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DISCOVERY • 3

Jesus Offers to Forgive Sin

● WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

Many intelligent thinkers today are trying to discover and explain what has gone wrong with human behavior, human institutions and ultimately the entire world. Perhaps if we begin with the individual and look at our own lives and our own human nature, we can begin to discover what's gone wrong.

Dr. Charles Malik, former Lebanese ambassador to the U.S. and former president of the U.N. General Assembly, once stated the problem of human nature this way: *"If only people rose to the occasion, if only they weren't overwhelmed by softness and apathy, if only they overcame their greed, if only they were morally strong, if only they were not selfish and narrow, if only they were not petty and spiteful and stupid, if only they were big, if only they knew what was at stake, if only they were not hypocritical, if only they trampled underfoot the wide and easy way!"*

DISCUSS

Do you agree with Dr. Malik? Why or why not?

● A FLAW IN THE OINTMENT

"In an age when human potential and self-actualization are buzzwords...the idea that our human nature is flawed tends to threaten us because it forces us to give up cherished notions about our own goodness. Many of us prefer to accept more positive or humanistic views of human nature...This view of human nature certainly makes us feel better, but is it true? I don't think so. Humanity seems bent individually toward self-destruction as much as growth. Physically, most people do not exercise enough or eat a balanced diet. Emotionally, most people are plagued by some degree of turmoil, often severe enough to require professional help. Mentally,

people often have faulty ways of viewing themselves, others, and life in general. And spiritually, most people do not seek God or any form of meaning in life with much consistency or depth.” — Dr. Chris Thurman, *The Lies We Believe*

DISCUSS

Do any elements of Dr. Thurman’s observations ring true for you? Why or why not?

● INSIDE OUT

“Don’t you understand either?’ Jesus asked. ‘Can’t you see that what you eat won’t harm your soul? For food doesn’t come in contact with your heart, but only passes through the digestive system.’ And then He added, ‘It is the thought-life that pollutes. For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts of lust, theft, murder, adultery, wanting what belongs to others, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, pride, and all other folly. All these vile things come from within; they are what pollute you and make you unfit for God.’” — Mark 7:18-23

DISCUSS

What is Jesus saying about the source of our problems?
Would changing your outward actions be enough to make you acceptable to God?
Have any of the above things ever been true of you?

● WE’RE ALL IN THE SAME SINKING BOAT

“As the Scriptures say, ‘No one is good—no one in all the world is innocent...’ Everyone has turned away; all have gone wrong. No one anywhere has kept on doing what is right; ...yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious ideal.” — Romans 3:10-12, 23

DISCUSS

Why is this description of our nature so hard to accept?

“Sin is transgression of the law of God; disobedience of the divine will; moral failure; failure to realize in conduct and character the moral ideal; failure to do as one ought towards one’s fellow man.” — Webster’s Dictionary

According to the Bible, sin is more than outward actions. It is described as self-will — wanting what I want, rather than what God wants. This self-will is characterized on the one hand by an attitude of resistance toward God, or on the other hand as an attitude of indifference toward God.

● HOLY SMOKES!

“The year King Uzziah died I saw the Lord! He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the temple was filled with His glory. In a great antiphonal chorus [the angels] sang, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is filled with His glory.’...It shook the Temple to its foundations, and suddenly the entire sanctuary was filled with smoke. Then I said, ‘My doom is sealed, for I am a foul-mouthed sinner, a member of a sinful, foul-mouthed race; and I have looked upon the King, the Lord of heaven’s armies.’” — Isaiah 6:1-5

DISCUSS

What did Isaiah see?
What did he realize about himself and his culture as a result?

● DEFINITION

“Holiness is one of the essential attributes of the divine nature. It is, on the one hand, entire freedom from moral evil, and upon the other, absolute moral perfection.”
— Unger’s Bible Dictionary

Isaiah experienced first-hand the problem that exists between God and us. The character of God is so perfect and flawless, and we are so full of flaws, that the very holiness of God becomes a barrier to you and me. A holy God only lets holy beings into His presence.

● HAVE YOU EVER CAUGHT YOURSELF SAYING...?

"I'm not such a bad person! Sure, I've committed a few 'little' sins here and there, but what's that to God? I'm sure He'll understand!"

● ADD 'EM UP!

