



3. Knowing God

Italy, 1250 A.D. A priest named Thomas Aquinas believed in God, and also searched for logical ways to defend his faith. One of his observations involved the origin of the universe. As Aquinas observed, everything comes from something else. A tree comes from a seed, which comes from a tree, which comes from a seed – etc. But that chain of causes can't go on forever. There has to be a starting point, a “primary cause,” from which the whole universe came into being. The only logical explanation for that primary cause, Aquinas argued, is an eternal and all-powerful God.

England, 1802 A.D. A pastor named William Paley believed in God, and also searched for logical ways to defend his faith. One of his observations involved the universe's complexity. Imagine that you hold a finely crafted stopwatch. As you examine the beautiful device with its many moving parts, you can't help but marvel at the cleverness and skill of the watchmaker. The same thing goes for our universe. As we examine the intricate parts of the human body, or the precisely balanced rotation of the planets, we can't help but marvel at the cleverness and skill of the Maker. Something this complicated and beautiful could never have happened by accident.

Oxford University, 1943 A.D. A writer named C.S. Lewis did not believe in God. However, the more he looked at the world around him, the more he saw evidence for God everywhere, especially in the morality of human beings. Lewis observed that people all over the world consider some actions to be “right,” and other actions to be “wrong.” For example, virtually everyone agrees that what Adolf Hitler tried to do in WWII was “wrong.” But why? Where did human beings get this universal standard of morality? The only logical explanation is that we were created by a moral God. C.S. Lewis eventually became a devout Christian and wrote many books explaining and defending his faith.

Human philosophy clearly points to the **existence** of some kind of God, but it is unable to tell us exactly what that God is **like**. Fortunately, it doesn't have to. In this lesson we will also take a look at some important details God reveals about himself in the Bible.

HOW DOES GOD MAKE HIMSELF KNOWN?

Psalm 19:1-2 *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands...There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the earth.*

Romans 1:20 *Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what had been made, so that men are without excuse.*

Romans 2:14,15 *When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by law... they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.*

<p><u>Words to Know</u></p> <p>“Natural Knowledge of God” =</p> <p>“Conscience” =</p>

If we had no information about God to go on (other than our “natural knowledge” of him) what would we have to conclude that God is like?

Even though we find some information about God in the natural world, that information is very limited. So God has chosen a special way to tell us more about himself, and the way he feels about us. . . .

1 Corinthians 2:9 *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*

2 Timothy 3:15 *From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

The Bible reveals truths we would otherwise have no way of knowing – truths about how our world got here, what happened to it, and how a gracious God entered into our world to save, redeem, and restore.

WHAT SPECIAL INFORMATION IS REVEALED IN THE BIBLE?

NATURE and the creation of the universe

The Bible says that God created the universe, the earth, and all living things in six 24-hour days.

Read Genesis 1:1-31.

Note the differences between the Bible's account of creation and an atheistic, evolutionary explanation of the world. These two belief systems lead to drastically different worldviews.

	<u>Creation</u>	<u>Atheistic Evolution</u>
Time	6 days	Billions of years
Method	God speaks things into being	By chance or accident
Mankind	A special creation	A superior animal
Man's purpose	To serve and honor God	To survive, to serve self
Man's responsibility	To manage his creation	None
Death?	Cause of sin	Basis for evolution

The evidence is right there! God created the universe, and everyone has natural knowledge of God. Why, then, do so many people today believe that he did not create the world? Consider the following passages.

Psalm 14:2-3 *The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*

Hebrews 11:3 *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

The sinful nature hates the idea of being responsible to God. But through his Word God gives us a new heart of faith, which trusts in him and his loving care.

Key teaching #1: The LAW

Even our consciences can become corrupted by sin, leading to skewed ideas about what is right and wrong. In the Bible, God clears up any confusion by spelling out the exact standards by which he wants us to live our lives. These standards are known as God's **law**.

For one well-known summary of God's law, see the 10 Commandments, given in Exodus 20:1-17.

Read & Discuss 10 Commandments: (Appendix A, pg.77)

Note that these laws are not intended to hurt us, but actually to help us show love to God and our neighbor.

Romans 13:10 *Love is the fulfillment of the law.*

1 John 5:3b *His commands are not burdensome.*

However, when we honestly compare our lives with all the things that God demands. . . .

Leviticus 19:2 *Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.*

Matthew 5:48 *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

. . . .we see that we have not measured up to his standards.

Romans 3:23 *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

In summary, God's law does this:

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Key teaching #2: The GOSPEL

The word "gospel" means "Good News." Instead of telling us what we should do, the Gospel tells us the good news about something that has already been done.

