

The “Unknown” Gospel of Grace and Truth: God’s Answer to Man’s Basic Questions (in essential harmony with the Catholic and Protestant teachings cited at the end)

Bible quotations can easily be found at Biblos.com.

Most of the time I used the New International Version (NIV).

1. What gospel (good news) did Jesus preach? In short, He preached that whoever, by faith in Him and by His grace, turns from his sins and trusts Him with his life as his Lord and Saviour – who died and rose again for him – can live a holy life of happiness and be in intimate fellowship with Him in this world and after his resurrection in His kingdom forever, delivered from eternal damnation (existence without God).

2. What is God like? He is infinitely loving and holy, compassionate and righteous (just), merciful and faithful, unchangeable, all powerful, present everywhere, the perfect Father who loves each of us immensely, passionately, and personally as His creatures made in His own image with whom He wants to live in complete unity and fellowship of love (Isa. 6; John 1:14, 17; 3:16; 17:21; Rom. 5:17, 21; Psa. 102:24ff; Jam. 1:17; Jer. 32:17; 23:23f; see fathersloveletter.com). Although He is the creator, maintainer, governor, and final judge of the whole universe (Rom. 1:20; Acts 17:24-31), at conversion He “runs to meet us”, like the father of the prodigal son did (Luke 15:20), and He even anticipates it, works in us through His Holy Spirit in advance, desires to have fellowship with us, speaks tenderly to us to win us as His bride (Hosea 2:14-23). He deems us to be so precious that He sacrificed His only Son for us, gave Himself for you and me personally (Gal. 2:20). Jesus Christ showed God’s character in His life perfectly, and His teaching and His death on the cross testify of both God’s love and His holiness/righteousness in an eternal and infinitely effective way.

3. How can we know this all? First, from the Bible, which is in its entirety the inspired and infallible Word of God (who cannot lie or be mistaken), and God and Jesus said that it would stand forever, every word of it would come true, and nobody can take away from it (Isa. 40:8; Matt. 5:18-19; 2Tim. 3:16-17; see also below); second, from God’s faithful servants who have preserved and kept His teachings through the centuries; finally, from our own experience, if we accept and try this all by building our lives on it.

4. What is the purpose of our lives? To reach unity with God, and, by glorifying Him, to enjoy our fellowship with Him – that is what makes our lives complete (John 17:17-26; 1Cor. 10:31; 1John 1:3-4). “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me” (Psa. 50:15). “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psa. 16:11).

5. What hinders reaching this purpose? (The bondage of) our own selfishness, self-centered life, self-will, sin. God created us to relate to Him in a love relationship as His friends, children, spouses and even more closely, but we have turned away from him, “turned our own ways” (Isa 53:6), even used His gifts as we pleased and not according to His plan. So disobeying Him, we have become our own gods, our hearts curved inward upon themselves. We have become independent of God, but this way we have become separated from Him and spiritually dead, „addicts” and slaves of sin: our sinful state and our sins separate us from God, the source of life, and hinder our fellowship with Him (Rom. 6:23, 1John 1:5-6).

5. a. Why is there evil/sin in the world? The essence of love includes freedom of will/decision, voluntary choice, the ability to accept and reject love. From this follows the existence of evil and sin, in the knowledge of which good can be appreciated much more (just like light in the background of darkness).

6. What sins are typical today? The root of every sin is selfishness and self-will, and sin is everything that is said to be so by (the Word of) God. For example: lack of love, hatefulness, slandering, gossiping, sex apart from the marriage of one man and one woman (fornication), occultism, esotericism (Deut. 18:9-14), oppression, unjust judgements, bribery, corruption, cheating (e.g. with taxes, see Luke 20:20-26; we may also cheat if we do not ask for a bill/receipt, at least we may take part in the sins of others; 1Tim. 5:22), dishonesty, lying, breaking laws (1Pet. 2:13; Rom. 13:1-7), passions (e.g. drinking, smoking, taking drugs, addiction to the internet or television, pornography, passion for gambling – all these are our “idols” if we cannot or do not want to get rid of them; we have to love God above all else; Mark 12:30); disobedience of employees, wives, and children to their bosses, husbands or parents (Eph. 5-6); work-shyness, sponging (2Thess. 3:10); etc. If we eat (spend on ourselves) more than we should, we help the needy less than we

should. Not only what we do is important, but WHY we do it also! God sees and judges our heart – He knows everything (1John 3:17-24). No man is better than another (1Cor. 4:7), but our decisions determine our character, our eternal destiny, and partially our circumstances.

