

BASIC DISCIPLESHIP 101

**LAYING THE
FOUNDATION
OF CHRIST**



**RON
HORDYK**

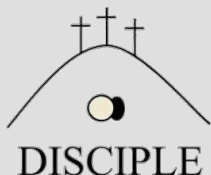


For we are God's fellow-workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 1 Corinthians 3:9-10

When someone starts to build a house, he first lays the foundation on which the rest of the house will be built. If the foundation is not built correctly, the rest of the building will be compromised, affecting not only its immediate use but also its longevity. The previous scripture states that the church must also lay a good foundation in new believers.

The Bible contains specific teachings that form the foundation of the Christian faith. To overlook even one of these teachings will affect how we perceive the rest of the Christian faith. An obvious example is to teach judgment without mercy, a teaching which causes the church to be legalistic. However, to teach mercy without judgment causes the church to give license to sin. Both teachings are essential, for the one teaching balances the other.

When a person accepts Jesus as his Savior and Lord, most churches place the person in their ongoing programs, with the hope that he will grow. However, a new believer does not share the foundational truths that mature Christians have. The minister may make statements which out of context will appear harsh, but are not harsh when placed in the context of other accepted teachings. For this reason, the church must give new believers a foundation which will allow for a balance, in regard to the teachings to which they will be exposed. Basic Discipleship 101 is written to give new born believers the foundation on which they can build their Christian faith. In this collection of studies, we will examine what it means to become a Christian, identify the principle players in salvation, and examine the elementary truths on which the sermons they will be exposed to will be built upon. Welcome to Basic Discipleship 101.



Back Cover

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Basic Discipleship 101

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**To God,
Who—while I was a vile sinner—
saved me from sin, self, and Satan;
possessed me with the power of His presence;
elevated me to the position of a son;
and equipped me for the fulfilling of His purpose,
be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

**I give thanks for my family, friends,
and brothers and sisters in the Lord,
whom God used in my life
to shed the world while
being transformed into His image.**

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PREFACE

This series on discipleship establishes what scripturally constitutes a commitment to Christ. The teachings of the New Testament Scripture build upon each other; consequently, misunderstanding foundational teachings leads to further confusion and false interpretations. The Bible states that discipling new believers is similar to building a house:

*After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. **Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.** It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. **What's important is that God makes the seed grow.** The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For **we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.*** (1Co.3:5-9 NLT)

Years ago, there was no building code—an approved standard for building a house. A person would hire someone who had a reputation of being a good builder. When winter weather came, the building would be tested. Would the house collapse under a snow load? Hopefully not! For this reason, governments in developed countries hire engineers to formulate a building code which sets a minimum standard for building houses in different climates. If every builder built according to the building code, the houses will stand for decades. The Scriptures state that there is a Biblical standard for building a spiritual house as well. Paul and Apollos were working together to build the church at Corinth. Specific spiritual principles ensure that Christians are equipped to face life in this world. Paul laid the spiritual foundation in Corinth:

*According to the grace of God given to me, **like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.** For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; **that foundation is Jesus Christ.*** (1Co.3:10-11 NRSV)

The only foundation for building the church is Christ, but in Christ there are different teachings that if taught without balance will cause the church to be weak. For instance, teaching love and forgiveness in the context of Christ's death on the cross without teaching holiness leads to a

license to sin. But on the other hand, preaching obedience and judgment without teaching sanctification leads to legalism. For this reason, we must focus on laying a good foundation of Christ so that a person will grow to maturity to the end of life and enter heaven:

Their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss.

(1Co.3:12-14 TNIV)

The building, the believers in the Corinthian church, can be burned up! On the day of judgment, a minister will see if there was any merit to his ministry. The judgment will reveal whether the church, the people he taught, will survive the judgment and enter heaven. If the minister compromised the truth, possibly everyone in his congregation will burn in hell:

If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

(1Co.3:15 NASB)

The Scriptures suggest that it is possible for a minister to be born again and pass through the fire of judgment, yet lose everyone in his congregation. Consequently, one must consider what truths need to be taught; otherwise, years of ministry will be for nothing. The book of Hebrews identifies the elementary teachings that form the foundation of the Christian faith:

*Therefore let us leave the **elementary teachings** about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the **foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death**, and of **faith in God**, **instruction about baptisms**, the **laying on of hands**, the **resurrection of the dead**, and **eternal judgment**.*

(He.6:1-2 NIV)

In this book, the first in my series on discipleship, we will consider the foundational teachings of the Scriptures, and I hope, on the day of judgment, we will not suffer the loss of seeing those we know and love not enter heaven.

Four sets of thirteen lessons allow this discipleship course to be taught within one year. Each week, prior to doing any other part of the lesson, the participant is to answer the first statement on the daily reading page. Each day, Bible readings are supplied with space to reflect

on the questions. A verse is included and needs to be memorized. The weekly lesson consists of reading material and corresponding questions. This work must be completed before the group discussion, or participation will be limited to listening to the discussion.

The only book allowed at the study will be a personal Bible. No study Bible notes (such as Scofield's) are to be quoted as an equal authority to the Scripture in the study, for all knowledge apart from that which is contained in Scripture is fallible. Anytime a person makes a statement, others in the group can ask for a Scripture which supports the statement or give other Scriptures which contradict a statement, allowing the Scriptures to formulate a Biblical conclusion. Theology is man's understanding of God, an understanding which is limited at best, but the Bible is God's revelation of Himself to mankind. Many passages found in the Bible are written to culturally specific problems; however, God's solution, given in the Bible, is to call mankind to His universal truth. For it is written:

*Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, **"Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.*** (1Co.4:6 NIV)

My hope is that through scriptural dialogue the church may be united, for over the centuries, the church has either been torn apart by denominational bias or deadened through compromise.

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DAILY BIBLE READINGS

A Christian is someone who

Day 1: Read the narrative of Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10. What did you learn about becoming a Christian?

Day 2: Read the narrative of Simon the Sorcerer, Acts 8:1-25. What did you learn about being a Christian?

Day 3: Read the narrative of the Philippian jailer, Acts 16:22-36. What did you learn about becoming a Christian?

Day 4: Read the narrative of the rich young ruler, Luke 18:18-30. What did you learn about becoming a Christian?

Day 5: Read about the prophecy of the sheep and the goats, Matthew 25:31-46. What did you learn about being a Christian?

Day 6: Read the narrative found in Matthew 13:44-46. What did you learn about becoming a Christian?

Day 7: Read the narrative found in Luke 9:57-62. What did you learn about becoming a Christian?

Memory verse:

In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:33

LESSON 1

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR CREATING

Have you ever wondered why an artist takes the time to paint a picture? Or why a musician creates a beautiful piece of music? They create for their own enjoyment as well as the enjoyment of others. In the same way, God created man because He found pleasure in His creation:

The LORD has made all for Himself. (Pr.16:4 NKJV)

God actually enjoyed the company of man. When mankind sinned, they were familiar with the sound of God walking in His creation:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" (Ge.3:8-9 NIV)

God sought fellowship with man, and through their relationship, He received glory. An artist is honored when people compliment his work. God is no different. He is pleased when man shares in His delight of the creation and praises Him for all He has made:

For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! (Ro.11:36; NLT; Isa.43:7)

However, instead of glorifying God, man wanted to become like God and sought glory for themselves. Satan tempted Eve:

God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. (Ge.3:5 NRSV)

Man ate the forbidden fruit with the hope of becoming independent of God. God created man to worship Him in fellowship, but man rebelled by disobeying Him. Even though man lives in rebellion against God, God never enjoys the destruction of the wicked. However, He is just:

*“Do you think that I like to see wicked people die?” says the Sovereign LORD. **“Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live.”*** (Eze.18:23 NLT)

Since God loved His creation, He gave man a second opportunity to return to Him and make Him Lord of their lives:

*For **God so loved the world** that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.* (Jn.3:16 NRSV)

Through Jesus’ death, we can restore our relationship with God if we only humble ourselves. Therefore, God has given us another chance to choose life. We must examine the cost of following Christ so that we can make a knowledgeable decision.

DOES GOD NEGOTIATE?

Most people live to the minimum expected requirements. Children live to the minimum standard required by their parents. Workers work to the minimum standard required by their employers. And yes, even most Christians live to the minimum standard that their church requires. However, God’s minimum standard, which many churches do not teach, is required to enter heaven. Jesus said:

*Enter through the narrow gate; for **the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction**, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is **narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*** (Mt.7:13-14 NASB)

Both groups of people think that they are going to the same place, heaven; but one group isn’t going to arrive. The reason is that most people accept Christ in the same way that they buy software. Most people have installed software. When they insert the CD, the setup kicks in; and the licensing agreement pops up. How many people read the licensing agreement before clicking the “I accept” box? Not many. People think, “I bought it; I want it; click.” However, with that click, they have just obligated themselves to the terms of the contract. I am afraid that many people reading this have accepted Christ in the same way and have never understood what their commitment involved.

CONSIDER THE COST

Jesus constantly presented the cost of commitment to those who said that they wanted to follow Him. Consider the rich ruler:

*Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, **what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?**"* (Mk.10:17 NKJV)

The ruler just wanted to get into heaven. He did not want to sit on the right hand of Christ; he just wanted to make it in the door. Jesus told him to keep the commandments, and the ruler responded that he had kept them. The story continues:

*Jesus looked at him **and loved him**. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, **sell everything you have** and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then **come, follow me.**"* (Mk.10:21 TNIV)

Jesus loved him and yet asked him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor. The ruler responded:

*When he heard this, **he was shocked** and **went away grieving**, for he had many possessions.* (Mk.10:23 NRSV)

To inherit eternal life, Jesus asked him for everything; but he was not willing to count the cost. Jesus did not go after him and negotiate more agreeable terms. For example, Jesus did not ask for 20% of the ruler's wealth upfront and then 10% per annum. No, Jesus had a minimum standard for becoming His disciple, and He was not afraid of turning away perspective seekers like the rich ruler. In the end, the rich ruler walked away from eternal life.

PRIORITY OVER FAMILY

Jesus' followers are called disciples. A disciple is not some super-spiritual leader; rather, he is an entry-level follower of Christ:

*So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and **it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians."*** (Ac.11:26 NRSV)

All Christians are disciples of Christ. Jesus' minimum standard for Christians is the same as for a disciple. Jesus was always very explicit about His minimum standard:

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them. (Lk.14:25 NASB)

Jesus is not talking to the spiritual leaders of His day, but to the everyday common folk who came for healing, for freedom from demons, or for His forgiveness. He turns to them and talks about the cost of being a disciple:

If anyone comes to me and **does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, **even life itself**—such a person **cannot be my disciple.**** (Lk.14:26 TNIV)

Our commitment to Christ must be so focused that when it is compared to other relationships, these other relationships seem like hate. Christ is not commanding us to hate our family, for we are commanded to love everyone, even our enemies:

*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and **hate your enemy.**’ But I tell you: **Love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.* (Mt.5:43-45 NIV)

For Christians, to actually hate someone places into question the sincerity of their faith and their authenticity as a Christian:

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. (1Jn.3:15 NIV)

When Christ said that we must hate our family, He was prophesying about what would be said by family members: “Why do you hate us and bring shame to our family by becoming a Christian?” If the choice is between becoming a Christian or appeasing our families and their honor, a clear decision must be made between the two. Christ must have preeminence over all other relationships:

He who loves father or mother **more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter **more than Me** is not worthy of Me.** (Mt.10:37 NKJV)

Christ is not asking us to do anything that He Himself has not done. Christ left His Father and His home in heaven to live in this world, which is polluted by sin. He took our sins on the cross, knowing that this action would bring rejection from His Father. Throughout His life, He referred to God as “My Father,” yet when He hung on the cross He said:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk.15:34 NASB)

He could not call out “Father” because when He took with Him our sin with its shame upon the cross, the sin separated Christ from His Father. Since it was our sin that separated Jesus from His Father, Jesus asks us to count the cost, which may involve rejection from our families. When the choice is the affections and will of family members or obedience to Christ, our choice must be clear:

*To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “**Lord, first let me go and bury my father.**” But Jesus said to him, “**Let the dead bury their own dead**; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”*

(Lk.9:59- 60 NRSV)

Family members may not understand all that Christ asks of us. This may cause division, but it must not deter us from following God. Jesus warned us in the Scripture:

*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a **man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.**”*

(Mt.10:34-36 NIV)

Christ sacrificed His relationship with His Father when He died for us, and He asks us to have that same level of commitment toward Him. If you do not place Christ above your commitment to your family, then you cannot be His disciple and do not have eternal life!

DENIAL OF OUR PERSONAL RIGHTS

When Christ came down to earth in the form of a baby, He denied Himself His rights as God and lowered Himself to become a man:

*Your attitude should be the **same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!***

(Php.2:5-8 NIV)

Since Christ denied Himself His rights as Lord (God over the universe), He asks us to deny ourselves our rights as masters of our own lives:

*“**Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.***

(Lk.14:26 NRSV)

We must be so devoted to Christ that we lay our lives on the altar by putting aside our preferences for His will:

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross, and follow Me. "For **whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it**; but **whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it**. "For **what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?** Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mt.16:24-26 NASB)

We must be willing to stop living for our own desires and live solely for Christ. After this decision, no sacrifice is too great. Jesus did not negotiate with the rich young ruler, and He will not negotiate with us either. Again the Scriptures state the cost:

*Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, **I will follow You wherever You go**." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but **the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head**." (Lk.9:57-58 NKJV)*

A Christian must have tunnel vision: they must be solely focused on Christ and totally committed to Him. Paul said it best:

But for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Php.1:21 KJV)

Christ denied Himself His God-ship and laid His life on the cross for us. He is now asking us to give up our lives to Him:

*And he died for all, so that **those who live might live no longer for themselves**, but for him who died and was raised for them.* (2Co.5:15 NRSV)

Many self-professed Christians live to please themselves and appease God; however, Christ is commanding us to live to please God:

*So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, **to please Him in all respects**, bearing fruit in **every** good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.* (Co.1:10 NASB)

Therefore, if you do not give over your life, you cannot be His disciple and will not go to heaven.

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

How does the decision to give ourselves to Christ affect our purpose for life? Many people attend college without asking God for wisdom about His intended purpose for their lives. God has saved you for a purpose:

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who **are called according to His purpose.*** (Ro.8:28 NASB)

Christ does not stop at your life; He asks for all your hopes and dreams to be placed at the cross and for you to embrace His purpose for your life:

*And **whoever does not carry their cross** and follow me **cannot be my disciple.*** (Lk.14:27 TNIV)

To understand what is meant by “their cross” we must grasp what the cross meant to Christ:

*Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save Me from this hour”? **But for this purpose I came to this hour.**”* (Jn.12:27 NKJV)

The cross was God’s specific purpose for Christ’s coming to earth. In turn, our cross is Christ’s specific purpose for our lives. Christ knew the pain He was going to endure, and yet, the Bible tells us:

*When **the days were approaching** for His ascension, **He was determined to go to Jerusalem.*** (Lk.9:51 NASB)

Jesus was determined to fulfill God’s purpose for His coming to earth regardless of the pain. We too must embrace God’s purpose for our lives no matter where it will lead:

God, who has saved us and called us** to a holy life--not because of anything we have done **but because of his own purpose and grace. (2Ti.1:9 NIV)

God’s purpose for your life is different than His purpose for my life, and yet, both are equally important to Christ:

*For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*** (Eph.2:10 NASB)

I cannot fulfill Christ’s purpose for your life because He has a specific purpose for my life. Each Christian must give up his own goals in life and consider Christ’s goals:

*Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." Jesus replied, "**No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.**"*

(Lk.9:61-62 TNIV)

Christ gave up His glory in heaven to come down to earth and endure the cross for us; He asks us to give up our dreams of self-glory to fulfill His purpose for our lives. Therefore, if you do not embrace God's purpose for your life, you cannot be His disciple, and do not have eternal life!

FOLLOW HIM

From the very first disciples, Jesus' call was simple, "Come follow Me."

*As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "**Come, follow me,**" Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." **At once they left their nets and followed him.** Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. **Jesus called them,** and **immediately they left the boat and their father** and followed him.*

(Mt.4:18-22 TNIV)

No matter what their station was in life, Jesus expected instant obedience from His disciples. Think of Matthew with his career in the Roman government:

*As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called **Matthew** sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "**Follow me.**" And **he got up and followed him.***

(Mt:9:9 NRSV)

Jesus does not hold two standards; His call is the same for us today—get up and follow Him:

*And **whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.***

(Lk.14:27 TNIV)

We, as Christians, are also called to follow Christ; this is different than taking up our cross:

*And **he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.** He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.*

(Mt.10:38-39 NKJV)

When I was a child, I played follow the leader. One child would be appointed leader, and the others needed to copy the leader's actions. To follow, we must look to our leader:

*That the world may know that I love the Father, **I do exactly as the Father commanded Me.*** (Jn.14:31 NASB Jn.15:10)

*And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for **I always do those things that please Him.*** (Jn.8:29 NKJV)

*For **I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.*** (Jn.12:49 NIV)

Christ's life could be summed up as instant, absolute obedience to the Father. Christ gave up equality with God and came to earth to assume a position of a son and to serve His Father in complete obedience:

*Just as **the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve**, and to give his life a ransom for many.* (Mt.20:28 NRSV)

Christ humbled Himself by being obedient to the Father. As Creator, Jesus also humbled Himself to serve His creation—man:

*Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so **that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.** When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "**He is out of his mind.**"* (Mk.3:20-21 TNIV)

Following Christ's example, we are to humble ourselves, being obedient to the Father as we serve our fellow man. We are not saved to enjoy an easy life; we are saved to serve God and our fellow man:

*But he that is greatest among you **shall be your servant.*** (Mt.23:11 KJV)

While "your cross" is God's specific purpose for your life, "to follow Him" is God's general will for all the people who constitute His church. His general will for His disciples is to live in obedience to the New Testament:

*Go **therefore and make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*** (Mt.28:19-20 NRSV)

What is excluded from everything? Nothing! We must obey everything the church is commanded in the New Testament. The New Testament is inspired by God; all of its instructions are given by the authority of Christ:

*Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know **what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*** (1Th.4:1-2 NIV)

Since the New Testament is written by the authority of Jesus Christ, Paul, as a disciple of Christ, writes:

*Follow my example, **as I follow the example of Christ.*** (1Co.11:1 TNIV)

Paul followed the example of Christ and was obedient to the commands of God. Christ was absolutely obedient to God. Christ commanded the universe into being, but He humbled Himself when He became a man. Like a servant, He was obedient in everything. All Christians, as they follow Christ, are called to humble themselves and be obedient to God in everything:

*This is how we know we are in him: **Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.*** (1Jn.2:5-6 NIV)

Therefore, if you do not follow Him in absolute, instant obedience, then you cannot be His disciple, and you do not possess eternal life!

*Such people **claim they know God, but they deny him by the way they live.** They are detestable and **disobedient.*** (Ti.1:16 NLT)

SALVATION IS A FREE GIFT

At this point, most people who are enjoying the wide road of salvation say, “Wait a minute; salvation is a free gift.” This is truth:

*For the wages of sin is death; but **the gift of God is eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Ro.6:23 KJV)

A gift is different than a wage. A wage is earned or deserved, while a gift is given, based on benevolence:

***For by grace you have been saved** through faith, and that not of yourselves; **it is the gift of God,** not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Eph.2:8-9 NKJV)

Most people do not realize that even though a gift is given free of charge, sometimes costs and obligations are incurred by receiving the gift. For example, if I give you a brand new sports car at no cost—it is a free gift. To receive this gift, all you have to do is sign on the dotted line, and it is

yours. The car is a gift, for you did not pay one cent to receive it. However, before you can drive that car, you need to take ownership of it:

- You need to pay for insurance.
- You need to fill the tank with gas.
- You need to drive responsibly; otherwise you will lose your license.
- You need to maintain it.
- You need to repair it when something breaks.

To forfeit any obligations associated with the car could eventually mean to forfeit the car itself. The car was free, but ownership obligates you to responsibilities. In the same way, salvation is a free gift; but Jesus said that there is a cost to the commitment:

*For which of you, intending to build a tower, does **not first sit down and estimate the cost**, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it **will begin to ridicule him**, saying, 'This fellow began to build and **was not able to finish**.'* (Lk.14:28-30 NRSV)

Jesus stresses the great importance of this point by giving a second illustration:

*Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will **not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough** with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or **else**, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and **asks for terms of peace**.* (Lk.14:31-32 NASB)

Christ is saying that to start something and yet not finish it is foolish. To only go part of the way is not good enough:

***You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God**, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. **And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.**" But **we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed**, but of those who believe and are saved.* (He.10:36-39 NIV)

We need to present the cost of Christianity to those who come to Christ so that they might make an informed choice. Getting a person to make a partial commitment is worthless:

For **if, after they have escaped** the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, **they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first.** For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, **after knowing it, to turn back** from the holy commandment that was passed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "The dog turns back to its own vomit," and, "The sow is washed only to wallow in the mud."
(2Pe.2:20-21 NRSV)

Heaven is free, but to commit our lives to Christ and not meet the cost is worse than if we had never made the commitment. Jesus was never vague about the cost of being His disciple. To be fair, we must also present the cost. Jesus asked the rich young ruler to sell everything, and the ruler walked sadly away from Jesus. Jesus does not have two standards; today He asks the same from all who want to follow Him:

*In the same way, **those of you who do not give up everything** you have **cannot be my disciple.***
(Lk.14:33 TNIV)

What is excluded in everything? Nothing! Christ gave up everything, even His own life, to save us. Now He is asking us to do the same for Him. The twelve disciples obeyed Christ:

*Peter began to say to him, "Look, **we have left everything** and followed you."*
(Mk.10:28 NRSV)

When Peter, James, and John were partners working as fishermen, they answered Jesus' call:

*When they had brought their boats to land, **they left everything** and followed Him.*
(Lk.5:11NASB)

When Levi was sitting in his tax collector booth, Jesus came and commanded him to follow Him, and Levi left everything behind:

*Levi got up, **left everything** and followed him.*
(Lk.5:28 TNIV)

Consider what Paul says on this matter:

*More than that, **I regard everything as loss** because of the **surpassing value of knowing Christ** Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered **the loss of all things**, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that **I may gain Christ and be found in him.***
(Php.3:8-9 NRSV)

Prior to this Scripture, Paul spoke of his previous religion of Judaism. Giving up everything includes the religion practiced prior to receiving Christ. God is a jealous God and will not tolerate unfaithfulness.

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? **What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?***

(2Co.6:14-16 NIV)

You cannot be a Christian and hold to your past religion. You do not add Christ to your life; you give up all other things to embrace Christ. God does not have two standards. Unless you give up everything, you cannot be His disciple—and only disciples go to heaven.

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

Today, many Christians are taught that they have a free choice. They make Christ Savior, yet they retain the right to make the final decision to obey Christ or to continue in their disobedience. These people cannot be Christ's disciples because they have not given up their lives and everything contained therein, taken up their cross, or followed Him. Like the rich ruler, Jesus is asking you to make a choice to obey Him. This will be the last choice you will ever make. For by making Christ your Lord, you have already answered every choice for the rest of your life. When I decided to make Christ "Lord," that was the last choice that I had to make. Even though there has been many opportunities to disobey Christ, disobedience for a Christian is not an option. Jesus said:

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; **then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.***

(Mt.13:44 NRSV)

Jesus is stressing that only those who are willing to give up all will enter the kingdom of heaven. He tells a second parable:

*"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, **went and sold all that he had and bought it.***

(Mt.13:45-46 NKJV)

If we are not willing to meet the cost, then our Christianity is a sham and will be treated by God as such. Many people call themselves Christian, but from Christ's perspective, they are not:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.' (Lk.14:34-35 NRSV)

Many self-professing Christians will be rejected by God when they stand before Him in judgment. Jesus ends His discourse on the cost of becoming a disciple with:

Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Lk.14:33-34 NIV)

Jesus likens Christianity to two roads, a wide road without commitment and a narrow road with full surrender:

*"Enter through the narrow gate. For **wide is the gate and broad is the road** that leads to **destruction**, and many enter through it. But **small is the gate and narrow the road** that leads to **life**, and only a few find it.* (Mt.7:13-14 TNIV)

Which road are you on? If you find yourself on the wide road, you can turn around and take the narrow road. One road leads to life, the other to destruction. Choose wisely, for this choice carries eternal consequences.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. What is God's minimum requirement for Christians?
2. Explain from God's perspective whether a nominal Christian exists?
3. Explain how becoming a Christian should affect your view on life?
4. Explain how becoming a Christian should affect your relationships?
5. What is your cross, and how are you to carry it?
6. What does it mean to follow Christ?
7. What things in your life have a higher priority than Christ?
8. Explain whether the cost of becoming a Christian is too high, and what other options are available?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

The Bible is

Day 1: Read the narrative of King Josiah, 2 Kings 22:1-23:3. What did you learn about Scripture?

Day 2: Read Psalm 119:1-24, 89-112. What did you learn about Scripture?

Day 3: Read the narrative of Jeremiah, Jeremiah 1. What did you learn about Scripture in regard to inspiration?

Day 4: Read the narrative of God questioning Job, Job 38:1-40:5. What did you learn about Scripture in regard to wisdom?

Day 5: Read the narrative of the temptation of Jesus, Matthew 4:1-11. What is a practical use for Scripture when we are tempted?

Day 6: Read the narrative of Jesus and the Pharisees, Mark 7:1-13. What is the difference between Scripture and the traditions of men?

Day 7: Read the parable of the builders, Matthew 7:21-27. What did you learn about Scripture?

Memory verse:

Learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written. "Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.

1Corinthians 4:6

LESSON 2

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

THE WORD OF GOD

God authored the Bible Himself because He did not desire man to remain in ignorance. God desired man to know His will so that they would have the opportunity to serve Him:

*All Scripture is **God-breathed** and is useful for **teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness**, so that the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped for every good work**. (2Ti.3:16-17NIV)*

The Bible is God-breathed; the very words came from God's mouth:

*We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that **when you received the word of God that you heard from us**, you accepted it not as a human word **but as what it really is, God's word**, which is also at work in you believers. (1Th.2:13 NRSV)*

Men did not necessarily hear the audible voice of God; they heard the inner voice of the Spirit within their hearts:

*But know this first of all, that no **prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation**, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, **but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God**. (2Pe.1:20-21 NASB)*

Those individuals who took dictation from God were so acutely aware of the Spirit's leading that they knew what was from God and what was from themselves. Paul, when answering the specific questions of the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7, differentiated between that which came from God and that which came from himself:

*To the married **I give this command—not I but the Lord**—that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest **I say—I and not the Lord**—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. (1Co.7:10-12 NRSV)*

The writers of the Scriptures were highly aware when their inspiration was from the Spirit of God. Hence, all the words contained within Scripture are from the eternal, unchangeable God:

*God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that **he should change his mind.*** (Nu 23:19 NIV; Ja.1:17; He.1:11-12; 1Sa.15:29)

Since God does not change, His words are as applicable to the church today as they were two thousand years ago:

*Heaven and earth shall pass away, **but my words shall not pass away.*** (Mt.24:35 KJV; 1Pe.1:25)

Jesus is not only referring to the words He spoke while He walked on earth, but He is also talking about all New Testament Scripture, which was written by His authority:

*For you know **what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*** (1Th.4:2 NASB)

The whole of Scripture is God's Word for His people. The Old Testament was written primarily for Israel. Through these Scriptures, Christians also learn about God's love and justice. However, the New Testament was specifically written for the direction of His church. To reject Scripture is to reject the dictates of God:

*Therefore **he who rejects this does not reject man, but God,** who has also given us His Holy Spirit.* (1Th.4: 8 NKJV)

Therefore, the New Testament is the timeless Word of God to His people for all matters of life and doctrine:

*Learn from us the meaning of the saying, "**Do not go beyond what is written.**" Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.* (1Co.4:6 NIV)

ILLUMINATING THE SINFULNESS OF MAN

Sin is disobedience to God's expressed commands. When Adam and Eve first sinned, their actions were in rebellion to God's authority. Rather than serve God in the garden, they sought to be like God by becoming masters of their own destiny. For Satan said:

*Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it **your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**" So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a*

tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. (Ge.3:5-6 NKJV)

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God through disobedience, they dishonored Him. Consequently, God banished them from the garden, into the world. For four thousand years after the fall, man lived a life separate from God because of their sin. The Old Testament contrasts the nature of God with the rebellious nature of Israel. The Scriptures teach who God is and what He required of Israel, in order to expose the nature of man's hearts. Similar to Israel, many people, including church-goers, are ignorant of God's will because they are ignorant of His Word:

Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God--I say this to your shame. (1Co.15:34 NIV)

The Old Testament does not directly apply to the New Testament church because it was written for the nation of Israel which was under the covenant of Law. However, the Old Testament teaches us about God, His moral absolutes, and His reaction to sin; it describes His historical relationship with man:

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Ro 15:4 NIV; 1Co.10:11)

The Old Testament instructs us, but observance of its laws is powerless to enable man to live a life pleasing to God and to secure eternal life:

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. (Jn.5:39-40 NKJV)

No one who died under the Old Testament entered heaven by keeping the Law. Nor could the Old Testament practices remove the penalty for our sin or restore our relationship with God:

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (He.11:39-40 TNIV)

The Jews studied the Scriptures in the hope that their knowledge would lead to God. They could not understand that the purpose of the Old Testament Law was to convict mankind that they were sinners:

*Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so **that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.** For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, **for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.*** (Ro.3:19-20 NRSV)

Israel's attempts to live a life favorable to God failed. Even David, who had a heart that sought after God, lied, committed adultery, and murder. We are convicted that we are sinners by both the historical record of the Old Testament and by our own experience of failing to keep God's Law. Once we know our need, we can then seek the solution—God's Savior. He alone can restore His honor and save us from our sin:

*So **the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.** Now that faith has come, **we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*** (Ga.3:24-25 NIV)

The Law does not save us but establishes our need. Only Christ can save us. Once we accept Christ, the Law becomes obsolete. Through Christ, we are reconciled with God and live by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Only through Christ has the purpose for the Law and the prophecies of the Old Testament been fulfilled:

*Do not think that I came to destroy **the Law or the Prophets.** I did not come to destroy **but to fulfill.*** (Mt 5:17 NKJV)

Therefore, the Old Testament teaches us about God, man, and sin, convincing us that we are sinners who need a Savior.