Hebrews 4:15 *We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.*

John 3:16 *(a.k.a. "the Gospel in a nutshell) God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*

The good news of the Gospel is that God sent Jesus to perfectly follow all God's laws in your place, and to die for your sins on the cross. **You don't have to do anything to get yourself to heaven – Jesus already did all of it for you.**

In summary, God's Gospel does this:

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The Importance of the Bible

The reason we place so much value on God’s Word is because this is the only place where we find the gospel, the good news which assures us that we are going to heaven because of Jesus. Such a beautiful message could only have come from God himself.

2 Peter 1:21 *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Timothy 3:16 *All Scripture is God-breathed. . . .*

John 17:17 *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*

Discuss the difference between “absolute truth” and “relative truth.” Which one does the Bible claim to be, and why is that important?

TAKING IT DEEPER

Agree or disagree?

1. All people naturally know, deep down in their heart of hearts, that Jesus is their Savior.
2. You must keep God’s law perfectly to be saved.
3. Since the Bible was written almost 2,000 years ago, we can’t be sure that our bibles today contain the true word of God.
4. From time to time we need to update the teachings of the Bible to fit our society.

Law or Gospel?

Read the following passages, in write in the box to the left whether the passage is law or gospel.

<i>Law or Gospel?</i>	<i>Bible Passage</i>
	Colossians 3:20 <i>Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.</i>
	Luke 2:11 <i>I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ, the Lord.</i>
	Galatians 4:4 <i>God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.</i>
	Ephesians 2:8-9 <i>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.</i>
	Romans 3:12 <i>All have turned away. . . .there is no one who does good, not even one.</i>
	Luke 10:27 <i>Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.</i>
	2Timothy 2:13 <i>If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.</i>

more info: Manuscript Evidence for the New Testament

There is more abundant and accurate manuscript evidence for the New Testament than for any other book from the ancient world. Consider the following extant manuscripts:

The John Rylands Fragment - This papyrus contains five verses from John's Gospel (18:31-33, 37-38.) It is dated between A.D. 117-138.

The Bodmer Papyri - These papyri date from around AD. 200. They contain most of the Gospels of John and Luke along with the books of Jude, I Peter, and II Peter. These are the earliest known complete copies of New Testament books.

Codex Vaticanus - This manuscript, dating from between AD. 325-350, contains the whole New Testament as well as the Greek (LXX) Old Testament.

Codex Sinaiticus - This manuscript dating from around AD. 340, contains the whole New Testament and half of the Old Testament.

Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus - This manuscript, dating from around A.D. 350, contains only part of the Old Testament but most of the New Testament.

Codex Alexandrinus - Dating from about AD. 450, this is a complete manuscript of the Bible with only minor mutilations. It is housed in the National Library of the British Museum.

Other Early Greek Manuscripts - *The grand total of surviving copies of the Greek New Testament is around 5,000! Compare how well the New Testament has been copied and preserved to other ancient writings. . . .*

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Number of Copies
Caesar	1st Cent. BC	900 AD	10
Livy	1st Cent. BC	450 AD	20
Tacitus' Annals	1st Cent. AD	850 AD	31
Thucydides	5th Cent. BC	900 AD	8
Herodotus	5th Cent. BC	900 AD	8
Demosthenes	4th Cent. BC	1100 AD	200
Homer	6th Cent. BC	100 BC	643
New Testament	1st Cent. AD	130 AD	5,000 +

WE BELIEVE AND CONFESS . . .

Proper interpretation of the Bible, including the distinction between Law and Gospel, is a very serious matter. St. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Be diligent . . . handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Below are statements, many direct quotes from official documents, showing how various denominations and groups officially teach Law and Gospel. Readers of *GOOD NEWS* are encouraged to compare all religious teachings with the Scriptures, including everything taught in this journal. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1).

DENOMINATION

TEACHING

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

EASTERN ORTHODOX

In their official publication, *The Longer Catechism*, Eastern Orthodox theologians ask: “How have we salvation by Christ’s life? Their answer is that we have salvation through Christ’s life “**when we imitate it**” (Question and Answer 198).

Christ does call us to imitate His life, but we can only do this **after we have received salvation from Christ** (Ephesians 5:1–2). If we must imitate Christ in order to be saved, then our salvation depends on how well we keep the Law, and not on what the Bible teaches: **on the the cross, Jesus accomplished everything for our salvation when He announced, “It is finished”** (John 19:30). Christ fulfilled the Law for us! Requiring that we imitate Christ in order to receive salvation changes the Gospel into the Law. “But if [salvation] is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Romans 11:6).

