



INTRODUCING

THE GOSPEL

Forgiveness and salvation





Lesson 4: Forgiveness and salvation

Introduction

We have learned already in Lesson 1 that the death and resurrection of Jesus are overwhelmingly important events. The resurrection of Jesus establishes the truth of the claims he made about himself and shows him to be the Son of God.

But why did Jesus have to die for us?

In this chapter you will learn:

- Where the difference between right and wrong comes from
- How Jesus' death allows sin to be forgiven
- How we can associate ourselves with this, and have our own sins forgiven



The eternal moral standard

It is an important fact that there is an objective standard of right and wrong. There are some non-universal (local) standards of right and wrong that vary depending on where you are - like speed limits or local customs. But there are other things which are universally considered either absolutely right or absolutely wrong. This is not a matter of opinion or consensus: right is right, and wrong is wrong.

If there were no universal rights or wrongs, then there would be no absolute reason to avoid the torture of the innocent, or murder. A moral judgement would merely be a matter of personal taste. Only if there is a standard against which right and wrong can be judged is it rational to state that some action is wrong.

But how do we determine this? Moral values cannot be discovered by science; science can tell us that if we give someone a dose of cyanide, it will kill them, but it can't tell us that it is wrong to do this.

Here are some steps to help you think about this argument:

1. There are universally accepted right and wrongs, for example murder is known to be wrong regardless of culture.
2. These have not been 'agreed' by human beings and have not changed over time. Therefore, there must be an underlying universal moral code.
3. This universal moral code is not defined by the physical laws of nature. For example, gravity does not tell us what is right or wrong, merely what happens to something if you drop it.
4. Therefore, this universal moral code must have been created by an external entity.
5. This entity is God.

Right and wrong must be determined by someone outside the creation who has the power to ensure that moral principles exist inside the creation and are known by people within the creation. Such a being can only be God.

The moral standard is God's moral standard. The simplest statement of this is in the New Testament:



“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 7:12

“And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”

Luke 6:31

This principle is often known as the Golden Rule - it is the idea that you should seek the welfare of others in the same way that you would seek your own.

This principle is accepted by almost everyone, even if it is not always practiced! We know that there is a standard of right and wrong, and we mostly share the same picture of right and wrong with people from other cultures across the ages.

What is sin?

While there is an objective moral standard which most people understand, it is not always observed. It is common for people to violate the eternal moral standard. The Bible has a term for this - it is called 'sin'.

A sin is committed whenever we do something we should not do, or whenever we fail to do something that we should do. Any person who commits sin is described as a sinner.

And everyone is a sinner. We know this from personal experience; we can all remember times when we have done things which we were later ashamed of, and plenty of times we did things that were wrong that we may not remember. No one is exempt from this.

Key chapter to read: Romans 3

The point of this chapter is summarised neatly in this verse:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

Romans 3:23

We will explore more about sin and its relationship with temptation in Lesson 8. For now, the really big principle to understand is that sin leads to death.



“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...”

Romans 5:12

This refers to the fact that the first man - Adam - sinned, which you can read about at the beginning of **Genesis**. Since that time, mankind has continually disobeyed God, and as a result, everyone dies.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 6:23

These and many similar passages show a clear teaching. Sin leads to death. It is relatively easy to see why this must be the case. If sinners never died, then evil men would never die, and we would be faced with a (very crowded) world full of immortal characters full of humanity’s worst characteristics. The law that sin leads to death prevents the victory of such people.

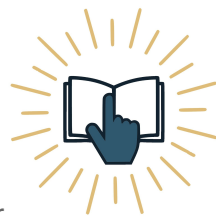
However, this principle also leads to a problem. As everyone has broken the moral principle of God, everyone deserves to die. It is not only the very wicked who are sinners, everyone is, and that includes you and I.

Not only this, but death has to be eternal. A form of death where the dead continue to live in some form in another place has not brought an end to their wrongdoing.

God’s dilemma

This leads to a dilemma. If God allows some sinners to live, thus breaking the law that sin leads to death, then he would be unjust. However, for God to kill everyone because we are all sinners would be unmerciful, and would not fulfil the purpose of creation, which is to provide a place where people can freely choose to live in harmony with God.

