



THE STORY OF
REDEMPTION

*Everyone who calls upon the name
of the Lord will be saved.*

Romans 10:13

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

These are the opening words of the Bible. If we are to understand the main message of this ancient book, we must begin with God. We must understand who He is and what He expects of us.

God is the Creator and Owner of Everything

Because God made us, we are His property. He has rights over us. Practically, this means that we are obligated to obey and honor Him. The owner gets to make the rules. It's like flying on a commercial airline – there are certain rules you are obligated to follow simply because the airline (owner) says so. As Creator, God has exclusive rights over His creation.

God is Love

God is not disinterested and uninvolved in the universe He created. He is actively and intimately engaged in His world. The Bible says that He is a God of love, and His love is demonstrated in countless ways. The rain, the air we breathe, the sunshine, the sheer beauty of creation – all of these things come from God and are evidences of His love for us.

God is holy

God's love is a holy love. This means that He is absolutely perfect and pure. He does no wrong – ever. This also means He hates anything that is impure. He has a holy hatred of evil. In light of the fact that we are obligated to obey God, the concept of absolute holiness has huge implications for us.

*You therefore must be perfect, as your
heavenly Father is perfect.*

Matthew 5:48

Some people say, "I'm a pretty good person. I've never done anything REALLY bad." But we need to understand that God's standard for us is perfection. Now before you yell, "Unfair!" remember – He is the Owner; so He gets to make the rules.

What are God's rules?

The *Ten Commandments* are a summary of God's rules for every person. Here's what they teach us:

- 1. We may worship no one else and nothing else but the true God.*
- 2. We should not have any wrong thoughts about God and should only worship Him as taught in the Bible.*
- 3. We must not use the name of God thoughtlessly or as a swear word.*
- 4. We must keep Sunday as a special day, set apart for God, and complete our work on the other six days of the week.*
- 5. We must respect and love our parents and obey them.*
- 6. We must not murder or have hateful thoughts about other people.*
- 7. We must not commit adultery with our bodies or in our minds.*
- 8. We must not steal.*
- 9. We must not tell lies.*
- 10. We must not be jealous of others people's possessions.*

God's rules are intended for our own good. Remember, God is perfectly loving in all He does. He has not given us rules to follow in hopes that we will mess up and fail. The *Ten Commandments* have our best interests in mind. But His holiness demands that He punish law-breakers.

Am I a Law Breaker?

Before we can honestly answer this question we need to consider what the New Testament says about God's law. Jesus explained in Matthew 5 that the law requires more than just external compliance. He said,

You have heard that it was said, "Do not murder." But I tell you, "Don't even get angry." You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But I tell you, "If you have even looked at another person to lust after them, you have committed adultery already in your heart." You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemies." But I tell you, "Love your enemies."

From Matthew 5 (paraphrased)

It is clear that by God's standards, every human being is a law-breaker. The Bible has a name for one who has broken the laws of our Creator, and that name is 'sinner.'

To be perfect as God requires is to keep His law, not only in our actions, but also in how we think and feel. And if that weren't enough, if you break the law in just one area, you're as guilty as if you had broken every commandment.

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

James 2:10

What is the consequence of sin?

For the wages of sin is death...
Romans 6:23

From the very beginning, God made it clear that disobedience to His law would bring about death. Sin kills. We see the effect of sin all around us – people die everyday. But death, as we know it, is only the beginning of sin's punishment.

What happens to the sinner after death?

The Bible speaks of a 'second death' (Revelation 20:14) – a death of unspeakable agony, suffering and pain. This death is God's full punishment for sin. The Bible says that God has reserved a place for this punishment to occur, and it is called 'Hell.'

*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God...for our
God is a consuming fire.*
Hebrews 10:31 & 12:29

It's hard for us to imagine a place of immeasurable and never-ending punishment. It's also difficult to accept the fact that such a place exists. It just doesn't seem fair. God is supposed to be a God of love.

We must remember, however, that God's love is a *holy* love. He does only what is perfectly right. Think of all the suffering and agony that has been caused by sin over the course of history – countless wars, the Holocaust of the 1940's, slavery in the 19th century and prior, acts of religious bigotry such as Muslim jihad or the torture tactics of the Inquisition in the 15th century, numerous massacres and revolutions, diseases such as AIDS and other STD's brought on by sexual immorality, theft, rape, murder. Would God be a loving God to ignore all of the wrong-doing that has ever been done and pretend it had never happened? Would God be holy – that is, perfectly good and right – to behave as if hate and rebellion and immorality were okay? No, God must punish sin.

But why must His punishment last forever?

Perhaps this is the hardest question of all, because it requires that we understand (or at least accept) the infinite purity and majesty of God. One's punishment is determined by the dignity of the person who has been violated. A crime against a police officer is judged more harshly than a crime against another criminal. If this principle is true, then think what it means for us – my sin is committed against a God who possesses immeasurable dignity; therefore, it deserves an immeasurable punishment. Anything less than hell for the sinner would be unfair.

