

# The Gospel: MythBuster Edition

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Various passages

April 7, 2019

## Introduction:

One of the biggest hits for the Discovery Channel has been the show *MythBusters*. I've watched a few episodes and can attest that it's highly entertaining. For those of you who've never seen it, the show attempts to scientifically test the validity of various movie scenes, internet rumors, urban legends, and popular beliefs. Some of their tests have real-world applications – such as whether the heat from an excessive number of lights on your Christmas tree could start a fire (answer: they can't) – while other tests are more whimsical and fanciful – such as whether it was feasible for Han Solo to keep Luke Skywalker warm in a blizzard by cutting open a tauntaun (answer: it is). Inquiring minds want to know the truth behind these pressing questions and *MythBusters* is there to provide those answers!

While the show addresses a wide variety of myths found in our culture, there are some myths the show doesn't touch on, and those are ones regarding spiritual truth. Floating out there on Facebook and Twitter and on bumper sticker and church signs are all kinds of slogans that get repeated so often eventually people regard them as true. It's as Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda once said, "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it."

So this morning I want to bust some of the myths that have crept into our cultural belief system as they relate to the gospel. Twice a year I give a sermon specifically on the four main elements of the gospel. Hopefully those of you who have been coming to Grace Fellowship for a while know what they are. I've used four words that serve as an outline of the gospel, describing them as "coat pegs" on which you need to hang your ideas upon. Those words are: **God, Sin, Christ, and Faith**. If you can burn those four little words into your head, and know how to unpack them when doing evangelism, then you'll have a simple but accurate outline of the gospel message in your head.

But today I'm going to bust some cultural myths that have attached themselves like barnacles to these four terms. So our four points still have to do with **God, Sin, Christ, and Faith** but I'm going to dispel common ideas that have threatened to obscure these four necessary components of the gospel. Our first point this morning then deals with ,

## 1. Myth #1: God is not angry

I was on vacation last fall and as we were driving down the road, I saw a church sign with this phrase on it: "God is not angry with you." Now in an effort to be fair to them, I can imagine one intent of the sign was to communicate that their church was a welcoming place for sinners. The idea may have been to let people know that God offers them grace and mercy should they repent of their sin and come to him in faith. It may have been a response to counteract the kind of legalistic judgmentalism that can be unfortunately be found in churches, especially those in the part of the country

I was driving in. So that would be my most charitable take on it. But having not stopped in to ascertain anything further about the church, I can't say with any certainty if that was indeed their intent.

But knowing our popular culture's view of God currently, I can't help but fear that it meant no more than what it said: that God is not angry with you, whoever you might be. God is accepting of you, regardless of what you've done. There's a myth about God that is often repeated today, which is God loves everyone, period. Rather than being angry at us or judging us, he's more like a giant cheerleader in the sky who's rooting for us or is like a cosmic butler, ready and willing to serve us anytime we call on him, never judging, never disapproving, always supportive. According to this myth, God is similar to a kind grandfather who never scolds us and at worse shrugs his shoulders when we're bad and says, "Well, boys will be boys."

The myth that God isn't angry with humanity is dangerous because it takes an axe to the root of the tree of the gospel. The entire message of the gospel is predicated on the fact that God is angry with us for our sin. This is nowhere more clearly stated in Scripture than in Romans 1. Turn there for a moment in your Bibles. You can find it on pg. 939 if you're using one of the pew Bibles. After his introductory statements, the apostle Paul begins laying out the gospel in v. 18 with these words, **"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."**

This verse serves as the theme of the entire rest of the section that runs through Romans 3. It's all about God's wrath, his judgment against sin, both for the Jews and the Gentiles. The gospel is good news because it tells us how the wrath of God can be averted. But if there is no wrath to fear, if God isn't angry with us at all, then there's no need for the gospel. We don't need salvation because without God's wrath, then there's nothing to be saved from. If God's not angry, we have nothing to fear because everything's going to be alright.

