

The *Content* of the Gospel . . . and some discipleship [1]

Compiled by Spencer Gear [2]

Two rather different experiences came out of the communist experiment with trying to create a classless society. Both examples point to a need for something in life that goes beyond what our senses interpret.

Romanian pastor, Richard Wurmbrand, spent 14 years in a communist prison – three of these years were in solitary confinement. Later, he was able to say,

“We prisoners have experienced the power of God, the love of God which made us leap with joy. Prison has proved that love is as strong as death. We have conquered through Christ. Officers with rubber truncheons came to interrogate us; we interrogated them, and they became Christians. Other prisoners had been converted. . . The Communists believe that happiness comes from material satisfaction; but alone in my cell, cold, hungry and in rags, I danced for joy every night. . . Sometimes I was so filled with joy that I felt I would burst if I did not give it expression. . . I had discovered a beauty in Christ which I had not known before.”[3]

The other experience is told by Christian journalist, Philip Yancey who said,

I remember vividly a meeting with the editors of *Pravda*, formerly the official mouthpiece of the Community Party. . . *Pravda*'s circulation was falling dramatically (from eleven million to 700,000) in concert with communism's fall from grace. The editors of *Pravda* seemed earnest, sincere, searching – shaken to the core. So shaken that they were now asking advice from emissaries of a religion their founder had scorned as ‘the opiate of the people.’

“The editors remarked wistfully that Christianity and communism have many of the same ideals: equality, sharing, justice, and racial harmony. Yet they had to admit the Marxist pursuit of their vision had produced the worst nightmares the world has ever seen. Why?

‘We don't know how to motivate people to show compassion,’ said the editor-in-chief. ‘We tried raising money for the children of Chernobyl [who had suffered badly from radiation sickness when the nuclear reactor exploded.], but the average Russian citizen would rather spend his money on drink. How do you reform and motivate people? How do you get them to be good?’

Seventy-four years of communism had proved beyond all doubt that goodness could not be legislated from the Kremlin and enforced at the point of a gun. [4]

How can we obtain joy and hope in the here and now, even when in prison? What will bring motivation to show compassion to the unlovely and suffering? It is the same inner change that brings eternal life. How can we experience this salvation that comes with an eternal guarantee?

Here's an outline of some of the essentials!

A. You must understand God's holiness.

“God’s holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.”[5]

See Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 111:10; Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7; 15:33; Micah 6:9.

1. God is utterly holy and His law, therefore, demands perfect holiness.

See Leviticus 11:44-45; Joshua 24:19; I Samuel 2:2; 6:20.

2. Even the New Testament gospel requires this holiness.

See I Peter 1:15-16; Hebrews 12:14.

3. Because the Lord God Almighty is holy, He hates sin.

Exodus 20:5.

4. Sinners cannot stand before Him

What is sin? “Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature. . . Sin is more than simply painful and destructive – it is also *wrong* in the deepest sense of the word. . . Sin is directly opposite to all that is good in the character of God.”[6]

See Psalm 1:5

B. You must understand God's righteousness/justice.

In English, the terms “righteousness” and “justice” are different words. This is not so in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. There is only one word group behind these two English terms.[7]

1. What is God's righteousness/justice?

- “God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right.”[8]
- What is right or just? “Whatever conforms to God’s moral character is right.”[9]

Deuteronomy 32:4; Genesis 18:25; Psalm 19:8; Isaiah 45:19; Romans 9:20-21.

2. Christ's sacrifice was to show God's righteousness

- When God sent Christ as a sacrifice to bear the punishment for sin, it was to show God’s righteousness. See Romans 3:25-26.

C. You must understand that you are a sinner who sins & God hates sin.

- Gospel means “good news.”
- What makes it truly “good news” is not only that heaven is free, but also God’s Son has conquered that sin.
- Jesus said: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). What do you think Jesus meant by that?

1. Sin is what it is that makes true peace impossible for unbelievers.

Isaiah 57:20-21

2. All have sinned.

Romans 3:10-18

3. Sin makes the sinner worthy of death.

James 1:5; Romans 6:23

4. Sinners can do nothing to earn salvation.

Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; Revelation 21:8

D. You must understand the wrath of God.

“If God loves all that is right and good, and all that conforms to his moral character, then it should not be surprising that he would hate everything that is opposed to his moral character. God’s wrath directed against sin is therefore closely related to God’s holiness and justice.”[10]

1. What is the wrath of God?

“God’s wrath means that he intensely hates all sin.”[11]

Exodus 32:9-10; Deuteronomy 9:7-8; 29:23; 2 Kings 22:13; John 3:36; Romans 1:18; 2:5, 8; 5:9; 9:22; Colossians 3:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Hebrews 3:11; Revelation 6:16-17; 19:15.

2. God is slow to inflict his wrath on people. Why?

See Psalm 103:8-9; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9-10.

