



Living and Sharing the Gospel

Weekly bulletin
December 20, 2020

Worship services are being cancelled until further notice because of Covid-19. However, we will have worship services through the Internet Zoom platform every Sunday at 10:30 AM in NB, NS and PEI. The Zoom link for this service will be sent to you by email. The telephone numbers for Zoom always remains the same but the Meeting ID and password number change every week.. Please let Mr. Vautour know if you would like to be added to the weekly email list. See the bottom of the bulletin for the contact information

If you have friends or acquaintances who want to join in the worship service, please do not hesitate to share with them the Zoom links to join with us in the worship our great God.

Please note that audio and video sermons are available at www.gcine Brunswick.org .

On Christmas Day, those who desire can join the Montreal English church worship services at 11:30 a.m. Atlantic time. The Zoom link will be send to you prior. If you are reading this bulletin and you are not on the email list and you wish to attend, please feel free to contact Mr. Vautour at the email address below.

Bible Study: Our next Bible Study will be in January 13, 2021 when we begin to study the Epistle of James.

The 8th session of the study of the book of Acts is now available on our local website under “Members Only”.

To see specific prayer requests from the church, please go to www.gcine Brunswick.org – under “Members Only” and type the password.

- Let us pray for the Church to put first things first which is **to love God with all of our heart, with all of our soul and with all of our mind.** The secondary commandment and flowing from the first is **to love our neighbour as ourselves.**
- Let us pray according to God’s will as per his instructions: **“1 ¶ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1Ti 2:1-4 ESV)**
- **Let us pray that God will strengthen his people with faith, perseverance and love during this difficult pandemic period and that the good news of the Gospel will be spread widely.**
- Covid-19 is causing more and more pain and ravages. Let us pray for God’s merciful intervention as millions all over the world are suffering as result of this pandemic. Let us pray, **“Our Father n heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”** as we read in Matthew 6.
- Let us pray that God will give us to wisdom to know how he is working and how he wants us to humbly participate in his work of salvation. **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2:10 ESV)**

Important note from Mr. Hall regarding offerings dated December 23, 2020

This past week, I was wondering what percentage of our donations come from what avenue. Here is what we found:

Type	% of total	Type	% of total
Cash	3.47	E-Transfer	1.65
Cheque	55.07	Canada Helps	7.08

Credit Card	22.50	Direct Debit	10.23
Total	100.00%		

These percentages may change once we get back to taking up offerings during in-person services and E-transfers are a newer avenue for giving. Just a reminder that any donations we receive via either Credit Card or Canada Helps are subject to about a 3-3.5% fee which means any donations we receive for your congregation, are reduced by that amount. Direct Debit (Pre-authorized Payment) or E-Transfers have much lower transaction fees, that we don't back charge to the local congregation. (Cheques do not have a transaction fee). A person can send E-transfers to khawood@gcicanada.ca if their bank uses INTERACT. In the subject line put your name and address, and church area and member number. If you do not know your member number, please write to Mr. Vautour at the email address below.

Offerings: you can send your offering directly to the following address: **Grace Communion International- Canada, Suite 203A, 2121 Airport Dr., Saskatoon, SK 7SL 6W5.** If you prefer, you can also call **1-306-653-2705.** Thank you for your continued generous giving to God by giving to this part of God's church, his body.

From Mr. Bill Hall – GCI Canadian Director *"We will continue to process the donations we receive in Saskatoon. Members are urged to mail them directly to our office for the time-being. They can also donate via phone using a credit card, or via Canada Helps using **the donate button** on our website at <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/7735> . We will credit all donations received via Canada Helps to a member's local congregation, if we can identify where they attend."*

Theological Look at Evangelism, by Michael Morrison (From GCI Seminary)

Let's start with the Trinity as a doctrine, which says that God is best described as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existing as one God. The early church formulated this doctrine because the Bible reveals that the Father is God, that Jesus Christ is God, and the Holy Spirit—yet the Bible also insists that there is only one God. The doctrine of the Trinity puts this complex idea into a shorter phrase.

We do not want to teach a Trinity that is functionally unitarian, as if God is an undifferentiated singularity. Nor do we want to present a God that is functionally tri-theistic, as if the Persons of the Godhead are separate from one another and different in personality.

God is not a faceless, abstract principle existing in some distant place—God is *love* ([1 John 4:8](#)). Love is inherent to God—his essence and being—that's what makes him God. And this God who is love by nature existed before God created anything, before there was anything else to love.

Can love be expressed by a solitary person? It cannot. The doctrine of the Trinity explains that God not a solitary person, but three persons. The Father loves the Son and the Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Spirit, the Holy Spirit loves the Father and the Son, in a criss-crossing interchange. This love relationship is part of the inner life of the Godhead. Not only do they love one another, they also *live* in one another—the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father, etc.