RELEVANT FOR TODAY

A person does not become a Christian by the human process of weighing out the facts and making a cognitive decision. Accepting the truth about Christ has a spiritual dynamic. The Holy Spirit works within a person, convicting his heart:

*For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because **our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.*** (1Th.1:4-5 TNIV)

The Gospel came not merely as words which were spoken or written on a page, but the Gospel also came with power and conviction through the Holy Spirit. Our acceptance of the truth of Christ is an acceptance of Christ Himself. His Words contain life which gives birth to our spirits, and thus, we are born again:

You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

(1Pe.1:23 NRSV ; Ja.1:18)

The New Testament Scripture is different than that of the Old Testament. We can learn truths from the Old Testament, but the New Testament Scriptures teach us that truth came with Christ:

*For the law was given through Moses, but **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.***

(Jn.1:17 NKJV)

Truth is eternal. It never ceases to be true in principle; hence, truth cannot become obsolete. The Old Testament was written in the context of the first covenant, which could not give freedom to mankind. When Christ came, the old covenant became obsolete:

*By calling **this covenant "new,"** he has made **the first one obsolete;** and what **is obsolete** and ageing will soon disappear.*

(He.8:13 NIV)

Christ ushered in the new covenant which is eternal, based on truth which will not change. Only through the truth that is found in Christ can Israel be free from their sins:

*For this reason **Christ is the mediator of a new covenant,** that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—**now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.***

(He.9:15 NIV)

Israel's experience was one of hopeless defeat, but Christ came to grant them the truth which would free them:

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you **hold to my teaching,** you are really my disciples. Then **you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**"*

(Jn.8:31-32 TNIV)

The New Testament truth enables people to live in holiness:

*Make them **holy by your truth;** teach them **your word, which is truth.***

(Jn.17:17 NLT)

The New Testament is not just God's will for the church, but it is also truth that gives life to His church. God revealed Himself in Christ; and in the New Testament, He also reveals Himself to the church. Both the Word and Christ are truth:

*Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life.**"*

(Jn.14:6 NKJV)

Jesus is the truth, the living and eternal Word of God. Those who walked with Jesus and observed His actions experienced the living and

eternal Word of God, and we can experience this same Word today by reading the New Testament. John writes:

*In the beginning was **the Word**, and the **Word was with God**, and the **Word was God**. He was in the beginning with God. **All things came into being by Him**, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.* (Jn.1:1-3 NASB)

When God spoke the world into being, the living Word of God created everything. Both the written Word and the living Word are God's revelation to man. We cannot separate the person of Christ from the Word of God:

*That which was from the beginning, which we **have heard**, which we **have seen** with our eyes, which we **have looked** at and our hands **have touched**—this we **proclaim concerning the Word of life**.* (1Jn.1:1 NIV; Jn.1:14)

The Word of God is not simply words written on a piece of parchment; the Word of God is Christ Himself:

***For the word of God is living and active**. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; **it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart**.* (He.4:12 TNIV)

The living Word is active, for He continues to speak into our lives. We are born again as infants, and Christ causes us to grow to maturity. Christ, the living Word, empowers the written Word:

*Like newborn babes, **long for the pure milk of the word**, that **by it you may grow in respect to salvation**,* (1Pe.2:2-3 NASB)

The Word enables us to grow because it is dynamic. The association between the written Word and the living Word causes the Scriptures to be as applicable today as they were two thousand years ago. For neither the written Word nor the living Word has changed:

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. (He.13:8 KJV)

To make the statement that the New Testament does not apply in today's culture causes a separation between the living Word and the written Word. This renders the Word powerless:

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "**If you hold to my **teaching**, you are really my disciples. Then **you will know the truth**, and the truth will set you free."*** (Jn.8:31-32 TNIV)

If the church denies the inspiration of the New Testament, then its words will be reduced to lifelessness, similar to the many novels authored by man. The Scripture is inspired by the living Word of God:

*We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that **when you received the word of God that you heard from us**, you accepted it not as a human word but **as what it really is, God's word**, which is also at work in you believers.* (1Th.2:13 NRSV)

The living Word of God is at work in the church. The written Word was given by the authority of the living Word—Jesus. To reject any part of the written Word is to return to the rebellion of our first forefather:

*Finally, brothers, **we instructed you how to live in order to please God**, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know **what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus**.* (1Th.4:1-2 NIV)

The New Testament is calling us to fulfill the living Word's will for the church. Even though many letters were written to specific churches which had specific problems, the solutions given are not culturally specific. Scripture calls all cultures to God's universal, eternal truth—a heavenly standard. For this reason, the letters were shared among all the New Testament churches:

*And when this letter has been read among you, have **it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea**.* (Co.4:16 NRSV)

The universality of the New Testament as absolute truth is clearly seen in the letter to the Corinthians:

*He will remind you of **my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church**.* (1Co.4:17 NASB)

***This is my rule in all the churches**.* (1Co 7:17 NRSV)

As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches., (1Co.14:33 NRSV)

***But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God**.* (1Co.11:16 NASB)

If the letters were culturally specific, we would find conflicting teachings amongst the various letters. However, the New Testament never contradicts itself; for the written Word is universal truth and, therefore, does not change. Consider Paul's charge to the Thessalonians:

*In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to **keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.***

(2Th.3:6 TNIV; note 14-15)

Today, many Christians reject parts of God's written Word and classify them as merely Paul's writings. However, Peter writes:

*Just as our dear brother **Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.** **He writes** the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. **His letters contain some things that are hard to understand,** which ignorant and unstable people distort, **as they do the other Scriptures,** to their own destruction.* (2Pe.3:15-16 NIV)

Peter declares that Paul wrote while inspired by God, which equates Paul's letters to the rest of the Scriptures. Therefore, the whole of the New Testament is the Word of God, which was given to the church so that the Living Word could transform our lives.

OBEDIENCE: OUR APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

Many church-goers can tell you many Bible stories. Some can even quote entire books of the Bible from memory. Yet many do not realize that Satan knows the Scriptures as well; in fact, Satan can quote the Scriptures better than we can. Consider when Satan tempted Christ:

*If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: '**He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'*** (Mt 4:6 NKJV)

Even though Satan knows the Scriptures, he persists in his rebellion toward God. To know and memorize Scripture is good, but if we do not apply Scripture to our lives, we profit nothing. The difference between knowledge and wisdom is that knowledge understands but wisdom puts the understanding into practice. What you know is not important; what you do with what you know is important. Knowledge alone is stagnant; wisdom is dynamic:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (Ja.1:22 TNIV)

To **know about** God is not enough; we must **know Him**, the living Word. I know about President Obama; I know about Tom Cruise; I know about Tiger Woods. Often one of them is mentioned in the

newspaper, but I cannot personally address any of them. There is a difference between knowing about people and knowing them:

*We know that **we have come to know him if we keep his commands.** Those who say, “**I know him,**” but do not do what he commands are **liars**, and the truth is not in them. **But if anyone obeys his word**, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: **Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.***

(1Jn.2:3-6 TNIV)

To know God is to obey God. Our knowledge must go beyond an intellectual exercise; our knowledge must also have an appropriate response. Faith in God’s Word produces an appropriate response:

They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

(Ti.1:15 NKJV)

To claim to know God means nothing if our actions are not altered according to that knowledge. People who know about God yet continue in disobedience will go to hell with the demons:

*He will punish **those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.** They will be **punished with everlasting destruction** and shut out from the presence of the Lord.* (2Th.1:8-9 NIV)

Two kinds of faith exist. One is a stagnant faith, which merely acknowledges something as truth—as a statement of faith. The other is a dynamic faith, in which knowledge causes a change of action in accordance to what is held as truth. Jesus said:

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’ (Mt.7:21-23 NRSV)

Lip service, “Lord, Lord,” means nothing; only he who does the will of the Father will enter heaven. An acknowledgement of something as truth is no substitute for an application of the truth in our lives. Satan and his demons lived in the presence of God. They were present at the creation of the world. Some were even at Christ’s death and resurrection. They know the face of God; however, they spend every moment plotting against Him and His people:

*You believe that there is one God. You do well. **Even the demons believe — and tremble!*** (Ja.2:19 NKJV)

The demons believe that God exists but lack an appropriate response. They continue in their disobedience—for which they will receive hell. If we continue in a demonic faith, our end will be the same as theirs. The truth is that faith without an appropriate response is dead. Our faith must go beyond mere beliefism. If there is no appropriate response to what we claim to believe, then from God's perspective we really do not believe!

*In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.** ... You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and **his faith was made complete by what he did...** You see that a person is **justified by what he does** and not by faith alone... As the body without the spirit is dead, **so faith without deeds is dead.*** (Ja.2:17,22,24,&26 NIV)

As parents, we would not allow our children the luxury of blatant disobedience that some church-goers show toward God. And yet we think that God, our heavenly Father, will tolerate disobedience from us, His children. Jesus asked:

"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Lk.6:46 NASB)

You can tell me that you believe in Christ, but I can tell you what you believe by your actions. We confirm what we truly believe when our actions are altered according to our words. Belief in a truth always alters one's actions in an appropriate response, according to that truth:

*Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles **to the obedience that comes from faith.*** (Ro.1:5 NIV)

To say that people believe in Christ or to say that they became obedient to Christ is the same:

*And the word of God kept on spreading; and **the number of the disciples continued to increase** greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests **were becoming obedient to the faith.*** (Ac.6:7 NASB)

Our obedience is the only appropriate response to a saving faith in Christ. So many church-goers think that they can be saved apart from their actions. Yet we read:

*Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, **he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*** (He.5:8-9 NRSV)

We can either say that we believe in Christ or that we obey Him; for a saving faith will always be accompanied by obedience. Many people would say, “But you don’t understand. We love Jesus, and the demons don’t.” Can you love your parents and not obey them? Or is our obedience a true indicator of our love? Jesus said:

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.” (Jn.14:23-24 NKJV)

Many verses tie our love for God to an appropriate response of obedience toward God:

*In fact, **this is love for God: to keep his commands.*** (1Jn.5:3 TNIV)

If anything keeps us from obeying the Scriptures, then we love that thing more than we love God. To love something more than Christ is idolatry!

*And **this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands.** As you have heard from the beginning, **his command is that you walk in love.*** (2Jn.1:6 NIV)

The truth is, if we love God, we will obey Him. In this lesson, we looked at believing God, knowing God, and loving God; and in every case, the appropriate response was obedience. Therefore, obedience is not optional in the Christian life.

DISOBEDIENCE EQUATES UNBELIEF

In many churches and from many platforms, “free choice” is preached—“I don’t have to do it if I don’t want to; I have the right to choose to refuse to obey God.” Many Christians do not realize that the first sin was a sin of disobedience to the command of God, which was a rejection of His authority:

*For as **by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners,** so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.* (Ro.5:19 NKJV)

Disobedience to the first command had eternal consequences, and our disobedience to the commands of Christ has eternal consequences as

well. The Bible states that a direct relationship between belief and obedience exists. Consider the Greek word “apeitheo.” Scripture uses this word 16 times. In the KJV, it is translated as follows: believe not—8 times; disobedient—4 times; obey—3 times; unbelieving—1 time. The concept of disobedience equating to not believing is clearly seen in Scripture:

*To you then who believe, he is precious; but **for those who do not believe**, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,” and “A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.” **They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.*** (1Pe.2:7-8 NRSV)

Not only can “not believe” and “disobey” be used interchangeably as in the previous verses, but other Scriptures tie these two concepts together as well:

*To the pure all things are pure, but **to the corrupt and unbelieving** nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted. **They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions.** They are detestable, **disobedient**, unfit for any good work.* (Tit.1:15-16 NRSV)

If we believe God, we will obey Him. If we claim to believe Him yet disobey Him, our actions are incongruent with our words. For the Bible speaks of disobedience as a past way of life:

*As for you, you **were** dead in your transgressions and sins, **in which you used to live** when you ***followed*** the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit ***who is now at work in those who are disobedient***. All of us also lived among them at **one time**, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, **we were** by nature objects of wrath.*

(Eph.2:1-3 NIV)

We can say that God’s wrath comes upon those who do not believe in Christ, or we can equally say that God’s wrath comes upon those who are disobedient:

For this you know with certainty**, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has ***an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things ***the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience***.* (Eph.5:5-6 NASB)

No matter how one might say it, those who are referred to as disobedient are equated to the unsaved. The Bible questions the eternal fate of those who continue to disobey the Scriptures:

*For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what **will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?** And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?* (1Pe.4:17-18 NASB)

The Word of God is not to be studied like a textbook; rather, it is to be obeyed. Therefore, to disobey the Word of God is equated to unbelief; and the penalty is the wrath of God, which will come upon those who are unsaved:

*If we **deliberately keep on sinning** after we have received the knowledge of the truth, **no sacrifice for sins is left**, but only a fearful **expectation of judgment and of raging fire** that will consume the enemies of God.* (He.10:26-27 TNIV)

THE MEASURE OF MAN AND MINISTRY

The Christian life is not about rules but about a relationship with Christ. As you read the Scriptures, do you feel the Holy Spirit drawing your attention to a certain verse which you need to apply in your life? The New Testament is not a new rule book:

*But now we have been **released from the Law**, having died to that by which we were bound, so that **we serve in newness of the Spirit** and not in oldness of **the letter**.* (Ro.7:6 NASB)

Christians live by the living Word, which agrees with the written Word. Do not read the Scripture like you read the latest novel. Take time to pray and talk to God about how He wants you to incorporate Scripture into your life. The living Word applies the written Word to situations that we face every day:

*You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written **not with ink** but with **the Spirit of the living God**, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of **human hearts**.* (2Co.3:3 TNIV)

We need the living Word to understand the written Word, and we need the written Word to discern the voice of the living Word:

Test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. (1Th.5:21-22 NRSV)

We must test everything by God's standard. The Bible commands us to test even ourselves:

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you — **unless indeed you fail the test?** (2Co.13:5 NASB)

You can fail the test. Do you want to wait until you die and stand before God to find that you have failed the test and cannot alter your fate? Or do you want to find out now while you can still make changes? What is this test? To find the test, we need to go to the beginning of the book of 2 Corinthians:

*I wrote for this reason: to test you and to know whether you **are obedient in everything.*** (2Co.2:9 NRSV)

What is excluded from everything? Nothing! Obedience to the living Word as revealed in His written Word is God's minimum standard for the church. If we are not obedient in everything, we have failed the test and do not have a saving faith. When Jesus gave His commission to the apostles, He commanded them:

*Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything** I have commanded you.* (Mt.28:19-20 TNIV)

The test of a Christian is based on Christ's commission to His disciples: to be obedient in everything. Are you trying to appease God? Or are you striving to please God? Even though we will never be perfect, Christians strive to please God:

*Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, **let us purify ourselves from everything** that contaminates body and spirit, **perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*** (2Co 7:1 TNIV)

We need to believe the Word of God; and we also need to have an appropriate response of obedience to the living Word of God. Obedience to God's Word is not only the test of each person but also the test of every ministry and every mission. Did you pass His test?

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. Explain whether the Bible, as written in the original language, contains error?
2. Explain how the Old Testament applies to Christians?
3. What relationship exists between the written Word and the living Word?
4. Explain whether the Bible is written to a specific culture, for a specific time period, or for neither?
5. Explain whether any parts of the Bible are not inspired by God?
6. How is knowing, believing, and loving God directly related to our obedience?
7. What is the relationship between disobedience and unbelief?
8. What is the test of being a Christian?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Without Christ, the moral condition of mankind is

Day 1: Read the narrative of Cain, Genesis 4:1-16. What did you learn about man before Christ?

Day 2: Read the summary of man before the flood, Genesis 6:1-8. What did you learn about man before Christ?

Day 3: Read the narrative of Solomon, 1 Kings 11:1-13. What did you learn about man before Christ?

Day 4: Read the narrative of Israel's captivity, 2 Kings 17:1-23. What did you learn about man without Christ?

Day 5: Read the narrative of Judah's captivity, 2 Chronicles 36:11-21. What did you learn about man under the Law?

Day 6: Read God's summary of man, Romans 3:9-20. What did you learn about man without Christ?

Day 7: Read Paul's life under the Law, Romans 7:7-25. What did you learn about man under the Law?

MEMORY VERSE:

But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin.

(Galatians 3:22)

LESSON 3

MAN: THE WEAKEST LINK

A UNIQUE CREATION

God created man on the sixth day of creation. He created man different from the animals, for man was created in God's image and God's likeness:

*Then God said, "Let Us make man **in Our image, according to Our likeness**; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man **in His own image, in the image of God He created him**; male and female He created them.* (Ge.1:26-27 NASB)

Image and likeness are different. Man was created in the image of God; image has to do with the physical appearance—"in the image of God He create **him**"—masculine, singular pronoun. God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures refer to Them all with masculine pronouns. Jesus became a man, Who is the image of God:

*In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of **Christ, who is the image of God**.* (2Co.4:4 NRSV; Co.1:15)

The Bible teaches that all men contain the image of God:

*This is the written account of Adam's line. When **God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them.** And when they were created, he called them "man." When Adam had lived 130 years, **he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image**; and he named him Seth.*

(Ge.5:1-3NIV)

Likeness, on the other hand, means "similar"; God and mankind, men and women, are tri-unities. God exists in three parts: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

*And when **Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water**, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw **the Spirit of God descending like a dove** and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."* (Mt.3:16-17 NRSV)

When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit descended, and the voice of the Father spoke from heaven—all three were in different locations at the same time. We find further proof in Romans when the terms “God’s Spirit” and “Christ’s Spirit” are used interchangeably:

*You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if **the Spirit of God** lives in you. And if anyone does not have **the Spirit of Christ**, he does not belong to Christ.* (Ro.8:9 NIV)

God is one Being existing in three persons. Being is what He is, and person is who He is. While God is an infinite complexity, man is a finite simplicity, because he is **only** made in the likeness of God. When God created man on the sixth day, He made him in His likeness—one being consisting of three distinct parts:

*And the LORD God **formed man of the dust of the ground**, and **breathed** into his nostrils **the breath of life**; and man **became a living soul**.* (Ge.2:7 KJV)

God took dirt and formed a body, breathed into it a spirit, and man became a living soul. Man is body, soul, and spirit:

*Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may **your whole spirit and soul and body** be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.* (1Th.5:23 NLT)

Both men and women have a body, soul, and spirit. Our spirit gives us life:

*For **as the body without the spirit is dead**, so faith without works is dead also.* (Ja.2:26 KJV; Ps.104:29)

Since our spirit was given to us by the breath of God, it is eternal. This means that our spirit cannot die but will return to God after our physical death:

*The dust returns to the earth as it was, and **the breath returns to God who gave it**.* (Ec.12:7 NRSV; Job 34:14-15)

Since our spirit is eternal, the question “Will we live eternally” changes to “Where will we spend eternity.” God made us in His image and likeness. The third aspect of God, the knowledge of God, was stolen by man in the fall. God commanded man not to eat of one tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but **from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat**, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."* (Ge.2:16-17 NASB)

Mankind gained the knowledge of good and evil by Satan presenting Eve with the choice to disobey God. This happened before Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree. They had to know what evil was before they could be tempted to sin. The knowledge of good and evil made mankind more like God, but it also made them contrary to God, which held serious consequences:

*Then the LORD God said, "See, the **man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil**."* (Ge.3:22 NRSV)

When man gained the knowledge of God, he became hopelessly controlled by sin. For when man gained the knowledge of God, he could not control the evil he now knew because he lacked the character of God—His holiness. God’s knowledge of evil does not lead Him to enact evil because He is holy in nature. God’s holiness prevents Him from being evil in thought, word, or deed. When man gained the knowledge of God apart from the holy nature of God, the sinful nature in man was given birth. Mankind did not receive God’s divine nature until after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon man:

*Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them **you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature**.* (2Pe.1:4 NRSV)

Only after Christ rose from the dead, could we share in the divine nature, which enabled man to know evil yet live above it. Therefore, the sinful nature was created when man gained the knowledge of God apart from the holy nature of God. This event caused the knowledge of evil to control mankind.

MAN WAS CREATED INNOCENT

The first sin ever committed was by Eve in the Garden of Eden. God only gave Adam and Eve one command:

*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but **of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.**"* (Ge.2:16-17 NKJV)

God created all things but only reserved one tree for Himself; mankind was free to eat of all the other trees. There was nothing intrinsically evil with the fruit of the forbidden tree. For example, a mother may tell her child, "You cannot have a cookie before supper." Eating a cookie was not a sin until the mother commanded him not to eat one. After dinner, however, the Mother told the child that he could have two cookies. The cookies were not harmful or evil, but to eat when commanded not to eat would be disobedience—sin. When man ate that which God commanded him not to, he sinned through his disobedience. Mankind fully understood the command and the consequences for disobedience:

*The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, '**You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.**'"* (Ge.3:2-3 NIV)

In Eve's response, we need to notice her description, or rather lack of description of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was some nondescript tree in the middle of the garden, that is, until Satan removed her innocence. Satan taught Eve a reason to disobey God—to become like God:

*But the serpent said to the woman, "**You will not die;** for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**"* (Ge.3:4-5 NRSV)

Satan tempted Eve with the opportunity to become like God—master of her own destiny—through the eating of the forbidden fruit. However, notice the change that takes place in Eve's perception of the fruit after Satan tempted her:

*When the woman **saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise**, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.* (Ge.3:6 NASB)

Satan only tempted Eve by saying that the fruit was desirable for gaining wisdom. However, from within Eve, she not only saw the fruit as pleasing to the eye; but she also concluded it was good for food. Through Eve's loss of innocence—gaining the knowledge of evil—a new desire came alive in her that had not existed prior to the conversation. Through the knowledge of choice, her sinful nature came alive, causing her to lust after the fruit and rationalize why she should eat it:

*Each one is tempted when he is drawn away **by his own desires** and enticed. Then, **when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin**; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.* (Ja.1:14-15 NKJV)

After Eve desired the fruit and ate of it, death came into the world. Since Eve, by her own evil desire, was dragged away and enticed by the appearance of the fruit, she had both the knowledge of good and evil and a sinful nature prior to eating the fruit. Neither was the result of eating the fruit. Eating the forbidden fruit did not give Eve the knowledge of good and evil; rather, **Satan did** through the presentation of the choice. Eating the forbidden fruit was only the proof that such knowledge had been attained:

*Then the LORD God said, "See, **the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.**"* (Ge.3:22 NRSV)

Nowhere does the Bible record that the holy nature of God was imparted to mankind when he was created. The Bible teaches us that God looked on all that He created and considered all that He had made good:

*God saw **all** that he had made, and **it was very good**. And there was evening, and there was morning— the sixth day.* (Ge.1:31 NIV)

Man was considered "good" at the time of creation. This does not mean that man shared the holy nature of God. Rather, man had not sinned at that point in time and was found to be without fault. Even Satan was created good by the sixth day of creation but later rebelled against God. For example, my wife may make cookies that are very good on the day she bakes them, but four weeks later, they may have become very bad. The fact that God declared everything He created as good on the sixth day was merely a statement about the condition of the world at that time—void of evil. Hence, mankind was created in innocence, without the knowledge of sin or the concept of choice:

*And the man and his wife **were both naked and were not ashamed.***

(Ge.2:25 NASB)

Adam and Eve were innocent, similar to an infant boy and girl. Both children can be naked in the bathtub without experiencing lust. Babies are not perfect but innocent; they are without the knowledge of evil:

*Surely I was **sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.***

(Ps.51:5 NIV)

All babies are born in sin yet innocent of what sin is. They have the desire to do evil without the knowledge of what evil actually is. Even at a very young age, if we want a baby to lie on his back to change his diaper, he will try to roll over. As he grows older, his innocence is removed through the attaining of knowledge; and sin begins to manifest itself in his life. When Adam and Eve gained the knowledge of good and evil, their perception changed:

*At that moment **their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness.** So they sewed fig leaves together **to cover themselves.***

(Ge.3:7 NLT)

Satan did not teach them that they were naked, but once they attained the knowledge of evil, their worldview changed into a life-long series of choices to do evil. Consequently, their nakedness was now perceived through lust, which made them feel uncomfortable; hence, they felt the need to cover themselves. Therefore, mankind was created good, for they had not yet committed a sin. However, they were neither created morally neutral nor perfect in nature but were good by virtue of their innocence. Once they lost their innocence, they became sinners:

*And Adam was not the one deceived; **it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.***

(1Ti.2:14 NIV)

"SIN" AS A POWER CAME INTO THE WORLD

Once Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, the power of sin came into the world:

*Therefore, **just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned--for before the law was given, sin was in the world.***

(Ro.5:12-13 NIV)

The power of sin incites man's sinful nature to rebel against God. When Adam and Eve realized that a command is a choice, sin sprang to life; sin

became a power that controls all of mankind. God gave Moses the Law, giving sin an even greater power over an Israelite's life:

*The sting of death is sin, and **the power of sin is the law.***

(1Co.15:56 NRSV)

The power of sin is the Law, for the Law reveals God's will and forces man to make a choice. Sin responds to the Law by inciting rebellion and proposing the opposite of God's commands. Sin interprets the command "Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" as "God is withholding that beautiful and delicious fruit because He does not want us to become like Him." Consider the principle of the power of sin in the following example. While visiting a farm, a father told his son, "I do not want you to leave the barnyard. There is a big and very deep fish pond in the center of the farm, and I don't want you to go near it for fear that you will drown." The knowledge given about the pond through the command created allurements and generated a power to sin. If the father did not speak about the pond, the son would not have been drawn to that part of the farm. The information led to temptation, subjecting the son to the power of sin. While ignorance/innocence of the pond would not have kept the son from the pond, it would have kept him from being drawn by sin's power. In the same way, sin gained power over mankind through God's command because a command is perceived as a choice. Through Adam, mankind learned that they do not have to obey God but instead have the freedom to choose. The concept of a choice to obey or disobey God became the power of sin which controlled man:

For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

(Ro.7:11 NRSV)

