

THE NEED FOR THE INCARNATION

INTRODUCTION

This might surprise some people, but the primary message of the Bible is not how we should live. How we should live is actually way down the list of biblical priorities.

The Bible's primary message is *the revelation of God's holiness and love*.

Next comes *how we should have lived* in light of His holiness and love; that's the role of the Law.

The Bible then explains *why we don't live as we should*: we are descendants of Adam. His sin permanently altered the spiritual nature of mankind so that faith and obedience are impossible.

God's holiness is revealed in many ways, including *His justice toward sinners*. His justice is perfect and exact. Edward Donnelly writes in his book *Heaven and Hell*,

... the doctrine of hell confronts us with a God who is overwhelming in His anger, irresistible in His power, terrifying in His justice. A mighty Sovereign, who holds the earth between His fingers like a pinch of dust ... Hell speaks to us of the God who is in control, doing with us as He pleases, the God whom we cannot ignore or marginalize or manipulate.

Hell is proof that God keeps His promises: "In the day you eat of it you will surely die," He said to Adam (Genesis 2:17).

But we also see *God's love toward sinners* revealed through various expressions

of grace and mercy. By God's mercy, Adam and Eve were not instantly destroyed when they sinned. Instead, He sent His own Son as Savior and Redeemer. And the fulfillment of it began with His incarnation.

Here's the roadmap for today's sermon. We must begin by being clear about the nature and will of God. We must also be clear about the nature and will of man. Then, we can understand how the incarnation of Jesus Christ answers the problem of our sin.

THE NATURE AND WILL OF GOD

By *the nature of God*, I mean who God is; by the will of God, I mean what God requires.

God's nature is who God is and what He is like. When we say that God is holy, we don't just mean that He chooses to act in holy ways; we mean that His actions define holiness. First John 4:8 doesn't say that God is *loving*, although He is; it says that God IS Love itself. In the same way, God is not merely holy; He IS holiness itself. God doesn't merely act in righteous ways; He IS righteousness itself. The attributes of God do tell us what God is *like*, but more importantly, they tell us what God IS.

God's will is what God requires according to His good pleasure. God's will is always what God *does*. He never acts contrary to His will or His good pleasure. It pleased Him to create all things exactly as He did. He was not subject to the laws of physics when He made all things; He created the laws of physics at the same time that He created light. We sink when we jump into the water, but Jesus walked on the Sea of Galilee like He was walking across the floor. It was His good pleasure to do so, and He did.

By virtue of being the Creator, God has both the *right* and the *authority* (we could say power) to command His creation. When God revealed Himself to Job, He

asked some rhetorical questions that show the difference between Creator and creature.

31 “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
Or loose the cords of Orion?

32 Can you lead forth a constellation in its season,
And guide the Bear with her satellites?

33 Do you know the statutes of the heavens,
Or fix their rule over the earth?”

(Job 38:31–33, 2022 LSB)

27 “Is it at your command that the eagle goes on high
And raises his nest high?”

(Job 39:27, 2022 LSB)

Why does the universe function like it does? Because God made it to work that way. He determined how the stars and constellations and galaxies would function in the heavens, and He determined where the eagle would build his nest. All things are equally simple for Him. Nothing is hard for Him. He speaks and it is done.

This includes God’s *right* and *authority* to create and command man as He pleases. He has the right and authority to bless those who trust and obey Him. He has the right and authority to condemn those who disbelieve and disobey Him. God’s commands to mankind are holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12).

The standard God uses in creating and commanding His creation is His own nature and will. This is especially true when it comes to mankind, because only mankind was made in God’s image.

2 “Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them,
‘**You shall be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy.**’ ”

(Leviticus 19:2, 2022 LSB)

48 “Therefore **you** are to be perfect, as **your heavenly Father** is perfect.”
(Matthew 5:48, 2022 LSB)

THE NATURE AND WILL OF MAN

Before the fall, Adam’s nature and will, like everything else in creation, were “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Everything about Adam and Eve was right and good. They were very good physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Their relationship with one another before the fall, brief as it was, was very good. They were made in the image of God and perfectly reflected God’s image exactly as He desired. Nothing was lacking in them, nothing to complain about, nothing that could have been just a little bit better.

But then Adam sinned. He committed a single *act* of sin. But in the process, he became a sinner. His nature and will were deformed from what they were at creation. Romans 3:23 defines sin for us:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
(Romans 3:23, 2022 LSB)

The words that are translated as “sin” in the Old and New Testaments mean to miss a target or fall short of a standard. Judges 20:16 uses the word literally when it says,

16 Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed;
each one could sling a stone at a hair **and not miss.**
(Judges 20:16, 2022 LSB)

God made Adam and Eve in His image so that they would reflect His image in everything they did. When they sinned they “missed the mark” of acting as God had created them to do. But they also fell in their nature. Adam’s nature became impure and unholy. God’s good pleasure no longer constrained him; instead, he

acted according to his own desires.

And Adam's will became enslaved to sin. Before he sinned, Adam enjoyed free will. He could obey or disobey as he liked. But once he sinned he lost his freedom of will and became a slave to sin. It is as though Adam stood on the edge of a bottomless pit. While he stood there he could freely choose to remain where he was or jump into the pit. But once he jumped into the bottomless pit, he no longer had a choice to fall or not to fall. Some today believe that mankind has free will, but that's not a biblical idea. We are born already falling into the bottomless pit of sin.

No matter what word the Bible uses, sin is always defined as a violation of God's nature and will. We fall short of the glory of God. We violate His holy nature. We break His commandment. We trespass into areas He has forbidden.

THE RESULTS OF THE FALL

The results of the fall were immediate and unmistakable.

Adam and Eve's eyes were opened. They knew they were naked; they experienced guilt and shame. They proved their shame by trying to cover themselves up with fig leaves. They had been naked and unshamed but were suddenly driven by the impulse to conceal themselves from one another.

They tried to hide from God. When they heard God walking in the garden, they jumped into the bushes instead of running to Him in confession. They learned what Hebrews 4:13 means when it says,

**13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight,
but all things are uncovered and laid bare
to the eyes of Him to whom we have an account to give.
(Hebrews 4:13, 2022 LSB)**

They thought the bushes concealed them, but God knew exactly where they were the entire time.

They denied responsibility for their sin.

10 And [Adam] said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

11 And [God] said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

12 And the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave to me from the tree, and I ate.”

13 Then Yahweh God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

(Genesis 3:10–13, 2022 LSB)

Adam blamed Eve for giving him the fruit and God for giving him Eve. Eve blamed the serpent for deceiving her.

God does the unexpected. Genesis 2:17 says that Adam would die if he ate the forbidden fruit. He certainly did die spiritually.

Yahweh’s nature is holy and perfect. All mankind is guilty of sin. All deserve death. God would have been completely justified had He executed Adam and Eve on the spot. But He had a different purpose in mind. All of creation exists to display the glory of His nature. He wanted to manifest His love through mercy and His holiness through righteous wrath, Romans 9:22-23 says.

So we see God reveal Himself to be compassionate, gracious, patient, and abounding in lovingkindness when, instead of destroying Adam and Eve for their sin, He properly covered their nakedness.

Let’s think about this for a moment. The first physical death in creation was

that of an animal. That animal – perhaps a sheep, but we aren't told – died as a substitute for Adam and Eve. It did not die as a natural consequence of the fall but was put to death deliberately. And it died at the hands of God. That innocent creature foreshadowed an infinitely greater and more perfect substitute. The death of that creature foreshadows the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the redemption He would accomplish.

So, let's think about how the incarnation of the Son of God addresses our sins.

SIN AND THE INCARNATION

God warned Adam that sin would result in death. Every sinner owes God their death. That's the just penalty for our sins.

The death of an animal is not sufficient. God killed that first animal Himself, but He refused to accept that death as payment in full for Adam's sin. The best it could do was cover Adam and Eve until a permanent solution was presented.

Much later on King David wrote in Psalm 51:16,

16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
(Psalm 51:16, 2022 LSB)

David understood that an animal sacrifice could only cover sin, and he was desperate for his sin to be removed entirely.

The same issue continued on. Hebrews 10:4 says,

4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
(Hebrews 10:4, 2022 LSB)

But God provided a substitute. Hebrews 10:10 says that Jesus accomplished what no animal could:

10 By [the will of God] we have been sanctified
through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
(Hebrews 10:10, 2022 LSB)

I want to press this home. God's answer to sin was not fig leaves. He rejects all human efforts to deal with sin. Neither was God's answer to sin the keeping of His Law. He commanded the sacrifice of animals as a means of temporarily covering sins, but never as a means of removing them. If it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins, it is equally impossible for baptisms, washings, good works, and other religious rituals to take them away.

God's answer was to send His own Son into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3) but without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Theologians sometimes call Jesus "the second Adam," but the Bible calls Him the *Last* Adam (First Corinthians 15:45). There will not be a third or fourth or fifth Adam, because, unlike the first Adam, Jesus Christ completely succeeded in what He was given to do.

Jesus did not come to displace Adam as the head of the fallen race of man. He came to create a new, born-again, regenerated humanity. From the beginning, God intended that His people would be made twice, first physically and then spiritually. He promises in Ezekiel 11:19-20,

19 "And I will give them one heart
and give within them a new spirit.
And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh
and give them a heart of flesh,
20 that they may walk in My statutes
and keep My judgments and do them.
Then they will be My people,
and I shall be their God."

(Ezekiel 11:19–20, 2022 LSB)

The New Covenant is perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ:

17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
(2 Corinthians 5:17, 2022 LSB)

All who are in Adam die. The animal skins are just a temporary solution. But all who are in Christ will live forever (First Corinthians 15:22) because Jesus died once for all time (Hebrews 10:10).

The Son of God took on human flesh, conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit and born in the usual way. Luke 2:52 says that as He grew, He "was advancing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." With the start of His public ministry, Jesus taught, worked miracles that confirmed His identity and taught disciples. But all the while, His eyes were fixed on Jerusalem, where He would suffer and die on the cross for the sins of many (Hebrews 9:28) and then be resurrected and glorified as the Firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15), the Firstborn of the dead (Colossians 1:18).

God killed an innocent animal in the garden as a substitute for Adam and Eve. But Jesus was the perfect substitute for us; "Yahweh was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief" (Isaiah 53:10).

God dressed Adam and Eve in the skins of that innocent animal, covering their sin and shame. But God "has wrapped me [and all His people] with a robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10). That's the righteousness that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22), the gift of righteousness given by the Father (Romans 5:17).

From that moment in the garden when God killed an animal and dressed Adam and Eve in its skin, the death of the Son of God on behalf of sinful man was

foreshadowed. Jesus was born as a man, lived a holy life, died as a substitute for sinners, rose from the grave in victory over death, ascended to heaven, and now mediates for His people before the throne of God.

BRINGING IT HOME

Before the end of the first century false teachers and enemies of the faith were denying that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh. Oddly enough, they had no problem believing that, in some way, He was divine, although no false teachers understood that Jesus is fully God. What they could not conceive, and what still confuses Muslims and others today, is that Jesus is fully human. John writes in his first letter,

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come *in the flesh* is from God, **3** and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. **(1 John 4:2-3, 2022 LSB)**

Gnosticism believed that all physical material was inherently evil and that God would never become a man. But God the Father sent His Son to be born as a human being. Jesus did not give up anything of His divine nature in the incarnation. Hebrews 4:15-16 says,

15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things like we are, yet without sin.

16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. **(Hebrews 4:15-16, 2022 LSB)**

I don't know about you, but I need mercy and grace to help in times of need. There is only one source of grace and mercy: the Father's throne of grace.

But how can I approach the holy God? I can never be good enough to get within shouting distance of Him, much less close enough to lay my hand on His throne.

But the Scripture says that I can approach with confidence; me! Me, with my sins. Me, with my weaknesses. Me, with my complete lack of merit. How can I do that? How can I draw near with confidence to the throne of grace?

I can do so because I have a high priest, Jesus Christ. Jesus can sympathize with my weakness because He was also tempted. And He can mediate for me before the Father's throne because He was without sin.

This is important for those who don't know Christ. If you are tired of your sin and guilt, if you are tired of hopelessness, if you are tired of trying to please God on your own, I invite you to throw up your hands in surrender and trust in Jesus Christ. He has already accomplished everything you are trying to do. He has already obtained what you long to have. It is there in Him if you will turn from your sin and trust Him to save you.

This is also important for those of us who know Christ. We continue to sin. We continue to displease our God. We are saved by grace, and we stand in Christ by grace. He is not a brutal, dismissive, proud high priest. He is lowly and humble of heart. He is kind. He is gentle. There, at the Father's throne of grace, He gives us rest for our souls.

The devil wants us to believe a lie. So do his children, those who are opposed to the Gospel and hate Jesus. Frankly, our pride often wants us to believe this lie as well. What is the lie? It is that once we are saved by grace, we grow by works, are kept by works, and only please God by our works.

The Bible says that we are saved by grace (that's justification), that we grow by grace (that's sanctification), and that we will be perfected by grace (that's glorification). Good works have a place in the Christian life; they help us understand the maturity and depth of our faith. But that's all. They don't save us. They don't give us a better standing with God.

Will you do something for me? I don't ask you to do things very often, but this would mean so much. Would you be willing to lay down the proud idea that you should be able to please God by anything other than trusting in Him? I have in mind Hebrews 11:6, which says that without faith, it is impossible to please God, for he who draws near to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Your peace and joy are directly related to your faith that God is pleased and delighted by your faith in Him.

Would you pray with me?