The 1992 official edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks about the “**Law of the Gospel**” which “**requires us . . . to put into practice the words of the Lord**” (paragraph 1970).

ROMAN CATHOLIC

Rather than clearly distinguishing between Law and Gospel, Roman Catholic theology **confuses the two when it speaks of the “Law of the Gospel.”** Mixing the Law with the Gospel is like adding water to an automobile gas tank. Even in small amounts, this mixing of water with gasoline destroys the power of the fuel. In the same way, even a small amount of Law mixed into the Gospel destroys the assurance of salvation that the pure Gospel offers: “But if [salvation] is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Romans 11:6).

Roman Catholic theology focuses on the Law and clashes with Christ’s announcement from the cross that **everything needed for our salvation “is finished”** (John 19:30). What Christ accomplished for us on the cross is the heart of the Gospel

REFORMED

The founder of Reformed theology, Ulrich Zwingli, stated 470 years ago, "In itself **the Law is nothing else than a Gospel**; that is, a good, certain message from God by means of which He instructs us concerning His will." See Daniel Schenkel's *Wesen des Protestantismus*, Vol. I, p. 173. Karl Barth, the father of "Neo-orthodoxy" and the most influential Reformed theologian of this century, wrote: "**We hear the Law of God when we hear the Gospel. The two dare not be separated.** When we say 'faith,' we must say 'obedience.' When we say 'Gospel,' we must also say 'Law.'" (*Freie Reformierte Synod Barmen-Gemarke*, 1934, p. 30).

Saint Paul considered mixing Law and Gospel so serious that, of those who did this in Galatia, he said twice, "Let them be accursed" (Galatians 1:8–9). Therefore, it is shocking to see that Zwingli and Barth intentionally confused God's Law and Gospel. In so doing, the sinner never experiences the comfort and hope of the pure Gospel. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery [the Law]" (Galatians 5:1).

POPULAR EVANGELICAL

Evangelicalism represents the "popular" or "cultural" Christianity of Protestantism in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Europe. Members of this movement claim to be nondenominational, but have roots primarily in Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches. While many Evangelical pastors and teachers proclaim Christ's death and resurrection, they focus on the Law to make people feel sorry because their sins killed Jesus and He will return to judge them. They fail to focus on God's gracious forgiveness through Christ's death and resurrection.

Evangelicalism treats the Gospel as fear-inspiring information rather than "the power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16). Even in situations where both Law and Gospel are proclaimed, **preachers and teachers who emphasize what man must do (Law) instead of what God has already done in Jesus Christ (Gospel) will leave sinners with no assurance of forgiveness.** Emphasis must always be on Jesus and the Gospel. "The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

LUTHERAN

As they faced persecution and death for their faith five hundred years ago, the first Lutheran Christians searched the Scriptures and then boldly stated, "We believe and confess that these two doctrines [Law and Gospel] must be urged constantly and diligently in the church of God until the end of the world," but they said this must be done "with due distinction." In their confession of faith, these first Lutheran Christians also pointed out that "this distinction between the **Law and Gospel is thoroughly and mightily set forth by St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:7–9**" (see p. 27 of this issue). Finally, they said, "In order that both doctrines, Law and Gospel, may not be mingled together and confused (so that what belongs to one doctrine is ascribed to the other), it is necessary to urge and to maintain with all diligence the true and proper distinction between Law and Gospel. This careful distinction is made to avoid anything that might give occasion for a confusion between them by which the two doctrines would be tangled together and made into one doctrine. Such a confusion would easily darken the merits and benefits of Christ, [and] once more make the Gospel a teaching of the Law . . ." (*Lutheran Confessions*—Solid Declaration, Article V. 24, 26–27).

Based on Biblical teaching, Lutherans insist that a clear distinction of God's Law and Gospel enables a sinner to realize he is justified by God's grace, through God's gift of faith, and not by his own works. Consequently, the sinner has "peace with God" (Romans 5:1).

Even though Lutherans have the clearest official position on the necessity of distinguishing Law and Gospel, many Lutheran Christians either do not understand this Biblical teaching, or they are indifferent to it. A recent survey in the U.S. revealed that 60% of Lutheran Christians believe that "the main emphasis of the Gospel is God's rules for right living." This indicates that the majority of Lutherans in the U.S. are confused regarding God's revealed plan of salvation. This confusion could lead to their eternal destruction.

And how will this tragic situation be resolved? *When missionaries, pastors, and teachers joyfully proclaim "repentance [Law] for the forgiveness of sins [Gospel]" in Jesus' name (Luke 24:47), then people will have peace with God.* For only through God's Law and Gospel can souls be cleansed, healed, and prepared to stand before God's judgment throne, justified!