Paul states that before he was saved sin **seized** him, **deceived** him, and **killed** him. The Bible presents sin as more than an action. Sin takes control and has an imposing affect on people's lives. God's Law is good and upholds His standard, but the Law also presents man with the opportunity to choose disobedience. Many people are actively doing what God forbids because sin has power over their lives. They cannot stop the evil even though they hate those actions. Before Christ, Paul could not bring to completion the good that he knew, and he could not discontinue the evil that he despised:

*For I know that **nothing good dwells within me**, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, **but I cannot do it**. For I do not do the good I want, **but the evil I do not want** is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is **no longer I** that do it, **but sin that dwells within me**.*

(Ro.7:14-17 NRSV)

Before Paul received the Holy Spirit, sin controlled him, causing him to do the opposite of what he wanted. Our very first forefather Adam sold mankind into slavery to sin when he ate the forbidden fruit. After mankind ate the forbidden fruit, mankind naturally gravitated away from God's intended purpose and order for creation. The Bible clearly teaches that once Adam and Eve sinned, this mindset not only affected them but their children as well. Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. God warned Cain of the power of sin:

*Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, **sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it**.*

(Ge.4:6-7 TNIV)

The choice to disobey God is not freedom; it has consequences. Each subsequent time we disobey God, disobedience becomes easier, allowing sin to gain greater control as master of our lives. Even after God had warned Cain about sin's design for man, Cain continued to yield to it:

*Cain said to his brother Abel, "**Let us go out to the field.**" And when they were in the field, **Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.***

(Ge.4:8 NRSV)

By killing Abel, Cain proved that he was mastered by sin, just as sin has mastered each one of us from birth. Man's inability to conquer sin's control of their hearts caused the world to be destroyed by the flood. God summarized society before the flood:

*The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that **every inclination** of the thoughts of his heart was **only evil all the time**. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.*

(Ge.6:5-6 NIV)

Sin had total control over mankind. After eating the fruit, mankind knew that obedience to God was optional and not a prerequisite for physical life. As long as mankind perceives that they have the choice to disobey God—they will be controlled by sin:

*For when **we were controlled by the sinful nature**, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that **we bore fruit for death**.* (Ro.7:5 NIV)

Before becoming Christians, we were controlled by sin. Our choice became a reaction to a higher power that undetectably worked in our being, leading us to rebel against God:

*For **the sinful nature is always** hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why **those who are still under the control of their sinful nature** can never please God.* (Ro.8:8 NLT)

We all were part of those who displeased God. Paul, in the New Testament, states that all mankind apart from Christ are under sin:

*What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that **both Jews and Greeks are all under sin**; as it is written, "**there is none righteous, not even one**; there is **none who understands**, there is **none who seeks** for God; **all have turned aside**, together they have become useless; there is **none who does good**, there is **not even one**." (Ro.3:9-12 NASB)*

Notice all the inclusives: all, no one, not even one—no exceptions. Romans 7 carries this hopeless theme when Paul describes his life apart from Christ, under the Law:

*But **sin, taking opportunity** through the commandment, **produced in me** coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law **sin is dead**. **I was once alive** apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, **sin became alive and I died**; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result **in death for me**.* (Ro.7:8-10 NASB)

In the previous Scriptures, sin is taking opportunity, producing evil, and in the end, putting Paul to death. Once I worked with a friend's brother. Every day he came to work smelling of beer, often unable to do his job. I mentioned to my friend that his brother had a drinking problem. His response was: "No, he just likes beer." Some deny that mankind is controlled by sin; they think they choose sin because of their preference. Jesus said:

*"Very truly, I tell you, **everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin**.*

(Jn.8:34 NRSV)

Mankind was not only deceived into thinking that they chose sin, but they were unaware that they themselves were enslaved to it:

*For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, **deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures**, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.* (Ti.3:3 NASB)

We are deceived into thinking that we always do what we want; our slavery is only revealed when we try to stop. Paul, before Christ, describes his life of trying to live by the Law:

*I don't really understand myself, **for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.** But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good.* (Ro.7:14-17 NLT)

Paul, as a Jew, lived by the Law. The Law said, “Do not touch!” Suddenly, sin’s power of allurements became evident in his life. Notice that Paul was not able to do the good he wanted but consistently did the evil he did not want to do. My brother started smoking at a young age. He always insisted that he smoked when he wanted to, denying that he was addicted. One day, he decided to stop; suddenly, he found that he could not stop—cigarettes controlled him. It is the same with sin; as long as we yield to temptation, we think we are in control, doing what we want. The moment we try to stop, we realize sin’s power and control. In this way, the world does not perceive the power of sin, for they deal with temptation by yielding to the urge. By always yielding, they never come to the realization that sin manipulates what they feel. Hence, prior to Christ, sin was our master; and we unknowingly served it as its slave:

*They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; **for people are slaves to whatever masters them.*** (2Pe.2:19 NRSV)

Mankind always thinks that they are the ones who choose to sin—but in reality, it is sin that controls them. King Solomon summarized his experience with sin when praying:

When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin). (1Ki.8:46 NKJV)

“When they sin” indicates the helplessness of mankind trying to attain the Law by their own effort. They do not recognize the power of sin:

*The Scriptures declares that **the whole world is a prisoner to sin.*** (Ga.3:22 NIV)

All of us at one time lived as a prisoner to sin, being controlled by our sinful nature; our actions reflected the sin which controlled our hearts:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that **those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

(Ga.5:19-21 NIV)

Our nature's inclination to sin caused us to rebel against God and His will for man. No one born of Adam escapes this fate:

All of us once lived among them in the **passions of our flesh**, following the **desires of flesh and senses**, and **we were by nature** children of wrath, like everyone else.

(Eph.2:3 NRSV)

Some Christians do not like the concept that we **were** controlled by sin, that our nature **was** bent on sin; but the Bible teaches that we **were**:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. **The mind of sinful man is death**, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; **the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.** **Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.**

(Ro.8:5-8 NIV)

Before Christ, Paul's nature was controlled by sin. Sin always prevented him from doing that which he wanted and coerced him to do the evil he did not want to do:

And I know that **nothing good lives in me**, that is, **in my sinful nature**. I want to do what is right, **but I can't**. I want to do what is good, **but I don't**. I don't want to do what is wrong, **but I do it anyway**. But if I do **what I don't want to do**, I am not really the one doing wrong; **it is sin living in me that does it.**

(Ro.7:18-20 NLT)

Under the Law, sin controlled Paul's heart, and he could not overcome its power. The Law could not help us overcome the power of sin because the Law relied on man's will to obey. Since man had a sinful nature, he always was enslaved by sin's power:

The law of Moses was unable to save us because **of the weakness of our sinful nature**. So **God did what the law could not do**. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body **God declared an end to sin's control over us** by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

(Ro.8:3 NLT)

Our sinful nature is bent on sin. As long as it remains in control, it causes us to be powerless. In order to be saved, our sinful nature must be destroyed :

*You must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan **so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved** on the day the Lord returns.* (1Co.5:4-5 NIV)

We never do what we want, but rather, we follow whatever controls our hearts—sin from birth or the Spirit through rebirth:

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (Ga.5:16-17 NIV)

The problem with man is not his actions; his actions are but the symptoms of a life controlled by sin. Our hearts being controlled by sin is what sends us to hell; our actions are just the evidence of that control. Therefore, all mankind is born with a sin nature, one that rebels against God and causes us to disregard the Bible's teachings:

*Indeed, there is **not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.*** (Ec.7:20 NASB)

ALL ARE GUILTY OF SIN

In conclusion, we must understand how God perceives us. Romans states it simply:

*For there is no difference; **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** (Ro.3:22-23 NKJV)

Which of Adam's descendants is excluded from all?

*We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are **all under the power of sin**. As it is written: "There is **no one** righteous, **not even one**; there is **no one** who understands; there is **no one** who seeks God. **All** have turned away, **they have together** become worthless; there is **no one** who does good, **not even one.**"* (Ro.3:9-12 TNIV)

You may deny your slavery to sin, but that will not change your situation:

*If we say that **we have not sinned**, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.* (1Jn.1:10 NRSV)

We have worked all our lives serving our master: sin; and in the end, we will receive our wages:

*For **the wages of sin is death,***

(Ro.6:23 NASB)

A man's work is worth his wages, and to deprive a man his wages would be unjust. Hence, all men must suffer death—eternal death. It is our sin and not our rejection of His Son that causes us to face the wrath of God:

*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever **rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*** (Jn.3:36 NKJV)

Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, **for God's wrath remains on him.** Rejecting God's Son kept us under the wrath of God—which was our original position:

*So put to death **the sinful, earthly things lurking within you.** Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. **Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming.*** (Co.3:5-6 NLT)

Our very first forefather sealed our death sentence, for by gaining the knowledge of God apart from His character, the sin nature was created:

*You have no obligation to do what your **sinful nature** urges you to do. **For if you live by its dictates, you will die.*** (Ro.8:12-13 NLT)

Since the sinful nature is contrary to God's nature, it makes living with Him for eternity an impossibility. Eternal separation from sinful man is the only option for our holy God:

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. **The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction.*** (Ga.6:7-8 NIV)

Living a life of sin causes us to receive the wrath of God; do not be deceived by those who say otherwise:

Be sure of this,** that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), **has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things **the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. (Eph.5:5-6 NRSV)

If God allowed sinful man into heaven in the state described in this chapter, then heaven would soon be no different than earth. Since mankind are eternal beings, they cannot be destroyed; God has to put them some place:

*Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, **into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.**'"*

(Mt 25:41 NIV)

The lake of fire was meant to be the final dwelling place for the devil and his angels that rebelled against God. God's wrath sends man to a place where He never goes--the lake of fire, a living death:

*But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, **their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.***

(Re 21:8 NASB)

For those who continue to sin, hell is not a punishment but the banishment from the presence of our holy God. Man does not suffer hell for a specific amount of time, depending on what they did on earth; but sinful man is sent to hell because they continue to rebel against God. Therefore, man's nature is predisposed to sin; and for this reason, God's wrath remains on mankind because they continue in rebellion against Him.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. What did mankind gain by eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?
2. Explain what the sinful nature is and how it came into being?
3. Explain whether mankind had an evil desire before they ate of the forbidden fruit?
4. Explain whether sin is an aspect of man's nature or whether it is a power in and of itself?
5. Explain whether man always did what he wanted?
6. Why do children not need to be encouraged to be bad, but instead, they need constant reminding and disciplining to be good?
7. Why do people continue to sin even though they hate what they are doing?
8. Explain whether man's good ever canceled out his wickedness, thereby, allowing him to escape the wrath of God? Why?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Describe God:

Day 1: Read the narrative of Sodom, Genesis 18:16-19-29. What did you learn about God?

Day 2: Read the narrative of the twelve spies, Deuteronomy 1:19-46. What did you learn about God?

Day 3: Read the narrative of Manasseh, Chronicles 33:1-20. What did you learn about God?

Day 4: Read the narrative of Jonah, Jonah 3. What did you learn about God?

Day 5: Read the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16. What did you learn about God?

Day 6: Read the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14-30. What did you learn about a God?

Day 7: Read the narrative of Moses, Exodus 33:12-23. What did you learn about God?

Memory verse:

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 12:14 NIV

LESSON 4

ONE TRUE GOD

ONE GOD

God exists! If there were no Being called God, then we would be left to impersonal fate. We would be solely dependent on our own resources, and we would be limited to our own observations. However, if there is an all-powerful, eternal God Who loves us, then the possibilities for our lives are endless. Webster defines God as follows:

“the supreme reality; a being believed to have supernatural attributes and powers and to require worship.”

In light of this study, when we refer to God, we mean the Christian God called “Yhwh.” God is what He is; Yhwh is His name:

*Say this to the people of Israel: **I AM** has sent me to you.” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: **Yhwh, the God of your ancestors**—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.* (Ex.14:14-15 NLT)

There are many Scriptures which support the existence of only one God, denying the existence of all other deities:

*See now that I, even I, am he; **there is no god beside me**. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and **no one can deliver from my hand**.* (Deut.32:39 NRSV Is.45:5-6)

To believe that other gods exist besides Yhwh is to contradict what God has revealed to us about Himself in the New Testament:

*Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and **that there is no other God but one**.* (1Co.8:4 NKJV)

However, the concept of a tri-unity—one Being, God, existing in a plurality of persons—is also clearly stated in the Old Testament:

*In the beginning **God created the heavens and the earth.** And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and **the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.*** (Ge.1:1-2 NASB)

The Scripture could have said, “God was hovering over the waters”; instead, Scripture says that the Spirit of God, which is one part of God, independently hovered over the waters. Again, we catch a glimpse of the tri-unity in the creation of man when we read:

*Then God said, “**Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.**”* (Ge.1:26 NKJV)

Then God (singular) said, “Let Us (plural) make man in Our (plural) image.” God is revealing Himself as both singular and plural. In the New Testament, He also reveals Himself as the Word, Who created everything:

*In the beginning **was the Word**, and the **Word was with God**, and the **Word was God**. He was in the beginning with God. **All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*** (Jn.1:1-3 NKJV)

The Word was God and was with God. The plurality of God is clearly presented when man sinned by eating the forbidden fruit:

*Then the LORD **God said**, “See, the **man has become like one of us**, knowing good and evil.* (Ge.3:22 NRSV)

The New Testament clearly teaches that God is a single Being Who exists in three distinct persons. The first indication that God is one Being existing in three persons is when the angel announced to Mary that she would miraculously be expecting a son:

*And Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered and said to her, “**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will** overshadow you; and for that reason **the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.*** (Lk.1:34-35 NASB)

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinctly seen at Jesus’ baptism when each person of the one God is in a different location, doing something different simultaneously:

*When He had been baptized, **Jesus came up immediately from the water**; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw **the Spirit of God descending** like a dove and alighting upon Him. And*

suddenly **a voice came from heaven, saying,** "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Mt.3:16-17 NKJV)

The Bible divides the salvation of man not only into three actions but also into the three different "Persons" of Yhwh:

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect"" who have been **chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*** (1Pe.1:1-2 NIV)

Each Person of the trinity has a different role in the salvation of man. These roles indicate that each Person of God is a distinct Being. Furthermore, each Person has His own function and attributes:

*The **grace of the Lord Jesus Christ**, and the **love of God**, and the **fellowship of the Holy Spirit**, be with you all.* (2Co.13:14 NASB)

In the great commission, Matthew uses the singular word "name" for the three Persons of God:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them **in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

(Mt.28:19-20 NKJV)

Therefore, throughout this study when we refer to one of these three, we simply are referring to the only true God called Yhwh.

THE GOD WHO IS

The Bible teaches us that He is the only true God and that He is an eternal Being:

*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, **from everlasting to everlasting you are God**.*

(Ps.90:2 NRSV; Ps.41:13)

Since God existed before the creation of the world and will live forever past the end of this world, we say that He is eternal—without beginning or end:

*But the LORD is **the true God**; He is **the living God** and the **everlasting King**.*

(Jer.10:10; NKJV Ge.1:1; Re.1:8; Jn.1:1-2)

In heaven, we will constantly be reminded of the eternal existence of God by the seraphim surrounding His throne:

*The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, **Who was and is and is to come!**" Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, **who lives forever and ever.*** (Re.4:8-9 NKJV)

Just as eternity is incomprehensible to man, God Himself cannot be understood by our minds' limitations:

*"Can you **discover the depths of God?** Can you **discover the limits of the Almighty?*** (Job 11:7 NASB)

A finite man cannot intellectually grasp the concept of an infinite, eternal God. For example, a finite man may change his mind many times each day, yet our infinite God is consistent—He does not change:

*God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so **he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act?*** (Nu 23:19 NLT)

God's inability to change over eternity provides security to His people. His standard of morality yesterday is the same for today and forever:

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, **who does not change like shifting shadows.*** (Ja.1:17 NIV; He.1:12)

Since God does not change, the past is the key to understanding not only the present, but the future as well:

*I know that **whatever God does, It shall be forever.** Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. **God does it, that men should fear before Him.*** (Ecc.3:14 NKJV)

God's inability to change gives us confidence today in all that He has promised His Church two thousand years ago:

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.** And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. **Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.** He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put **his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2Co.1:20-22 NIV)

God's unchanging nature ensures us that His promises of yesterday are for today and forever. Since Jesus is God, we read:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

(He.13:8 NASB)

Therefore, the fact that we serve an eternal, unchanging God gives us confidence. He was, is, and always will be the same. All that He has promised to His church in the first century is a promise for the church today.

GOD IS HOLY

God is also holy—absolute, sinless perfection; however, the concept of holiness is beyond human comprehension:

This God—his way is perfect; the promise of the LORD proves true.

(Ps 18:30 NRSV)

Holiness is the absence of all wickedness:

*"Therefore, hear me, you who have sense, **far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong.***

(Job 34:10 NRSV)

God's holy character finds evil repulsive and sin unacceptable, causing Him to be separated from those who do wrong:

But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.

(Isa.59:2 NASB)

God no longer walked with man after He sent them out of His garden because they had sinned. God is perfect, and sin is imperfection. Sin isolates us from our perfect God:

Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

(Hab.1:13 NIV)

Man's sin prevented him from having a relationship with God. In the temple, God remained in the Holy of Holies with a curtain separating Himself from the daily activities of the priests. When Moses asked to see God's glory, God only allowed a view of His back:

But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"

(Ex 33:20 NASB)

If Moses has stood before the glorified face of God, he would have died instantly, been judged, and been sent to hell for his sin. A sinful man cannot stand before God:

*The men of Beth-shemesh said, “**Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?**”* (1Sa 6:20 NASB)

For this reason, God’s Spirit could not live in man’s heart because all hearts were evil, and man’s nature was bent on sin:

*“**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?**”* (Jer.17:9 NKJV)

Sinners cannot dwell with a Holy God, not on earth or for eternity in heaven:

*For You are not a God **who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You.** The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; **You hate all who do iniquity.*** (Ps.5:4-5 NASB)

Since man is wicked, God sends them after death to the only place He does not go—hell:

*For there is no difference, **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*** (Ro.3:22-23 NKJV)

If a man ever hopes to live with God in heaven, then all his sins must be removed from his record and all his wickedness must cease:

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and **to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*** (He.12:14 NIV)

Therefore, God is holy—absolute, sinless perfection; hence, once mankind had sinned, they were separated from God.

GOD IS OMNIPRESENT—ALL PRESENT

Out of all the qualities of God, three are necessary for us to grasp because they dictate His relationship with man. The **first** is that God through His Spirit is always present everywhere. No place exists in our physical universe where we can escape Him:

Am I a God near by, says the LORD, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD. (Jer.23:23 NRSV)

This can be considered in a negative light for those who commit sin, for there is no place to escape the ever watchful Spirit of God:

*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where **can I flee from Your presence?** If I ascend into heaven, **You are there;** If I make my bed in hell, behold, **You are there.** If I take the wings of the morning, And*

*dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, **even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.*** (Ps.139:7-10 NKJV)

However, for the Christian, God's omnipresence is a comfort. He is always present, never too far away that He cannot hear or help. He will guide us and will see us through all situations, no matter what may come:

*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and **has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings**, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that **they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being.*** (Ac.17:26-28 NKJV)

Therefore, the concept that God is always near gives comfort to Christians; for He is always ready to intervene on our behalf.

GOD IS OMNISCIENT—ALL KNOWING

Second, God's knowledge is infinite; at any given moment, nothing in the universe is beyond His awareness:

*He counts the number of the stars; **He gives names to all of them.** Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; **His understanding is infinite.*** (Ps.147:4-5 NASB)

God's knowledge is infinite, while arrogant man's knowledge is finite. Someone once asked, "Has it ever occurred to you that nothing ever occurs to God?" For those who commit sin, this concept brings fear. God's knowledge is not based on physical sight but on intuition, a perfect awareness that penetrates even total darkness:

*If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," **even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.*** (Ps.139:11-12 NRSV)

Some people commit wickedness in darkness, thinking that they will escape judgment. God knows everything that all people have ever done or will do, and He will judge them according to their actions:

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (He.4:13 NIV)

For the sinner, God's omniscience should instill fear; but for the Christian, it offers hope. He knows what we are going through and how much we can endure:

*O LORD, **You have searched me and known me.** You know my sitting down and my rising up; **You understand my thought afar off.** You comprehend my path and my lying down, **And are acquainted with all my ways.** For **there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.*** (Ps.139:1-4 NASB)

He knows us more intimately than we know ourselves; we can trust His wisdom. God does not only know how many hairs we have, but He also has each one numbered—hair number 1,417 just fell out!

The very hairs of your head are all numbered. (Mt.10:30 KJV)

The significance of God's knowledge for the Christian gives us tremendous peace because He knows what was in the past, what is in the present, and even more important, what will be in the future:

*My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. **In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.***

(Ps.139:15-16 NRSV)

God knows what is about to happen around the next corner, during the next event, and in the next year. Therefore, God knows what we are going to need before we need it. He knows how much we can endure—giving us the hope that He will intervene at the right moment, providing all that we need.

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT—ALL POWERFUL

Many times we have knowledge about a situation but do not have the power to intervene. The **third** attribute of God is that He is the Almighty. God is all powerful; there is no one greater or stronger. No one can stop what He has planned:

*From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. **What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.*** (Isa.46:11NIV)

Because God created all things, there is nothing that He cannot do:

For nothing is impossible with God. (Lk.1:37 NIV; Mt.19:26; Job.42:2)

God not only created the universe and the heavens, but He also sustains its order, by His laws of nature. Any time God desires to deviate from those laws, He can do as He wishes:

*"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, **for you created all things**, and **by your will** they were created and **have their being**.* (Re.4:11 NIV; Co.1:16-17 He.1:3)

All Satan's forces were created by God; hence, their collective power cannot overcome God. They cannot harm us apart from the will of God; in other words, God limits their effect in our lives:

*We know that those who are born of God **do not sin**, but the one who was born of God **protects them**, and the **evil one does not touch them**.* (1Jn.5:18 NRSV; 1Jn.4:4; Ro.8:31-39)

This does not mean that we will not go through trials; rather, God will be with us through the trials—granting us the strength to thrive. Since He is everywhere at once and knows everything about us at any given moment, He can and will give us the strength to stand:

*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to us all. And **God is faithful**; he **will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear**. But when you are tempted, **he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it**.* (1Co.10:13 TNIV)

God promises to provide everything to meet our needs:

*And **God is able to make all grace abound** to you, so that in **all things at all times**, having **all that you need**, you will **abound in every good work**.* (2Co.9:8 NIV)

Because God is all powerful, we know that we can trust Him to do as He has promised. Therefore, we can say:

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Php.4:13 NKJV)

Therefore, the knowledge that no one is greater than God grants us peace:

*What then are we to say about these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?** He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, **will he not with him also give us everything else?*** (Ro.8:31-32 NRSV)

GOD IS JUST

When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a garden that He had prepared for them. He allowed them to eat of any tree they desired except one, the one which He reserved for Himself—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

*Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but **from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.**"*

(Ge.2:15-17 NASB)

Mankind knew the penalty for eating the forbidden fruit, yet because they had a nature that was predisposed to sin, they ate the fruit:

*When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, **she took from its fruit and ate**; and she gave also to her husband with her, **and he ate.***

(Ge.3:6 NASB)

Once man ate of the forbidden fruit, God had to punish them according to His Law. God loved His creation and created man with a spirit to live with Him forever. He did not want to destroy mankind. However, God is a just judge and must punish mankind according to His Law:

God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

(Ps.7:11 NKJV)

Twice God prematurely judged society because it had reached an intolerable threshold of evil. God sent His wrath upon it :

*For if God... **did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter.***

(2Pe.2:4-6 NASB)

These societies were judged and suffered God's wrath before the appointed time at the end of the world. However, all mankind are sinners who cannot stand before a Holy God without being judged and condemned to face the full fury of His wrath:

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of **our sinful nature** and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, **we were by nature objects of wrath**. (Eph 2:3 NIV)

Since God knows us intimately, He does not need a trial or witnesses in order to establish guilt. His knowledge is 100% accurate:

*For I know my transgressions, and **my sin is ever before me**. **Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight**, so that **you are justified in your sentence** and blameless **when you pass judgment**.* (Ps.51:3-4 NRSV)

True justice does not consider whether a person has done good, but only whether he has committed the wrong. One sin, any sin, will condemn a person to hell:

*For whoever **keeps the whole law** and yet **stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it**. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker.*

(Ja.2:10-11 NIV)

Some might claim that because of their ignorance about God's Law, they should be exempt from punishment. However, in earthly society, if I break a law without knowing its existence, an earthly judge will still hold me accountable for the offence. God is no different:

For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law. (Ro.2:11-12 NASB)

What I believe about God or whether I go to church is immaterial to Him. God is impartial; He will judge each man's work strictly according to His Law:

*Since you call on a Father **who judges each man's work impartially**, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.* (1Pe.1:17 NIV)

God is an impartial judge, judging all men's actions by His standard:

God "will give to each person according to what he has done".

(Ro.2:6 NIV; Mt 16:27; 2Co 5:10; 1Pe. 4:17)

One sin will give us the verdict of guilty, and the penalty for sin is eternal separation from God. For this reason, we will face the wrath of God for our sin:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. (Ro.1:18 NRSV)

Just as physical death separates us from the ones we love, eternal death separates us from the God Who loves us. People go to hell because they ignore God even though He provides everything that we need. In hell God ignores man's needs, and man is left with only the things he can provide himself. Therefore, God's justice demands that the penalty of death be given to whoever sins, and His holiness will not tolerate sinners in heaven.

GOD IS LOVE

Finally, God loved His creation. He did not create mankind in order to destroy them. However, God is absolutely just; His justice demands that the full penalty for disobedience be served:

God is just. (2Th.1:6 NIV)

On the other hand, as much as God is just, God is also love:

God is love. (1Jn.4:16 NKJV)

Since God is both loving and just, a conflict emerged. God's holiness demands justice, yet God's absolute love is expressed in His mercy and grace:

Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.
(Ps.116:5 NRSV)

If God showed His love to mankind by forgiving them, His justice would be violated. But if God upheld His holiness as expressed in true justice by punishing man, His love would be violated. God's love prevents Him from taking pleasure in the destruction of those He must punish—even though His justice demands it:

'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways!'

(Eze.33:11 NASB note verses 23& 32)

God's love always motivated Him to send a prophet to warn the people before He acted in judgement. When the city of Nineveh had surpassed God's threshold for evil, God planned to prematurely judge the city by unleashing His wrath upon it. God's love sent Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh of their impending doom, in the hope that they would change. When the king heard the judgment of God, we read:

Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "**By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything.** They shall not feed, **nor shall they drink water.** Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. **All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.**" (Jn.3:7-8 NRSV)

God spared the people of Nineveh because they turned away from their evil ways and violence. God is not a vengeful God Who delights in the destruction of His creation. God's love can be clearly seen in the Old Testament. Many times God would warn Israel through His prophets about the consequences of their actions. The first example of God warning man to change his ways is clearly seen with Cain:

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? **If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?** But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Ge.4:6-7 NIV)

When God's justice is about to punish the wicked, His love warns them in the hope that they will heed the warning and turn from their wickedness. This is why God sent the prophets to warn the people of His judgement:

And God did not spare the ancient world—except for Noah and the seven others in his family. **Noah warned the world of God's righteous judgment.** (2Pe 2:5 NLT)

God's love always motivated Him to warn mankind of their impending doom, in the hope that some would turn from their sin. His love is expressed in His patience with wicked men and His hope that they would eventually turn:

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but **is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.** (2Pe.3:9 NASB)

For six thousand years, God has put up with mankind's sin, waiting for the few who would turn from their sin. This is an expression of love:

But You, O Lord, **are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness and truth.** (Ps.86:15 NASB)

If mankind goes to hell, it won't be God's fault. God has been patient, but mankind did not respond to God's calling because their nature

desires sin. However, if a solution to man's destruction can be found, it cannot come from man himself because he is the violator. A solution can only come through God:

*"I, even I, am the LORD; **And there is no savior besides Me.***

(Is.43:11 NASB)

Therefore, God's love for mankind prevents Him from ever taking pleasure in the death of any man; for this reason, He is patient in waiting for mankind to turn to Him.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. What is the difference between Christianity and other religions of the world?
2. What aspect of God makes you stand in awe? Why?
3. How does God's omnipresence affect you personally?
4. How does God's omniscience affect you personally?
5. How does God's omnipotence affect you personally?
6. Is it unjust that God should save one and not another, or is He unjust to save any at all?
7. How does God's justice and love present Him with a dilemma?
8. How has God's love been expressed to man since the beginning of time?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Jesus is

Day 1: Read the narrative of the fall of man, Genesis 3:1-21. When man sinned, what needed to be killed for his covering?

