

This short tome is my attempt to render the Gospel straightforwardly, in my own words. It is somewhat of an extract/edition of a couple of letters I've written (widely separated in time) over the years to people close to me. I've tried to remove any references to them, and I expect to do a bit of technical edit along the way as need appears. But in tone and intent, this is the effort of one person to make the Gospel clear(er) to another, nothing more or less.
- Larry Brunelle -

This letter follows some communication we may have had indicating your interest in God, the Bible, Christians, and/or some related topic. You may have encountered more than one group offering more than one interpretation of one Biblical doctrine or another, and/or you may have encountered some people claiming to be Christians whose behavior was, at least, confusing. (Most of us have.)

I thought I might attempt to render the Bible, and Christians, less confusing. Not that I'm any kind of scholar, but I fancy I can speak English. (Also, I'd refer you to C. S. Lewis's famous work *Mere Christianity*, which might supply where I fail.) So, here goes.

The Bible is about God reaching down to man. While it contains information about history, science, economics, and human behavior (and of accuracy quite surprising to some), it isn't really **about** those things. It's about telling a world of fallen men who He is, who and what they are, their place and significance in the universe. It's about the sad state of a man apart from Him (that's each and all of us, more's the pity), and about the provision He has made to recover to Himself those who are willing to be recovered.

For what we already know of the physical universe, it is huge beyond understanding, and expanding. It dwarfs us in sheer expanse and in apparent duration from past to future; we pale into insignificance. Yet we can know that it both is finite and has a finite life span – one day, left to itself, it will arrive at heat death through entropy. Yet we, who are so small, can comprehend all of this, at some level of abstraction, Why? Because we're made in God's image. (*Genesis 1:26-28*) In a certain sense, we're shaped like Him, although we don't have His scope.

But what's beyond the universe? And beyond our own deaths? We know intuitively something about the universe in which we live that (loosely) follows Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem – (again loosely,) we can't know or prove a number of things about the universe from within the universe, and can know nothing at all about things outside of it. Any information about what is “beyond” has to come from someone who **is** outside of the universe. And the Bible claims to be exactly that: a communication not only from outside the universe, but from its very Creator, one Who is from everlasting to everlasting, outside of time as well as space.

Now, what does the Bible tell us? First, and easy to overlook, is that, if the Bible is the message from God it claims to be, its very existence means God intends to communicate with the puny likes of us. Then, the Bible itself informs us of several further points.

- We (as a race) began in a sinless state of fellowship with Him.
- Adam and Eve didn't wait long to sin. We now inherit from them the legacy of being estranged from God. Since they are the progenitors of the entire race, we all share this common legacy.
- We each of us (lest we say we don't deserve that legacy) lives true to our breeding, and sins. Every single one of us falls short in some way of God's standard.
- God is holy and righteous, and can't abide sin. ANY sin. And sin merits punishment.
- Therefore our state is hopeless. Not only can't we pay for any sins we have committed, but we'll be sinning again in some way before the next day rolls around.
- Yet, God loves us, whom He made, in spite of our sin, and our sins.
- He has therefore provided a payment for our sins to reconcile us to Himself.
- We can have that payment applied to our account, freely, without payment, IF WE CHOOSE. God won't force the situation against our will.
- The chief end of man is to glorify God.

The main thrust of the Bible, then, is to acquaint man with the God he doesn't (and couldn't) know, to acquaint him of his own state and need, and to offer God's solution, and to direct his behavior to glorify God. It is all about the relationship. (That's why the Bible is sometimes called “God's love letter to man”.)

So – God made us, yet we're sinners and alienated from Him. Does it matter? What's the practical consequence?

Well, first: we die. In the beginning, man had no curse of death. God told him, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (*Genesis 2:7*) and, later, after he'd gone and done it, "cursed is the ground for thy sake" (*Genesis 3:17*). From that point on, men die – and the whole creation about us is likewise cursed and experiences death.

Second, and more distressing: it isn't just a death of oblivion. No, the Scripture says that sinners go to the lake of fire. A literal, eternal hell. (*Revelation 20:15*) Interestingly, it is only people who do not accept the Scripture as authoritative who teach otherwise. People who understand the Bible to be God's own communication to us invariably understand hell to be a real place, to which some real people are consigned, forever.