Suppose the average person committed only one 'little' sin every day from the age of 10 until the age of 60. By that time he would have on his conscience 18,262 sins. That means that at least 18,262 times, this average person fell short of measuring up to the perfect character of God which is the standard that God measures man against. The point is that it is impossible to "rise to the occasion" over the course of a lifetime and be what we should.

Suppose you stood before God and He said, "I only allow morally perfect people into My heaven." How would you respond?

How do you think God would react if you said, "I've lived a better life than my neighbors"?

● WHO PAYS?

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

"Here is the problem that developed as a result of humanity (you and me) entering into sin. We sinned. The Bible says, 'the wages of sin is death.' No matter how much He loved us, God had to bring down the gavel, and say DEATH, because He is a righteous and just God. And yet, being a loving God, He loved us so much that He was willing to come down off the throne in the form of the man Jesus and pay the price for us, which was Christ's death on the cross.

"At this point many people ask the question, 'Why couldn't God just forgive?' An executive of a large corporation asked, 'My employees often do something, break something, and I just forgive them.' Then he added, 'Are you trying to tell me I can do something that God can't do?' People fail to realize that wherever there is forgiveness there is a payment...Then I ask the question, 'Who pays for what was broken? You

do.' There's always a price in forgiveness. Let's say someone insults you in front of others and later you graciously say, 'I forgive you.' Who bears the price of the insult? You do.

"This is what God has done. God has said, 'I forgive you.' But He was willing to pay the price Himself through the cross." — Josh McDowell, More Than A Carpenter

● GOD PAYS THE PENALTY FOR OUR SINS

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree. ... by His wounds you have been healed."
— 1 Peter 2:24 (NIV)

"Christ...died once for the sins of all us guilty sinners although He Himself was innocent of any sin at any time, that He might bring us safely home to God." — 1 Peter 3:18

"When we were utterly helpless, with no way of escape, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners who had no use for Him. ... God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."
— Romans 5:6-8

DISCUSS

What did God have to do to offer forgiveness to us?

Why did the payment need to be so significant?

What do you think motivated Jesus to do it?

● LOOK AT THIS ROAD MAP!

"Jesus told him, 'I am the Way—yes, and the Truth and the Life. No one can get to the Father except by means of Me.'" — John 14:6

DISCUSS

On what basis could Jesus claim to be the only way to God?

● **OUR RESPONSE**

“For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
— John 3:16

“But to all who received Him, He gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust Him to save them.” — John 1:12

“Because of His kindness you have been saved through trusting Christ.” — Ephesians 2:8

● **DEFINITION**

To believe is not just an intellectual agreement with certain ideas. It is an act of the will to rely upon God and what He has said and done. Trusting Christ means that you stop relying on your own ability to get into heaven. Instead, you choose to rely on Jesus’ death on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins. It is a decision to accept the gift of forgiveness being offered by God.

● **A TRUE STORY**

In 1830, George Wilson was tried and convicted in Philadelphia for robbery and murder and was sentenced to hang. President Andrew Jackson granted him a presidential pardon. But Wilson refused the pardon, insisting that it was not a pardon unless he accepted it. The question was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court, and Chief Justice John Marshall wrote the following decision: *“A pardon is a paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It’s hardly to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must hang.”* And he was hanged.

Do you think you need God’s forgiveness? Why or why not?

If Jesus is truly the God of the universe, how does it make you feel that He was willing to die to give you eternal life?

Why would anyone choose to ignore or reject Jesus’ offer of forgiveness the way George Wilson refused his pardon?

Suppose you were standing before God and He asked you, “Why should I let you into My heaven?” What would you say?

● **RECEIVING CHRIST’S FORGIVENESS**

Christ said, *“Look! I have been standing at the door [of your heart] and I am constantly knocking. If anyone hears Me calling him and opens the door, I will come in and fellowship with him and be with Me.”* — Revelation 3:20

You can receive Christ right now through prayer, which is simply talking with God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

“Lord Jesus, I want to know You personally. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me and give me eternal life. Come into my life as my Savior and Lord. Give direction to my life and make me into a new person.”

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, pray this prayer right now and Christ will come into your life as He promised. Through His power you will begin to experience the lasting peace, direction and fulfillment that only He can provide.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- *Amazing Grace* by Hal Lindsey
- *Letters From a Skeptic* by Dr. Gregory Boyd



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