Day 2: Read the narrative of the first Passover, Exodus 12:1-30. What did you learn about Christ?

Day 3: Read the narrative of Isaac, Genesis 22:1-19. What did you learn about sacrifice?

Day 4: Read the narrative of the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16. What did you learn about sacrifice?

Day 5: Read the narrative of Israel crossing the Jordan, Joshua 3:14-4:18. What did you learn about Christ?

Day 6: Read the prophecy, Isaiah 53. What did you learn about Christ?

Day 7: Read the narrative of Hosea and Gomer, Hosea 3:1-5. What did you learn about Christ?

Memory verse:

Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12 NIV

LESSON 5

GOD'S SOLUTION

GOD HAD A PLAN

Man was given the freedom to choose between the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. Man chose the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of evil; thus, he chose a life of sin. Before God made the world, He knew man would choose to sin, but He also had a plan to redeem mankind from sin:

*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, **according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** (Eph.3:10-11 NIV)

God knew that if He gave mankind the freedom to choose evil, they would reject and disobey Him. God could have predisposed man to do good; but He did not want to interfere with man's free choice. No matter how God would have created the world, free choice with the knowledge of evil would always lead man to choose sin. However, God still created man with free choice because God had an eternal plan which surpassed man's role as gardeners:

For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Ro.8:20-21 NRSV)

God's plan was that through Jesus, man could be adopted as His children. Through Jesus, man would be given a second chance to choose between slavery to sin and adoption as His children:

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (Eph.1:4-5 NKJV)

Creating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life made the choice obvious. Yet God still created man with free choice because Christ was already destined to die for our sake:

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (1Pe.1:20 NIV)

Before God made the world, Jesus was. He was not part of creation. Jesus was with God when He created everything:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (Jn.1:1-3 NKJV)

The Word, or Jesus, is God; and He created all things. Even though mankind chose to disobey, God still loved man. However, because God is just, His justice must be met to the full extent of the law:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Ro.5:8 NASB)

God resolved His conflict between love and justice by allowing man to live and have children. God allowed man to live because when the time was right, He would put in effect His plan to save man:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn.3:16 NASB)

God does not love the world with its sin; breaking God's law always brings punishment. But God loved the world before the beginning of time. Two thousand years ago, He sent His Son to die—paying our penalty for sin and reconciling us back to Himself. Only after we receive God's Son as our blood payment to restore God's honor can we receive the full expression of His love. Without Christ, man is already condemned by his sin and will experience the full measure of God's wrath:

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Jn.3:18 NJKV)

Our sin condemns us. Jesus took the punishment for our sin upon the cross, experiencing the fullness of God's wrath upon Himself. If we ask Jesus to apply His death on our behalf, then we will not experience the

wrath of God. To reject Jesus as our blood payment is to remain under the wrath of God:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

(Jn.3:36 NIV)

We do not have to do anything to receive God's wrath; it is our inheritance from our first forefather—Adam, and the just punishment for our own acts of sin. Jesus is the extension of God's love poured out to sinful man, to rescue us from that wrath:

*For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and **how you turned to God from idols**, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, **who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.***

(1Th.1:9-10 NRSV)

The only hope for man is Christ, for apart from Christ, no payment exists for our sins:

*And **there is salvation in no one else**; for **there is no other name under heaven** that has been given among men **by which we must be saved.***

(Ac.4:12 NASB)

God had planned that Christ would be the way for man to be reconciled with Himself. Since it was man who sinned, our substitute had to be a man:

*For this reason **he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way**, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and **that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.***

(He.2:17 TNIV)

However, he had to be a perfect man, for only someone without sin could pay the penalty. God became a man:

*Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. **He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God.***

(1Pe. 3:18 NLT)

God became a perfect man, Jesus, to take our punishment:

*Jesus said to him, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.***

(Jn.14:6 NKJV)

Christ is God's only way for us to inherit eternal life with Him. Therefore, since God is as loving as He is just, He sent Jesus to die in our place so that we might escape the full measure of His wrath.

GOD'S PLAN REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Throughout the Old Testament, God gave man insight through prophecy into His solution for man's sin. When man was cursed in the garden, God foretold that Christ would come and destroy the devil:

He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." (Ge.3:15.NLT)

Jesus came into the world to destroy the devil's work of leading mankind into sin:

*Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. **The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*** (1Jn.3:8 NRSV)

God gave the people hope, for the Scriptures foretold of many signs of His coming. Seven hundred years before Christ's birth, Isaiah prophesied:

*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the **virgin shall conceive and bear a Son**, and shall call His name Immanuel.*

(Isa.7:14 NKJV)

Mary was a virgin; the Holy Spirit miraculously produced the baby in her. The baby was to be called "Immanuel," which meant "God with us." Many doubt whether conception without a father is possible, and yet today science has achieved this feat in cloning. When scientists clone a sheep, for example, they take an egg out of a ewe in heat and remove the egg's DNA. They then take the DNA from a cell of another sheep, say a prize winning ram (Supersheep), and place it in the egg of the ewe. The egg with Supersheep's DNA is then placed within the womb of the ewe and allowed normal gestation and birth. The lamb that is born has no genetic similarities to the ewe but is identical to Supersheep. A farmer may ask to see Supersheep, and the scientist can show him the lamb because the lamb is not like Supersheep; the lamb is Supersheep. In a limited way, cloning is similar to what God accomplished with Christ. God placed Himself in the egg of Mary. The DNA was of God; otherwise, with Mary's DNA, the baby would have been a girl. One day a disciple asked Jesus to show him God the Father:

*Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? **Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?*** (Jn.14:9-10 NRSV)

When it was time to fulfill the prophecy of a virgin being with child, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary saying:

*"And behold, **you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.** And Mary said to the angel, **"How can this be, since I am a virgin?"** And the angel answered and said to her, **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.**"* (Lk.1:31&34-35 NASB)

Jesus was not the offspring of God but was called the Son of God. Similarly, Muslims are not the offspring of the same parentage but are called brothers. Muslim's from Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco have a relationship as brothers through their common faith of Islam. Relational terms do not imply a connection through blood. Jesus was called the Son of God because He assumed the relationship of a son to a father when He came down from heaven:

*"You are my Son; **today I have become your Father**"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"?"* (He.1:5 NIV; Ac.13:33)

There were many prophecies that had to be fulfilled by Christ. Mary lived in Nazareth, but the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem of the house and line of David. About 700 BC, Micah prophesied:

*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the **One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.*** (Mic.5:2 NKJV)

God moved Caesar Augustus to issue a decree, which caused Mary to go to Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth:

*And it came to pass **in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered...** So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. **Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem,** because he was of the house and lineage of David, **to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.** So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And **she brought forth her firstborn Son.*** (Lk.2:1,3-7 NKJV)

God prophesied the specific events of His death such as the price offered to betray Jesus—thirty pieces of silver. About 500 B.C., the prophet Zechariah foretold:

*And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter" --the handsome **price at which they priced me!** So I took the **thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.** (Zec.11:13 NASB)*

When the Jewish leaders sought to kill Jesus, they offered Judas thirty pieces of silver:

*Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" **They paid him thirty pieces of silver.** And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. (Mt.26:14-16 NRSV)*

Then when Judas regretted his actions, we read:

*"I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." **So Judas threw the money into the temple and left.** Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they decided **to use the money to buy the potter's field** as a burial place for foreigners. (Mt.27:4-7 NIV)*

These prophecies and their fulfillment were very specific. For example, death by crucifixion was not practiced at the time of David, but one thousand years before Christ, David prophesied:

*Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; **they pierce my hands and my feet.** All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. **They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.** (Ps.22:16-18 TNIV)*

After they scourged Jesus, they crucified Him:

*When the soldiers **crucified Jesus**, they took his clothes, **dividing them** into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. **"Let's decide by lot who will get it.** (Jn.19:23-24 NIV)*

There are over three hundred prophecies written long before the coming of Christ that were fulfilled by Christ's life and death. The odds of one man fulfilling just eight key prophecies from the Old Testament is 1 to 10¹⁷ or 1 to 100,000,000,000,000,000. Jesus' life and death was not a

coincidence. Everything that took place was part of God's plan to redeem man for Himself.

GOD'S PLAN FULFILLED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When considering the prophecies fulfilled by Jesus, we must establish that Jesus could not fulfill the prophecies of the Messiah by His own design. In the death of Jesus, the timing and the specific nature of the events required many people to be involved. Each person had different reasons for their involvement—some even against their will, but in the end, we must conclude that they all played a vital part in this tragedy. Some think it strange that mankind, the creature, was able to kill its Creator—for the Bible teaches that Jesus is God. Man did not take Jesus' life; Jesus voluntarily gave up His life. For Jesus to be our blood payment, His death needed to be voluntary; He did not oppose crucifixion in any way. Jesus' disciples tried to prevent His arrest, but He commanded them to stop their violence:

*And suddenly, **one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"*** (Mt.26:51-54 NKJV)

Jesus stopped His disciples from any attempt to rescue Him, for He came to die in fulfillment to the Scriptures. At Jesus' trial, He did not give any defense, for the prophecy stated that He came to die:

*The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "**Aren't you going to answer?** See how many things they are accusing you of." But Jesus **still made no reply**, and Pilate was amazed.* (Mk.15:3-5 NIV)

Jesus' life was not taken from Him; rather, He laid down His life to be a blood payment for our sin. Jesus could have stopped His death because He is God, but He didn't:

*For this reason the Father loves me, because **I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.** I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.* (Jn.10:17-18 NRSV)

For Christians, the fact that the physical part of Jesus, inherited from Mary, was killed by His creation is not a problem. For the Scriptures declare that Jesus' death was according to God's plan:

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, **that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and **that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures**.* (1Co.5:3-4 NASB)

Christ died according to the prophecies given hundreds—even thousands—of years before His death:

*Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and **everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished**.* (Lk.18:31 NRSV; Ac.3:18)

If Jesus died according to the prophetic message, then we must conclude that it was not mankind's will which prevailed over God; but rather, it was God's will which mankind enacted:

*This man **was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge**; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.* (Ac.2:23 NIV)

God had a plan, and He worked out His plan. Since it was God Who controlled the events surrounding Jesus' death, God maintained His sovereignty throughout Jesus' death—even though it was enacted by men:

*For in this city, in fact, both **Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel**, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, **to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place**.* (Ac.4:27-28 NRSV)

The Jews killed Jesus; however, they could not do any more or any less than that which God allowed:

***When they had done all that the prophecies said about him**, they took him down from the cross and placed him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead!* (Ac.13:29-30 NLT)

The control of God over the events surrounding Christ's death was clearly seen in Judas—who betrayed Christ. Judas' greed did not cause him to betray Christ; God's will allowed Judas' greed to succeed for God's plan. In the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He knew who would betray Him:

For **Jesus had known from the beginning** which of them did not believe and **who would betray him** (Jn.6:64 TNIV)

Jesus knew Judas was going to be the one who would betray Him, and yet, He did nothing to prevent Judas from becoming one of His disciples. Knowing that Judas would betray Jesus did not change the way Jesus treated him. On the night Jesus was betrayed, when Jesus announced that one of the disciples would betray Him, no one could guess that the betrayer was Judas. Jesus knew that Judas was part of God's plan:

*While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost **except the one destined to be lost, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled.***

(Jn.17:12 NRSV)

The Scriptures are clear that man did not do anything to Christ that God had not pre-ordained. God maintained His sovereignty over Christ's death. Everything that took place in Christ's death was according to the purpose and will of God. Therefore, God planned to redeem man prior to the creation of the world, and He carefully orchestrated the events surrounding Christ's death.

THE SON OF MAN

Since we understand that God was the One Who planned to redeem man through Jesus, we must understand two distinct qualities that Jesus had to have in order for Him to die on our behalf. First, since man was the one who sinned, only a man could die in mankind's place. Daniel prophesied about the Messiah, calling Him the Son of Man:

*I was watching in the night visions, and behold, **One like the Son of Man**, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to **the Ancient of Days**, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and **a kingdom**, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is **an everlasting dominion**, which **shall not pass away**, and His kingdom **the one Which shall not be destroyed.***

(Da.7:13-14 NKJV)

The person described in this prophecy is obviously Jesus in His return to judge mankind. Daniel made the distinction that Jesus was not a son of man but **like** a son of man. Jesus used the title "Son of Man" to align Himself with Daniel's Messianic prophecies. Only the death of a perfect man could pay man's penalty for sin—death. For this reason, God sent His Son to be born of a woman to become a man:

*But **when the right time came**, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, **so that he could adopt us as his very own children.***

(Ga.4:4-5 NLT)

Mary was not the wife of God, but rather she was selected and used by God to fulfill His prophecy. Jesus grew up in a family; He had step-brothers and step-sisters born of Joseph and Mary:

*"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and **brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?**"*

And they took offense at Him.

(Mk.6:3 NASB)

The New Testament refers to Jesus eighty-four times as "the Son of Man":

*No one has ascended to heaven but **He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man** who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even **so must the Son of Man be lifted up**, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*

(Jn.3:13-15 NKJV)

Since Christ was man, He could be our substitute and die to pay the penalty for our sin :

*For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the **man Christ Jesus**. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.*

(1Ti.2:5-6 NRSV note Ro.5:15,17)

Christ was like us in every way. He felt joy, sorrow, pain, hunger, and temptation:

*Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the **Son also became flesh and blood**. For **only as a human being could he die**, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. (He.2:13 TNIV; He.2:17-18,-4:15)*

When God created mankind, He made them in His likeness, a trinity:

*Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may **your whole spirit and soul and body** be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.*

(1Th.5:23-24 NLT)

Jesus was like us in every way. He had a body, soul, and spirit:

*Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for **the body of Jesus**.*

(Mk.15:43 NRSV)

Jesus' body felt all the pain, and His soul suffered the separation from His Father when He took our sin upon Himself:

*Then He said to them, "My soul is **deeply grieved**, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."* (Mt.26:38 NASB)

When Christ finally died, He committed His spirit to the Father:

*And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, '**into Your hands I commit My spirit**.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.* (Lk.23:46 NKJV)

Jesus experienced everything we do; however, even though He was tempted like we are, He did not sin:

*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but **was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin**.* (He.4:15 NKJV)

Jesus did not sin because He is God. Jesus had the nature of God when He came in the likeness of sinful man:

*For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son **in the likeness of sinful man** to be a sin offering.* (Ro.8:5 NIV)

Physically, Jesus was like man in every way. Christ became like man to be born of a virgin. The only exception was that being God, he was holy in nature and, hence, did not commit any sin.

THE SON OF GOD

Jesus always referred to Himself as the "Son of Man," but He allowed others to call Him the "Son of God." Only in His trial did He acknowledge that He was indeed the Son of God:

*The high priest said to him, "**I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God**." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."* (Mt.26:63-64 NIV)

Jesus acknowledged under oath that He was the Son of God, knowing that this claim would sentence Him to death. The term "Son of God" does not mean that God had sex with Mary but rather implies that He, God, assumed the relationship of a father to a son:

*And without controversy great is the **mystery of godliness**: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.* (1Ti.3:16 NRSV)

God would only accept the voluntary death of a perfect man as a blood payment. Only God is holy; consequently, God had to become man in order to be a sinless man. Isaiah prophesied seven hundred years before Christ's birth that the child would be called Mighty God, Whose reign would last forever:

*For a **child will be born to us**, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; and **His name will be called** Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God**, **Eternal Father**, Prince of Peace. **There will be no end** to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and **to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore**. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.* (Isa.9:6-7 NRSV)

Jesus is the only One Who never sinned—in thought, word, or deed; hence, He could be our substitute. Jesus was born of a virgin through the Holy Spirit, but He Himself was God, holy by merit of Who He is:

*Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, **since I am a virgin?**" The angel said to her, "**The Holy Spirit will come upon you**, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore **the child to be born will be holy**; he will be called Son of God.* (Lk.1:34-35 NRSV)

Sin came through Adam, the father of all mankind. Man's sinfulness was hereditarily passed through the father. Jesus was not conceived through a man and was, therefore, freed from the sin nature of mankind. Scriptures teach that He was more than just a man:

*Theirs are the patriarchs, and **from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all**, forever praised! Amen.* (Ro.9:5 TNIV)

Jesus had human ancestry through His mother Mary. But, He was more than just the Son of God; He was God:

*We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true— even **in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life**.* (1Jn.5:20 NIV)

God not only planned a way to save mankind, but He, that is God, was the way—the Creator died for His creation:

*The blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our **great God and Savior, Christ Jesus**, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and **to purify for Himself a people** for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Ti.2:13-14 NASB; Jn.1:1; Jn.20:28)*

Jesus was exactly God but in a human body:

***The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being**, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (He.1:3 TNIV)*

Even though Jesus was a man, He was far different from all mankind, for He contained all the fullness of God:

*For in Christ **lives all the fullness of God** in a human body. (Co.2:9 NLT)*

We may not be able to comprehend what the fullness of God entails, but one thing we do know is that Jesus had the very nature of God:

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, **being in very nature God**, did not consider **equality with God** something to be grasped. (Php.2:5-6 NIV)*

Jesus was not beneath God, but He was God when He lowered Himself, taking the form of human likeness, assuming the relationship as a Son. Since Jesus was in nature God, His holiness prevented Him from sinning when He was tempted:

*One **who has been tempted in all things** as we are, **yet without sin**. (He.4:15 NASB)*

Jesus had to become a man to die in our place, but He also had to be without sin in order to save mankind. In order for someone to be a savior, the person must be in a position to save. If I were drowning and you were drowning, there would be little chance of you saving me. In the same way, I cannot pay your penalty for sin because I am also guilty of sin. Likewise, you cannot pay my penalty for sin because you are also guilty of sin. Since Jesus is the fullness of God—being in very nature the one holy God—He did not sin. Because Jesus was sinless, His death can be applied to our debt of sin, paying our penalty:

***For God made Christ, who never sinned**, to be the offering for our sin, so that **we could be made right with God** through Christ. (2Co.5:21 NLT)*

God loved us so much that He became a man, lived a holy life, and then died in our place in order to appease His perfect standard of justice:

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1Pe 3:18 TNIV)

Christ became a man to die in our place. He took the physical form of a man in order to restore our relationship with God. However, He could not give up the holy nature of God because then He would cease being God:

So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. (Ro.8:3 NLT)

Therefore, before the creation of the world, God knew that man would sin and be sentenced to hell. However, God had a plan. He would become a man, live a perfect life, and die to pay mankind's penalty for sin.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. When did God make a plan to send Jesus into the world?
2. Explain whether Christ is a way to get right with God or the only way?
3. What is the proof that Christ was the One that God promised—the Messiah?
4. Who orchestrated the events surrounding Christ's life and death?
5. What was God's purpose in sending Christ into the world?
6. Why did Christ have to be born of a woman?
7. Why did Christ have to be God in order to die in our place?
8. How did Christ solve the dilemma of God's love and justice?"

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Faith is

Day 1: Read the narrative of Noah, Ge.6:8-22. What did you learn about the faith?

Day 2: Read the narrative of Abraham, Ge.22:1-14. What did you learn about the faith?

Day 3: Read the narrative of Gideon, Judg.7:1-22. What did you learn about the faith?

Day 4: Read the narrative of David, 1Sa.17:1-51. What did you learn about the faith?

Day 5: Read the narrative of a prophet, 1Ki.13:1-25. What did you learn about the faith?

Day 6: Read the narrative of Naaman, 2 Ki.5:1-14. What did you learn about the faith?

Day 7: Read the narrative of the centurion, Mt.8:5-13. What did you learn about the faith?

Memory verse:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

LESSON 6

THE REALITY OF FAITH

FAITH

Faith is a peculiar word. When I ask someone what faith he is, I am questioning him about his religious preference. Someone might encourage another person saying, “I have faith in you.” This statement reflects a confidence in that person’s character or ability. However, if I use the word “faith” from a Biblical perspective, what do I mean? The Bible defines faith as:

*Now faith is **the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*** (He.11:1 NKJV)

There are different aspects to faith. If I did not see or experience an event, I would need to believe another person’s account of that event. For example, medieval historians recorded events with dragons, and yet many people do not have faith that dragons ever existed. We need faith to believe in past things, to judge whether a theory or historical account is accurate. However, if two accounts exist, then the person must determine which account to believe. For example, scientists have theories about how the universe began. These theories require faith in order to believe them. Scientists use terms such as dark matter and dark energy to force the big bang theory into a working model, even though there is no proof that either of these things exist. Science cannot prove that a big bang occurred because no scientist was present to make the observations and collect the data. The three pillars of science state that something must be observable, repeatable, and irrefutable. Since recorded observation has less than ten thousand years of records and key events have not since been repeated, all man can offer is science fiction to explain what happened at the beginning of time. Scientific theories require faith to accept them. To have a majority of scientists agree on a theory does not establish truth. For example, the majority of scientists

held that the world was flat prior to Columbus' voyage. This example proves that the acceptance by a majority does not establish the truth of a theory. On the other hand, the Jewish and Christian Scriptures offer another perspective of how the universe began. God created everything; therefore, He observed everything. Genesis 1 is the Creator's eyewitness account of the beginning:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Ge.1:1 NKJV)

Only God was present at the beginning. Since man was created as an intelligent being at the end of creation, his account of creation in Genesis 2 is far more limited but more specific to the facts that pertain to mankind. In conclusion, what a person believes about the beginning of the universe requires faith from both the evolutionist and Christian perspective. Even more importantly, what we believe to be truth determines our worldview.

OUR FAITH AFFECTS OUR PRESENT

Faith also affects the present because it influences what we do. Faith helps us reconcile what we see with what we don't understand. If I see, touch, smell, hear, or taste something, I do not need faith. For example, people who believe in evolution also tend to believe that life exists on other planets. They surmise that if life evolved here on earth, then it is only logical that it has evolved elsewhere in our solar system. Even though there is no empirical evidence for this belief, millions of dollars are spent each year trying to prove the existence of life on other planets. These scientists place their faith in what is unseen. In a similar way, Christians believe that Jesus is alive. Today we cannot touch the nail prints in Jesus' hands and feet, yet every year millions of dollars are spent to convince others that Jesus exists. Christians place their faith in what is unseen: that Jesus is alive. What we believe affects our life in the present. What we believe about Jesus affects what we do with Jesus' teachings. The importance of our decision concerning faith in Jesus is illustrated by the two criminals crucified on either side of Him. Each criminal had to decide how to respond to Jesus as he was dying beside Him. One criminal rejected Jesus:

*One of the criminals who were hanged there was **hurling abuse** at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" (Lk.23:39 NASB)*

This criminal continued in his rebellion toward God, mocking the very One Who could save his soul from hell. The other criminal, realizing his damnable state, reached out in faith to Jesus:

*But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "**Do you not even fear God**, seeing you are under the same condemnation? **And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.**" Then he said to Jesus, "**Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.**"* (Lk.23:40-41 NKJV)

Both criminals experienced the same event, yet one rejected Jesus while the other one accepted Him. Even though we cannot see Jesus, we must decide what to believe about Him:

*I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, **now is the day of salvation.*** (2Co.6:2 NIV)

When considering Jesus, the world is ready to call Him a great teacher. However, Christians refer to Jesus as God and apply His teachings to their lives. Either way, our faith affects our actions. Therefore, what we believe today determines where we are willing to invest millions of dollars tomorrow. Whether we are promoting aliens or Christ, both scientists and Christians are placing their faith in the unseen.

OUR FAITH AFFECTS OUR FUTURE

Faith also affects our actions toward the future. Today, cancer is a major cause of death. Everyone knows someone who has died or is dying from some form of cancer. Each year, people spend millions of dollars in research, believing a cure can be found. The hope of a cure for tomorrow gives people the strength to live through the pain of today. For Christians, we place that same faith in eradicating the moral cancer of our society—sin. We believe that Christ is the cure for drug addiction, pornography, obesity, broken marriages, etc... Once we make Jesus Lord of our lives, we need faith for tomorrow that Christ will give us the strength to overcome sin. Our faith enables us to believe that all of God's promises in Christ are promises for us today:

***For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.** And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.* (2Co.1:20 NIV)

Christians believe in God's promise to transform their lives. The Bible is clear that faith is more than a set of beliefs about events of the past; it is a way of life that looks toward the future:

We live by faith, not by sight. (2Co.5:7 TNIV)

As we watch humanity continue in its wickedness and destruction, our faith believes that Christ can change lives. Knowing God's promise, to transform our lives, gives us hope when life seems hopeless:

*For in hope we were saved. Now **hope that is seen is not hope.** For **who hopes for what is seen?** But if **we hope for what we do not see,** we wait for it with patience.* (Ro.8:24-25 NRSV)

Faith that Jesus has come to help us overcome sin enables us to draw from His strength and say "no" to temptation. No matter how wicked people are, God has promised to help them overcome sin:

*The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. **He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand.** When you are tempted, **he will show you a way out so that you can endure.*** (1Co.10:13 NLT)

Our faith alters the way we live. No matter what temptation comes our way, we trust that God will help us to avoid it or grant us the inner strength to withstand it. For if we believe something to be true, we will live in the confidence of that truth. Our situation and experience may not have changed as of yet, but we will act and live, trusting that He will change us. My belief in God's ability to change my present situation will empower me to live above my past experience:

*Now may **the God of peace make you holy in every way,** and may your **whole spirit and soul and body** be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. **God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.*** (1th.5:23-24 NLT)

What we believe about tomorrow will affect our actions today. Our unfaltering trust in God's ability to give us the strength to overcome sin enables us to say "no" to sin today:

He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. ***God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says,*** and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1Co.1:8-9 NLT)

I know that I do not have the power in and of myself, but my faith is in Christ. He lives in me and empowers me to make the right decisions:

*I pray that out of his glorious riches **he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being**, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.* (Eph.3:16-17 TNIV)

I trust that today I will not commit those sins of my past because Christ promised me the strength to stand. For example, if I traveled to your hometown and you offered to meet me at the airport and provide lodging, I would not make other arrangements because I trusted your faithfulness. I would travel without concern about these details. All my actions were in faith that you would do as you had promised. Christ is faithful and promises to empower us to overcome sin; we must live our lives trusting in His faithfulness. Hence, I know I will say “no” to temptation because God promises to provide me with the strength to walk in victory. I believe and trust Him, and therefore, I receive:

*For **every child of God defeats this evil world**, and **we achieve this victory through our faith**. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.*

(1Jn.5:4-5 NLT)

Our faith is not a stagnant set of beliefs that we hold as being true; rather, our faith is dynamic. What we believe will affect our actions today as well as tomorrow:

*Jesus answered, “I am the **way**, the **truth** and the **life**. **No-one comes to the Father except through me**.”* (Jn.14:6 NKJV)

We have faith that Jesus spoke the truth in **the past**, that He is the way to live for **today**, and that He will transform our lives for **tomorrow**. Therefore, let us understand faith and experience all that Christ has accomplished for us through His death and resurrection.

