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What You Need to Know: Gospel Presentation

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This is the third and final article concerning the things you need to know as a believer in order to be able to share an effective witness in any situation. The things which have been dealt with up until now – understanding worldview and understanding the big picture context of the Christian worldview – set the stage for sharing the message of the gospel. These previous topics are essential to help us build a bridge of understanding between the person who is hearing the gospel and the message itself. But setting the stage is relatively meaningless unless we ultimately bring the person to a place where they can actually make a decision to enter into a personal relationship with God.

To do this, we must explain the content of the gospel message itself. And this content is found by discovering how the Bible answers the three essential worldview questions. We have already discussed the concept of "the essentials" as it relates to worldview in general and to specific belief systems. These essentials define the line that cannot be crossed and one still remain within any given belief system. This line exists for the Christian faith, as well. In fact, it is this explanation which actually defines the gospel message. And it is this line that we must make clear as we share the gospel. The essentials of the Christian faith (the gospel message) are clarified as we answer the three questions:

- 1) Who is God?
- 2) What is a human being?
- 3) What is salvation?

In order to clarify this even more, we are going to divide the third question into two parts which will give us four questions. So, question three will be: What is salvation? And questions four becomes: How does one achieve salvation?

Since the answers to these questions for the Christian faith are revealed in the Bible, we must answer them using Scripture. Many practical methods have been developed to share this knowledge. There are such methods as the Romans Road, The Four Spiritual Laws, Evangelism Explosion, FAITH, and numerous others. These various methods may use different imagery and different Scripture verses to make the explanation, but regardless of how it is put together, the explanation must somehow answer these four questions.

To make this explanation here, we will simply ask each question, then answer them in a way that will allow people to understand the concepts and invite Christ into their lives.

Question 1 - Who Is God?

"Who is God?" is the first thing people need to know. A person can't enter into a personal relationship with God if they don't understand who he is. There are those who believe that all religions point to the same God. But that is simply not true. The God of Islam or Mormonism, for instance, is entirely different than the one who is revealed in the Bible.

As such, one of the first things we need to share is an explanation of the God of the Bible. In order to help an individual put their decision in context, there are certain things about God that we need to make sure they

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understand. Of course, not everything about God must be explained in every context. People come to the table with varying levels of knowledge. Some people you interact with will already have a decent understanding about what the Bible teaches concerning God. On the other side of the spectrum, some will know almost nothing. Then, of course, there are those who think they know about God but their knowledge is wrong. It will be necessary to discern where people are as you deal with this topic and share the particular information that will be relevant to any given situation.

For the sake of completeness, though, below is an overview of the particular things people need to know about God in order to receive him into their lives.

1. God is a person (Genesis 1:26-27)

God's unity and triunity - (1 Corinthians 8:4; Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19)

Christ's deity (Romans 9:5; John 10:30)

Christ's humanity - Virgin Birth (Matthew 1:18; John 1:14; Philippians 2:6-8)

2. God is holy (Psalms 97:1-2)

Christ's sinlessness (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22)

3. God is just (Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Job 34:12)

God can't allow sin to stand (Isaiah 61:8; Colossians 3:25)

Christ's second coming and final judgment (heaven and hell) (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 20:12-13)

4. God is love (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4-5)

The necessity of God's grace (Romans 3:20-24; Ephesians 2:8-9)

Christ's atoning death (Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2)

Christ's bodily resurrection (Acts 17:31; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Christ's bodily ascension (Acts 1:9-11)

All of these points are critical because they relate specifically to how the person of God is connected to the salvation process.

It is important to recognize that God is a *person* because only persons are able to have self-conscious relationships. God created human beings as persons which allows us to fellowship with him as a person.

God's *holiness* (moral perfection) is important because it explains why sin is such a problem. Our sin prevents us from interacting with God because he will not fellowship with sin.

Knowing God is *just* is critical because this expresses the consequences to our rebellion against him. When we sin, God will pronounce judgment against it. Judgment has eternal consequences when a person dies without having his or her sin forgiven.

Finally, God's *love* is critical because he cares enough for us to have provided a means of satisfying his justice. His love moved him to provide us a way to enter into a relationship with him. God's love is a constant, but he doesn't force it upon us. We have to love him back and express it by inviting Christ into our lives.

Question 2 - What Is a Human Being?

Moving to the second essential worldview question, two points concerning the nature of mankind must be emphasized. This is important because we need to make sure the person clearly understands God's purpose for humanity and our problem with sin. The two points are:

1. We are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27; James 3:7-9), and
2. We are fallen creatures (Romans 3:23, Romans 5:12).

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The fact that we are *made in the image of God* does not mean human beings physically look like God. Rather, we are the same quality of being as is he. This element allows us to interact with him in a personal relationship.

Understanding that we are *fallen creatures* is also critical. This fallenness permeates our human nature and inclines us to rebel against God. It does not mechanically make us rebel, but it does incline us in that direction. We are still creatures possessing a free will who can choose to rebel or not. That being the case, we are responsible for any rebellion we express. This rebellion puts us outside of a relationship with God and creates the necessity for salvation.

Question 3 - What Is Salvation?

The third essential question to be answered must define the ultimate that a person can achieve for this life. That defines for us the concept of Christian salvation.