So when it comes to understanding and explaining the gospel, we have to start with God's wrath. We can't assume it. Too many people believe this myth in our culture today that God's disposition towards humanity is one of receptivity instead of wrath. And I say this because often we as Christians are unclear on this. One of the things I've observed over the years as I have interviewed those wanting to join the church is how often believers who have attended church for decades aren't clear on this. If I press them on why Jesus had to die, why God couldn't have just forgiven us without all the messiness of the crucifixion, they're often muddled in their thinking. It's rare for me to find someone state clearly that Jesus suffered God's wrath on the cross, that God's just and holy anger had to be dealt with.

So if we as Christians don't have this down pat in our heads, how can we assume it of unbelievers? We can't, especially in a culture that has domesticated God such that they no longer see him as angry but only as accepting. So then, we need to be clear on this in our own understanding, but also in our evangelism. We must be aware of this commonly-held myth that says God isn't angry with us. Scripture tells a different

story. It says God's wrath stands against us for our sins and until it is propitiated, until it is appeased, we're under his divine judgment, not his good pleasure.

So that's the first myth that gets attached to the first peg of the gospel concerning **God**: we believe God is not angry with us when the opposite is true. And why is God angry with us? Why does his wrath stand against us? It's because of our **sin**, which is the second peg of the gospel message. God's wrath is against us because we've sinned against him. But once again, a myth has threatened to replace a biblical view of sin with something else, which brings us to the second myth we need to bust this morning, which is this...

## 2. Myth #2: God loves you just the way you are

This myth goes hand-in-hand with the first myth. It claims that God isn't angry with us because there isn't any reason for God to be angry. God loves us just the way we are, warts and all, and we don't need to change anything in ourselves in order to please him.

Now all good lies have an element of truth in them and this myth is not the exception. We're told in Scripture, for example in Romans 5, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. In other words, God's love for us in Christ wasn't predicated on us getting our act together first. True enough. God's grace is given freely and isn't first earned by our moral efforts.

But Christ dying for us while we were yet sinners doesn't negate the fact that we were indeed sinners in the first place. Our disposition as sinners, as rebels against God, was not something God approved of. God hates and detests sin and it's the reason God's wrath stands against us. I could go numerous places in to demonstrate this in Scripture, but let me just limit it to Ephesians 2. Turn ahead a few pages in your Bibles to Ephesians 2:1-3, which is on pg. 978 of the pew Bibles. Paul describes the condition of people before coming to faith in Christ like this, **“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”**

Paul describes us in remarkably unflattering terms. He says we were **“dead in our trespasses,”** that we were **“sons of disobedience”** and **“were by nature children of wrath.”** Those aren't descriptions that should give us the warm fuzzies! This passage here in Ephesians, along with many others in Scripture, tell us we have a very serious problem called sin. We've rebelled against our Creator in thought, word, and deed. And while God has loved us by mercifully by sending his Son to suffer in our place on the cross, nevertheless he did so because he was angry at our sin, not pleased with it. Who we are as sinful rebels against God is not a good thing. It's not something to be celebrated or embraced. It is something to be repented of because it cost Christ his life to redeem us from the punishment our sin deserves.

This myth, that God loves you just the way you are, has gained a lot of traction these days in light of the rapid rise of the acceptance of homosexuality. The world refuses to see anything wrong with homosexual behavior and therefore everything must be made to accommodate it, not only in the laws of our culture and in the words we speak but also in terms of God himself. No moral censure of sexual sin can be allowed these days and so as a result God is reimagined to love people no matter what. So this myth gains ever more traction in our culture, all the while ignoring those passages in Scripture that identify homosexuality as sin and cherry-picking passages that would paint God as all-accepting of everyone no matter what they say or do.