THE AUTHOR OF OUR FAITH

Faith in God does not, nor ever could, originate from man. Mankind’s very nature lives in denial of the existence of the true God. Saul (later called Paul after conversion) did not believe that Christ was the Messiah and persecuted the church until:

*The grace of our Lord **was poured out on me** abundantly, along with the faith and hope that are in Christ Jesus.* (1Ti.1:14 TNIV)

The Bible states that both grace and faith were given to Paul (Saul before conversion), which means that faith does not originate from man:

*For by grace you have been saved **through faith**, and **this is not your own doing**; it is **the gift of God**—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.* (Eph.2:8-9 NRSV)

God does not give us faith because we are worthy; faith is a gift from God. He gives us faith because through our unworthiness, He receives the glory for our salvation:

*Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. **Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith?*** (Ja.2:5 NLT)

We did not choose to believe in God; He chose us to believe. We lived in rebellion to God; consequently, Christ had to be the originator of our faith:

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, **the author and perfecter of our faith**.* (He.12:2 NIV)

Our faith only comes through Jesus:

*Yes, **the faith which comes through Him** has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.* (Ac.3:16 NKJV)

Jesus is the originator of our faith. All Christians start by receiving a measure of faith to accept Who Christ is:

*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, **in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you**.* (Ro.12:3 NIV)

You have one measure; I might have less. However, receiving a smaller measure of faith does not give me an excuse to doubt! The differing measures of faith are not a ratio of faith to doubt, but rather greater amounts of faith are given by God to a person in order to attempt the difficult tasks that God has given him. Great faith reflects the ability to trust God to do impossible things. Jesus said:

*For truly I say to you, **if you have faith the size of a mustard seed**, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and **nothing will be impossible to you**.* (Mt.17:20 NASB)

No matter how small the original portion of faith Christ gave you, it must not remain stagnant; it needs to grow:

*We must always give **thanks to God for you**, brothers and sisters, as is right, because **your faith is growing abundantly**, and the love of everyone of you for one another **is increasing**.* (2Th.1:3 NRSV)

Our faith is supposed to grow from the day it is first given. When I was a young Christian, I lived by the motto: "Faith is like a muscle; the more we use it, the stronger it becomes." The process of growing in faith coincides with our willingness to trust God; hence, growing in faith is not always easy:

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that **the testing of your faith develops perseverance**. Perseverance must finish its work **so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything**.* (Ja.1:2-4 NIV)

Our faith grows when we encounter temptations and trials. Through hardship we learn to rely on God's strength, and we grow into maturity. Growing in faith is similar to weight lifting. A weight lifter only gains muscle when he puts his muscles under great strain. When one weight becomes easy, he adds more weight, for only by increasing the weight will his muscles grow. In the same way, our faith grows when we are forced to rely on God. Without temptation or trials, we default to our own self-reliance, but when temptation and trials stretch us beyond our means, we call on God and are forced to trust Him to help us in our time of need. Therefore, our faith starts with Christ, Who is its Author, but it continues to grow with the trials of life.

FAITH AS OPPOSED TO DOUBT

Faith is simply believing. The question is never how much faith do we have, but rather, do we have faith. Jesus said:

*So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and **does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says**.* (Mk.11:22-24 NKJV)

Many times this passage is interpreted to not mean a physical mountain but, rather, spiritual problems in our lives. This teaching sows the seeds of doubt that are preventing us from moving both the physical and the spiritual mountains in our lives. Doubt cancels faith:

*But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. **But he must ask in faith without any doubting**, for the one who doubts is like*

*the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For **that man ought not to expect** that he will receive anything from the Lord.* (Ja.1:5-8 NASB)

Faith is not something we can measure; we either have faith or we don't. We either believe that the mountain will move, or we doubt it. We cannot be 95% sure that God will answer a prayer, for 5% doubt nullifies the 95% faith. Faith and doubt are opposites. If faith says, "It will rain," doubt says, "We will continue to have drought." If faith says "Victory," then doubt concedes defeat. If we define faith, we would probably quote:

*Now faith **is being sure** of what we hope for **and certain** of what we do not see.* (He.11:1 TNIV)

If we define doubt, we could probably create the quote:

*"Now **doubt is being sure of what we fear** for and certain of what we do not see."* (not Scripture)

Doubt is merely being certain that God cannot or will not do as He promised. If we doubt God, we believe Satan; if we believe God, we doubt Satan's lies. We must stop fooling ourselves; who are we going to believe? Are we going to believe God, Who cannot lie?

*A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which **God, who does not lie**, promised before the beginning of time,* (Ti.1:2 NIV)

Or, are we going to believe the devil, who is the father of lies?

***You are of your father the devil**, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, **he speaks from his own nature**, for **he is a liar and the father of lies**.* (Jn.8:44 NASB)

Therefore, the question is not how much faith do we have; but rather, do we have faith to trust that God will do as He promised.

A TRUE FAITH

The Gospel message states that all people can receive God's gift of eternal life through faith, by believing that Christ died for their sins:

*They answered, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved**, you and your household."* (Ac.16:31 NRSV)

If we believe that we are saved, then we will share this good news with others. Because of our faith that Jesus saved us, the appropriate response is to tell others what has happened to us:

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Ro.10:9-10 NIV)

To merely concede that God exists and that a man named Jesus died on a cross two thousand years ago is not faith unless this brings you to a point of an appropriate response. For example, if you were about to leave my house and I saw a lion go behind my garage, I would warn you not to go to your car. If you would acknowledge what I said but continue to walk out my front door, your action would be incongruent with your statement that you believed me. Lacking an appropriate response discredits your claim of faith. However, if you would take the baseball bat from the closet and proceed outside to your car, your response would be somewhat appropriate and affirm your statement of faith. When you read the Scripture, do you respond appropriately or are you unaffected by what you read? You might say that you believe God, but how can people tell that you believe?

*Now to Him who is able to establish you **according to my gospel...** and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, **leading to obedience of faith.*** (Ro.16:25-26 NASB)

Paul's message was not just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but he always taught the necessity of having an appropriate response of obedience to the teachings of Jesus. Our claim to believe that Jesus is the Way necessitates that we live His way:

*Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among **all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.*** (Ro.1:5 NIV)

The Gentiles believed that everything Jesus said was true, and from that belief came the obedience to follow His teachings. We cannot separate believing in God from obedience to God. Paul writes:

*I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me **in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done.*** (Ro.15:18 NIV)

All three of the previous texts came from the same book, Romans, and prove the direct association between belief and obedience. We can say that someone believes in Christ, or we can say that someone is obedient to the faith:

*The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and **a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.*** (Ac.6:7 NRSV)

The priests became obedient to the faith because they believed the Gospel to be truth. Faith that is not accompanied by obedience is a demonic faith; for Satan and his demons believe in God as well. Demons actually lived at one time in the presence of God but refused to obey Him. Now, they spend every moment plotting against both Him and His people:

*You believe that there is one God. You do well. **Even the demons believe—and tremble!*** (Ja.2:19 NKJV)

Faith in God without an appropriate response of obedience does not save:

*So you see, **faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.*** (Ja.2:17 NLT)

Our faith must go beyond mere belief-ism. If there is no appropriate response to what we claim to believe, then we really do not believe:

*In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and **he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him.*** (He.5:9 NLT)

A saving faith in Christ is proven to be real when our faith moves us to respond in obedience to what God commands. Therefore, true faith, as opposed to demonic faith, is not just based on knowledge but is always accompanied by an appropriate response.

LIVING BY FAITH

Many Christians make the New Testaments a rule book that is focused on the commands of God, making it a religion with a set of rites, rituals, and regulations. It is true: we must obey the New Testament:

"So why do you keep calling me 'Lord, Lord!' when you don't do what I say?" (Lk.6:46 NLT; Lk.8:20)

Is God only seeking a mechanical obedience with a life of submission: do this and don't do that? God sent Jesus to die on the cross in order to

re-establish a relationship with man. We are not saved solely to keep the commands of the New Testament; we are saved to have a relationship with God. God reveals His will, and man responds to it:

*This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put **My laws in their mind** and **write them on their hearts**.* (He.8:10 NRSV)

The Christian life is not about commands but about listening to God as He speaks to our hearts. It is about a relationship. The Holy Spirit opens our minds to understand the Scriptures and reveals how we are to apply them to our lives. First, we listen; then, we must respond:

*But **don't just listen to God's word**. You must **do what it says**. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.* (Ja.1:22 NLT)

We need to discern the will of God in every situation by listening to His voice. The New Testament commands each of us to do many things, but as one person, I can only do one thing at a time. There are times when I know of three people with needs, but which am I to help? I can't do all three at the same time, and yet we read:

*Anyone, then, **who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins**.* (Ja.4:17 NIV)

If I do one of the three things, the previous Scripture says that I will be guilty of sin because I did not do the other two. If I am visiting the sick, I cannot feed the hungry. If I am feeding the hungry, I am not inviting strangers into my home. A Christian can only do one thing at one time; hence, it is important to know which one thing God wants us to do at any given moment. God seeks a personal relationship, through which we respond to the Spirit's leading:

*He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—**not of the letter but of the Spirit**; for the letter kills, but **the Spirit gives life**.* (2Co.3:6 TNIV)

The Christian life is more than just keeping commands; it is about talking with God about our day. Once God reveals His will, He expects us to obey. Obedience to God's specific will requires faith:

*So then, **just as you received Christ** Jesus as Lord, **continue to live in him**, rooted and built up in him, **strengthened in the faith** as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.* (Co.2:6-7 NIV)

We must continue in Christ just as we have received Him—by faith. We received Him through hearing, believing, and responding:

*Peter said to them, "**Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.**"* (Ac.2:38-39 NASB)

By responding to what we heard, we received the Holy Spirit:

*In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so **that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*** (Ga.3:14 NASB)

Since we received Christ's Spirit by believing what we heard, we must continue to live in Him by listening and responding to what the Spirit says through the Word. Obedience is more than following the do's and do not's of the Scripture. Obedience is listening for God to personally tell us His will for each day of our lives:

*So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish **all the good things your faith prompts you to do.*** (2Th.1:11 NLT)

Faith discerns the voice of God even when no audible sound is heard. It is the voice that the great evangelists heard; it is the voice that the great prophets heard; and it is the voice that beckons you to do what the Lord has planned for you today. Do you hear His voice? Noah did, and He built an ark. His faith directed his actions:

*By faith Noah, **being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear**, prepared an ark for the saving of his household* (He.11:7 NKJV)

Abraham heard God, and he left Haran. Moses heard God, and he went to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go!" Gideon heard God, and he routed a vast army with three hundred men. David heard God, and he ran to meet the giant and killed him with one stone. Elijah heard God, and he told King Ahab that it would not rain. It did not rain for three and one half years.

***Elijah was a human being like us**, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.* (Ja.5:17-18 NRSV)

These men did not have an extra set of ears but were men like us: people of faith willing to step out when their hearts heard the voice of God. Maybe God is telling you to say something to someone:

*And since **we have the same spirit of faith**, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," **we also believe and therefore speak**.* (2Co.4:13 NKJV; 1Pe.4:11)

What have you heard God tell you to do lately? Did you step out in obedience to His voice, or did you deny that God was speaking to you? There are only two choices that every Christian has before him: to obey God's voice or to deny that God ever spoke. When we read the Word of God, we need to step out in faith and in the confidence of His leading:

*We remember before our God and Father **your work produced by faith**, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1Th.1:3 TNIV)

We need to live by faith. When God speaks to us, whether it be a command of Scripture or a task He whispers in our hearts, we must obey.

A SAVING FAITH

Faith has a greater purpose than merely allowing us to go to heaven; our faith in God frees us from the power of sin. Faith is necessary if we have a need that makes us rely on others:

*We were given this hope when we were saved. (If **we already have something, we don't need to hope for it**. But if we **look forward to something we don't yet have**, we must wait patiently and confidently.)* (Ro.8:24-25 NLT)

For example, Abraham had faith and trusted God that he would have a son even though it was physically impossible for Sarah to conceive:

*Abraham's faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah's womb. Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. **He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.*** (Ro.4:19-21 NLT)

Abraham had enough spiritual sense to take God at His Word and overlook what common sense told him was impossible—he trusted God. Many Christians do not trust that God will do what He has promised.

Hence, they strive to maintain a certain standard of holiness by their own efforts. By their efforts, they negate God's promise:

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

(Ga.5:4-5 NIV)

God has made many promises, and we must trust and wait for Him to accomplish them in our lives. The only time a person must wait is when he cannot do something by himself. We must come to this point. God waits until we humble ourselves and trust in Him to do as He has promised:

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.

(1Pe.5:5-6 NRSV)

Humility is the key to victory over sin. We must trust God and wait in faith for Him to do what He has promised. We must humble ourselves and wait on God:

Who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(1Pe.1:5 NKJV)

We will never attain holiness by our own effort. Holiness can be attained only by trusting in the Holy Spirit to transform our lives:

We are always thankful that God chose you to be among the first to experience salvation—a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and through your belief in the truth.

(2Th 2:13 NLT)

I remember my past and my failure to live a life pleasing to God, but I am confident in God and trust that He will do as He has promised:

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

(Php.1:6 NRSV)

The choice is yours. You can keep trying to live the Christian life by your own strength, or you can trust that God will empower you not to sin:

He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful.

(1Co.8-9 TNIV)

God is faithful, and He will keep us from falling into sin. The question is do we believe and trust Him? We are saved by faith in Christ and by faith alone. However, true faith doesn't merely believe something to be true but trusts that it is true and looks for its fulfillment in our lives.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. What is faith?
2. Who is the originator of our faith? Why?
3. What percentage of faith is necessary in order to receive answers to our prayers? Why?
4. What relationship does faith and doubt have in regard to God and Satan?
5. What is the evidence that we believe something?
6. What does it mean to “live by faith?”
7. When is faith necessary?
8. Do you have faith in God? Why?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Grace is

Day 1: Read John 1:1-18. What came through Jesus Christ?

Day 2: Read the summary of Elijah's life, Romans 11:1-6. What did you learn about grace?

Day 3: Read the summary of Paul's life, Galatians 1:13-24. What did you learn about grace?

Day 4: Read Ephesians 2:1-10. What did you learn about grace?

Day 5: Read Titus 3:3-8. What did you learn about grace?

Day 6: Read Ephesians 1:3-14. What did you learn about grace?

Day 7: Read the parable of the lost son, Luke 15:11-24. What did you learn about grace?

Memory verse:

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews.4:15-16

LESSON 7

THE GRACE OF GOD

A COVENANT OF GRACE

Many people define grace by an acronym “**God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.**” What does that mean? We can better understand grace if we know the difference between justice, mercy, and grace. **Justice** gives us **what we deserve**:

For the wages of sin is death.

(Ro.6:23 NKJV)

The penalty for one sin is eternal separation from God in a place called hell. Since we have all sinned, God is just in sending every person to hell. On the other hand, **mercy** **does not** give us **what we deserve**:

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

(1Ti.1:16 NIV)

Mercy is reactive. Rather than sending us to hell for sin, God decided to forgive us when we believe and receive Jesus’ death as payment for our sin. Finally, **grace** gives us **what we do not deserve**:

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

(He.4:16 NKJV)

Grace is proactive rather than merely negating the penalty for our sin. It empowers us with the inner strength to say “no” when we are tempted; it enables us to overcome our sins. Grace also grants us the privilege of adoption by God as sons. This adoption allows us the opportunity to spend eternity with Him in heaven. For many, grace means that while we were sinners God justified us:

*For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they **are now justified by his grace as a gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

(Ro.3:22-24 NRSV)

Justification is part of grace, but it is not the whole truth. We need to grasp the whole truth about grace:

*This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere **by changing lives, just as it changed your lives** from the day you first heard and **understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.*** (Co.1:6 NLT)

The prophets of the old covenant knew that their experience did not hold the fullness of all that God had promised. They waited with eager anticipation for all that they only partially understood:

*As to this salvation, the prophets **who prophesied of the grace that would come** to you made careful searches.* (1Pe.1:10 NASB)

Before Christ came, the promises were beyond the grasp of the people of Israel. For the promises came by grace, and grace came through Christ:

*For the law was given through Moses, but **grace and truth came through Christ.*** (Jn.1:17; NKJV; Ro.1:5)

The Old Testament prophets did not experience grace but rather spoke of the promised grace. Yet God speaks of the fullness of grace that was poured out after Christ's death:

***From the fullness of his grace** we have all received one blessing after another.* (Jn.1:16 NIV)

The old covenant was of Law, which came through Moses. The new covenant was one of grace, which came through Christ. Grace did not exist in its present form prior to Christ's birth into the world:

*But to **each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*** (Eph.4:7 TNIV)

Many will argue the fact that the word grace was found in the Old Testament as well. This is true as God's grace was required to sustain a physical line of people from whom the Christ would come. If God had not worked in those Israelites who were faithful to Him, none of Israel would have survived:

*And as Isaiah predicted, "**If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors to us,** we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah."* (Ro.9:29 NRSV)

In the old covenant, God's grace always ensured that a remnant would be left faithful. Their grace was a sustaining grace which enabled them to survive in the favor of God:

God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." But what is the divine reply to him? **"I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."** **So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.** But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise **grace would no longer be grace.** (Ro.11:2-6 NRSV)

The first covenant was by Law; the second covenant was by grace. The difference between Law and grace is this: the Law says, "Do this, and you shall live"; while grace says, "You have received life; now walk therein." To try to live by Law after we receive Christ violates grace:

*For if you are trying to **make yourselves right with God by keeping the law**, you have been **cut off from Christ!** You have **fallen away from God's grace.** But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive by faith the righteousness God has promised to us.*

(Ga.5:4-5 NLT)

Law is opposed to grace, as the Law requires effort from man to live up to a certain standard. Grace, on the other hand, enables man to live up to God's standard. Law is man trying to appease God, while grace is God enabling man to please Him:

*I do not set aside the grace of God; for **if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.*** (Ga.2:21 NKJV)

We do not live by Law but by grace, but we must understand God's grace. A significant change took place between the old covenant and the new; through Christ, grace came into the world to eternally change the lives of men.

GOD'S WORK, MAN'S RESPONSE:

The new covenant is not just for the Jews but, rather, for all the nations. However, not everyone is saved; for the covenant is only for all whom the Lord our God will call:

*Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **The promise is** for you and your children and **for all who are afar off**- **for all whom the Lord our God will call.*** (Ac.2:38-39 NIV)

Before we accepted Christ, some of us denied the existence of God, while others believed in Him but rejected His commands. Both groups of people were controlled by sin:

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. **Like the rest, we were** by nature objects of wrath. **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.** (Eph.2:3-5 NIV)

Because man lived in rebellion against God, God had to initiate the relationship with mankind. People had no interest in Him—only an act of grace could start this relationship:

No one can come to Me **unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up on the last day. (Jn.6:44 NASB; Jn.6:65)

Like a light on a summer night that attracts insects, God has to draw people to Himself; otherwise, no one would ever have come to Him:

You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then **God made you alive with Christ**, for he forgave all our sins. (Co.2:13 NLT)

When Adam sinned, we died spiritually, apathetically deadened to the things of God. God had to make us alive by His Spirit so that we could not only accept Him but also grasp salvation:

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because **they are discerned only through the Spirit.** (1Co.2:14 TNIV)

To gain spiritual sensitivity or insight, man needs to die to his former way of life and be born again. Just as physical conception and birth are determined by the parents, God determines our spiritual birth:

He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession. (Ja.1:18 NLT)

Grace is all about God choosing man—not man choosing God:

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit. (Jn.15:16 NKJV)

God denies man a part in salvation, saying that He chose us before we existed—before the creation of all things:

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (Eph.1:4 NKJV)

God's grace was not given to us because we merited it, but it was given to us before the beginning of time:

For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. (2Ti.1:9-10 NLT)

Paul makes it unmistakably clear that he did nothing to deserve God's favor or to influence God to call him by His grace:

But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles. (Ga.1:15-16 NRSV)

We cannot earn the right to be chosen by God; otherwise, it would be considered a work. Like Paul, God chose us before our birth:

Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Ro.9:10-13 TNIV)

If God's decision to choose us is based on the effort of man, then it is not grace:

So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (Ro.11:5-6 NIV)

Over and over, the Bible establishes our inability to come to Christ and God's power to intervene in our lives and choose some of us by His grace:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify

the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. **It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus**, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1Co.1:26-31 TNIV)

Grace is all about God extending His favor on undeserving man:

*Giving thanks to the Father, **who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints** in the light. **He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son**, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

(Col.1:12-14 NRSV)

God qualified, rescued, and brought us to Himself; God made us open to the Gospel in order to receive Christ as Lord:

*A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, **was listening**; and **the Lord opened her heart to respond** to the things spoken by Paul.*

(Ac.16:14 NASB)

Like Lydia, God is the One Who opened our hearts to respond to the Gospel. Therefore, grace is about God doing for man what man could not do for himself: reach out to God for mercy.

GRACE THAT SAVES

I made the decision to follow Christ when I was 17 on a flight to army boot camp. You too accepted Christ at some point in your life, but grace is not based on that decision. In order to understand grace, we must understand choice. What is free choice? Romans 7 speaks about Paul's life before Christ, and he denies free choice:

*And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, **in my sinful nature**. I want to do what is right, **but I can't**. I want to do what is good, **but I don't**. I don't want to do what is wrong, **but I do it anyway**. But if I **do what I don't want to do**, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.*

(Ro.7:18-20 NLT)

Paul was a Jew under the Law before he received Christ—unable to do what he wanted; he only did the evil he did not want to do. Before Christ, we made choices; but we were controlled by sin, predisposed to evil by our sinful nature. This is another type of choice: manipulated choice. We can make a choice that is manipulated by outside forces. Consider why companies are willing to pay millions of dollars for one 20 second commercial at the Super Bowl. They know, and science has

proven it, that through subliminal advertising at an event like the Super Bowl, they can get people to change their choice of deodorant, food, car, and so on. Through advertising, we are manipulated to do things we did not intend to do before watching the advertisement. The Bible teaches us that Satan, like the advertising companies, knows how to manipulate our choices:

The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2Co.4:4 NASB)

People do not believe because Satan has manipulated their choices.

For Christians, another kind of choice is empowered choice. What does it mean to be empowered? We make choices, but God, through the indwelling of His Spirit, influences our choices by grace:

*Therefore, my dear friends, **as you have always obeyed**— not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence— **continue to work out your salvation** with fear and trembling, **for it is God who works in you to will and to act** according to his good purpose.* (Php.2:12-13 NIV)

Paul is saying “continue to choose” but “it is God who works in you, strengthening you to make the right choice.” Grace works by God working within our will. Christ is the One Who lives in us and gives us the strength and will to change. The Scriptures clearly teach that we received Christ because of God’s grace working in us. Our faith, the means through which we received Christ, is from Jesus:

*We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion **who initiates and perfects our faith.*** (He.12:2 NLT)

Jesus is the author of our faith. Faith does not originate from ourselves—faith is a gift from God by grace:

*For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**, and that **not of yourselves; it is the gift of God**, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For **we are His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* (Eph.2:8-10 NKJV)

We are God’s workmanship. He not only calls us, but He gives us the faith to believe in Him. The Bible is unmistakably clear that God is the author of our faith:

*The grace of our Lord overflowed for me **with the faith and love** that are in Christ Jesus.* (1Ti.1:14 NRSV)

Faith is not an intellectual exercise but a gift from God by His grace:

*When he arrived, he was a great help to those **who by grace had believed.*** (Ac.18:27 NASB)

Salvation really has little to do with man; it is all about God:

It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. (Ro.9:16 NIV; Php.1:6)

Grace, by definition, denies man any credit for coming to Christ.

***For it has been granted to you** on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,* (Php.1:29 TNIV)

God does not force us against our will but works in us, making all the other options seem unpalatable, illogical, and unacceptable. Once again, God is the One Who works in us and, by His grace, brings us to accept Him:

*When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*** (Ac.13:48 NASB)

Therefore, before we think that our ability to believe caused us to rise above the rest of the world, understand that our faith was really another working of God's grace that authored within us the faith to be saved.

MERCY FORGIVES; GRACE EMPOWERS

One of the greatest problems facing the church is that many people accept God's grace to be saved but never realize the fullness of His grace. Their lives become stagnate. We need to continue in grace:

*When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who **spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.*** (Ac.13:43 NRSV)

If we relegate grace to the realm of mercy, accepting only the forgiveness of sin but rejecting its power to transform lives, we will have received God's grace in vain:

*God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, **so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.** As God's fellow workers **we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.*** (2Co.5:21-6:1 NIV)

Many people teach that grace is no more than mercy, offering only forgiveness. They tell us that what we do does not matter, as long as we ask God for forgiveness. To offer forgiveness for sin without the requirement to discontinue sinning, makes grace a license to sin:

*For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, **who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality** and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.* (Jude 4 NIV)

Grace is not mercy. The grace to be saved is but a small sampling of all that God's grace wants to accomplish in the lives of His people:

*They long for you and pray for you because of **the surpassing grace of God that he has given you.*** (2Co.9:14 NRSV)

Grace enables man to live to God's holy standard because grace frees us from our slavery to sin and continues to change our actions:

For sin shall not be master over you**, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? **Shall we sin** because we are not under law but under grace? **May it never be! (Ro.6:14-15 NASB)

Mercy is reactive, forgiving us for the sins we have committed. Grace is proactive. Not only does it change our very nature, but it also empowers us to say "no" to sin. Grace enables us to live for God:

*For **the grace of God** that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say **"No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,*** (Ti.2:11-12 NIV)

Grace empowers us to change. If we are not saying "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions, then we do not have the grace of God that saves:

*Now this is our boast: our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, **in the holiness and sincerity that are from God.** We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but **according to God's grace.*** (2Co.1:12 TNIV)

While living under Law, admitting defeat is a sign of utter hopelessness. However, under grace, our admission of weakness releases God's grace by causing us to seek His promised freedom:

*He said to me, "**My grace** is sufficient for you, **for power is made perfect in weakness.**" So, I will boast all the more gladly of my*

*weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ...**whenever I am weak, then I am strong.*** (2Co.12:9-10 NRSV)

When we cry out to God from our weakness, we begin to rely on Him for His strength to help us. Since we admitted that we were helpless, God receives all the glory when we receive victory over a sin. Our weakness and humility is the key to releasing God's grace, which helps us overcome:

*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but **One who has been tempted in all things as we are**, yet without sin. Therefore **let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace**, so that we may receive mercy and **find grace to help in time of need.*** (He.4:15-16 NASB)

In today's society, humility is often seen as weakness; however, with Christianity, it is our humility that offers us true strength:

*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, **"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."** Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, **that he may lift you up in due time.*** (1Pe.5:5-6 NIV)

God's grace enables us to live holy lives and transforms our lives. Grace keeps us from falling. We stand firm by God protecting and enabling us:

*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*** (1Co.10:12-13 NKJV)

Once humbled, we need to ask God to do what we cannot do for ourselves. God did not merely justify us before the beginning of time; He also had a comprehensive plan, that through the Spirit we would be made holy:

*We are always thankful **that God chose you to be among the first to experience salvation—a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy** and through your belief in the truth.* (2Th.2:13 NLT)

We are saved through the work of the Spirit; His work makes us holy. God's Spirit does the work of transforming our lives:

*To God's elect... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, **through the sanctifying work of the***

Spirit, to be obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1Pe.1:1-2 TNIV)

As we continue to live in the truth, we begin to realize how much salvation is God's work and how little of salvation is dependent on man's work:

*But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly **that what he has done has been done through God.*** (Jn.3:21 NIV)

God's grace not only justifies us; it also sanctifies us through God's Spirit of grace. Therefore, we need to continue in the grace of God to be sanctified; otherwise, we have received God's grace in vain.

