

INTRODUCTION

Most of us are familiar with product warning labels. Here are some actual warning labels that are rather humorous:

1. Window air conditioning units are now required to display the warning:
CAUTION - AVOID DROPPING AIR CONDITIONER OUT OF WINDOW.
2. The tag on irons says:
WARNING - NEVER IRON CLOTHES WHILE WEARING THEM.
3. A warning label on a Halloween Superman costume reads:
WARNING - CAPE DOES NOT ENABLE USER TO FLY.
4. Nabisco Easy Spread Cheese announces on its label:
FOR BEST RESULTS REMOVE CAP
5. The label on Little Ones Baby lotion reads:
KEEP PRODUCT AWAY FROM CHILDREN.

A warning label is designed to protect us from harm. If there was a warning label attached to this passage of scripture, it would read: **WARNING: IF YOU REJECT GOD'S SON YOU WILL RECEIVE GOD'S JUDGEMENT.** On the Sunday before the crucifixion, Jesus was welcomed by the cheers of the people. As He entered Jerusalem He paused and sobbed bitter tears over how the people of Israel had rejected Him. Over the next few days, He taught openly in the temple courts. The religious leaders tried unsuccessfully to entrap Him with trick questions. In the midst of these questions, He shared a parable that contained a scathing indictment against the failure of the Jewish people to accept Him.

He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'what shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

What will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the capstone?' Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

The title of this message is "The Shocking Truth About God." I got the idea while standing in the checkout line in the grocery store. I glanced at one of the absurd tabloids and the headline

declared in bold print, “THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT THE SHUTTLE CRASH - ATTACKED BY ALIENS.”

When Jesus finished telling this parable, the people were so shocked, they cried out, “May it never be so!” They were astonished because Jesus disrupted their nice, neat understanding of the God of Israel. Their view of God had become so skewed they thought God existed for the sake of Israel, not Israel for God.

Over 90 percent of Americans claim to believe in God—but what *kind* of God do they trust? For some, He is the nice, neat God they salute for an hour a week and then live the rest of their lives as if He doesn’t exist. For others, their religious rules and rituals have become a substitute for knowing God. Jesus Christ visited planet earth 2,000 years ago to teach what God is really like. In this parable, He reveals four foundational aspects of the nature of God. You may be shocked to learn the truth!

I. GOD IS GOOD - HE HAS PLACED US IN THIS WORLD TO TEND IT

Like the owner of the vineyard, God created this world. He is the owner of this vineyard called Planet Earth. He has placed us here to manage it. We don’t own anything, we’re just the tenants. The Psalmist proclaimed, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalm 24:1)

A good place to learn about the nature of God is in the book of Genesis. The first three words in the Hebrew Bible are, “Bershith bara Elohim,” which means, “in the beginning God created.” The Bible really doesn’t go into detail about *how* God created the universe, it simply says, “In the beginning God created.”

Sadly most Americans have been taught the universe just came into existence by chance rather than by creation. Most schools teach that billions of years ago there was a big bang somewhere in space and the spark of life was ignited. Then through the process of natural selection, this tiny cell of proto-life evolved and evolved until today you find the epitome of evolutionary development—Ozzy Osborne!

I believe God created the heavens and the earth. And you don’t have to commit intellectual suicide to believe there is a higher being, who planned and created this world. Actually, I believe in the Big Bang theory. I believe God said, “Let there be light” and “Bang!” it happened! You must understand the first two chapters of Genesis were not written to teach us about the exact process of creation, they were written to teach us about the God of Creation. From the beginning, we see He is a good God.

During creation, God was like a master painter. He created something, and stepped back and said, “That’s good.” In Genesis 1, the phrase “and God saw that it was good” is repeated six times. When He finished, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” The Lord God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” (Genesis 1:31; 2:18)

When He created Adam, He saw He was alone, and said, "It is not good for man to be alone." God's nature is to create and seek good. When He sees something that is not good, He corrects it. That's why God gave Adam a wife, because He knew she would be good for him!