1. Sin has created spiritual death in man - (Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10)
2. Spiritual death leads to eternal separation from God (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)
3. Because of God's love for man, he provided a means for overcoming spiritual death (a way of salvation) - (John 3:16; Romans 8:10-11; Ephesians 2:1-6; John 1:12)

All human beings have a sin problem. The Bible reveals that God, as a Trinity, is a person who does not need another being to have his personal need for relationship fulfilled. As three persons in one, he completely satisfies that need within himself. But, for some reason, he wanted another personal being with whom he could express his love further. Mankind was created to fulfill that purpose.

Initially, things worked out fine. But, at a certain point, God's plan was interrupted by the introduction of sin into the world. Sin corrupted every element of God's creation, beginning with the physical universe. It also created a specific problem for mankind. Since God is holy and will not allow sin into his presence, *the introduction of sin into the world separated the creation from the Creator.*

The first problem connected to separation from God relates to how we live life in this world. Mankind was corrupted in a way which prevented personal interaction with God – and it was to provide for this interaction that he created man in the first place. Before sin entered the world, man interacted with God in a personal relationship. This interaction occurred in God's perfect paradise – the Garden of Eden. But with the entry of sin, mankind was tarnished in a way which prevents the relationship from occurring.

In God's economy, this is not an unsolvable problem, but that solution is beyond unaided human ability. Human beings do not have the power within themselves to remove sin. So, in this life, humans are naturally in a position which is outside of the purpose for which they were created. People have a constant and unfilled gap in their lives which expresses hatred, anger, jealousy, selfishness and every other sin. Mankind is in a hopeless situation unless some power from the outside can create a fix.

Besides the gap people experience in their spiritual lives, they also think and behave in ways displeasing to God. These thoughts and actions have consequences in society. Not only is the relationship between man and God corrupt, but so are the relationships between human beings. This is expressed in, among other things, broken homes, abused spouses and children, tension in the

workplace, human trafficking, political upheaval and even war.

If the results of this problem were confined to this life, it would be bad enough. But, unfortunately, mankind's inability to fulfill God's purpose is not limited to life on earth. People are in danger of being separated from him throughout eternity. Since humans were created as eternal spiritual beings, their essential personhood continues even after physical death with two possible destinies. Each person will spend eternity either in the presence of God or out of the presence of God. If they desire to live eternally in the presence of God, the sin problem must be resolved. God will not allow sin to exist in his presence. So without some kind of fix for the sin problem, mankind is lost and without hope for eternity.

The solution to this dilemma is found in an act of God based on his great love for humanity. Since sin entered the world through the disobedience of a human being, it had to be defeated by the obedience of a human being. This obedience would have the effect of reversing what was done at the Fall. According to the biblical revelation, a fix of this nature required some person to live a perfect life (without any sin), then die as a sacrificial substitute for those who failed to live up to God's holiness.

Those individuals who commit sin should have to pay for their own rebellion against God. This penalty for sin is death. But death, in this case, is not merely physical, it is spiritual death – eternal separation from God.

Nonetheless, God created mankind for fellowship and was determined not to be defeated by Satan. So he instituted the fix. But in order to do so he could not use an ordinary human being. Ordinary humans start already immersed in sin. So, God needed a person who did not already have the sin nature within.

To provide the solution, God determined to come to earth himself and take the form of a human. He was born of a woman, but the father was not a human father. The Holy Spirit miraculously came upon the Virgin Mary to form a man who was not corrupted by sin. That person was Jesus Christ.

As Jesus lived on earth, he fulfilled all the requirements necessary to qualify as the sacrifice for mankind's sins – that is, he lived a life totally free of sin. Then, having qualified to be the sacrifice, he died on the cross and actually became the sacrifice.

In this case, the sacrifice could not be a guilty person. Rather, it had to be an innocent (sinless) person who willingly sacrificed himself as a substitute. The theological term for this process is called "substitutionary atonement." This doctrine says that sin had to be appeased by an innocent sacrifice, with the sacrificed person taking the place of the guilty party.

Christ's resurrection from the dead validated the entire process. It showed that he indeed had the power and authority to carry out this task. It accomplished the fix that God determined to carry out. The power of sin was broken and mankind became qualified to have sin forgiven without personally paying the penalty.

Question 4 - How Does One Achieve Salvation?

1. Salvation is provided by God's grace - (Ephesians 2:8-9)
2. Salvation is appropriated by faith - (Ephesians 2:8-9)
3. Salvation is received based on an intentional decision - (John 1:12; Revelation 3:20)

*The substitutionary sacrifice of Christ based on God's grace makes salvation available to individual human beings. But, just because it is available does not mean it is applied automatically. A requirement must be met – though not a requirement based on human effort. *It is received through the application of our faith in Jesus Christ.**

Then, to receive this gift of eternal life, *one must make a free-will decision to turn his or her life over to God* and become his bond servant. It is this act of receiving Christ and turning our lives over to him which causes the salvation, which God has provided, to be applied individually.

And that is all there is to it. An explanation of salvation is simply a matter of answering the three essential worldview questions based on the teachings of the Bible. When a person is ready to receive that message, it is this content that they need to hear. And when they make a decision for Christ based on that understanding, they will enter into a personal relationship with God.

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