So when we come to the second peg of the gospel and talk about **sin**, we need to recognize that this myth is floating around out there. You can't assume people see themselves as sinners. There may be no guilt whatsoever connect to what they say or do. They may believe the myth that God loves them just the way they are and as a result, they see no need for repentance or even of salvation because they don't see themselves as sinful. So unless people believe that God is angry against them for their sin, nothing else of the gospel message will make any sense. People who don't believe they need saving aren't going to look to Christ as their savior.

But that then brings us to the third peg of the gospel; **Christ**. Assuming you are speaking to an individual who recognizes the problem – that God is angry with them for their sin and will punishment them in his wrath – then the next step is for them to recognize the solution. But there is yet another myth that has arisen and attached itself to this essential element of the gospel that may need to be dispelled. So the third myth we need to bust this morning is this...

### **3. Myth #3: There are many paths to God**

Once upon a time in Western civilization, people recognized the place of objective truth. Either something was true or else it was false and the merits of any given statement could be investigated as to whether the proof demonstrated it to be one or the other. Since Christianity makes truth claims, those could be defended on the basis of reason or evidence, and could also be rejected for the same reason. Thus the popularity of Christian apologetics, in which evidence was presented to show the reasonableness of believing in Christ.

But these days, during what future historians may label as the decline of Western civilization, truth is no long viewed as an objective reality that exists outside of us but rather only what we decide subjectively for ourselves. Thus we get people who talk about "my truth" as opposed to "the truth." In our culture today, what is "true for me" is all that matters. Insistent that truth claims are universal and objective, especially those of a religious variety, and you'll be labeled an intolerant bigot and dismissed.

As a result, religious claims have all been subjectified such that a claim that one religion is true to the exception of any other religion is met with harsh denunciation. How dare anyone should say, for example, that Christianity is the only true faith and therefore imply Muslims are wrong. That is Islamophobia! So when we come to the third peg of the gospel, which is really the heart and soul of the gospel because it's

centered on the person and work of **Christ**, we need to recognize that what Jesus claimed about himself runs against the grain of our pluralistic, post-truth culture.

We need to be aware that people might listen to us, nod their heads and smile, but at the end respond with, “Well, that might be true for you, but it’s not true for me.” So one of the things we need to especially drive home in proclaiming the gospel is that Christ is not one of many possible ways to God – and he just so happens to work for you – but that he’s the only way to God (and thus any other path to God, no matter how sincerely believed, will fail to get you there).

The two most significant passages in this regard are John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. Turn there briefly with me in your Bibles. We’ll start first with John 14:6 (on pg. 901 of the pew Bibles). Jesus, speaking to his disciples, says this, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**” So no one can come to God, meaning no one can enter into a saving relationship with God, unless they come through faith in Christ. Then turn ahead Acts 4:12, which is very next book after the gospel of John. The apostle Peter, in responding to the Jewish leaders, says this about Jesus, “**And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**”

Jesus is the only way to be saved. Any other paths to God are dead ends. And the reason this is true is because only Jesus does for us what we desperately need. He alone suffered the wrath of God as our substitute, taking our punishment for us. And he alone lived the righteous life we should have lived. Only Jesus accomplished that and only he could. So there aren’t any other options available. Salvation is found in him alone which means any other religion, no matter how devoted one is to it, will fail to deliver you from God’s wrath for your sins.

So we need to be clear on the exclusivity of Christ. There is no plan-B. There’s no alternative road one can travel on. If what the Bible says is true, then all other religions - be it Islam or Hinduism or being a Buddhist – won’t save you. We must insist on what Scripture insists, that salvation comes from no one else, that no one can come to the Father except through Jesus.

But there’s one more myth we need to bust this morning, one that attaches itself to our last peg of the gospel. So far, we’ve talked about myths related to **God, sin, and Christ**, and now we come to the fourth and final peg of the gospel, which is **faith**. In order to receive the benefits of what Christ has done in suffering God’s wrath on the cross for our sins, we need to respond in faith. We need to believe in Christ and trust in the promises of God. But of course our culture has sought to corrupt and obscure this element of the gospel with yet another prevailing cultural myth. So the fourth and final myth we need to bust this morning is...