GOD'S EQUIPPING GRACE

God does not give us a little grace every once in a while; God offers us the fullness of His grace. Stephen is a testimony to this fact:

*Stephen, **full of grace** and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.* (Ac.6:8 NRSV)

Just as with Stephen, God gives us abundant grace. God's grace is proactive; it empowers and affects the total person:

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2Co.9:8 NIV)

Did you notice the "all's" in the previous verse. We have been given abundant grace because God has a work for us to do. Grace is not a Christian smorgasbord in which we choose the types of grace we want. God's grace is all or nothing:

*We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to **those who are the called according to His purpose.** For whom He foreknew, **He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son,** that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom **He** predestined, these **He** also called; whom **He** called, these **He** also justified; and whom **He** justified, these **He** also glorified.* (Ro.8:28-30 NKJV)

Since God's primary purpose for the Church is to bring transformation into others lives, to stop at our own personal transformation without sharing this truth is to resist God's will. We are called according to His

purpose. One of the great fallacies of the Christian life taught in North America is that God saved us so that we could enjoy life and go to heaven. However, God saved us for His purpose:

*God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, **but according to His own purpose and grace** which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.* (2Ti.1:9 NASB)

We do not merely receive the character of God but the purpose of God. For, the Spirit burdens us with the concerns of God and creates in us the will to live for God's purpose:

*For it is God who **works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*** (Php.2:13 TNIV)

God has a specific plan for your life because you were saved for His purpose:

*In him we **were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.*** (Eph.1:11 NIV)

God has a plan and specific purpose for every Christian's life. Paul also was saved for God's plan, and He equipped Paul to complete it:

*I was made a minister, according to **the gift of God's grace** which was given to me **according to the working of His power.** To me, the very least of all saints, **this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles** the unfathomable riches of Christ.* (Eph.3:7-8 NASB)

Paul was set apart with the laying on of hands to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. His ministry was successful because of God's grace:

*Finally, they returned by ship to Antioch of Syria, where their journey had begun. The **believers there had entrusted them to the grace of God to do the work** they had now completed.* (Ac.14:26 NLT)

Paul became an apostle by the grace that God had given him. You too have been given gifts by God's grace to fulfill His purpose for your life:

*We have **gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.*** (Ro.12:6 NRSV)

For this purpose, God's grace equips us individually for a specific purpose, which no other person can fulfill:

*Each one should **use whatever gift he has received** to serve others, **faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*** (1Pe.4:10 NIV)

God's grace takes various forms to meet various needs. These gifts are not the natural talents with which a person may be born. Rather, each Christian receives specific spiritual gifts from God:

*All these **are activated by one and the same Spirit**, who **allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses**.* (1Co.12:11 NRSV)

Once we are born again, the Spirit determines what gifts we receive:

*There are **different kinds of gifts**, but the **same Spirit**. There are **different kinds of service**, but the **same Lord**. There are **different kinds of working**, but the **same God works all of them in all men**. Now **to each one the manifestation of the Spirit** is given for the common good.* (1Co.12:4-7 NIV; He.2:4)

I have heard many people who were taught how to preach in seminaries; however, they were not gifted by God. Ministers in the church, apart from God's gifting, are counterproductive:

*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for **apart from Me you can do nothing**.* (Jn.15:5 NASB)

We can try to minister to people by our own initiative, but we will fail to be effective. Only when we minister through Christ will we succeed. No Christian is exempt from God's purpose or gifting. No Christian has all the gifts. Diversity of God's gifts is similar to our bodies. We are not made of just one part but of many parts working to one goal. It is in the collective ministering of Christians that the fullness of Christ can bring wholeness to the world :

*But to **each one of us grace was given** according to the measure of Christ's gift... And **He gave some** as apostles, and **some as prophets**, and **some as evangelists**, and **some as pastors and teachers**, for **the equipping** of the saints for the work of service, to the **building up** of the body of Christ.* (Eph.4:7; 11-12 NASB)

God's gifts are developed with use. I may give my son a baseball glove, but using it will make him proficient in catching a ball. We receive gifts by God's grace, but we must use them in order to bless others. Through our faithfulness in using God's gift, we are blessed:

*For this reason I remind you to **fan into flame the gift of God**, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.* (2Ti.1:6 TNIV)

If God's grace chooses us, changes us, and equips us, then mankind cannot claim any merit in regard to their salvation. God's grace works in our lives, making us what we are:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

(1Co.15:10 NRSV)

The actions of Christians are merely the evidence that we have received the grace of God. In this way, our works do not earn us salvation but are the proof that we are saved:

*When he arrived and **saw the evidence of the grace of God**, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*

(Ac.11:23 NIV)

Grace draws us to God, transforms our lives, and equips us for service. Therefore, the whole of the Christian life can be summed up in one word: grace. Every good thing is completed for God by Christ through the Spirit of grace.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. When did grace first come into the world?
2. What is the difference between mercy and grace?
3. When did you receive God's grace?
4. What is the difference between salvation by works and salvation by grace?
5. Mercy is reactive, while grace is proactive. How does this affect the Christian's life?
6. What is the relationship between law and grace?
7. How can a person receive God's grace in vain?
8. What does "the evidence of the grace of God" mean?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

A Covenant is

Day 1: Read the narrative of Noah, Genesis 9:1-17. What did you learn about a covenant?

Day 2: Read the narrative of Abram, Genesis 12:1-9. What did you learn about Abram's covenant?

Day 3: Read the narrative of Abraham, Genesis 17. What did you learn about Abraham's covenant?

Day 4: Read the narrative of Moses, Leviticus 26. What did you learn about Israel's covenant?

Day 5: Read the illustration found in Galatians 4:21-32. What did you learn about the two covenants?

Day 6: Read the prophecy found in Hebrews 8:6-13. Who failed the first covenant, and how did the new covenant rectify its problems?

Day 7: Read the narrative of Cornelius, Acts 10. What did you learn about the two covenants?

Memory verse:

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 Corinthians 3:6

LESSON 8

AN ETERNAL CONTRACT

THREE DISTINCT ERAS

We can speak of faith, grace, and salvation as free gifts, but does God expect something from man? If we divide the six thousand years of man's history as determined by the genealogies found in the Scripture, we find that they are divided into three distinct eras: the era of conscience, the era of Law, and the era of grace. Each one lasted about two thousand years. The first two thousand years of man's history began with the fall in the garden of Eden and continued through the time of Noah when man lived by his **conscience**. The second two thousand year period of man's history, started with Abraham and ended with Christ's resurrection, when God's people lived by **Law**. It was during this era that God revealed His will to man in the form of a written code, which man had to keep in order to share in the blessings of God. The final two thousand year period of man's history, when God's people live by **grace**, began with Christ's resurrection and will end with His return. As previously studied, grace empowers God's people to become like Him. Since there are three different ways (conscience, Law, and grace) that God has dealt with man, people might accuse God of changing. To answer this accusation, let me use an example. When my first child was born, I did not give him much freedom because he was still without the ability to reason. When he was unsupervised, he was contained within a crib or a playpen, and when he was allowed to roam free, he was constantly supervised. It would have been irresponsible for me to tell my toddler, "I am going out for a while, and I have left directions on the fridge for feeding yourself and changing your diaper; I hope to be back before bedtime." Since he could not read or understand my directions, they would have been meaningless. However, when my child was eight years old, I could leave him alone in the yard or house for periods of time. He could go to his friend's house for the day because I knew he could reason between

right and wrong. He had learned the rules, as well as, the punishment expected should he violate the rules. Usually, he did as expected, but there were moments of distraction and temptation in which he would break the rules. Dependant upon the severity of the offense, an appropriate discipline was given. As he matured and the more responsible he proved himself to be, the greater the freedom he enjoyed. However, when he failed, he lost his freedom in a form of discipline, referred to as “being grounded.” At the age of seventeen, my son proved himself to be responsible. Not only did we allow him to go out for the day without any contact with us, but we also allowed him the right to use our car. Now to drive a car requires great self-control. One has to pay attention to the surroundings and the car’s speed. A car is also a huge investment, the loss of which would have a profound financial effect on the family. One might claim that I had changed over the years; however, I did not. What changed was the ability and maturity of my son. My relationship with my son had changed to reflect what he had learned. It is with this understanding that we examine the three eras of man. My son as a baby illustrates the age of conscience, when God did not give any laws because man had no understanding; however, there was consequence for sin. My son as a child illustrates the age of law, when God gave basic laws because man had a minimal reasoning; however, there was personal consequence for sin. My son as a teenager represents the age of grace, when God fully communicated His will through His Spirit and man knew Him intimately; however, the consequence for sin was experienced in the loss of rights. Many unbelievers accuse God of change, but the Bible teaches that He cannot and will not change:

*God is not a human being, that he should lie, or **a mortal, that he should change his mind.** Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?* (Nu.23:19 NRSV)

God does not change, but as mankind came to understand who they were, God’s relationship with man changed to reflect that understanding. Therefore, let us consider the changes that took place in the relationship between God and man under the three distinct eras.

THE ERA OF CONSCIENCE

For the first two thousand years, God did not give mankind any laws, whereby, men would know how to live. Yet in spite of this, in the

first generation after the fall, we find humanity being divided into two types of people: those with faith and those without faith:

It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. (He.11:4 NLT)

Cain was very aware that his life was not pleasing to God; in fact, God addressed this issue with him:

*Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? **If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.**"* (Ge.4:6-7 NIV)

Cain did not heed God's warning. One day Cain was overcome by sin and killed Abel. Cain eliminated the only man of faith living on the earth at that time. Not even Adam was a man of faith, for we read:

*Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him." **To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.*** (Ge.4:25-26 NASB)

Adam was created as an adult in the image and likeness of God. When he had children, he passed on both his likeness and image to his offspring. One hundred thirty years later, when Seth was born, man began to call on the name of the Lord:

*When **Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.*** (Ge.5:3 NRSV)

Even though the Bible tells us that with Seth men began to call on the name of the Lord, not everyone born of Seth had the faith of his father. It wasn't until Seth was 105 years old that he became the father of Enosh (Ge.5:6), who also was a man of faith. When Enosh was 90 years old, he finally had a son named Kenan, who shared his faith (Ge.5:9). When Kenan was 70 years old, he finally had a son named Mahalalel, who shared his faith (Ge.5:12). When Mahalalel was 65 years old, he finally had a son named Jared, who shared his faith (Ge.5:15). When Jared was 162 years old, he finally had a son named Enoch, who shared his faith (Ge.5:18). Let me remind you that these men had other sons and daughters, born before and after the son who shared their father's faith,

but they followed the way of Cain. This pattern becomes clear in Enoch's life when we read:

*When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah. After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another 300 years, and he had other sons and daughters. **Enoch lived 365 years, walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.*** (Ge.5:21-24 NLT)

To have faith in God is to walk with Him rather than to walk opposed to Him. Enoch walked with God:

*By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." **For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*** (He.11:5 TNIV)

When Enoch was 65 years old, he finally had a son, Methuselah, who shared his faith and became the oldest man who ever lived--969 years old (Ge.5:21). When Methuselah was 187 years old, he finally had a son named Lamech, who shared his faith (Ge.5:25). When Lamech was 182 years old, he finally had a son named Noah, who shared his faith (Ge.5:28). Of Noah we read:

*By faith Noah, **warned by God** about events as yet unseen, **respected the warning and built an ark** to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became **an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.*** (He.11:7 NRSV)

When Noah was 500 years old, he had three sons named Shem, Ham, and Japheth, who shared his faith (Ge.5:32). I feel it is important to understand that as far as the Bible is concerned, only one line of twelve people lived who had faith before the flood: Abel, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, and Noah's sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Each of these twelve men had other sons and daughters, yet at the time of the flood, only Noah and his three sons and their wives survived in the ark. Other than these twelve men, there is no record of anyone else who followed God. In fact, the Bible concludes that the wickedness of the earth reached such a saturation point that God said:

*The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that **every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil***

all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. (Ge.6:6 NIV)

Without guidelines, man's depravity went out of control; they turned to violence as the means to gain what they desired:

*So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is **filled with violence** because of them.* (Ge.6:13 TNIV)

God had to destroy the world with a flood but saved Noah and his family in an ark. God warned the people through Noah:

*He did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but **protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others.*** (2Pe 2:5 NIV)

Noah lived another 350 years; but before he died (2006 years after creation), a man named Abram was born. Therefore, even though they had no law to guide mankind from creation to the death of Noah, there was a line of twelve men who lived by faith. The rest of the world became so wicked that God had to destroy it.

GOD MAKES A COVENANT:

It is important to understand that both Noah and Abram lived at the same time. In the crossing of these two men's lives, God entered a new relationship with one man, Abram. Abram's father was not a man of faith, for he served other gods:

*Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: '**Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.*** (Jos.24:2 NKJV)

God chose Abram and made a covenant with him, singling him out from the rest of mankind. A covenant is an eternal contract that is subject to its terms: **If** man does his part, **then** God will fulfill His part. Abram was 75 years old when God made a covenant with him:

*The LORD had said to Abram, "**Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**"* (Ge.12:1-3 TNIV)

God's covenant with Abram had two aspects of blessing: first to become a nation and second to be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. If Abram was to become a great nation, he had to leave his country, his family, and his friends and go to an unknown land. We know Abram believed God because he obeyed Him:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. (He.11:8 NASB)

When Abram was 99 years old, God changed Abram's name to Abraham and reminded him of His covenant:

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; **walk before me, and be blameless.** And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous."* (Ge.17:1-2 NRSV)

God was asking Abraham to be blameless. To be blameless is not to be sinless; rather, it is to be without blame. In other words, God was attaching to the covenant the stipulation that Abraham follow in absolute obedience to all God asked of him. This stipulation is clearly evident when we read:

*By faith Abraham, when God tested him, **offered Isaac as a sacrifice.** He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son.* (He.11:17 TNIV)

When God asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham set out early the next morning to do it. God stopped Abraham when he lifted the knife to kill Isaac on the altar. Abraham was blameless, for when God asked, Abraham responded in instant obedience. When God asked Abraham to circumcise every male in his household as a sign of their covenant, Abraham obeyed:

This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.** And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and **it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. (Ge.17:10-11 NASB)

Abraham kept the covenant of which circumcision was a sign; hence, God blessed him and his descendants by making them the great nation of

Israel. Therefore, Abraham kept the covenant he made with God by blamelessly doing everything God asked of him.

THE COVENANT OF LAW

Abraham's descendants went to Egypt during a severe drought and stayed there for four hundred years. Israel became a great nation in Egypt. Just as twelve men lived for God prior to Abraham, now twelve tribes were in Israel with a thirteenth tribe, Levi, being appointed to serve God at His tabernacle. On Israel's journey back to the land that God had promised Abraham, He re-established Abraham's covenant with Israel:

*Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ...Now **if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then** out of all nations **you will be my treasured possession.**"* (Ex.19:3, 5 NIV)

The covenant that God made with the twelve tribes of Israel contained the "if" and the "then" clauses. If Israel fully obeyed God, then God would make Israel His treasured possession. Moses wrote the words of the covenant on two stone tablets:

*Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance **with these words I have made a covenant** with you and with Israel." So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And **he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.**"* (Ex.34:27-28 NASB)

In the terms of the covenant that God made with Israel, God did not ask man to become perfect like Himself, but rather, God asked Israel to honor Him and to stop committing harm to their neighbor:

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. "**You shall have no** other gods before Me. **You shall not make** for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything... **You shall not take** the name of the LORD your God in vain... **Remember the Sabbath day**, to keep it holy... **Honor your father** and your mother.. **You shall not murder.** **You shall not commit adultery.** **You shall not steal.** **You shall not bear false witness** against your neighbor. **You shall not covet**... anything that is your neighbor's.* (Ex.20:1-17 NKJV)

The terms of the covenant were just ten simple commands. Israel agreed to God's proposal of covenant: to obey not just the Ten Commandments but everything the Lord had said:

*Then he took the Book of the Covenant and **read in the hearing of the people.** And they said, "**All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.**"* (Ex.24:7 NKJV)

The people of Israel agreed to the terms of the covenant. Israel was also aware of the blessings for keeping the covenant, and they also knew the punishment for disobeying it:

*But **if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes,** or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but **break My covenant,** I also will do this to you...^(v18) And **after all this, if you do not obey Me,** then **I will punish you seven times more for your sins...**⁽²¹⁾ **Then, if you** walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, **I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins...**⁽²³⁾ **And if** by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and **I will punish you yet seven times for your sins...**⁽²⁷⁾ **And after all this, if you do not obey Me,** but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, **will chastise you seven times for your sins.** (Le.26:14-15;18-19;23-24;27-28 NKJV)*

God loved those with whom He made a covenant enough to punish them in increasing increments (7x7x7x7=2401 times), until they would turn from and confess their sin to God:

But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility towards me, which made me hostile towards them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham... (Le.26:40-42 NIV)

Israel kept breaking their covenant with God, and God kept punishing them and waiting for them to return because He loved them. The purpose of the Law was to give sin definition, to convict men of their sinfulness, and to cause them to humbly come to God in their need. Paul, in speaking about his life under the Law before he became a Christian, wrote:

So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. **The trouble is with me**, for I am all too human, **a slave to sin**. I don't really understand myself, for **I want to do what is right, but I don't do it**. Instead, **I do what I hate**. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; **it is sin living in me that does it**. And I know that **nothing good lives in me**, that is, in my sinful nature. **I want to do what is right, but I can't**. **I want to do what is good, but I don't**. **I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it** anyway. But **if I do what I don't want to do**, I am not really the one doing wrong; **it is sin living in me that does it**.
(Ro.7:14-20 NLT)

The Law is best summed up as “Do this, and you will live.” However, Israel and Judah could not do what the Law required. This failure caused them to experience the wrath of God, generation after generation:

*They have returned to **the sins of their forefathers**. They have refused to listen to me and **are worshiping other gods**. **Israel and Judah have both broken the covenant I made** with their ancestors.* (Jer.11:10 NLT)

Israel and Judah didn't just break the Law, but at times their evil also surpassed the nations who lived in the land of Israel before them:

*But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that **they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed** before the Israelites.* (2Ch.33:9 NKJV)

God is always able to keep His covenant, but the covenant was contingent on both Israel and Judah fulfilling their parts first:

*The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, **broken the everlasting covenant**.*
(Isa.24:5 TNIV)

Even though some sought after God, the majority constantly rebelled against Him and disobeyed His commands. God's covenant was everlasting, but Israel always failed to keep their part of the covenant:

*For if there had been nothing **wrong with that first covenant**, no place would have been sought for another. **But God found fault with the people** and said: “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. **It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors** when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because **they did not remain faithful to my covenant**, and **I turned away from them**, declares the Lord’*
(He.8:7-9 TNIV)

Since it was impossible for Israel to keep their covenant, God promised to one day make a new covenant. It was God's desire that man should gain an understanding of holiness through the Law. The Law was never meant to enable Israel to live a holy life. God's purpose for the covenant of Law was to make mankind aware that they cannot achieve holiness by their own effort. God's hope was that they would humbly seek beyond themselves to His Saviour:

*So **the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ** that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, **we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*** (Ga.3:24-25 NIV)

Therefore, Israel entered a covenant of Law with God; however, not many kept the covenant; thereby, they experienced the judgment and wrath of God rather than His blessing.

A CHANGE IN COVENANTS

Abraham had been given two aspects of God's covenant: the first to the nation of Israel—a covenant of Law, and the second to all the peoples of the earth—a new covenant. Abraham's two wives illustrate the two covenants:

*The son of the slave-wife **was born in a human attempt to bring about the fulfillment** of God's promise. But the son of the freeborn wife **was born as God's own fulfillment** of his promise. **These two women serve as an illustration of God's two covenants.** The first woman, Hagar, represents Mount Sinai where people received the law that enslaved them. And now Jerusalem is just like Mount Sinai in Arabia, because she and her children live in slavery to the law. But the other woman, Sarah, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. **She is the free woman, and she is our mother.*** (Ga.4:23-26 NLT)

This new covenant was not just another covenant; it had to be a better covenant:

*Jesus has become **the guarantee of a better covenant.***

(He.7:22 NKJV)

Jesus became the mediator of the new covenant. It was superior to the old covenant because it came with new promises:

*But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree **he is the mediator of a better covenant**, which has been enacted through better promises... In speaking of "a new*

covenant," he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear. (He.8:6,13 NRSV)

Even though the new covenant made the old one obsolete, the Law still has a purpose today:

*Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; **I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.** For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, **not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law** until all is accomplished.* (Mt.5:17-18 NASB)

The Law is in effect today to convict us that we are sinners; however, knowing God's Law has never empowered anyone to live a godly life:

"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? *These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but **they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*** (Co.2:21-23 TNIV)

Law is never made for good people; it is made for evil people to be convicted of their sin and need for a Savior:

*Now we know that **the law is good, if one uses it legitimately.** This means understanding that **the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless** and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.* (1Ti.1:8-11 NRSV)

The purpose of the Law is to convict us that we are sinners and have come under God's wrath. Once we come to the realization that we are sinners and receive the Savior, the Law has fulfilled its purpose:

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, **we are no longer under the supervision of the law.** (Ga.3:24-25 NIV)

The moment we receive Christ, we enter into a new covenant with God through Jesus' blood. When Christ died on the cross, the curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom (Mk.15:37-38), signifying the passing of the old covenant:

*Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the **new covenant in My blood,** which is shed for you.* (Lk.22:20 NKJV)

The covenant of Law could not overcome man's desire to sin; only Christ can enable us to fulfill the Law by His Spirit:

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.
(Ro.8:3-4 NIV; He.7:18-19; Eph.2:14-15)

The first covenant of the Law with its animal sacrifices did nothing to enable us to live holy lives. It is only through Christ and by the indwelling of His Spirit that our consciences can be clean before God:

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance— now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.
(He.9:13-15 NIV)

The new covenant promises to give us the ability to keep the covenant, with complete dependence upon God:

Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
(2Co.3:5-6 NRSV)

Under the old covenant, man had to remember the Law that was written on stone and then personally apply it to their lives. Now with the new covenant, God writes His laws in our minds and on our hearts through the presence of the Spirit and He empowers us to live His way:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days", says the Lord: "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'know the Lord,' for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."
(He.8:10-12 NASB)

God writes His laws on our minds when we repent and writes them on our hearts through baptism. For this reason, our **"if"** terms are to repent and be baptized; **"then"** He forgives us our sins and gives us the Holy Spirit.

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Ac.2:38-39 TNIV)

Therefore, all Christians are under another covenant, a new and better covenant which is far superior to anything that man has ever experienced.

AN EVERLASTING COVENANT

There have been many false prophets who claim to be the next Messiah and claim to have the last revelation of God. Jesus warned us of them:

*He replied, "Don't let anyone mislead you, for **many** will come in my name, **claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and saying, 'The time has come!'** But don't believe them.* (Lk.21:8 NLT)

The best known of these would be Mohammad and his religion of Islam. Mohammed claimed to be the last prophet of God:

*Then if anyone tells you, '**Look, here is the Messiah,**' or '**There he is,**' don't believe it. **For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones. See, I have warned you about this ahead of time.*** (Mt.24:23-25 NLT)

Jesus never taught that there was another covenant. However, in the Old Testament, God foretold of the next covenant with many prophecies to define what it would look like:

*I will make **an everlasting covenant** with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and **I will inspire** them to fear me, **so that they will never turn away** from me.* (Jer.32:40 NIV)

Since no other covenant was foretold in the New Testament, then those claiming to be the last prophet are false. We are continually being warned in Scripture:

*But **false prophets** also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who **will secretly bring in destructive***

opinions. They will even **deny the Master** who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. (2Pe 2:1 NRSV)

Many of today's cults (i.e., Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah Witnesses) deny that Jesus is God. They were started by men who claim that they were given a revelation by an angel. This is contrary to the Scripture:

*But even **if we, or an angel from heaven**, should preach to you a **gospel contrary to what we have preached** to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, **if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received**, he is to be accursed!* (Ga.1:8-9 NASB)

An angel may have spoken to them, but since their message is different from the one found in the New Testament, the angel was not from God:

*For such persons are false apostles, deceitful workers, **masquerading as apostles of Christ**. And no wonder, **for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light**. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also **masquerade as servants of righteousness**. Their end will be what their actions deserve.* (2Co.11:13-15 TNIV)

Just because an angel claims to be from God, it does not mean that he is from God:

*Anyone **who goes too far** and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and **does not bring this teaching**, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting **participates in his evil deeds**.* (2Jn.1:9-11 NASB)

The final book in the Bible, Revelation, reveals the end of the world but does not mention another covenant between God and man:

*I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues** which are written in this book; and **if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life** and from the holy city, which are written in this book.* (Re.22:18-19 NASB)

Therefore, Jesus ushered in God's final covenant with man. If anyone would like to suggest another gospel or revelation contrary to that of Christ, He will be eternally condemned.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. After being banished from the garden, what laws did God give man for the first two thousand years?
2. What were the two aspects of the first covenant which God made with Abram?
3. Most covenants contain an “if” and a “then” clause; what are their purposes?
4. What was Israel’s penalty for breaking their covenant with God?
5. What is the purpose of the Law in today’s society?
6. What are the terms of the new covenant?
7. When did the new covenant take effect?
8. What replaced the Law, and how is it better?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Repentance is

Day 1: Read the narrative of Jonah, Jonah 3. What does it mean to repent?

Day 2: Read the narrative of Samson's death, Judges 16. What did you learn about repentance?

Day 3: Read the narrative of the anointing of Jesus' feet, Luke 7:36-50. What did you learn about repentance?

Day 4: Read the parable of the two sons, Matthew 21:28-32. What did you learn about repentance?

Day 5: Read the narrative of Ezra's judgment, Ezra 10:1-17. What did you learn about repentance?

Day 6: Read the narrative of John the Baptist, Luke 3:1-18. What did you learn about repentance?

Day 7: Read the narrative of Simon the Sorcerer, Acts 8:9-25. What did you learn about repentance?

Memory verse:

I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Acts 26:20

LESSON 9

WHEN SORRY IS NOT ENOUGH

THE FOUNDATION OF THE GOSPEL

Repentance is the first requirement for man in the new covenant. Repentance is an elementary teaching that should be taught to new Christians. The Bible also tells us that repentance is a foundational teaching of Christianity on which other teachings, like justification and sanctification, are built:

*Therefore let us leave **the elementary teachings** about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again **the foundation of repentance** from acts that lead to death, ..* (He.6:1-2 NIV)

Like building a house, if the foundation is compromised, the rest of the house will be too. Without true repentance, the Gospel is compromised. For this reason, Christ told His disciples that repentance must be part of the Gospel message for all nations:

*He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that **repentance** for forgiveness of sins **would be proclaimed** in His name **to all the nations**, beginning from Jerusalem.* (Lk.24:46-47 NASB))

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost in Jerusalem, Peter shared the Gospel (good news). The men responded to the message with, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter told them what God required by introducing the new covenant:

*Peter said to them, "**Repent**, and be baptized **every one of you** in the name of Jesus Christ **so that your sins may be forgiven**; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and **for all who are far away**, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."* (Ac.2:38-39 NRSV)

Repentance was part of the first Gospel presentation. If anyone is to come to Christ, he must repent—you, your children, and all who are afar

off—**everyone** whom God will call. God, through the eternal Gospel, is commanding all people **everywhere** to repent:

*We shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but **now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him.*** (Ac.17:29-30 NLT)

We cannot have eternal life without repentance. We must repent or perish:

*The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. **He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.*** (2Pe.3:9 NLT)

The Bible is not suggesting personal perfection after believing on Jesus and inviting Him into your life. Rather, people are called to turn from their life of sin. We cannot turn to God without turning away from our life that is consumed by the pleasures of sin. The Bible states Jesus' purpose for coming to earth:

*I have not come to call the righteous, **but sinners, to repentance.*** (Lk.5:31-32 NKJV)

Therefore, since everyone born of Adam is captive to sin, then everyone is a candidate for repentance. Unless we repent from sin and turn toward God, we also will perish in hell:

*I tell you, no! **But unless you repent, you too will all perish.*** (Lk.13:3 NIV)

REPENTANCE: OUR SPIRITUAL CONCEPTION

The Biblical concept of repentance is to turn around. The Greek word for “repentance” is “metanoia” meaning “**a change of mind.**” (Young's Analytical Concordance). Our minds need to be changed. From the moment we were born, the attitudes of our hearts were in rebellion to God, and our minds were controlled by sin:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. (Co.1:21 NIV)

The mind controls our actions. Since our minds were corrupt, our actions were also corrupt:

*To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. **Their very minds and consciences are corrupted.*** They

profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. (Ti.1:15-16 NRSV)

Our minds were so deceived. Like Israel, some of us thought we were serving God, when in actuality, we were opposing Him:

*Indeed, an hour is coming when **those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.*** (Jn.16:2 NRSV)

Because our minds were controlled by the sinful nature, our lives were hostile to God and to Christians who lived holy lives:

*Those who live according to the sinful nature **have their minds set on what that nature desires, ... the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.***" (Ro.8:5-8 NIV)

Another aspect of our corrupt minds is that our minds were also blinded and unable to perceive God's truth:

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God. (2Co.4:4 NLT)

Our minds were blinded by self, sin, and Satan. We thought God wanted religion—rules, rituals, and traditions—while God really sought an intimate relationship with us. Our ears heard the Gospel, but our minds were not able to understand:

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1Co.2:14 NKJV)

Repentance is the transformation of the mind from a natural mind that is based on intellect and blinded by sin to a spiritual mind. The spiritual mind is based on intuition with understanding given through the Spirit. This mind not only understands but also applies these truths to life:

*By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever **those who are being made holy.** The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 'This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put My laws in their hearts **and I will write them on their minds.*** (He.10:14-16 TNIV)

In the Old Testament, Israel had to take the Law written on the tablets of stone and apply it to their hearts. With the new covenant, God writes His

laws on our minds and in our hearts so that our obedience comes from within. By God writing His laws on our hearts, He changes our desires. For example, I used to like mint ice cream. One day, I became ill after eating it. I had such an unpleasant experience that I lost my appetite for that flavor and stopped eating it. Even to this day, I am not tempted to eat mint ice cream. This example is similar to the effect of the Holy Spirit writing God's laws on our minds, and it demonstrates the very concept of repentance. The normal process of sin is temptation, desire, and sin.