What is the Good News?

*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:8

The only way for justice to be satisfied is for a penalty to be imposed when someone is found guilty. God, as Judge, finds us guilty of breaking His law. But God has not left it there! He has left His judgment bench and traded places with the condemned law-breaker, receiving the punishment for sin on Himself.

Who is Jesus Christ and why did He come?

Jesus Christ is God, Himself, in human form.

The Bible says that the One who spoke everything into existence, the Creator, became flesh and blood and came to earth to live among us (John 1:14).

Jesus Christ is fully man.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ identified with us so much in becoming man that He was tempted in every way that we are tempted (yet without ever sinning), and because of His humanity He can fully sympathize with us in our weakness (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus Christ is perfect.

The Bible says that a person's sin nature is passed down from the father. Jesus was miraculously born of a virgin. This shows that He was perfect – He was in no way contaminated with sin.

He came to live a perfect life.

By living a perfect, sinless life He became the only human who did not deserve to be punished for sin. This put Him in the exclusive position of being able to endure hell for someone else, rather than for His own sin.

He came to die in the place of sinners.

Jesus' death was more than just physical. When He was crucified on a cross He literally absorbed God's holy wrath towards sin. He endured hell for sinners. The equivalent of an eternity in hell many times over was poured out on Jesus as He hung on the cross, and it literally killed Him.

He came to offer forgiveness to sinners.

Three days after His death something extraordinary happened. Jesus was raised from the dead as proof that His sacrifice had defeated sin and appeased the wrath of God. Forgiveness had become a reality!

He came to open heaven to the human race.

The Bible says that heaven is the final destination of those who have been forgiven. It is a place of never-ending peace and bliss in the presence of God.

Did Jesus' perfect life, horrific death, and amazing resurrection secure forgiveness for everyone? The Bible says 'no.'

How can you receive God's forgiveness for your sin?

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Will God forgive and accept me as long as I try to live a good life? No. Will God forgive and accept me as long as I join a church? No. There is only one way to find forgiveness.

Jesus Christ offers forgiveness of sin and eternal life in heaven to all those who *believe* in Him. What does it mean to believe in Jesus? The Bible teaches us that belief involves two things: repentance and faith.

What is repentance and faith?

What does it mean to repent of your sin?

To repent literally means to do an 'about face' – to turn around and head the other way. With regard to sin, it means to begin hating sin as God hates it. It means to stop condoning and excusing sin and to begin eradicating it from your life.

Does this mean you will never sin again? No. As long as you are in this sin-contaminated world you will struggle with sin. But repentance demands a change in your attitude toward sin. Sin must become something you fight against, at all cost, to your dying day.

What is saving faith in Jesus Christ?

Saving faith requires that you believe the facts about Jesus Christ – that He is God in the flesh, that He was born of a virgin, that He lived a perfect life, that He died for the sins of the world, and that He rose from the dead.

But the Bible says that the demons believe all the facts about Jesus Christ, and yet they will be condemned to hell one day. So saving faith requires something more. It demands that you trust Him to save you – that is, that you depend on Him alone. I can believe that a chair exists. I can even believe that it will hold me up. But I have not put my trust in the chair

until I have actually sat on the chair. It is not enough to say I believe that Jesus really existed and died and rose from the dead. I must rely on Him, and Him alone, to rescue me from the punishment of sin.

Will you repent of your sin and put your trust in Jesus?

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Isaiah 55:6, 7

Do I have to do anything before I can ask God to save me? No. Is it necessary that I feel God's presence in a special way before I can ask Him to save me? No. Am I too sinful to be saved? No. Whoever you are, whatever you've done, Jesus invites you to come to Him and be saved!

But what should I say?

"Jesus, save me."

If you are convinced that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true and that you are in need of the forgiveness that God is offering, nothing should stop you from calling on God right now. Try to find a place where you can be alone with God for a few moments. As you pray, remember that God is not interested in fine words or speeches. He will listen to anyone who sincerely wants to speak to Him, whatever words are used.

As you pray you should:

Admit that you are a sinner who deserves hell.

Tell God that you are helpless apart from Him.

Ask Him to help you repent and believe.

Tell Jesus that you want Him to be the Lord (ruler) of Your life and save you from God's anger against your sin.

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will be saved.*
Romans 10:13

What should I do next?

First, get a Bible and begin reading it. A good place to start would be in the Gospel of John. God is the author of the entire Bible, and He speaks to Christians when they read it.

Secondly, as soon as possible, you should tell a Christian friend what you have done. Perhaps you have no Christian friends at this point.

The Grace Church Family would love to get to know you and help you grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ. Give us a call at (704) 455-9312 or come visit us this Sunday.



GRACE CHURCH

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