Next, we see that God intends to share this life with us. He created human beings "in the image of God," and he wants *us* to love, because that is what he designed us for. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit want us to enjoy the same love that exists in the Godhead. Salvation does not consist in a change of location ("going to heaven"), as if that would solve all our problems. Nor is it better enforcement of the rules in a kingdom. Rather, it involves entry into the life of God—or we should say, the entry of his life into us. God's plan is for us to join in his life of love for all eternity.

Humans have fallen short of what God wants, and we are incapable of attaining what God wants to give us. We do not live in love because we are sinful. Humanity's "fall" into sinfulness was no surprise to God, because he had already planned the solution to our problem. God the Father sent the Son to become a human and to redeem humanity, to re-connect humanity to the Creator in whom we all live and have our being.

There is no Father-Son separation here. This is not a case of the Father being angry at humanity and really wanting to punish us, and the Son doing something to change the Father's mind. No, the New Testament consistently says that the Father sent the Son—the Father wants to save us just as much as the Son does. The Father is love just as much as the Son is. He wants to share his life and love with us.

The first step was our physical creation: humanity was made from elements of earth, and made to breathe oxygen. But love cannot be manufactured out of physical elements—it is a spiritual quality, and God continues his creative work in us spiritually. This takes time.

So Jesus became a human in order to save us, to rescue us from our physical and spiritual weakness. And in doing so, Jesus revealed to us what the Father is like. He told Philip, Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father ([John](#)

[14:9](#)). Jesus has the essential divine characteristic: love. Our concept of God is formed not by philosophical reasoning about what “the perfect” is—we form our concept of God based on what Jesus is and what he has done. That brings us back to love, which is serving others instead of ourselves.

Jesus became human and took our sins upon himself, and he experienced the results of our sins (including death) upon the cross. This was not because God became angry at Jesus or punished him; that would suggest some separation within the Trinity. God loves his Son, just as he loves humanity. But this death, even the shame and pain of the cross, was part of what it meant for him to take our fallen condition upon himself. And his resurrection demonstrated that death itself has been overcome. Jesus has done all that is needed for our salvation.

This brings us to an important part: Jesus died for our sins—past tense. He paid for them—past tense. The penalty has been paid—past tense. God does not count our sins against us. How could he? They’ve already been paid for. He has already forgiven us, and like the father of the prodigal son, he is eagerly waiting for us to return to him. He is not saying that we will be forgiven IF we repent or IF we believe in some particular doctrine. No, the gospel is that the penalty has already been paid in full, the sins are already forgiven, and God invites us to accept what he is offering in Christ.

In one popular evangelistic sketch, there is a great chasm between humanity and God—a gulf too wide for us to jump across, too deep for us to climb across. The gospel says that this chasm is an illusion—the truth is that in the incarnation, in his birth, life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has eliminated that chasm. He has come to us; it is not a matter of us having to go to him.

Our sins made us *feel* like we are separated from God, but because of Jesus Christ, they do not separate us. God is not unreachable – he is with us in Jesus Christ. God does not *want* us to live in sin, but those sins do not constitute a barrier between him and us. However, our sinfulness is a barrier between us and the *life* that God wants us to have—the life of love.

Sin is by definition something that is contrary to love. God is offering us a life of love, not a life of sin and death. We cannot experience the joy of mutual acceptance, for example, at the same time as we harbor resentment against others. It is a contradiction in terms. So ethical behavior goes hand-in-hand with a Trinitarian, love-based theology. Since none of us is perfect, we enter God’s life imperfectly, but the gospel promises that perfection will eventually be given to us. Even now, through the Holy Spirit, God’s love and righteousness are available to people.

What role does faith play? God can forgive us all he wants, but if we don’t *think* we are forgiven, we will see our sins as a chasm we cannot cross. We will not experience the benefits of his forgiveness, even though it’s there. To use a financial metaphor, it would be like we continue to make payments on our debt even though Jesus has already paid it in full. If we don’t believe he paid for us, and we continue to make payments anyway, we are enslaved by our own mistaken idea, our unbelief. Our faith does not change the external circumstances, but our faith is essential for our *experience* of salvation. That’s why we want people to *believe* the good news!

It is good news, but not everyone believes it. Why? The Bible explains that people, on their own, *cannot* believe it. God must intervene in their minds to call them or invite them to faith. We trust that he works in each person’s life in the best possible way—and he has a far better understanding of those circumstances than we do. From our limited perspective, we do not always understand why God works in the way that he does, but we know that he loves each person, and can be trusted to carry out his work in the best possible way.