#### **4. Myth #4: You have to believe in yourself**

In our self-help, therapeutic culture, one of the most common refrains you’ll hear is the call to “believe in yourself.” There is a common belief today that you only need

to look into your own heart to be successful. This myth states that if you place confidence in yourself, if you have faith in your abilities and your innate goodness and untapped potential, then out of that will flow all kinds of success relationally, financially, spiritually, and emotionally. The idea is summed up well in the title of a web site I came across as I was googling the phrase “believe in yourself.” The web site was called “Awaken the Greatness Within” dot com. That about sums it up. Underlying this myth is a belief that you don’t need to look to anyone or anything outside of yourself for help; all you need is what’s already inside of you; untapped reserves of greatness can be accessed if you only believe in yourself.

This myth is antithetical to the gospel. The gospel tells us that if we look within, instead of finding greatness we will discover our hearts are full of sin. Instead of freedom, we’ll find we’re actually enslaved to sin and are indeed far worse off than we realized. Instead, what we need to do is look for our help from outside of us, not looking for a greatness within but the greatness of Christ. We need to trust not in ourselves and what we can do but in Christ and what he has done.

The call to faith in Christ calls us to look outside of ourselves for what we need. Go for a moment in your Bibles to Acts 16, which can be found on pg. 925 of the pew Bibles. This chapter relates the story of Paul and Silas in prison in the city of Philippi. An unexpected earthquake shakes the building and more significantly shakes up the jailer in charge of guarding the prisoners. Fearing for his life, look at what happens in v. 30-31 of Acts 16. **“Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”**

Paul doesn’t tell the jailer to look into his own heart to unlock his inner greatness by believing in himself. He tells him to look outside of himself. He says, **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...”** Believing in yourself may give you a boost of self-confidence, but it will not save you. You cannot be your own messiah. Heaven does not swing open its gates to those carrying suitcases stuffed with their own good works and all-around personal awesomeness. Only those who’ve bent their knees to Lord Jesus, trusting in him, relying not on their righteousness but on his righteousness alone will gain admittance.

So as we proclaim the gospel, we need to dispel the myth that calls us to believe in ourselves. We must come as the words of the old hymn state,

*“Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind  
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!”*

We must call people to trust not in themselves but in Christ alone. Faith in yourself will gain you nothing before the throne of God. It is only belief in the finished work of Christ, who suffered God’s wrath for your sin, that can save anyone.

## Conclusion

So then, as we go and proclaim the gospel, we need to be wisely aware of these four myths that have become attached to the four main elements of the gospel. When we talk about God, we need to speak about his wrath. We need to dispel the myth that God isn't angry with us. It may not come across as good news at first, but people need to recognize the bad news before they'll be open to the good news.

Then when it comes to our sin, we need to confront the myth that God loves us just the way we are, that there's really nothing wrong with us. Unless we see ourselves as sinners who deserve punishment for our sin, we won't see the need for a savior.

When it comes to Christ, we may need to confront the pluralistic myth that claims all religions are true and equally provide a way to God. We must insist that there is no other name by which we can be saved other than Christ Jesus. Only he lived the perfect righteous life we should have lived and only he suffered God's wrath in our stead on the cross. So we need to be clear that Christ isn't a way that just happens to work for you, but that he is the way, the truth, and the life, that no one comes to the Father except through him.

Then finally we need to call people to faith, not in themselves but in Christ alone. The self-help myth of believing in yourself will not save you. Salvation comes from looking outside of yourself for salvation. Salvation is found in faith in Christ alone.

So may we be faithful and competent myth busters as we take every thought captive to Christ as we boldly and confidently proclaim the truth of the gospel, remembering to speak biblically about the four pegs of the gospel: **God, sin, Christ, and faith.**

Let's pray.