E. How can God’s wrath be pacified/appeased?

1. God has provided a way through blood-sacrifice.

Leviticus 8:15; 17:11

2. By Christ's death (blood-sacrifice), he appeased the wrath of God.

Hebrews 9:7, 12, 20, 22, 24.

3. God calls this "propitiation" and it makes God favourable towards sinners.

Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; I John 2:2; 4:10 (atoning sacrifice/sacrifice of atonement = propitiation)

Propitiation is important "because it is the heart of the doctrine of the atonement. It means that there is an eternal, unchangeable requirement in the holiness and justice of God that sin be paid for. Furthermore, before the atonement ever could have an effect on our subjective consciousness, it first had an effect on God and his relation to the sinners he planned to redeem. Apart from this central truth, the death of Christ really cannot be adequately understood." [12]

"The atonement is the work Christ did in his life and death to earn our salvation." [13]

F. Who is Christ and what has He done for you?

The solution for the sinner is found in the **Lord** Jesus Christ.

1. Christ is eternally God

John 1:1-3, 14; Colossians 2:9

2. Christ is Lord of all

Revelation 17:14; Philippians 2:9-11; Acts 10:36

3. Christ became man

Philippians 2:6-7

4. Christ is utterly pure and sinless

Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22-23; 1 John 3:5

5. The sinless one became a sacrifice for YOUR sin

2 Corinthians 5:21; Titus 2:14

6. He shed His own blood as an atonement for sin

Ephesians 1:7-8; Revelation 1:5

7. He died on the cross to provide a way of salvation for sinners

1 Peter 2:24; Colossians 1:20

8. Christ rose triumphantly from the dead

Romans 1:4; 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

G. What does God demand of you?

1. Repent

“Repentant faith is the requirement. It is NOT merely a ‘decision’ to trust Christ for eternal life, but a wholesale forsaking of everything else we trust, and a turning to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.”[14]

What is repentance? “Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.”[15]

Ezekiel 18:30, 32; Acts 17:30; 26:2; Luke 13:3

2. Turn your heart from all that you know dishonours God

Thessalonians 1:9

3. Follow Jesus

Luke 9:23, 62; John 12:26

4. Trust Jesus as your Lord and Saviour

Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9

5. Repentance and faith continue throughout your life

Repentance and faith must start together at the beginning of the Christian life. See Acts 20:21. Repentance and faith must be lived by Christians throughout their lives.

- Concerning faith, see Galatians 2:20; I Corinthians 13:13.
- Concerning repentance, see Revelation 3:19; 2 Corinthians 7:10

“Conversion is a single action of turning from sin in repentance and turning to Christ in faith. “Therefore, it is clearly contrary to the New Testament evidence to speak about the possibility of having true saving faith without having any repentance for sin. It is also contrary to the New Testament to speak about the possibility of someone accepting Christ ‘as Savior’ but not ‘as Lord,’ if that means simply depending on him for salvation but not committing oneself to forsake sin and to be obedient to Christ from that point on. . .

“Some prominent voices within evangelicalism have differed with this point, arguing that a gospel presentation that requires *repentance* as well as faith is really preaching salvation by works. They argue that the view advocated [here] that repentance and faith must go together, is a false gospel of ‘lordship salvation.’ They would say that saving faith *only* involves trusting Christ as Savior, and that submitting to him as Lord is an optional later step that is unnecessary for salvation. For many who teach this view, saving faith only requires an intellectual agreement with the facts of the gospel. . .

“The source of this view of the gospel is apparently Lewis Sperry Chafer. . . [who says], ‘the New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation. . .’ Chafer recognizes that many verses call upon people to repent, but he simply defines

repentance away as a ‘change of mind’ that does not include sorrow for sin or turning from sin”[16].

H. You must count the cost of following Jesus with much thought.

- Salvation is absolutely free.
- So is joining the army; you don’t have to pay to get into it. Everything you need is provided.[17]
- Following Christ is like joining the army. It will cost you daily. It will cost you freedom, family, friends, doing things your own way (autonomy), and possibly even your life.[18]
- I must tell you, a prospective believer, the full truth and nothing but the truth.
- Read what Jesus said about this in Luke 14:26-33; Matthew 10:34-38; Romans 6:6.

A.W. Tozer wrote:

“The cross is the most revolutionary thing ever to appear among men. The cross of Roman times knew no compromise; it never made concessions. It won all its arguments by killing its opponent and silencing him for good. It spared not Christ, but slew Him the same as the rest. He was alive when they hung Him on that cross and completely dead when they took Him down six hours later. That was the cross the first time it appeared in Christian history. . . The cross effects [i.e. brings about] its ends by destroying one established pattern, the victim’s, and creating another pattern, its own. Thus it always has its way. It wins by defeating its opponent and imposing its will upon him. It always dominates. It never compromises, never dickers nor confers, never surrenders a point for the sake of peace. It cares not for peace; it cares only to end its opposition as fast as possible.

With perfect knowledge of all this, Christ said, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.’ So the cross not only brings Christ’s life to an end, it ends also the first life, the old life, of every one of His true followers. It destroys the old pattern, the Adam pattern, in the believer’s life, and brings it to an end. Then the God who raised Christ from the dead raises the believer and a new life begins.