How does Christ give us salvation? The Bible describes it as a union between us and Christ: we died with him, we are raised with him, we are seated with him in heavenly places ([Ephesians 2:1-6](#)). He took our sinfulness, and he gives us his righteousness; we become partakers of the divine nature ([2 Peter 1:4](#)). There are different ways of saying it, but we become part of who he is, and he becomes part of what we are. He lives in us and our lives are hidden in him ([Colossians 3:3](#)). The goal is that we join the Trinitarian life and love of Father, Son and Spirit.

In our experience, there may be a specific point in time that we come to believe that our old self died with Christ and that we are forgiven. The Holy Spirit opened our minds to understand and believe what God has done for us. *But in fact*, the old self died when Christ died, which was before the foundation of the world. God’s plan all along has been that the old self would be counted as dead and the new self be reconstructed in Christ. It is his idea, not ours, and we can’t take any credit for catching on to what was his idea all along. We are time-bound creatures and cannot help but experience things as a succession of events, but from God’s perspective it was a done deal all along.

The parable of the prodigal son ([Luke 15:11-31](#)) provides a useful outline. To put it concisely, Trinitarian theology says that the Father is eagerly awaiting for us to come to ourselves, to realize that we have been wasting our life, and to return to the Father—not as a servant or slave, but as the treasured child that he has always loved.

Key points

1. God created all humans in his image, and he wants everyone to share in the love that characterizes the Triune Godhead.
2. Christ became a human to redeem all humanity through his Incarnation, life, death and resurrection. He atoned for the sins of all humanity.
3. Christ has already paid for our sins, and there is no further debt to pay. God has already forgiven us, does not want to punish us, and eagerly desires that we return to him.
4. We will not experience the blessing of receiving his love unless we *believe* that he loves us; we will not experience his forgiveness unless we believe he has forgiven us.
5. We will not experience the blessings of giving love while we continue living in sin. We will experience the joy of salvation only as we share in the life of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The motive for evangelism

Some fear that this theology reduces the motive for evangelism. For some people, that may be true. If they were motivated by a misunderstanding, then it *will* weaken their motive if we explain the error in their thinking. One person might evangelize because he's afraid that people will go to hell if he doesn't tell them. Another might evangelize because she thinks it's the only way she can earn her own salvation. A third person might think that God needs help. Hopefully each of these people will be given new and better motives for evangelism, but it may take a while before they are able to build on the new foundation.

We can confidently say that God wants all people to be saved, and that his plan includes everyone. We don't know how he will do it, but we trust that he (since he is fair and loving) will give everyone a decent opportunity. Not everyone will take what he offers, but he offers it. However, if everyone will get a chance for salvation whether or not we tell them in this life, why should we risk our lives (or the risk of being embarrassed) to tell anyone?

Simply this: Jesus told his disciples to spread the gospel – our theology cannot change that – and doing so is an expression of love for God, of giving him glory for his astonishing generosity. The command of Jesus and the example of Paul show us that a willingness to share the gospel is part of the lifestyle of love that God wants us to participate in. These foundations for evangelism have not changed.

However, the way in which we *explain* the gospel may have to change—mainly that we don't want to imply that Jesus did something to change the Father's mind, and second, we don't want to imply that God holds people's sins against them when Jesus has already paid the debt for them. God knows that the debt has been paid, and from his perspective, there is no huge chasm that people have to try to cross. Jesus has already crossed that chasm for them, and God is already on their side.

Some people prefer lifestyle evangelism, in which people are won to Christ by seeing an example of the way that Christ changes people from selfish to caring about others. Some of the people we meet can see our lifestyle; but others see us for only a few hours, and we may never see them again. Is there any way to share the gospel with them? Yes. For those who want some sort of outline, I'll give one, but I note in advance that many variations are possible, based on the personality of the presenter and the circumstances of the audience.

- 1) God created us because he wants to live with us. He loves us. Life is a gift from him to us.
- 2) Humans fall short of what we are supposed to be ([Romans 3:23](#)). We have all experienced pain from being let down or betrayed by a friend, and all of us have broken promises that we've made, too.
- 3) But God is not going to let our mistakes thwart his plan. So he has acted to rescue us. Salvation is a free gift ([Romans 6:23](#)). If a friend gives us a gift, we do not pull out our wallet and offer to pay for it. It's a gift. In the same way, eternal life is a gift. We cannot earn it or deserve it, either before it is given or afterwards—God gives it to us as a gift. No one has earned their way into a perfect eternity. God knows we don't deserve it, but he wants to give it to us anyway.
- 4) It is made possible by Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, and was raised to life so that we might live again. The Bible says that we died with him, and we live with him ([Romans 6:4](#); [Colossians 2:12](#)). The old self, with all its weaknesses and shortcomings, died with Christ. Some of the effects still linger with us, but in the next life, the old self will be gone, and only the new self will live—the new self that is created like Christ by the Holy Spirit. In the resurrection of Jesus, God has shown us that death itself has been defeated. He promises to raise us back to life, too. The problem of death has been overcome.
- 5) God will let us live forever, but he also wants to fix our other major problem: the *quality* of life. We were made for love, truth, kindness, and joy, not a life of betrayal and disappointment. We can't do this on our own, so God promises to live within us, to change us from the inside out, to create us anew.