I like the funny story of God saying to Adam, "Adam, I've got just the woman for you. She will never complain or nag you. She'll be a perfect cook and she'll always look great. She'll adore you and follow any instructions you give her." Adam said, "Sounds good, Lord. How much will this cost me?" God said, "It'll cost you an arm and a leg—but she'll be worth it." Adam said, "I don't know. What can you give me for just a rib?"

So Adam had a spare rib, which became a prime rib: Eve. When Adam first saw Eve, most of our English translations have him saying something profound like, "This is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh." But in the original Hebrew text, he uttered an interjection of surprise. He said something like, "Whoa! Man!" That's why we call them women. God gave a wife to Adam because she was good for Him. Everything good in our lives comes from God. James 1:17 says, "Every good and perfect gift comes down from above from the Father."

God is good. Things may not look too good in your world right now. You think for things to be good, there must be the absence of problems or pain. When you hear someone say, "God is good," you may want to argue, "If God is good, how could He allow this war to happen? If God is good, why do bad things happen?" Look at the parable again. The bad things that happened in the vineyard were not caused by the owner, the tenants messed up a good thing. That's what has happened in our world today. We live in a fallen, sinful world, and our sin has messed it up. When someone complains to me that life isn't fair, I sometimes say, "You're right, *life* isn't fair—but God is good."

It's more than just a song we sing. God *really is* good—and He's good all the time! When I used to live in Birmingham, Alabama, I loved to eat at a famous barbeque place named "Ollies." They had a big sign inside the restaurant with a quotation from Psalm 24:8, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Ollie's Barbeque was delicious, but there's no way you can know that for sure until you taste it for yourself. I can stand here and tell you God is good, but you'll never know it until you get to know God for yourself and you experience His goodness. But when you experience the Living God of the Bible—not a religion—and you'll say like Andy Griffith used to say, "umm umm good!"

II. GOD IS PATIENT - HE SENDS US MANY MESSENGERS

In the parable, the owner, who represents God, sent a servant to the vineyard when the grapes were ready to harvest. The tenants were like share-croppers. The owner didn't demand all of the grapes, just a portion of them. But the tenants rejected the servant and beat him up and kicked him out. The essence of sin is declaring independence from your Creator—refusing to acknowledge God's ownership of this world and rejecting His claim on your life. Sin is always first an attitude that says, "I don't need God. I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul."

The tenants insulted the owner by rejecting his servant. What would you do if you were the landlord of a rental house and you sent an employee to collect the rent and instead of paying, the

renter beat up your employee and said, "This is MY house. I'm not paying a dime!"? God would have been legally and morally justified to instantly reclaim the vineyard from sinful mankind and punish us immediately. But at this point in the parable, we learn the shocking truth that God is not only good, He is patient. Instead of punishing the farmers, he sends another servant, and another—and they are all rejected.

In the Old Testament, God sent many prophets to Israel to warn them of the dangers of rejecting God. Most of the prophets were abused and scorned when they were alive. Elijah was threatened by a wicked queen, Jeremiah was thrown into a pit to die, and Amos was scorned and ridiculed. The messages of the prophets were never valued until years after they died. Some one once said prophets, poets, and pigs have one thing in common—they aren't truly appreciated until they're dead.

God owns this world, and He owns your life. Have you rejected His claim? If you have, you should be thankful God is patient. He keeps on sending you messengers to patiently request you surrender to Him what is rightfully His. God has promised He will punish sin. You may think you are getting away with your sin—no, God is just being patient with you. The Bible says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) He is giving you another chance right now as you read these words. Patience is not weakness or unconcern, patience is strength under control.

In the 19th century, before radio or television, people in America found entertainment by listening to orators. One of the most infamous was a gifted atheist by the name of Robert Ingersol. He traveled around the country delivering eloquent speeches on the irrationality of believing in God. He was the Madalyn Murray O'Hair of his generation. One of his most dramatic methods was to stand on stage and shake his fist toward heaven and say, "If there is a God, I dare Him to strike me dead in 10 seconds!" Then he slowly counted to ten. Women fainted, and God-fearing people rushed for the exits, fully expecting God to send a fireball and consume Robert Ingersol. Of course, nothing happened. After completing his count, Ingersol challenged anyone in the audience to refute his logic. It is reported in one small Midwestern town, an old, godly woman laughed out loud and said, "Mr. Ingersol, do you think you can exhaust God's wonderful patience in just 10 seconds?" God *is* patient, but as we will see, His patience will run out one day.