This, and nothing less, is true Christianity. . .

We must do something about the cross, and one of two things only we can do – flee it or die upon it.” [19]

- Read Mark 8:35-37.

I. I urge you to trust (have faith in) Christ alone for your salvation.

- 2 Corinthians 5:11, 20; Isaiah 55:7; Romans 10:9-10;

What will you do with Jesus?

J. After you trust Christ alone, what should you do? Where do good works fit in?

- Good works: See Hebrews 5:9; Titus 2:14; Ephesians 2:10;
- Baptism: See Acts 2:28; 8:36-39; Mark 16:16; Romans 4:10-11;
- Join with a local church. See Hebrews 10:25.

K. What was the first creed of the early church?

See Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5.

L. How will you know that you are a Christian?

1. You presently continue to trust Christ for salvation

Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 3:14; 6:12; John 3:16 (“believes” means “continues believing in him.”[20])

2. There will be evidence in your heart of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit[21]

- Through the subjective testimony of the Holy Spirit within your hearts. Romans 8:14-16; 1 John 4:13.
- Your life will produce the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23
- You continue to believe and accept the sound teaching of the church. 1 John 2:23-24
- You will have a continuing relationship with Jesus Christ. John 15:4, 7
- You will have a life of obedience to God’s commands. 1 John 2:4-6, 10, 19; 3:9-10, 14, 17, 24; 4:7; 5:18; James 2:17-18.
- You will give to needy people. Matthew 25:31-46

3. You will have a long-term pattern of growth and obedience in your Christian life

2 Peter 1:5-7, 10; John 6:40

M. How will other people know that you are a Christian?

By the fruit in your life

Galatians 5:22-23; Matthew 7:16-20; 25:31-46; James 2:17-18

N. Do you want to repent and trust Christ alone for your salvation and live eternally for and with him?

O. What happens to those who reject God's offer of salvation?

Because God is an absolutely just God, if you reject his offer of salvation you will receive the consequences that God, the Maker, Sustainer, and Ruler of the world, has decided. At death, God sends you to hell.

1. Hell forever

“Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked.”[22] David Kingdon writes: “Sin against the Creator is heinous to a degree utterly beyond our sin-warped imaginations’ [ability] to conceive of. . . Who would have the temerity to suggest to God what the punishment . . . should be?”[23]

Matthew 25:30, 41, 46; Mark 9:43, 48; Luke 16:22-24, 28; Revelation 14:9-11; 19:3

2. Is hell just?

Revelation 19:1-3

“Be under no illusion. Unbelievers deserve to go to hell. And it is fair for God to send them there. Don’t blame God or say it is unfair. Man it is who has sinned. He is the rebel who continues to defy God and break his holy laws. In his heart he hates God and refuses to honour or serve him. He does not want God to interfere with his life or tell him how to live. And man is without excuse. The evidence stares him in the face. Even creation tells him that God exists and that God is powerful as well as eternal. Man’s conscience also tells him of his duty to obey God. There is the Bible, too, which reveals God to man. But man ignores the evidence. He continues to sin without realizing that God, in his holiness and anger, must punish him for his disobedience. ‘The soul who sins is the one who will die (Ezekiel 18:4).’ [24]

W. G. T. Shedd said, “If there were no hell in Scripture, we should be compelled to invent one.” [25] C. S. Lewis wrote: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done’. All that are in hell choose it.” [26]

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28 (ESV):

Endnotes:

1. This summary of the content of the Gospel is based on John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*. Milton Keynes, England: Word Publishing, 1993, p. 247ff.
2. Spencer is the coordinator of a youth counselling service in Australia, a doctoral student in theology, and an active apologist for the Christian faith.
3. Richard Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground* (Diane Books), in David K. Watson, *How to Find God*. Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1974, p. 65.
4. Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, p. 75.
5. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, p. 201
6. Ibid., pp. 490, 492.
7. Ibid., p. 203.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 204.
10. Ibid., pp. 205-206.
11. Ibid., p. 206.
12. Ibid., p. 575.
13. Ibid., p. 568.
14. MacArthur., p. 252.
15. Grudem, p. 713.
16. Ibid., p. 714, including note 5.
17. MacArthur, p. 253.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., pp. 254-55, from A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1955, pp. 61-63.

20. Grudem, p. 803.
21. Ibid., p. 803-806.
22. Ibid., p. 1148.
23. In *ibid.*, p. 1151.
24. Eryl Davies, *Condemned For Ever! What the Bible teaches about eternal punishment*. Welwyn, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1987, pp. 77-78. This quote is taken from Davies' chapter, "Is it fair?" He is asking the question about the justice and fairness of God sending unbelievers to hell.
25. In John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* Darling, Co. Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1992, p. 148.
26. In *ibid.*, p. 149.

Source: <http://gear.dyndns.org/~spencer/JesusChrist/contentofgospel.html>