So we are sinners. You and me. **ALL** of us. (*Romans 3:23*) And the thing is, we have no argument. If I say that I did the best I could, my conscience tells me that No, I didn't, either. (*Romans 2:15*) If I claim that God's unfair, that I couldn't help myself, that I was born that way, the Bible says that, Yes, I **was** born that way (*I Corinthians 15:22*), and No, I **couldn't** help myself. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and, come short of the glory of God." (*Romans 3:23*) God's standard is perfection. Not only that, but in the most concise statement of His standard, the first item is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy mind," (*Matthew 22:37*) a failure of which each of us is demonstrably guilty. Of course, if it stopped there, we'd all be on our way to hell with no hope, so what's the point of discussion? If God's going to take the trouble to tell us of our state, it seems reasonable to assume that He'd tell us of some remedy.

What to do? What to **DO?!?**

Well, on our own, we're fried. We, each of us, owe something like the national debt: it grows as we breathe, and a lifetime's work couldn't equal one minute's accumulation. The Bible says that all our righteousnesses are "as filthy rags" (*Isaiah 64:6*), and that salvation is "not of works, that any man should boast." (*Ephesians 2:9*) In other words, there's nothing we can do to secure our own salvation.

Curiously, that's a pretty good thing, when you think of it: if there **WAS** anything we **could** do, it makes sense that a) it would be in some proportion to our wrongdoings, and b) that God would certainly require it of us - and, at the least, it would be a whole **LOT** of work, with no assurance of success. But God, who **does** love us, even though we can't always see it, did engineer a solution. We, each of us, deserve eternal death (Scripturally, death means separation of one kind or another - separation of body from soul, separation from God, separation from the world, or from sin, depending on the context - never annihilation.), and there's nothing we can do to pay for our guilt to avoid that death. But what if somebody else paid?

And that is exactly God's solution. Christ died on the cross, according to the predictions of the Old Testament prophets (See *John 19:24, 28, 36, I Corinthians 15:3*, as well as the complete accounts in all four Gospels). His death and His resurrection both have better historical attestation than we are commonly led to believe, and in fact better evidence than any other event of that day. Even in His time on earth, He was seen as a remarkable man. Further, the claims Christ made of Himself were such that He would have to be a devil, a madman, or whom He said He was - the Son of God. He didn't leave open the choice of being "just a good man", and there is no evidence, nor significant present belief, that He was either demonic or mad. So the Son of God dies, and comes back from the dead: **WHY?** So that His death can now be used as payment for your sins and mine. (*Isaiah 53:5*)

I used to ask the question, "Why did God have to go to all that trouble? Why didn't He just forgive everybody anyway? Why have His Son die on the cross?" The answer is not always easy for men to grasp, but basically it is that God is perfectly righteous, and His righteousness, His justice, can't let wrongdoing go scot-free. For me, it's a little easier to understand if I remember that God has an open-ended, infinite system to run. Imagine that you were in charge of, well, any group of people for a year. Because you and they both knew it was for a limited time, you could tolerate certain disgusting habits and behaviors that some might have, and you needn't be perfect, either. But suppose it was for 30 years: that smoker would shape up or ship out, that supervisor would learn some manners or else, and you'd be speedily confronted with anything you did inconsistently (sort of like parenting). Now imagine the same situation for not merely a year, 30 years, or a lifetime, but for eternity. Anything out of order and not dealt with could only go from bad to worse.

In any case, whether we understand it or not, God's justice requires payment - else He **wouldn't** have sacrificed His

Son on the cross. And neither would He if He didn't love us - would you sacrifice a child of yours for the benefit of someone you didn't love? (*Romans 5:8*)

So Christ died and paid for our sins. So. And I can't do anything to earn salvation, nor do I need to. So. So everybody's saved, right? Not so. The Scripture offers salvation to those who believe in Christ ("into Christ", even, in the original Greek). So what must I do to be saved? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (*Acts 16:31*) The "work" God wants is belief - trust. (*John 6:29*) This trust is in a Person, Someone you CAN trust. Sometimes preachers talk about repentance - which, unfortunately (and incorrectly) is often understood to mean a renunciation and cessation of sin. (You can see how this takes us right back to the things we **CAN'T** do effectively.) Real repentance means a **change of mind** about sin, and about ourselves, and about Christ. It means to acknowledge that we are sinners, need salvation, and are willing to receive it from Christ (*John 1:12*). It **does not** mean a change in behavior - that would be a salvation by works. Rather, when one believes in Christ, he is saved **ON THE SPOT**. (Recall the thief on the cross - no works of any kind were available to him, but he did identify Whom to believe and ask for mercy.) At that moment, also, the Holy Spirit enters him, never to leave, and begins transforming the person. Changes in behavior necessarily follow - over time. In some cases, a very long time - but because it is God doing the work, it does get done. (*Phillipians 1:6, 2:13*)