III. GOD IS LOVING - HE SENT HIS ONLY SON

What is God like? He is good. He is patient. Do you know what is really shocking about God? He is loving. In the parable, after his servants had been rejected and abused, He takes an unprecedented, astonishing step—he sent his son. Jesus called him "the beloved son." In Mark's version of the story, the owner sends his *only* Son. The words "beloved son" are the same words heard when Jesus was baptized. A voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved son."

I was reading my Bible the other day, and I came across an amazing verse. When I read it I was blown away. It is probably the most important statement about God found in the Bible. I want to share it with you in case you've never read it. It says, "For 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.” (John 3:16) Can you comprehend that? There is only one God and He has only one Son, and He loves us so much He sent that only son to reconcile our differences with Him. So what did we do? Did we run out to meet God’s Son and fall at His feet in surrender? No, like the tenants in the parable, we crucified the Son of God.

This parable not only highlights the shocking truth about the character of God, it reveals the shocking truth about the utter wickedness of the human heart. The tenants of vineyard didn’t kill the owner’s son in the spontaneous heat of emotion; they made a calculated decision. They thought by killing the son, they could claim ownership of the vineyard.

That’s what so amazing about God’s love. I am a sinner by nature and by choice, but God still loves me, in spite of my sin. He loves you enough that He sent His only Son to die for you. The Bible says, “but God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

How can you resist that kind of love? Years ago in the early days of computers, the publishers of *Time* magazine were concerned about their declining circulation, so they designed a campaign to send out thousands of letters making an emotional appeal to potential subscribers. In the past, such mailings had been done manually, at a great cost in human resources. IBM made a proposal to install a fully automated system that would write the letters, seal the envelopes, address them according to a selected database, stamp them and send them into the postal system without the letters ever being touched by a human hand. The huge computer was installed with much fanfare and anticipation. However, as is still the case with computers, there was a glitch, and as a result a poor shepherd in Wyoming received 12,634 letters appealing to him to subscribe to *Time* magazine. The surprised shepherd, who didn’t ordinarily get much mail, opened the mail bags and started reading the letters. After reading a few dozen, he sent in a subscription order with a note that said, “I give up.” That’s the kind of persuasion that’s hard to resist!

God has written thousands of letters to you—and each one of them says, “I love you.” The reason some people don’t understand the Bible is because they try to study it like they study other literature such as Shakespeare or Milton. Instead, the Bible is one long love letter. On every page, God is expressing His love to you.

One of my top three songs our choir sings is “The Love of God.” My favorite verse is the third one. It says, “Could we with ink the oceans fill; and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on earth a quill; and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above would drain the oceans dry; nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky.”

The owner of the vineyard was good, patient, and loving, but he couldn’t allow the wickedness of the tenants to go unnoticed or unpunished. Notice one final shocking truth about God.

IV. GOD IS HOLY - HE WILL PUNISH SIN

After Jesus spoke of the tenants killing the owner's son, He paused and asked, "What will the owner of the vineyard do then?" Before the listeners had a chance to respond, He answered His own question. He said, "He will come and kill them and give the vineyard to someone else."

Don't confuse love with syrupy sentimentality. Because He is holy, He cannot tolerate sin. When I was a kid back in the olden days, school teachers still paddled us if we misbehaved. I'm not proud of the fact I got a few in my time. I always got the two-for-one special because whenever I got a paddling at school, my mother always learned about it, and I got another one when I got home! My eighth grade coach and teacher, Coach Presswood, had a big paddle he kept in his desk drawer. He had written the word "patience" on his paddle. Whenever someone misbehaved he would pull the paddle out and say, "You're getting close to the end of my patience." He always warned a student before he executed judgement. If the warning was ignored, the student got a paddling. Coach Presswood said, "You've reached the end of my patience, now the end of my patience is going to reach you."