7. What awaits those who commit these and other sins? Eternal separation from God, spiritual death, the endless anguish of “hell” (1Cor. 6:9-10; Rom. 1:22-32; 6:23; Gal. 5:19-21; Matt. 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43, 48; Rev. 21:8).

8. Does this mean that few people get to the kingdom of heaven? Many say that they are Christians but few follow Christ and live a life worthy of Him. True faith is not shown by words but by deeds (Matt. 7:13-29; James 2:14-26).

9. Can we get free of sin? “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23); even sinful thoughts are sins (Matt. 5:28). It is not enough to try to avoid damnation somehow – we have to be united with Christ, and in Him we receive “freedom from sin”, “holiness”, and what follows from it, “eternal life” (Rom 6:22). A Christian who is in fellowship with God in such a way does not sin deliberately in word or deed (1John 2:1-6; 3; 5:18-20; Matt. 18:15-20), but may sin unintentionally, in the heat of passion, even unconsciously (e.g. we often recognise our “idols” only later or never at all). We are not going to be sinless in the sense God is sinless, but with humility and His help we must strive to become completely free from sin, since God – who never tests or tempts us with anything that is above our ability (1Cor. 10:13) – expects us to be “perfect” and completely holy (Matt. 5:48; 1Cor. 2:6; 1Pet. 1:16; cf. Phil. 3:15; 2Cor. 7:1; 1Thess. 5:23; 1John 4:17-18). Our conscience can be pure without reaching perfection (and it must be pure: Acts 24:16; 1Tim. 1:5; 3:9; Heb. 13:18) if we get rid of our known sins (which does not always happen at once, e.g. with addictions) – acknowledging that while in a sense we are „free from sin” (Rom. 6:7, 18, 22), in another sense we are several times backsliding „addicted slaves” of sin (Rom. 7:14-24), and we have not been „cured” of it, neither do we try to get healed of it, but with Christ’s strength we try not to sin today/now (for which we have real chance, see Rom. 7:24f; 8). If we happen to stumble (which is no longer natural, see Rom. 7:15-20), we should confess our sins and go on (1John 1:9; Phil. 3:13-14).

10. How can we reach all this? We cannot do it on our own. Even the smallest sin violates God’s holiness, so what we deserve rightfully is the punishment of hell. Therefore all of us need the mercy of God.

11. What should we do to get that? Eternal life is God’s free gift (Eph. 2:8-9); we need only to ask for and receive it (Rom. 10:13). But in order to do that we have to let go of the “wheel” of our life so that we can get hold of the life-belt of God – Christ. People often cry to God, “Lord, save me,” but they do not want to let go of the wheel (directing their life), so they cannot grab the life-belt. “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). We have to give everything to God (as a way of giving thanks for His great love shown in the death of Jesus and as a sign of receiving it): **to trust Christ His Son with our whole life as our Lord and Saviour who died and rose from the dead for us** – that is what it means to receive Him by faith (Matt. 13:44-46; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 14:26-33; John 1:12; 3:16; 20:31). The true Christian is the disciple of Christ (Acts 6:7; 11:26). It is also vain to try to merit God’s forgiveness by our deeds - just like the man who killed the only son of the King coming for him to his dark hovel of clay, and when the King pardoned him saying that he would ascribe His son’s death to him, he said proudly, taking out his filthy little purse, “I’d rather pay you back my debt myself”. God has already done everything for our salvation when His only Son, Jesus Christ, took our sins and their punishment upon Himself on the cross, experiencing total separation from God, a suffering that is incomprehensible for us. That was expressed by the darkness that covered the land and by the cry of Jesus: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:33-34). What a blatant offence it is to reject this great love of our Father! If we could be saved in another way, Jesus would not have to die (cf. John 14:6).

12. How can we accomplish this? The order of events may vary in the process that may include one or more essential decisions and whose main elements are as follows. I have to admit that, before God, I am a powerless sinner in need of help. By faith in Christ I have to repent of and confess my sins, deciding to get rid of them through God’s strength and to obey Him in everything, receiving His mercy and gift of eternal life – Jesus Himself as my Saviour, Lord, and example with Whom I identify and am unified (1John 1:5-10; 5:1-5, 10-13, 18-20; John 17,17-26). I must trust and rely on Christ who died for me to be united with Him

in His death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, in His eternal life. For instance, we may tell this to God in our own words silently or loudly (that is praying); He knows our hearts and thoughts (Jer. 17:9-10). Before making a careless decision, we should assess the price of all this (see Jesus' words about it and about denying ourselves: Luke 14:26-35) – e.g. we should make amends for the sins we have committed, if it is possible (see the example of Zacheus: Luke 19:1-10). We must not be secret disciples; we should confess Christ before people – even if we lose some of our friends and suffer mocking because of it –, we should not be ashamed of Him (Mark 8:38). The sooner we witness for the new Lord of our lives before others the better. We should immediately begin to pray for being able to win other people for Christ.

13. What happens at that moment? According to God's promise, Christ comes into our life by the Holy Spirit (the third divine Person) invisibly but with his very real strength and guidance, gives us new birth, and if we remain faithful to Him (which, by His grace, is possible, even natural, and we also have promises for it, see below), gives us eternal life (Rom. 8:9-17, 29-39; Tit. 3:5; Heb. 3:12; 6:4-8; 10:26-31), since because of the sacrifice of Christ who lived a perfect and sinless life, and who now lives in us, too, God has forgiven our sins (2Cor. 5:21; Col. 2:13-14), even made us free from sin (Rom. 6:7, 18, 22), declared us to be righteous (Rom. 3:24), and as children of God we may expect our heavenly Father to give us everything that we ask according to His will, and that we need; to help us get rid of sin and live holy lives (1John 5:10-15, 18-21; Matt. 6:25-34); moreover, to work for our good in everything (even in difficulties; Rom. 8:28). In fact, He gives us all this in advance in a sense, for we have already been given a new self and life in Christ: His self and life! (John 17:17-26) God does not force eternal life on us – we can reject it, but why should we, if we really know Him? – because this would contradict the essence of love (which is the essence of God; 1John 4:8) that is based on free choice; but neither does He allow anything to separate us from Him (see Rom. 8:35-39).

14. What are its signs? Its inward signs are (can be) the joy, peace, and assurance received from God (Matt. 11:28-30; Rom. 8:15-17; 14:17; 1John 5:10-13), and the sense of the freedom arising from the fact that we are not slaves of (the opinions of) people, sin, guilt, ourselves (our desires), or Satan anymore, but we serve Christ alone who makes us free to fulfil the purpose of our lives, to live a life that is in Him and that pleases Him. Through the power and grace of the sovereign God these things may happen in a different order, gradually, or even at the same time. Christians practise their faith and grow in it as members of local communities (Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 2:42; etc.). Another (visible) sign is getting rid of sin, (gradual) sanctification (Eph. 4:17-24). There is holy tension in Christian life: most of the things mentioned above have already happened, and we can rely on them by faith with plenty of joy and relief; yet we will get to the fullness of all this only in eternal life, and till then we have to struggle with all that draw us back on this earth and in our human nature (John 16:33, Heb. 3:12-4:11). We can freely be joyful because we shall avoid the condemnation of God (Rom. 8:1), but we should work out our salvation with holy fear (Phil. 2:12) knowing that God will judge all our deeds (2Cor. 5:10, Matt. 12:36), and “*pressing on unto perfection*” (Heb. 6:1).

15. How does a local church function? God's children are brothers and sisters of each other, so they have to love one another, be willing to make sacrifices, help the needy (John 13:34-35). They have to show their love in deeds to non-believers as well (1John 3:16-18), living for saving lost souls and for helping justice to prevail (Matt. 28:18-20; 23:23; Mic. 6:8).

16. Is not there another way to the kingdom of heaven? Jesus declared: “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). (Saint) Peter the apostle testified to it risking even his life when he said: “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved*” than “*the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*” (Acts 4:10-11). (Saint) Paul the apostle confessed: “*there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus*” (1Tim. 2:5). So neither can we get to the heavenly kingdom of God the Father through the mediation or intercession of the Virgin Mary or any living or dead “saint” or “prophet” (e.g. Mohammed, Confucius, Joseph Smith [founder of the Mormons]) nor through saving ourselves (by our good works) – though this is what almost all religions teach –, but only through faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour: “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast*” (Eph. 2:8-9). Finally, (Saint) John the apostle added: “*Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe*

God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life... And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” (1John 5:10-13, 20).

17. Is the Bible still relevant today? Archaeology shows that the Bible (especially the New Testament) that has been preserved in much more manuscripts – and they are much closer in time to the original writings – than any other ancient work) is the most reliable historical document. Therefore we have to give credit to everything it says – including what it says about Jesus Christ. It clearly follows from the words and deeds of Jesus recorded in the Bible that He was the One He told Himself to be: God incarnate (John 10:30-31; that's why he was crucified: Mark 14:61-64) – otherwise He could have been only a lunatic or a liar/deceiver, but His teachings and the influence He had on His disciples excludes both. So we have to accept all that He said about the Bible. He proclaimed: “*until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished*” (Matt. 5:18-19). Furthermore: “*your word is truth*” (John 17:17). If there has ever been a person who could judge this it was Jesus. Therefore we have to look at the Bible the same way. How could God possibly make mistakes? The basic facts about Jesus (e.g. His resurrection) can be proved so well that several renowned historians and lawyers got saved through their unsuccessful attempt of refuting them. However, because of the great distance in time and culture it is not easy for us to understand the message of the Bible, so we should study it thoroughly to become more and more familiar with God and all that He has to say to us. (See also “More Than a Carpenter” and “The NEW Evidence that Demands a Verdict” by Josh McDowell and related pages at christiananswers.net.)

18. Do you believe what follows concerning Jesus Christ?

1. “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29) Has He taken away your sin, too? Yes/No

2. “*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them*” (2Cor. 5:19). Does it apply to you as well? Yes/No

3. “*Jesus Christ... loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood*” (Rev. 1:5). Are you one of these people? Yes/No

4. “*He... purged our sins*” (Heb. 1:3, NKJV). Does it apply to your sins, too? Yes/No

5. “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed*” (1Pet. 2:24). Did He bear your sins also on the cross? Yes/No (Adapted from “God's abounding grace in my life” by Fritz Berger, Evangelical Brotherhood Church, Herbligen, 1989.)

19. If you have answered “Yes” to the questions above, and if you have not done so yet, rejoice with angels “*that your name is written in heaven*” (Luke 10:20; 15:7). Every day read the Bible, pray, and trust the Lord who will finish the good work He has begun in you (Phil. 1:6). Find a Christian community (if possible, near your home) that teaches and lives according to Scripture, where you will be able to share your joy (and your grief) with your brothers and sisters in Christ; to learn, to grow, and to serve, and also to follow your Master in a disciplined way (Matt. 18:15-17). **If you answered “No”**, but would like to say “Yes” to God, you should know that conversion, regeneration, and sanctification is possible **only by the grace of God and the help of His Spirit**. Only He can give you the assurance arising from meeting Him personally and a life full of grace and truth – ask for it believing, ready to do His will, and you will receive all this as He promised (Luke 11:13; John 1), including the healing of your relationships. Do not be hindered by either the pursuit of pleasure or pride – both can be fulfilled only in Him (Psalm 16:11).

See the essentially similar Catholic and Lutheran (Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, accepted by the Methodists, too, cin.org/users/james/files/jddj.htm), Reformed (Second Helvetic Confession, 15-16., creeds.net/helvetic), Baptist (1925 Baptist Faith and Message, VII-X, sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp) teachings and tract by John Stott, “*Becoming a Christian*” (InterVarsity Press, 1950, 1999). **Faith = knowledge, trust, obedience.**