*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one **is tempted** when he is drawn **away by his own desires and enticed**. Then, **when desire** has conceived, it gives **birth to sin**; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.* (Ja.1:13-15 NKJV)

Before we were Christians, we failed because we tried to change our behavior by our will without having our desire changed. God's way is to change our desires so that when tempted, we no longer sin. Our minds control our bodies. Our minds were changed when we received the mind of Christ:

*But **we have the mind of Christ**.* (1Co.2:16 NASB)

Our minds were bent on rebellion toward God, but Christ's mind is one with God in direction and purpose. Repentance is a change of mind. It reflects a complete 180° change in our attitudes, behavior, and character—from serving sin to serving the Almighty God. A change of mind always reflects a change in action. Repentance is the initial "changing of our mind" and is ultimately reflected in a total change of behavior:

*You **were taught** to put away your **former way of life**, your **old self**, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and **to be renewed in the spirit of your minds**, and to clothe yourselves **with the new self**, created according to the likeness of God **in true righteousness and holiness**.* (Eph.4:22-24 NRSV)

If we are going to be permanently changed, then we need to change more than our intentions. We need a change in our desires. Repentance is comprised of two actions: first a change of mind in which sin becomes repugnant. This change causes us to turn from sin:

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "**Everyone** who names the name of the Lord **is to abstain from wickedness.**" (2Ti.2:19 NASB)

The second part is the new desire for holiness, which causes us to turn to God:

*I have declared both to **Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance** and have faith in our Lord Jesus.* (Ac.20:21 NIV)

This concept of repentance is clearly presented in Scripture when the Thessalonians turned from worshipping idols to serving God:

*For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and **how you turned to God from idols** to serve a living and true God.* (1Th.1:9 NASB)

We were all sinners—slaves of sin—because of our evil desires, but now we have the mind of Christ and are saints—people who desire holiness. How many of the books of the New Testament are addressed:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, **To the sinners who are unfaithful** in Christ Jesus:* (not Scripture)

Not one book of the New Testament is addressed to sinners. Paul never addresses the saved by the Greek word "hamartolos"—"sinners." Rather, he writes:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, **To the saints** who are at Ephesus and **who are faithful** in Christ Jesus:* (Eph.1:1 NASB)

Paul always refers to the saved by the Greek word "hagios"—"saints." This word is also used in regard to God's Spirit: the "Hagios" Spirit—the Holy Spirit. Repentance is the change of mind from sinner to saint. Notice the tense when we read:

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while we were still sinners**, Christ died for us.* (Ro.5:8 NKJV)

The concept of "were still" leads us to conclude that Christians are no longer sinners. We were sinners, but we turned from our rebellion against God toward obedience to God—repentance. Sometimes I play football, but I am not a pro-football player. Similarly, I am a saint who sometimes sins, but I am not a sinner. This is clear when we read:

*He who **turns a sinner** from the error of his way **will save his soul from death** and will **cover a multitude of sins.*** (Ja.5:20 NASB)

A sinner is saved when he experiences a change of mind that causes him to turn from sin. If we take the word metamorphosis, which shares the same root word as “metanoia,” we have a good idea of the extent of change in repentance. In repentance, our minds are so radically changed that it can be compared to metamorphosis: the transformation of an ugly caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly. What a caterpillar was, is in no way similar to what a butterfly is. The only difference between sinners and caterpillars is that with caterpillars, the transformation is physical; and with sinners, the transformation is spiritual. Repentance changes who we are:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. (Ro.8:5-8 NIV)

The Bible does not say, “when your mind is set on what that nature desires” and “when your mind is set on what the Spirit desires”—meaning one person oscillating between two different states of mind. Rather, the Bible uses “those” and “those,” two differing types of people. One in its natural state has the mind controlled by sin, and the other in a spiritual state has the mind changed, controlled by the Spirit. A Christian cannot have the mind of Christ and the mind controlled by sin. James addresses the issue of a double-minded man:

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. (Ja.1:8 NIV)

Some Christians are double minded, similar to children playing with a light switch. They act according to their whims: off/on; darkness /light; sin/ Spirit; sinner/saint. They are never sure of what mind they will be functioning in during the next moment, let alone the next day. This is not the Christian experience:

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (Ja.4:8 NRSV)

A double-minded man is still separate from Christ, a sinner with a wicked heart. A double-minded person will not see God:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Mt.5:8 NKJV)

Christians think that they can be double-minded because this teaching is prevalent in today's churches. If a man thinks he is a sinner, then he will continue to sin:

For **as he thinks** in his heart, **so is he**. (Pr.23:7 NKJV)

If a person believes he is a saint, then his actions will start to change. Once psychologists created the term “mid-life crisis,” every man over fifty had the excuse to do something irresponsible—whether buying an expensive sports car, having an affair, or acquiring some indulgent behavior. The popular acceptance of a fact as truth generates actions according to that belief. The Bible teaches:

And you shall **know the truth, and the truth shall make you free**. (Jn.8:32 NKJV)

If believing the truth will set us free, then believing a lie will keep us bound by sin. As long as the church teaches that a Christian can choose to oscillate between the sinful nature and the Spirit, man will continue to live a life of sin. Scriptures teach that Christians no longer have a sinful nature with evil desires:

Those **who belong to Christ Jesus** **have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires**. (Ga 5:24 NIV)

Christians have received the divine nature through the indwelling of God's Spirit—if the Spirit of God lives in them:

And because of his glory and excellence, **he has given us great and precious promises**. These are the promises that **enable you to share his divine nature** and **escape the world's corruption caused by human desires**. (2Pe.1:3-4 NLT)

Double-minded people are sorry for their sins. They show regret, but continue to live for the pleasures of sin. Being sorry for our sin is not repentance. Regretting an act falls short of discontinuing the act. Many people are sorry for their sin, but they refuse to stop their sinning:

Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that **your sorrow led to repentance**. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For **godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation**, not to be regretted; but **the sorrow of the world produces death**. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement

desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (2Co.7:9-11 NKJV)

Godly sorrow brings a change of mind that leads to salvation, while worldly sorrow goes no further than mere emotion. Worldly sorrow is clearly seen in Judas' life. After Judas betrayed Jesus, we read:

*Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, **he felt remorse** and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "**I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.**"* (Mt.27:3-4 NASB)

Judas had worldly sorrow—he merely regretted his decision but did not alter his actions. Instead, he continued in sin, destroying his very self through suicide:

*Then **he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple** and departed, and went **and hanged himself.*** (Mt.27:5 NKJV)

Unless we experience this change of mind, we are not saved. Repentance is not the rebirth that constitutes our salvation; repentance only leads to salvation:

***For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation** and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.* (2Co.7:10 NRSV)

We are not saved when we have a change of mind that is demonstrated by praying the sinner's prayer—a prayer of repentance. Repentance is our spiritual conception which leads to salvation but is not salvation itself. However, we cannot dismiss the importance of repentance; for it is an essential part of the new covenant. Repentance leads to eternal life:

*When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then **God has given** even to the Gentiles **the repentance that leads to life.**"* (Ac.11:18 NRSV)

If you have never experienced the life-changing transformation of your mind, then you are not saved. It is only when we have the mind of Christ controlling us that we can have the assurance that we are saved:

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1Jn.5:12 NKJV)

You may have turned from sin to the best of your ability but have never experienced the control of Christ in your life. You then need to invite Christ into your life as Lord. Repentance is not a work that we must do, but rather, it is a work that God does in us at our invitation:

*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one **whom God exalted** to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, **to grant repentance to Israel**, and forgiveness of sins.* (Ac.5:30-31 NASB)

Repentance doesn't have its origin in man but has its origin in God. Only God can change a person's mind; hence, when we go to a brother to share the Gospel, we must go with prayer, asking God to grant him repentance:

*Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope **that God will grant them repentance** to a knowledge of truth." and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.* (2Ti.2:25-26 NIV)

Again, when a person repents, he is really responding to an act of God. The Bible is clear; repentance is an act of God's grace. Romans says, "God's kindness":

*Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, **not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance**?* (Ro.2:4 NASB)

Since repentance is something we receive and not something man must attain, it is instantaneously received not achieved. Therefore, repentance is a one-time change of mind, from a mind living in rebellion toward God, to a mind which is controlled by Christ seeks after God.

A LIFETIME OF TRANSFORMATION

Even though repentance is the instantaneous change of mind, the act of repenting from all our acts of sin is a life-long process. The Greek word "metanoeo" interpreted "repent" means "to have another mind." This word can be interpreted "to be possessed by the Spirit of God." Repentance happens once, but we repent from sin throughout our lives as we mature in Christ. For once we have had "a change of mind," we will "have another mind" about the way we conduct ourselves:

*I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, **that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance.*** (Ac.26:20 NRSV)

A change of mind always produces a change of attitudes, behavior, and character. If a man loses his mind and becomes insane, his actions are the

only way that people can spot his insanity. His actions will cause him to be sent to a mental institution, because they are the evidence of the condition of his mind. In the same way, the change of mind, which takes place in our repentance, also produces a change of action—a discontinuation of sinful practices. Repentance dealt with the cause of sin—our rebellion against God; however, this change affects how we live—we now seek to please God. To deal with the cause of sin ultimately affects its symptoms—the sinful acts themselves. For, we did not receive just another mind; we received the mind of Christ:

But we have the mind of Christ.

(1Co.2:16 NKJV)

We receive the mind of Christ once, but that change affects every decision afterward. For example, if I could take my wife's mind and place it in my head, I would begin to act like my wife. It is only logical that after we have received the mind of Christ that our attitudes, behavior, and character change. We will begin to desire the things that Christ desires and thereby begin to act like Christ. When we think about demonic possession, we think about a person totally out of control and in a violent rampage of destruction. Even though we cannot see the demon, it not only controls the person and influences who he is, but it also manifests itself in the person's behavior. In the same way, if we are possessed by the Spirit of Christ, He controls our actions and causes us to live holy lives. Many legalistic churches try to change a person's action by his willpower. As Christians, we do not try to change a person's actions, but through Christ, his mind is changed to that of Christ. In turn, the new mind changes his actions:

*And you know that **Jesus came to take away our sins**, and there is no sin in him. **Anyone who continues to live in him will not sin.** But anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is.*

(1Jn.3:5-6 NLT)

If we have the mind of Christ, Christ living in us, then we will not continue to sin. A friend of mine tried to quit smoking. He tried hypnosis, the patch, acupuncture, and everything he knew. Then one day the Lord taught him that he was no longer a smoker because Christ lived in him and Christ does not smoke. Every time Satan tempted him to smoke, he simply told himself, "I am a Christian; I am no longer a smoker—I don't smoke." However, our new mind does not mean that we

are sinless, but rather, we will discontinue those sinful practices of which we are aware:

*Those who have been born into God's family do **not make a practice of sinning**, because **God's life is in them**. So they can't keep on sinning, because they are children of God.* (1Jn.3:9 NLT)

Repentance is a 180^o change of mind and reflects a 180^o change in actions. If I went into a store to buy a shirt but then changed my mind, would I come out of the store with a shirt? No! We repent from evil to do good. If we have the mind of Christ, it is only natural that we will react to sin just as He did—He refused to choose sin! When a Christian repents, he makes one choice that affects every choice thereafter. We have obligated ourselves to obey Christ. To repent is to stop all our sinful practices which the Holy Spirit reveals to us:

*Do not lie to one another, **since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices**, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, **but Christ is all, and in all.*** (Co.3:9-11 NASB)

Once we have received the mind of Christ, our minds are constantly being renewed as the Spirit teaches us and convicts us of sinful acts:

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as **a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship**. Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your minds**, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.* (Ro.12:1-2 NRSV)

As we study the Word of God, our thoughts are compared with God's will, and we become aware of our sin. Once we become conscious of our sin, we repent and confess our sins to God, and He transforms our lives:

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1Jn.1:9 NRSV)

This is the normal Christian life—anything less is heresy. Paul writes:

*I will be grieved because **many of you have not given up your old sins**. You **have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure**. ...I have already **warned those who had been sinning** when I was there on my second visit. Now I*

again warn them and all others, just as I did before, that next time **I will not spare them.** (2Co.12:21, 13:2 NLT)

You cannot claim to have turned to God in repentance if you have not discontinued your sinful practices. Repentance is a one-time act of receiving the mind of Christ, but we must repent from individual acts of sin throughout our life:

For **"Those who desire life** and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let **them turn away from evil and do good**; let them seek peace and pursue it. (1Pe.3:10-11 NRSV)

The narrative of Jonah clearly illustrates what it means to repent:

The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because **they repented at the preaching of Jonah**; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. (Mt.12:41 NKJV; Lk.11:32)

What did the people of Nineveh do when they repented? Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, which was an enemy of Israel:

The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. **Announce my judgment against it** because I have seen **how wicked its people are.** (Jonah 1:1-2 NLT)

Jonah preached that God was going to destroy the city in forty days. The Ninevites believed God and, on the basis of their belief, repented:

Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city: **"No one, not even the animals from your herds and flocks, may eat or drink anything at all. People and animals alike must wear garments of mourning, and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence.** (Jonah 3:7-8 NLT)

The Ninevites feared the Almighty God, but their fear went beyond mere concern. They repented. Because they repented and turned from their sin, God responded:

Then God **saw their works, that they turned from their evil way**; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. (Jonah 3:10 NKJV)

Their belief in God caused a turning from wickedness. This "turning from wickedness" is the Biblical definition of the word "repent." In Acts 8, we read of a man named Simon, who thought he could buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter rebukes him:

But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because **you thought you could obtain God's gift with money!** You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. **Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord** that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and **the chains of wickedness.**" (Ac.8:20-23 NRSV)

Because of Simon's past, his understanding was incorrect; he needed to think differently and confess to God in prayer. We all come with a past, but we must encourage one another to change. John the Baptist taught a true application of repentance—the turning away from sin:

Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God... Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire." The crowds asked, "What should we do?" John replied, "**If you have two shirts, give one to the poor.** If you have food, share it with those who are hungry." Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, "Teacher, what should we do?" He replied, "**Collect no more taxes than the government requires.**" "What should we do?" asked some soldiers. John replied, "**Don't extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.**" (Lk.3:8-14 NLT)

Claiming to receive the mind of Christ without repenting of our sins is incongruent with the mission of Christ. The angel, who appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that Mary's baby was a miracle of God, said:

She will bear a Son; and you shall call **His name Jesus**, for **He will save His people from their sins.**" (Mt.1:21 NASB)

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said:

The next day **he saw Jesus** coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God **who takes away the sin of the world!**" (Jn.1:29 NRSV)

When Peter shared the Gospel, he tied repenting from a sin to receiving forgiveness for that sin:

Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out. (Ac.3:19 NRSV)

Without a turning from our sinful acts, there is no forgiveness. Jesus, when speaking about Israel, said:

"They may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise **they might turn and be forgiven!**" (Mk.4:12 NIV)

If we refuse to turn to God in repentance and refuse to repent (turn from our sins), we will not be forgiven and will spend eternity in hell. The new covenant explicitly states that repentance is necessary to be forgiven and to receive the Holy Spirit:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Ac 2:38 NIV)

Therefore, both repentance (a one-time change of mind) and repenting of our sin (a life-long process) are essential for salvation.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. Describe the Biblical concept of repentance?
2. What importance does repentance play in one's salvation?
3. What is the Biblical definition of the words "repent" and "repentance," and how do they differ?
4. What is the original state of man's mind?
5. Which came first, repentance or salvation?
6. Who is the source of our repentance?
7. What is the evidence that we have repented?
8. What does the name "Jesus" mean, and how does it relate to repentance?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

We are born again when

Day 1: Read about the bronze basin, Exodus 30:17-21. What did you learn about the use of water?

Day 2: Read the narrative of John the Baptist, Mark 1:1-11. What did you learn about baptism?

Day 3: Read the narrative found in John 3:22-4:3. What did you learn about baptism?

Day 4: Read the narrative of foot washing, John 13:1-17. What did you learn about baptism?

Day 5: Read the narrative of James and John, Mark 10:35-45. What did you learn about baptism?

Day 6: Read the narrative of Paul's conversion, Acts 22:1-21. What did you learn about baptism?

Day 7: Read the narrative of Paul at Ephesus, Acts 19:1-7. What did you learn about baptism?

Memory verse:

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Romans 6:4

LESSON 10

THE WASHING OF REBIRTH

THE MODE OF BAPTISM:

When the Bible was translated from Greek to English, the “word,” or if necessary “words,” that would carry the same meaning as the Greek word were chosen. Yet some Greek words, in the course of time, have lost their original meaning and have acquired a religious, traditional meaning. With constant use, these words have been accepted as the true meaning. Such was the case with the Greek word “baptizo.” A new word “to baptize” was created instead of translating the exact meaning “to immerse.” Similarly, for “baptisma,” instead of translating its meaning “immersion or submersion,” the word “baptism” was created. To immerse or submerge requires a lot of water:

*At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, **because there was plenty of water there**; and people kept coming to him for baptism.* (Jn.3:22 NLT)

Some Christians imply that “baptizo” and “baptisma” mean “to wash” and do not imply immersion. The Greek New Testament uses “nipto” meaning “to cleanse a part of the body,” “louo” meaning “to bath a whole person,” and “pluno” meaning “to plunge, launder clothing.” These words indicate that baptism is not simply washing; hence, when reading the Bible, one should read “immerse” for “baptize” and “immersion” for “baptism.” The Biblical concept of baptism is to be totally surrounded by water. This fact is evident when the Scriptures use the word “baptism” to describe Israel crossing the Red Sea:

*For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all **under the cloud** and that they all **passed through the sea**. **They were all baptized** into Moses **in the cloud and in the sea**.* (1Co.10:1-2 NIV)

Therefore, the Biblical mode of baptism is to immerse the whole person under the water, surrounding the individual by water.

BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When God made the new covenant, His first requirement for the church was to repent; the second was to be baptized:

*Repent and **be baptized**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* (Ac.2:38 NIV)

The concept of baptism was not new to the disciples. Before Jesus started His ministry, baptism was practiced by John the Baptist:

*John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.* (Mk.1:4-5 NASB)

John the Baptist's ministry of baptism prepared the people for Jesus' coming and was completed when Jesus started His ministry. When Jesus was thirty years old, He was baptized by John in the Jordan River:

*When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that **Jesus also was baptized**... Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age.* (Lk.3:21, 23 NKJV)

When Jesus came to John, he realized who Jesus was:

*Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "**I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?**" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; **it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness**." Then John consented.* (Mt.3:13-15 NLT)

Jesus was not a sinner but had to be baptized in order to show God's way of righteousness. While John was still baptizing people, Jesus withdrew with His disciples to baptize them:

*Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he **spent some time there with them and baptized**. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized.* (Jn.3:22-23 NRSV)

John knew that his ministry was to fade away the moment the Messiah came. Even though some of Jesus' disciples were already baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus re-baptized them. Prior to His death, the twelve disciples started baptizing other people who sought to follow Jesus:

*Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "**Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John**—although it was not Jesus himself **but his disciples who baptized.**"* (Jn.4:1-2 NRSV)

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples (Lk.9) and later the seventy-two (Lk.12), He did not tell them to baptize but rather to preach the kingdom of God. No where do we read of Jesus commanding the twelve disciples to baptize others before His death. Jesus baptized the twelve disciples before His death, and the disciples continued the practice by baptizing other people who desired to become Jesus' disciples.

THE WATER FOR CLEANSING

Baptism is often equated to the first step of a Christian's walk. Even though it is the first step, it is not the only step:

*This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. **There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood,** and these three agree.*

(1Jn.5:6-8 NRSV)

Water is one of the three signs of a Christian, and yet, to conclude that baptism is merely a sign of a Christian would be to neglect a greater truth. The Scriptures tell us that baptism is more than a sign. Instructions are given within the Bible concerning baptism:

*Therefore **let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ** and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, **instruction about baptisms**, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.*

(He.6:1-2 NIV)

The first century church had instructions on baptisms, signifying a much deeper meaning than the sign of faith in Christ. Baptism is an essential part of becoming a Christian, for it is one of the criteria for God's covenant. However, to grasp its significance, we need to understand the role of water in the Old Testament. Before the priests could serve the Lord, they had to regularly wash their hands and feet in the water of cleansing from the bronze basin; otherwise, they would die:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water

*in it, for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. **When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die.*** (Ex.30:18-20 NKJV)

The blood of the sacrifice brought forgiveness, but the water was used for cleansing. Only the water in the bronze basin, which contained the ashes of the red heifer, could be used for cleansing:

*Then **someone who is ceremonially clean will gather up the ashes of the heifer** and deposit them in a purified place outside the camp. They will be kept there for the community of Israel **to use in the water for the purification ceremony.** This ceremony **is performed for the removal of sin.*** (Nu.19:8-9 NLT)

The water of cleansing was used for the purification of sin; however, in reality, this cleansing could only offer a ceremonial cleansing:

By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed** as long as the first tent is still standing. This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that **cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper**, but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body **imposed until the time comes to set things right. (He.9:8-10 NRSV)

The rituals of the old covenant made people ceremonially clean and dealt only with the symptom of sin—guilt. This washing could never restore mankind's conscience to its created potential. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, all consciences were corrupted:

*Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure. **But nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are corrupted.** Such people claim they know God, but **they deny him by the way they live.** They are detestable and disobedient, worthless for doing anything good.* (Ti.1:15 NLT)

The spiritual function of man's conscience was to discern the will of God. But when mankind fell, their spirits were deadened and were separated from God. The function of man's conscience was replaced with his soul's function of emotion/desire. Man no longer sought the will of God, but rather asked himself, "What do I feel like doing?"

They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are the men who divide you,

who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

(Jude 1:18-19 NIV)

The water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer could not restore the spiritual function of the Israelites' conscience because sin separated them from God. Only the voluntary death of a perfect man could deal with man's separation from God. Only Jesus could cleanse consciences from sin so that man could once again discern the will of God:

*The blood of goats and bulls **and the ashes of a heifer** sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that **they are outwardly clean**. How much more, then, will **the blood of Christ**, who **through the eternal Spirit** offered himself unblemished to God, **cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!***

(He.9:13-14 TNIV)

Once our relationship with God was restored through Christ, our consciences were restored to their rightful place—dethroning the soul with its pursuit of emotions and desires. When we receive the Holy Spirit, our spirits come alive again, and our consciences regain the ability to discern the will of God:

*The man without the **Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God**, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, **because they are spiritually discerned**.*

(1Co.2:14 NIV)

Through Adam, man's conscience was corrupted and rendered ineffective, but through baptism, it is restored from an evil conscience—one which merely reacts in guilt after sin:

*Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, **with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water**.*

(He.10:21 NRSV)

We were born with a defective, evil conscience, which had been corrupted by sin. However, the New Testament tells us that through baptism, Christians have received a good conscience:

*And corresponding to that, **baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience**.*

(1Pe.3:21 NRSV)

This good conscience allows us to know the will of God in any given situation. We do not live by the Law, which only tells us what not to do;

we live by the Spirit, Who allows us to discern God's specific will for each situation:

*I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, **my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit.*** (Ro.9:1-2 NASB)

When we lived by emotions, we did what we felt like doing—sin. After we sinned, our consciences condemned our actions, because Satan accused us with guilt. Once our spirits are born again, our consciences discern God's will, and He empowers us to accomplish it. This obedience is confirmed with peace:

*We can say with confidence and **a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness** and sincerity in all our dealings.* (2Co.1:12 NLT)

Paul tells the Corinthians that they can discern whether they please God by the function of their conscience. Our conscience also allows us to discern whether another person is walking with the Lord:

*So **we make it our goal to please him**, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body**, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and **I hope it is also plain to your conscience.*** (2Co.5:9-11 NIV)

A Christian's life is one characterized by obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading, through His voice to our conscience:

*This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that **by them** you fight the good fight, keeping faith and **a good conscience.*** (1Ti.1:18-19 NASB)

Our spirits are reborn and enable us to discern God's will by our conscience. Consequently, our conscience will direct us how to act in love toward our fellow man:

*But the goal of our instruction is **love from a pure heart and a good conscience** and a sincere faith.* (1Ti.1:5 NASB)

Therefore, baptism into Christ has accomplished what the water in the bronze laver with the ashes of the red heifer could never do. It restores our consciences from evil to good and enables us to discern the will of God.

SPIRITUAL HEART SURGERY

The previous Scripture tells us that Christ has not only restored our consciences, but that He has also performed spiritual heart surgery. We not only need a change of mind and a good conscience, but we also need God to cleanse our hearts. Just as our physical heart gives life to our body, our spiritual heart directs how we live—good or bad. Prior to the destruction of the world by a flood, God summarized the condition of man's heart:

*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that **every intent** of the thoughts **of his heart** was **only evil continually**.* (Ge.6:5 NASB)

Notice, we may think with our minds, but our hearts influence our minds for direction and preference:

*The good man brings good things out of the good stored up **in his heart**, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up **in his heart**. For **out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks**.* (Lk.6:45 NIV)

Whatever controls the heart, controls the mind, and, therefore, controls the whole of man. The source of man's sin is not his mind but his heart:

*And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, **out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts**, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. **All these evil things come from within** and defile a man."* (Mk.7:20-23 NKJV)

Man's acts of sin and his thinking are symptoms. The cause of the problem is that from birth our heart is predisposed to sin:

***The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked**; Who can know it?* (Jer.17:9 NKJV)

Natural man's heart is unclean, but God promises that He will give us a heart transplant and will place His Spirit in our hearts:

***I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes** and be careful to observe my ordinances.* (Ez.36:25-27 NRSV)

God promises us that His Spirit will enable us to follow His decrees and laws. Without a new heart, the Holy Spirit cannot live in us. Jesus said that if we are to see God, we must acquire pure hearts:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Mt.5:8 NASB)

We begin to understand how to receive a pure heart by examining the disciples' baptism. Jesus baptized His disciples prior to His death:

After this, Jesus and His disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where He spent some time with them, and baptized. (Jn.3:22 NIV)

At the last supper, Jesus pronounced the disciples clean; noting that Judas was not clean even though he was baptized:

*Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. **And you are clean**, though not all of you." **For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."*** (Jn.13:10-11 NRSV)

Baptism, in response to a sincere faith, cleanses one's heart. Judas' heart was not affected by baptism because he still loved money more than Jesus. By faith—a faith that does not believe **in** but believes **on** the Lord Jesus—are we cleansed from a wicked heart:

*So **God, who knows the heart**, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, **purifying their hearts by faith**.* (Ac.15:9 NKJV)

As we respond in baptism to the Holy Spirit's leading, our sins are washed away, and our hearts are cleansed:

*Now why do you delay? Get up and **be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name**.* (Ac.22:16 NASB)

Christians no longer have deceitfully wicked hearts because we were washed and made holy—past tense:

Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that. **But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

 (1Co 6:9-11 NLT)

The New Testament teaches that Christians call on the Lord in prayer from a pure heart:

*Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, **with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.***

(2Ti.2:22 NASB)

We like to break down becoming a Christian into a series of chronological steps, but the Bible was never meant to be a formula. God controls the order, but we can be sure that baptism, calling on the name of the Lord and receiving a pure heart, must be experienced first. The Christian experience originates from a pure heart:

*But the goal of our instruction **is love from a pure heart** and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

(1Ti.1:5 NASB)

Therefore, baptism is more than a sign. We need to believe that Jesus cleansed our hearts through baptism.

