

WHAT is the main message of God's book?

In the Bible's first pages, we learn that God gave life to his creatures. All of his work, including the gift of life, was perfect in every way. When his work was finished, he certified that all of his created universe was "very good."

The holy goodness was lost when Adam and Eve rebelled against God's will.

And that, my friends, is what makes life so miserable. *Sin* makes our lives miserable. Worse, there is nothing that we can do to erase our sin. Now that the world is tainted with sin, it is impossible for sinners to meet God's expectations for perfect living. This is our dilemma. How can sinners make our relationship with a holy God right again?

We can't. Trying to do it - trying to constantly be good - leads to burnout.

The good news is that God had a plan to address the issue of sin. As soon as sin happened, God put his plan in motion. **His plan, and the astounding way in which his plan unfolds over the course of time, is the most important theme in the Bible.**

The Bible actually focuses on these two basic truths in tandem. They are called *SIN* and *GRACE*.

- We sometimes refer to the truth about our sin as the *law*. God's law exposes our sin.
- The word that is often used for God's grace is *gospel*. While the law's honest truth is that we cannot repair our ruined relationship with God, the gospel communicates the good news that God has worked out a perfect plan to intervene. His plan was to send his own beloved Son into our sinful world to live the perfect life that we could not live and to sacrifice his own perfect life in place of our sin-stained lives. In this way, Jesus met God's just demand that sin must be punished. Though he was innocent, he died the death we rightly deserve for us. He did this because he loves us. His sacrifice gives us real hope in his promise to bring us safely into his heavenly home.

The following narrative is a true story about a sinner who put all his trust in Jesus' promise and found forgiveness. Notice how the story ends. Someday, we will hear Jesus say the same wonderful words that he said to this dying criminal.

... There was a written notice above Jesus, which read: this is the King of the Jews.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:38-43)

What to look for when you read the Bible

The two great truths of Scripture are God's *law*, which condemns sin (summarized in The Ten Commandments), and the *gospel*, which tells us the good news that God's Son lived, died, and rose victorious over death for us. It is fairly easy to spot both teachings, yet it takes practice to apply them to life.

- The law leads sinners to repent.
- The gospel leads sinners to rejoice in God's forgiveness and moves them to obey his will.

Make a conscious effort to determine if the text you are reading focuses on sin and our guilt under the *law* or if it is a *gospel* proclamation that all is well in your relationship with God.

Law and gospel also work together in helping us respond to God's mercy and undeserved love. The good news of the gospel motivates believers to keep God's law and to live in service to the people around us.

For thought and discussion

Read Romans 6:22-23. Which part of this reading is an expression of God's law? Which part is an expression of the gospel? Is verse 22 an expression of law, gospel, or both? Explain.

Why should we hear the law regularly? Why do we need to hear gospel often?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us apply law and gospel to our lives. Amen.

Helps

The Bible teaches that Jesus is both God and human. This is a mystery we cannot understand. We simply believe it with faith. Jesus was tempted to sin like we are tempted to sin. Yet, he always resisted Satan's evil temptations. (See Matthew 4:1-11.)

Suggested activity

Write a clear, brief sentence that answers the question, "What is the Bible's main message?" Memorize it so you are ready if an unbeliever asks you what the Bible says.