6) God doesn't force himself on us. For this to work in our lives, we have to *accept* God's plan. We have to believe that it's true, and we have to trust him to let him do the work in us. We need faith to know that God has planned something better for us than what we see in this life, and we need faith to know that our failures don't disqualify us from this better eternity. We need faith to know that God has power over death, and he has power over our life. He will live within us and we will be his children.

7) Our new life is experienced in this age by faith in Christ. He died for our sins whether or not we believe—our faith can't change that reality one way or the other. But faith makes it a reality in our lives, that we see ourselves as new people, made by God and enabled by the Holy Spirit to be like Christ. We see that we were made for love—and with the guarantee of eternal life, we are given the courage to love. If we look to ourselves, we will always have doubts. But if our life depends on Christ, it depends on something that is 100 percent reliable. Our confidence is in him, not in what we do. When we see an eternity with God as the good life we've always wanted, we will also try to live the good life.

Will everyone be saved?

Some people think that Trinitarian theology leads to universalism, the idea that absolutely everybody will be saved. I do not know why this idea is repugnant to some people. I think it would be good if God turned the Hitlers of this world into kind and considerate people, just as he turned Saul from a violent persecutor into a vigorous promoter of the gospel. However, I do not see anything in the Bible or in Trinitarian theology that requires that God will change everyone like that.

Trinitarian theology teaches that God gives people freedom. He gives people a real choice—love isn't really love unless it is freely given—and the Bible indicates that some people will insist on making the wrong choice, to live in self-imposed misery, in a world of selfishness rather than love. Jesus died for their sins, and they don't *have* to be trapped in them, but they choose to continue in them anyway.

The Bible says that Christ achieved reconciliation for all things and all people ([Colossians 1:20](#)), so we can speak of universal reconciliation. However, this does not mean that everyone suddenly likes God—it means that God likes everyone. The reconciliation has been unilateral, but is not complete until it is bilateral.

“Salvation” is a word with several meanings. The Bible can say that we *have* been saved by the death of Christ, but it also says that we *will* be saved when Christ returns and our bodies are transformed from weakness into glory. One of the biggest problems humans have is that we are enslaved to sin—sin is like an alien power that causes us to make stupid choices in life. Salvation is not complete unless we are freed from the grip of sin, and so our salvation is not complete until we are liberated from our tendency to sin, which is at death, or our resurrection.

Salvation comes in steps. Christ died for everyone, and God accepts his sacrifice as being effective for everyone. He forgives everyone, so everyone has been given that initial step in salvation. But when we say that everyone *will* be saved, we are speaking of salvation in the future and full meaning. This requires the *acceptance* of God's gift, the human response to God's unilateral action, and the cessation of all sin. We do not have biblical evidence that everyone will accept what God gives, so we cannot teach universalism.

Trinitarian theology helped me answer two questions that I had for a long time. First, what is the role of ethics, when we are judged on the basis of what Christ has done? If salvation merely consists of cancelling our sins, our debt, and our punishment, then why should we bother trying to be good? If the only thing bad about sin is that it is a violation of God's law, and that violation is stricken from the record, then what's the problem with sin? The New Testament clearly shows that we should try to do right, but why? The answer is that we are preparing for the life of the age to come. If we really want this godly way of life, then we will try to live that way now. If we don't really want it, then God isn't going to force us to have it. We will get what we want, and that's a sobering thought.

The other puzzle I had was, How can God be so sure that nobody is ever going to sin in the age to come? That just seems hard to believe, that I will sin until the day I die, and then suddenly at that point I will never sin, not even once, any more, ever. That's a pretty amazing miracle. But Trinitarian theology caused me to think more deeply about my union with Christ, what it means for my old self to die with him, and a new self to rise with him. My old self will stay dead; only what has been re-created in Christ will live, and that's why it's guaranteed to never sin again.



Michael Morrison received a PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary in 2006. He is Dean of Faculty and Professor of New Testament at Grace Communion Seminary.

GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—a) www.gci.org , b) gcinewbrunswick.org , c) <https://www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton> ; d) Grace Communion International-Moncton <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgKazyWhmKmDZy69vJcFPg>

For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website. Contact Information: Pastor's contact information: email— evautour47@outlook.com