I have noticed that previous versions of this letter contain little about the destination of those who believe in Christ, that is, heaven. There are a few reasons for that. First, it seems that a concept of "heaven" or "paradise" is very common among men, to the point of being assumed. Indeed, the Scriptures speak more about heaven as being a place where God dwells, a reference to a known fact, than to provide description. Second, from what description we have, we find that our experience really doesn't provide direct referents for such an environment. A good deal is beyond our understanding. And, third, perhaps, is that our present business on this earth is much more about choosing heaven, and helping others to do so as well, than to describe a place, out of our present view, whose features the explorations of an eternity would not exhaust. What is clear is that to have salvation is to have an eternity in the presence of God and those who also believe in Him, in His abode. (*John 14:3*) The key point is fellowship with Him and with His, and that can be experienced, enjoyed, and understood, in a measure, right here on earth. (Christ's prayer in *John 17* speaks about this relationship in some depth.) And you'll find nothing to complain of when you get there. (As a picture, you could talk all day at your dog about the house you're moving to - all the features and modern conveniences - and he'll listen, but much of it doesn't mean much to him. He wants to be with you, and beyond that, a comfy bed, food, and good smells - and he already knows you'll provide those things, because you do now.)

So, now - what are you going to do with this information? My goal in writing you is nothing more or less than to render the gospel (the word simply means "good news") clearly as I can, so you'd be able to think about it and consider. I (and not I alone) care about you (else I surely would not have written you), and would have you to have the benefit of salvation - which you must admit, if the Scriptures are true, is **THE** benefit to have over all others. What do I ask you to do? Simply to believe in Christ - to make a decision to trust Him to take you to Heaven with Him. (If that is a decision you had already made, of course there is no need to make it again. If you have really trusted Christ, He really has saved you.)

I find that some people have only to hear the gospel, set forth well enough to be understood, to believe in Christ. Others may ask something like, "Sounds great - but if I don't believe, how can I say otherwise? How do I know it's TRUE? I can't just force myself into a state of belief." That's a fair question, and one I had myself. The best answer I can give is the one Lowell Greer, a good friend, gave me - to ask God to show me if He was real. I did, and He did. In my case, I was already convinced that if there was a God, He had to be the Christian God; I knew that if there was sin against Him, then I was a sinner. What I wasn't convinced of was the reality of a spiritual world, of His existence. In a relatively short time after my unbelieving query, He showed me this reality, and consequently my need of a Saviour - and the existence of one. The details are not important here (though you're welcome to them if you want) - the point is that God knew what it would take to show **me**. He equally knows what **you** need to believe in Him. Ask Him - even unbelieving. And when He shows you, believe Him and say so.

With love from both of us and Him above.

(Scripture references in order of appearance in this letter - best to look at the whole passage in your Bible)

<i>Genesis</i>	1:26	And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.
	1:27	So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.
	1:28	And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.
<i>Genesis</i>	2:7	And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.
<i>Genesis</i>	3:17	And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;
<i>Revelation</i>	20:15	And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.
<i>Romans</i>	3:23	For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;
<i>Romans</i>	2:11	For there is no respect of persons with God.
	2:12	For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;
	2:13	(For not the hearers of the law [are] just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.
	2:14	For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:
	2:15	Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and [their] thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)
<i>I Corinthians</i>	15:22	For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.
<i>Matthew</i>	22:37	Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (<i>ref. Deuteronomy 6:5, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27</i>)
	22:38	This is the first and great commandment.
	22:39	And the second [is] like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.
<i>Isaiah</i>	64:6	But we are all as an unclean [thing], and all our righteousnesses [are] as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.
<i>John</i>	19:24	They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.
	19:28	After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.
	19:36	For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.
<i>I Corinthians</i>	15:3	For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
<i>Ephesians</i>	2:7	That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in [his] kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.
	2:8	For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God:
	2:9	Not of works, lest any man should boast.
<i>Romans</i>	5:6	For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.
	5:7	For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.
	5:8	But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
<i>Acts</i>	16:31	And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.
<i>John</i>	6:29	Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.
<i>John</i>	1:12	But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name:
<i>Phillipians</i>	1:6	Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ:
	2:13	For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of [his] good pleasure.