The problem is, how can it be possible to allow people to avoid eternal death if they are a sinner and should therefore expect to die?



The solution is sacrifice. This comes up in the Old Testament, where an animal was killed for a sin as a representation of what should happen to the person sacrificing it, and associating him with the moral principle we talked about earlier so they can receive forgiveness.

However, an animal is an *imperfect* sacrifice. Animals have no understanding of right or wrong and cannot sin. It also doesn't understand what is going on and therefore can't be a willing sacrifice. It was merely a representation of what was needed to forgive sin.

We as humans can't die on behalf of anyone else because we are sinful - when we die, we die for our own sins and not for those of others. We would make a poor sacrifice for anyone else!

What is needed therefore is a sinless man who will choose - of his own free will - to die on our behalf. Jesus is just such a person.

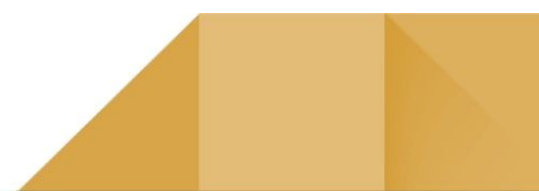
When Jesus died, he did not die because of his own sins. He had never broken God's moral principle and was therefore able to die as a representative for others. The resurrection of Jesus shows that he was a sinless person, and shows the value of his death.

But in order to make Jesus our personal representative, we need to take steps to associate ourselves with his sacrifice. This is the purpose of baptism.

Associating with Jesus' sacrifice

Baptism is where a person is briefly and completely submerged in water in order to associate themselves with the sacrifice of Jesus. It is a symbol for burial with Jesus - the person baptised is buried in water - and then emerges from the water in the same way that Jesus emerged from the grave.

In doing this, the person being baptised becomes part of Jesus' sacrifice - the death of Jesus has become representative of the death of the believer - and the person has a new life because of this. Have a look at this verse from Romans:





“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Romans 6:3-4

But people who have been baptised still die, like any other human. The promise is not that we will never die, but when we have died, we will be resurrected.

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

Romans 6:5

The point is that we don't receive eternal life immediately. What we receive is a promise that we too will be raised to life in a resurrection, just as Jesus was. This is the resurrection at the day of judgment, when Jesus returns - something we will explore further across later lessons.

The whole point of the death and resurrection of Jesus is to ensure that we can have our sins forgiven, and find eternal life in a better world. Look at this verse from further on in Romans:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 6:23

To get this free gift from God, we need to be associated with Jesus' death and resurrection. This is the purpose of baptism.

**Lesson summary:**

1. The difference between right and wrong comes from God
2. For God to be just, he can only forgive sin without breaking this law, hence the need for sacrifice
3. Jesus' death provides the complete sacrifice for sin and allows it to be forgiven
4. To make use of this free gift from God, we must choose to associate with Jesus' death and resurrection through baptism



Lesson 4 summary questions:

1:

- a) Read **1 John 3:4**, **1 John 1:8** and **James 4:17**. What do these passages tell us about sin?
- b) What does sin lead to? (Romans 6:23, James 1:13-15)
- c) What would be the consequence of allowing sinners to live forever?

2:

- a) Read **1 Peter 2:22**, **1 John 3:5** and **Hebrews 4:14-16**. What do these passages tell us about Jesus Christ?
- b) Why did Jesus die, and who did he die for? (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 1 Peter 2:24)
- c) What factors are required for one being to die as the representative for others?
- d) Why does Jesus alone qualify as such a representative?

3: Read **Romans 6:23**

- a) What is the gift of God?
- b) Who allows us to receive this gift?
- c) What is baptism symbolic of? (v3-7)

Deeper dive questions

4: We know that there is an objective difference between right and wrong.

- a) What could produce such an objective difference?
- b) What does this tell us about the character of God?

5: According to **Romans 6**, the method of associating ourselves with the death and resurrection of Jesus is through baptism.

- a) Are there any other references to this in the Bible?
- b) Does the Bible describe any other method of being associated with the death and resurrection of Jesus?