On the other hand, whenever we had substitute teacher, we could cut up and misbehave, because substitute teachers seldom punished us. Some people think God is like some half-witted, permissive substitute teacher who looks at the world of misbehaving sinners and says, "Now, now boys and girls, please sit down and be quiet!" No, God is Holy and like the owner of the vineyard, there will be a day of judgement for those who reject His Son.

In the book of Revelation, there is a great deal written about God's ultimate judgement against those who reject His love. In the middle of these future judgements, an angel says to God, "You are just in these judgements, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged." (Revelation 16:5) Because God is Holy, He will punish sin. And because He is Holy, He is *right* and *just* in His judgements.

What was true of the nation of Israel historically is true of us personally. God sent prophets and angels to Israel, and finally He sent His son. Because the nation of Israel rejected God's son, they suffered the consequence of losing the vineyard. For almost 1,900 years Israel passed out of existence, and only since 1948 have they had a nation again.

Jesus infuriated the Jewish leaders because He claimed to be the "stone which the builders rejected." This is a reference to the building of Solomon's Temple. It took 30,000 workmen over seven years to complete the temple. According to I Kings 6 all the stones were quarried far away from the building site, so there was no sound of hammering heard there. Jewish tradition says one day the building superintendent saw an unusual stone being delivered. Because it was cut in an odd shape, he thought it was flawed. He had it rolled away into the Kidron Valley where it lay untouched and unnoticed. Years later, the builder sent word to the quarry that he was ready for the main corner stone. The quarry master came and reported, "Why, I had that stone delivered years ago. When they began to search they discovered the discarded stone in the valley was the main cornerstone. It was covered with debris and moss. It took many men working hard to raise the massive stone out of the valley. When they raised it and set it, it fit perfectly! The chief cornerstone was the very rock they rejected.

Jesus is that Rock. The Jews were on the verge of rejecting God's chief cornerstone—they would crucify Him. But God was going to exalt Jesus by raising Him from the dead.

A few months after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, Peter and John were arrested for healing a paralyzed man. They were summoned before the same Jewish council who sentenced Jesus to die. Instead of pleading for mercy, Peter used the opportunity to repeat these words of Jesus right in their faces. In Acts 4:10-12 he said, "Know this, you and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is the 'stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

CONCLUSION

What is God really like? He is good, He is patient, and He is loving. But He is holy and today you must consider Jesus' warning: **IF YOU REJECT GOD'S SON, YOU WILL RECEIVE GOD'S JUDGEMENT.** Imagine for a moment you committed a capital crime and were convicted and sentenced to receive the death penalty. You're on death row, and the date of your execution is approaching. Just a few hours before you are scheduled to receive a lethal injection, the prison warden enters your cell and says, "I have good news for you! The governor has decided to grant you a full and free pardon. Here, this is a copy of your pardon." Then imagine you look at the warden and laugh and say, "I don't believe you. Besides, I'm guilty. No thanks." Then you tear up the pardon and toss it back in the warden's face. You would be a fool not to accept such an offer. The only recourse for the warden would be to carry out your execution.

It's also true that if you receive God's Son, you will receive God's forgiveness. Each of us stands guilty before the Lord. The good news is God has offered you a full and free pardon. Jesus Christ has already taken our punishment, and all we have to do is accept God's free gift of forgiveness. You would be a fool not to accept such an offer. But the Bible says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'there is no God.'" (Psalm 53:1)

Will you receive His Son today? The Bible says, "But as many as received Him, He gave the power to become the sons of God; even to those who believe on His name." (John 1:12)

OUTLINE

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Taste and see that the Lord is good. *Psalm 24:8*

II. GOD IS PATIENT—HE SENDS US MANY MESSENGERS

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. *2 Peter 3:9*

III. GOD IS LOVING—HE SENT HIS ONLY SON

For 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. *John 3:16*

IV. GOD IS HOLY—HE WILL PUNISH SIN

You are just in these judgements, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged. *Revelation 16:5*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes