, everything that exists in our cosmos is God's handiwork. Of course God exists. We have no excuse for denying it. The existence of God is an irrefutable, self-evident truth, one that we deliberately suppress to preserve the notion that we're autonomous.

Furthermore, God has revealed Himself to us. He is an eternally existing, invisible and formless Spirit. So for us to know that He's there and for us to know Him, He had to disclose Himself. And He did that in permanent written form, telling us not only what He is like but what His will is for us. The Bible is that revelation. It's an amazingly coherent book from beginning