ONE BAPTISM

Which baptism is more important: water baptism or Spirit baptism—the purification or the power? The Scriptures speak of only one baptism:

*For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.*

(Eph.4:4-6 NLT)

All that the Bible teaches concerning baptism is said to take place in the one act; however, this is not always the case. After Jesus' baptism by John, He spoke of having another baptism to undergo:

*I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! **But I have a baptism to be baptized with**, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!*

(Lk.12:49-50 NKJV)

Jesus was distressed about the baptism that He still had to undergo. Jesus asked James and John if they were willing to be baptized with that same baptism that He had yet to face:

*But Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from **the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink**? Are you able to be baptized **with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with**?"*

(Mk.10:37 NLT)

James and John had already been baptized by Jesus in water, but He told them that they would be baptized as He was about to be baptized:

*They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "**The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.*** (Mk.10:38 NRSV)

Jesus tied the concept of a cup with the baptism he had yet to experience. In the garden of Gethsemane, He used the term "cup" to describe His death:

*Father, if You are willing, **remove this cup from Me**; yet not My will, but Yours be done.* (Lk.22:42 NASB)

Jesus was asking if there was another way to redeem man and have the cup of suffering removed from Him. Jesus was using the words "baptism" and "cup" to speak of His upcoming death. Like the Romans, many Christians today do not tie the concept of death with baptism:

*Or **don't you know** that all of us who were **baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** We were therefore **buried with him through baptism into death.*** (Ro.6:3-4 TNIV)

Christians, at the time of the apostles, were baptized into Christ's death and were thereafter viewed as dead. Jesus used the word "baptism" to describe his death because we too must die in our baptism if we are going to be saved from hell:

*It is a trustworthy statement: **For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him.*** (2Ti.2:11 NASB)

We must die with Christ in order to live with Him! Again we read:

*Now **if we have died with Christ**, we believe that **we shall also live with Him.*** (Ro.6:8 NASB)

The Bible explains that our living with Christ is contingent on our dying with Him. Therefore, death is essential for salvation. A third time we read:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Ro.6:5 NRSV)

Our physical resurrection from death is tied with our dying with Christ. The Scriptures are clear that in our baptism, we have died with Christ:

*Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of **your sinful nature**. For you were **buried with Christ when you were***

baptized. And **with him you were raised to new life** because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

(Co.2:11-12 NLT)

The Scripture states that we died to the sinful nature/flesh through our baptism:

*Those who belong to Christ Jesus **have crucified the sinful nature** with its passions and desires.*

(Ga.5:24 NIV)

Many teachers say that the sinful nature/flesh is still alive and affects a Christian's life. The Bible warns:

*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision for the flesh** in regard to its lusts.*

(Ro.13:14 NASB)

The sinful nature/flesh is dead; do not make provision for it in your theology, your thinking, or especially in your actions—it is dead. Many false teachers make provision for the flesh by teaching that the flesh is still alive and needs to “die daily.” This idea **appears** to be truth:

*I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I **die daily**.*

(1Co.15:31 NKJV)

However, what is the context?

*And as for us, why do we **endanger ourselves** every hour? **I die every day**— I mean that, brothers— just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I **fought wild beasts in Ephesus** for merely human reasons, what have I gained?*

(1Co.15:30-32 NIV)

Paul was endangering his life every day for the Gospel—facing death daily. He was not describing spiritual death when he wrote about the need to die daily, because spiritual death happens only once in baptism. Therefore, the Bible clearly teaches us that all Christians died in their baptism.

DEAD IN CHRIST

We need to understand the implications of dying in our baptism. The Scriptures teach that Christians must die to seven things. **First**, we must die to the Law, as it has been replaced by the Spirit:

*In the same way, my friends, **you have died to the law through the body of Christ**, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.*

(Ro.7:4 NRSV)

Second, we must die to the basic principles of this world. Since we have already died to the Law, we no longer live by the basic principles of this world. That is, we no longer strive to keep a set of rules by our will-power:

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? (Co.2:20-21 NIV)

Third, we must die to sin. Sin is more than an action; it is a power that controls our lives. After we have died to sin, it no longer has power over us:

*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? **Certainly not!** How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* (Ro.6:1-3 NKJV)

Fourth, we must die to our sinful nature. The basic principles of the world could not help us overcome sin because the sinful nature desires that which is contrary to God. Once the Holy Spirit lives in us, the sinful nature is displaced, because we now live by the Spirit:

*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. **Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*** (Ga.5:24-25 NIV)

Fifth, we must die to our old self. Our life before Christ was self-centered—our lives were consumed with self-gratification. If we were religious before becoming a Christian, we lived to please self and merely appease God. Our former purpose for life must die:

*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, **that we should no longer be slaves to sin**— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.* (Ro.6:6-7 NIV)

Sixth, we must die to the world. The world is Satan's kingdom which he rules by demons who steal, kill, and destroy man. When we are baptized, we are no longer under the authority of the world but are citizens of the kingdom of God:

*May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, **by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but **a new creation is everything!*** (Ga.6:14-15 NRSV)

Seventh, we must die to ourselves. We need to give complete control of our lives to Christ. Before receiving Christ, we did what we wanted, when we wanted, and why we wanted. We were in control of our sinful lives. Now we must give Him control of our lives and make Him Lord:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Ga.2:20 NIV)

Dying in our baptism is essential for Christ to reveal Himself in us:

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Co.3:3-4 NASB)

We must die to the former life before we can experience all that God has promised to do in our lives as Christians:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2Co.5:17 NASB)

Everything we were is gone. All Christians should know this. Before we can become a new creation, we need to die to the old creation. Jesus depicts this truth when He said:

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the wine would burst the wineskins, and the wine and the skins would both be lost. New wine calls for new wineskins. (Mk.2:22 NLT)

The old wineskin had to go before God could put in us the new wine, Christ's Spirit. Being crucified in our baptism is really only half the truth; the other half is that the new will replace the old:

That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them **do not belong to him at all.**) (Ro.8:8-9 NLT)

Baptism is not only about death, but rather, it is also the means by which we are prepared for Christ's indwelling. Baptism is about God's Spirit living in man:

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Ro.6:4 NIV; Co.2:12)

Baptism does not save us. Through baptism, God destroys all that we had inherited from Adam. Water baptism without the Spirit baptism is nothing but a bath of hollow ritual:

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Ti.3:5 NIV)

The washing of rebirth is empty without the renewal by the Holy Spirit. When we are born again, our spirits are given life, and we are controlled by the Spirit of Christ:

My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. (Ga.4:19 NRSV)

We do not overcome sin by dying in our baptism; we overcome sin by living in Christ:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Ga.3:26-28 NKJV)

When Christ's Spirit lives in us we receive a new, divine nature:

And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires. (2Pe.1:4 NLT)

When we are baptized, we are made one with Christ through the indwelling of the Spirit:

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1Co.12:13 NASB)

Therefore, our water baptism is more than a sign of becoming a Christian, more than the cleansing of our hearts; it is a new birth into a new creation through the indwelling of the Spirit.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. What are the three signs of the believer, and are all three necessary?
2. What was the difference between the old and new covenant in terms of cleansing?
3. Compare the condition of a man's heart before and after he comes to God through Christ?
4. List the different aspects of Christianity's one baptism?
5. Why did Jesus use the word "baptism" to describe his death?
6. Biblically, how does a Christian die to the sinful nature?
7. According to Scripture, what seven things die in our baptism?
8. Even though the old is gone in baptism, what must happen to us before we are in Christ? (Mt.12:43-45)

THE DAILY BIBLE READINGS

God's purpose for the laying on of hands was

Day 1: Read the narrative of Jacob, Genesis 48:8-21. What did Jacob do to bless Joseph's sons?

Day 2: Read the narrative of Moses, Exodus 17:8-16. What did Moses do to help gain the victory?

Day 3: Read the account of Joshua's appointment, Numbers 27:12-23. What was the significance of Moses placing his hands on Joshua?

Day 4: Read Acts 10:34-43. What was the Holy Spirit's purpose in descending upon Christ in His baptism?

Day 5: Read Luke 4:33-41. What did Jesus actually do when He healed the people?

Day 6: Read Romans 8:8-9. Do all Christians have the Holy Spirit in them?

Day 7: Read Mark 16:14-20. What is the purpose of laying on of hands?

Memory verse:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son,

Romans 8:28-29

LESSON 11

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE

The laying on of hands is a basic, foundational teaching found in the Scripture:

*Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind **the basic teaching about Christ**, and not laying again **the foundation**: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, **instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands**, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.* (He.6:1-2 NRSV)

Generally, churches do not teach about this subject. Before we can understand the laying on of hands, we must understand Christ and His ministry. Christ was baptized:

*When **He had been baptized**, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and **He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him**. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Then **Jesus was led up by the Spirit** into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.* (Mt.3:16-17,4:1 NKJV)

Before Jesus started His public ministry, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in His baptism. Why? After all, Jesus was God, and because He had the nature of God, He never sinned:

*Have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had: Who, **being in very nature God**, did not consider **equality with God** something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* (Php.2:5-7 TNIV)

God is one being, existing in three persons. The fullness of God can only be experienced in unity:

*For God was pleased to have **all his fullness dwell in him**.* (Col 1:19 NIV)

The Holy Spirit spiritually connected God the Father with Jesus. After Jesus received the Holy Spirit, He was led into the desert to be tempted. When Jesus came out of the desert, He came in the power of the Holy Spirit and started His ministry:

*When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time. And **Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit**, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. And **He began teaching in their synagogues** and was praised by all.*

(Lk.4:13-15 NASB)

Some would conclude that Jesus could not be God because it was the Holy Spirit Who gave Him power. However, the persons of God are not identical:

*You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, **beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power**, and how he went around doing good and **healing all who were under the power of the devil**, because God was with him.*

(Ac.10:37-38 NIV)

The power of God did not originate in the person of Jesus. To understand how Jesus could be God and yet need the Spirit to grant Him the power to heal is best illustrated in man. Just as God is Father, Son, and Spirit, so man is body, soul, and spirit. Each part of a human being has different functions. Can your soul feel a table? No! Can your body think? No! Only your body can feel the table, and only your soul can think! Does this mean they are not part of a human being because they do not share the same function? No, but it teaches us that each part of a human being is unique unto itself—not all parts have the same function. God is one being, existing in three complex parts, each of Whom have their own function. The power is the function of the Holy Spirit through which Jesus did miracles:

*One day, while **he was teaching**, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting near by (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); **and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.***

(Lk.5:17 NRSV)

The Scriptures pointedly prove that the power was a function of the Holy Spirit. To say that power to heal came from the Spirit and not from Jesus is incorrect. Jesus was very aware of the power that flowed through Him:

*But Jesus said, "Someone deliberately touched me, **for I felt healing power go out from me.**"* (Lk.8:46 NLT)

When Jesus cast out demons, it was by the Holy Spirit:

*But **if it is by the Spirit of God** that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* (Mt.12:28 NIV)

The Scriptures state that Christ had the Holy Spirit without measure:

*For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; **for He gives the Spirit without measure.*** (Jn.3:34 NASB)

God the Father gave the Spirit without measure to Jesus His Son. The Spirit filled Jesus with the power of God, which Jesus enacted by healing people. Therefore, the three persons of God united in Jesus: the will of the Father and the power of the Spirit working through the person of Jesus. Similarly, the three parts of a man are united in a Christian: the human spirit discerns the will of God and the soul processes and enacts the will of God through the body. Christians and God are both one being consisting of different parts, working toward one purpose:

*May the **grace of the Lord Jesus Christ**, and the **love of God**, and the **fellowship of the Holy Spirit** be with you all.* (2Co.13:14 NIV)

Grace, love, and fellowship are different attributes. While knowledge, power, and example are different functions:

*Who have been **chosen according to the foreknowledge** of God the Father, **through the sanctifying work** of the Spirit, **for obedience to Jesus Christ** and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.* (1Pe.1:2 NIV)

The Bible records that the power of God by the Holy Spirit came through Jesus. Jesus released the power of God through physical touch. He cleansed the leper by the touch of His hand:

*Then **Jesus put out His hand and touched him**, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.* (Mt.8:3 NKJV)

Jesus' hand touched Peter's mother-in-law, causing the fever to leave:

*So **He touched her hand, and the fever left her.** And she arose and served them.* (Mt.8:15 NKJV)

Jesus' hand touched a blind man, healing him:

*They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and **begged him to touch him.** He took the blind man by the hand and led*

him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and **laid his hands on him**. (Mk.8:22-23 NRSV)

When a woman was crippled by a demon, Jesus laid His hands on her, and she was healed:

A woman was there who had been ***crippled by a spirit for eighteen years***. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman,^a you are set free from your infirmity." Then **he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God**. (Lk.13:10-13 TNIV)

The people knew that healing came through physical contact with Jesus:

He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. **Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.**" (Mk.5:23 TNIV)

The girl died because Jesus was delayed and arrived too late. However, this did not deter Jesus:

He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and *entered the room where the child was. **Taking the child by the hand**, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). **Immediately the girl got up and began to walk**, for she was twelve years old. (Mk.5:40-42 NASB)

The power of God came from the Holy Spirit, but the power was released through Christ by the physical touch of His hand. Since the power came through Christ, many people sought to touch Him for healing:

A great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and **be healed of their diseases**, as well as **those who were tormented with unclean spirits**. And they were healed. And the whole multitude **sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all**. (Lk.6:17-19 NKJV)

The only requirement for the power of the Holy Spirit to heal is faith. When Jesus went to His home town, He only did a few miracles because of the people's lack of faith:

Then Jesus told them, "A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family." And **because of their unbelief**, he couldn't do any mighty miracles among them except **to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them**. (Mk.6:4-5 NLT)

A person's faith in Jesus allows the power of God to flow to the sick and demon possessed by physical touch:

*Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him **that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.*** (Mk.6:56 NIV)

Jesus' common practice was power released through physical touch:

*When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and **laying his hands on each one**, he healed them.* (Lk.4:40 NIV)

In Jesus' ministry, the laying on of hands was used to heal and cast out demons—even raise the dead:

*When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and **such miracles as these performed by His hands?**"* (Mk.6:2 NASB)

However, Jesus did not need physical touch to heal. At different times, Jesus was not with the sick or demon-possessed person. He verbally commanded, and the person many miles away was restored to wholeness. The best known example is probably the centurion who did not want Jesus to come to his house:

*The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but **only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.** For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it."* (Mt.8:9-10 NRSV)

Therefore, once Jesus was reunited with the Holy Spirit, the power of God for accomplishing the will of the Father came upon Him, and anyone who had physical contact with Him was restored to wholeness.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Christians are commanded to practice the laying on of hands. Jesus taught that once He ascended back into heaven, every Christian would receive the Spirit:

Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.' (When he said

*"living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to **everyone** believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)* (Jn.8:38-39 NLT)

Since the disciples could not receive the Holy Spirit until Jesus ascended, the Christian experience with the Holy Spirit is very different than the Old Testament experience. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples the Holy Spirit in the same manner as the prophets had received the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament::

*And when He had said this, **He breathed on them**, and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit**".* (Jn.20:22 NKJV)

The disciples received the Holy Spirit, and yet later, before His ascension, He speaks of a deeper experience of the Spirit:

*And see, I am sending upon you **what my Father promised**; so stay here in the city **until you have been clothed with power from on high**."* (Lk.24:49 NRSV)

Jesus told His disciples that in the same way that He was clothed with power from heaven, they also would, but they had to wait for God's power:

*And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait for the Promise of the Father**, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now."* (Ac.1:4-5 NKJV)

Christians are clothed with power when they are baptized with the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, God promised that if people repent and are baptized, they will receive the Holy Spirit:

*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And **you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**."* (Ac 2:38 NIV)

This event is a fulfillment of the Old Testament when God promised to pour out His Spirit on all His people:

*In the last days, God says, **I will pour out my Spirit on all people**.* (Ac.2:17 NLT)

Only after Jesus died—a sinless man for sinful people—could God pour out the Holy Spirit on all His people:

***God raised Jesus from the dead**, and we are all witnesses of this. Now **he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven**, at God's right*

hand. And the Father, as he had promised, **gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us**, just as you see and hear today. (Ac.2:32-33 NLT)

Jesus cleansed our hearts from sin so that God could pour out His Spirit into us:

He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. **He generously poured out the Spirit** upon us **through Jesus Christ our Savior**. (Ti.3:5-6 NLT)

When the Holy Spirit lives in us, we are born again and live a totally new life. God prophesied that He would first give us a new heart and a new spirit, after which He would place the Holy Spirit in us:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will put my Spirit in you and move you** to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Eze.36:26-27 TNIV)

The previous prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost. God said that mankind would die the day they ate the forbidden fruit. That very day, man's spirit died. After Jesus ascended into heaven, Christians not only received a new, pure heart, which was prepared to receive the Holy Spirit, but their spirits were also re-born. Through this spiritual rebirth, Christians become one with the Holy Spirit:

But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. (1Co.6:16-17 NLT)

The oneness of spirit, our spirit with God's Spirit, is unique in that we are now seated in the heavenly realms in Christ (Eph.2:6), and Christ now lives in us (Ga.2:20; Co.3:3-4). The same Holy Spirit that came upon Christ, lives in us and fills us with the power of God:

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Ac.2:4 NRSV)

The Holy Spirit lives in us. This experience is different from the way that the Holy Spirit came upon the Old Testament prophets. David calls out:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put **a new and right spirit within me**. Do not cast me away from your presence, and **do not take your Holy Spirit from me**. (Ps.51:10-11 NRSV)

The Holy Spirit comes to indwell a Christian forever:

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor **to be with you for ever**—the Spirit of truth.* (Jn.14:16-17 NIV)

Because the Holy Spirit came with power forever and because He has the power to overcome, He has secured the Christian's life:

*It is God who enables us, along with you, to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, and he has identified us as his own **by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts** as the first instalment **that guarantees everything he has promised us.*** (2Co.1:21-22 NLT; 2Co.5:5, Eph.1:13-14)

There is no one greater than the Holy Spirit:

*Little children, you are from God, and **have conquered them**; for **the one who is in you is greater** than the one who is in the world.* (1Jn.4:4 NRSV)

Christ's Spirit lives in us and will keep us in Him until the end of time:

I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Mt.28:20 NRSV)

The Spirit is a person and is promised to live in us until Christ returns. Since He is a person, He can only be in, or not in, you. A person cannot have half of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit lives in Christians, then Christians contain His fullness. Are you full of the Spirit? Deacons are supposed to be full of the Spirit:

*Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, **full of the Spirit** and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. . . The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, **a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.* (Ac 6:3, 5 NASB)

Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit:

*For he was a good man, **full of the Holy Spirit** and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.* (Ac.11:24 NIV)

The deacon Stephen was also known to be full of the Holy Spirit:

*But **Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit**, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.* (Ac.7:55 TNIV)

The Holy Spirit is God; if He lives in us, we have the fullness of God:

*—that **you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*** (Eph.3:19 NIV)

Jesus promised that we would experience fullness:

*I have come **that they may have life, and have it to the full.*** (Jn.10:10 NIV)

The normal Christian life is to become mature and experience the fullness of God. Christ is God, and through Christ living in us by His Spirit, we experience the fullness of God:

*For **in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives** in bodily form, **and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.*** (Co.2:8-9 TNIV)

Therefore, the same Holy Spirit Who lived in Jesus lives in us today, and with Him, we receive the power of God.

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

If the church is functioning as it should, then the Christians will be mature. They will attain the fullness of God because God lives in them:

*It was **he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and **become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***** (Eph.4:11-13 NIV)

However, many Christians do not experience a Spirit-filled life. They do not know the presence of Christ within them because they struggle to live the Christian life by the power of their will. The Christian life is all about Christ living in us by His Spirit:

***And this is the secret: Christ lives in you.** This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.* (Co.1:27 NLT)

If you are not being transformed from a sinner to saint (growing in Christ's likeness), then you do not have the Spirit:

*But you are **not controlled** by your sinful nature. You **are controlled by the Spirit** if you have **the Spirit of God** living in you. (And remember that those who do not have **the Spirit of Christ** living in them do not belong to him at all.)* (Ro.8:9 NLT)

The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of God, for Christ is God. We have the same Holy Spirit living in us that Christ had. However, we must realize that some people in the church do not have the Holy Spirit. In Asia Minor, Paul met some disciples who were missing something:

*Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, "**Did you receive the Holy***

Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." (Ac.19:1-2 NKJV)

When these followers did not know of the Holy Spirit, Paul's first question was concerning their baptism because everyone who is baptized will receive the Holy Spirit:

*And he said to them, "**Into what then were you baptized?**" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." (Ac.19:3-4 NKJV)*

Paul did not dismiss their lack of water baptism, but rather he baptized them into Jesus. However, he did something else; he laid hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit:

*When they heard this, **they were baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when **Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them**, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.* (Ac.19:3-4 NKJV)

Another time, the deacon Philip went to Samaria and shared the Gospel. Many were baptized with water, but none received the Spirit with power:

*When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, **they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit**, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then **Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*** (Ac.8:14-17 TNIV)

Only after Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritans did they receive the Holy Spirit. Receiving the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands is not a gift or ability that can be attained. A man named Simon wanted the ability to lay his hands on people and give the Spirit:

*Now when **Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands**, he offered them money, saying, "**Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands** may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, **because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money!**"* (Ac.8:18-20 NRSV)

The only way a person can be empowered by the Holy Spirit is to give the Spirit control of his life. When the apostle Paul accepted the Lord, God sent Ananias to lay his hands on him:

So Ananias went and entered the house. **He laid his hands on Saul** and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me **so that you may** regain your sight **and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**" And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and **was baptized.**

(Ac.9:17-18 NRSV)

Paul was both healed and filled with the Spirit by the laying on of hands. Therefore, if a person has not received the Holy Spirit at his water baptism, he does not need to be baptized again. He only needs a born again Christian to lay his hands on him to receive the Holy Spirit.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When the Holy Spirit comes within a Christian, the power of God dwells in him, and he is given the power to heal by the laying on of hands:

These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak in new languages. They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and they will be healed.

(Mk.16:17-18 NLT)

All believers can lay their hands on sick people and heal them. The New Testament speaks of the power of healing through the laying on of hands:

It happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.

(Ac.28:8-9 NKJV)

When Jesus spoke about His miracles, He said that power would be given to His followers:

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

(Jn.14:12 NRSV)

Jesus made the sick and demon-possessed people whole. How is it possible that we can do even greater things than these? Concerning Paul:

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

(Ac.19:11-12 NIV)

Paul did not need to touch the sick person. At times he only touched a piece of cloth which would be brought to the sick, and they would be healed. Peter, as well, did not always need physical touch. Rather, only his shadow needed to fall on the sick or demon-possessed, and they would be healed:

*As a result, **people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them** as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and **all of them were healed.*** (Ac.5:15-16 NASB)

Why are not some people healed with the laying on of hands? Does the absence of healing mean God is not faithful to His promise? Consider:

*A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. **That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*** (1Co.11:27-29 NIV)

God uses sickness to discipline those He loves. For Christians who are not living lives worthy of Him, He allows them to become sick—even die. To lay hands on the sick when God has placed them under discipline is futile. Before elders act, they need to discern whether it is God's will that a person be healed; otherwise, they will be trying to do something that is against the will of God. We are commanded to heal the sick, but timing is important. Elders must discern when to lay on hands, for that person may need to repent from sin; otherwise, he will not be healed. Hence, we are commanded:

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. (1Ti.5:22 TNIV)

We need to discern the will of God in every situation by listening to His Spirit Who speaks into our hearts. Therefore, Christians have been given the power for healing and casting out of demons through the direct laying on of hands.

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

God has created each of us for a specific purpose and has given us specific gifts to minister to fellow Christians. Yet many Christians do not display the power of God in their ministry:

*There are **different kinds of gifts**, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are **different kinds of service**, but the same Lord. There are **different kinds of working**, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. **Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*** (1Co.12:4-7 TNIV)

Not everyone has the same purpose; hence, not everyone is gifted in the same way. However, each of us is commanded to use his gifts so that the church can grow:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If you speak, you should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If you serve, you should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. (1Pe.4:10-11 TNIV)

God gives us spiritual gifts to serve others. The reason the church is not thriving is that many Christians do not know what gifts they possess, or they do not use their gifts:

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, **for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry**, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, **to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*** (Eph.4:11-13 NKJV)

Only when our compassion for our fellowman moves us into action will we be empowered beyond our imagination. The church is not the whole measure of the fullness of Christ because many people are ignorant of their gifts. We are so ready to accept the status quo, but God did not save us to survive this life but to thrive in this life. He has given us everything we need:

*And God is able to make **all grace abound** to you, so that **in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*** (2Co.9:8 NIV)

All Christians are supposed to have a gift for the building up of His body. In the New Testament, people were empowered in their gifts through the laying on of hands. When it was decided to establish the office of deacon, those in leadership placed their hands on the seven men and prayed over them:

*The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these **they brought before the apostles**; and after praying, **they laid their hands on them.*** (Ac.6:5-6 NASB)

The church gives empowerment and authority to minister through the laying on of hands. In Antioch, there were both prophets and teachers when the Holy Spirit revealed that Paul and Barnabas were to be sent out as missionaries. Those with them prayed and laid their hands on them:

*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, **they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*** (Ac.13:2-3 NIV)

Paul and Barnabas were prophets or teachers, but once they were sent by the laying on of hands, their gift changed:

***When the apostles Barnabas and Paul** heard of it, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd.* (Ac.14:14 NRSV)

When Paul and Barnabas were sent on their missionary trip, they received the gift of an apostle through the laying on of hands. Also, consider Timothy's gifting:

***Do not neglect the gift** that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.* (1Ti.4:14 NKJV)

The prophetic message identified Timothy's gift, which he received by the elders laying on their hands. Even though the gift was given and identified, Timothy still had to develop it through its use:

This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. (2Ti 1:6 NLT)

Therefore, not only has God saved us for a specific purpose, but through the laying on of hands, His Holy Spirit also empowers and equips us with gifts to accomplish His purpose.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. Why is the teaching of the laying on of hands important?
2. Why did the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus in His baptism?
3. In most cases, what did Jesus actually do when He healed?
4. God said that you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Is it a promise, or can God lie?
5. According to the Scriptures, does the Holy Spirit come into a Christian fully and forever?
6. If a Christian says he does not have the Holy Spirit, what can be done?
7. Read John 14:12-13 and Ephesians 3:20-21. Can a Christian do more than Jesus did in His ministry?
8. What is your spiritual gift? If you do not know, what should you do?

THE DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Christ will not return until

Day 1: Read Acts 1:6-12. What does it teach about Christ's return?

Day 2: Read Matthew 24:26-31. What does it teach about the resurrection of the dead and Christ's return?

Day 3: Read the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-3. What does it teach about Christ's return?

Day 4: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. What does it teach about the resurrection and Christ's return?

Day 5: Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. What does it teach about Christ's return?

Day 6: Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-53. What does it teach about the resurrection and Christ's return?

Day 7: Read the prophecy found in Revelation 14:12-19. What does it teach about the resurrection and Christ's return?

Memory verse:

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

2 Thessalonians 2:3

LESSON 12

THE SIGNS OF THE END

One of the first century church's elementary truths was the events leading up to the resurrection and the return of Christ. If this truth was important then, we should heed it today; otherwise, we might be deceived:

*And **many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*** (Mt.24:10-13 NLT)

In Jesus' day, the Jews thought their Messiah was going to come as a conquering king. When Jesus came as a humble servant, the Jews killed their Messiah because they misinterpreted prophecy. When we attempt to connect the different prophecies of the Bible in a chronological order, we are not assured a correct interpretation. For this reason Jesus believed it was important to instruct the disciples concerning end time prophecy:

*Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, **when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?**"*

(Mt.24:1-3 NASB)

In Matthew 24, Jesus answers three questions: when will the temple be destroyed, what will be the sign of His coming, and what will be the sign of the end of the age. The first event, the destruction of the temple, happened around 70 AD when General Titus and the Roman army destroyed the temple. Luke prophesies:

*When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, **you will know that its desolation is near.** Then let those who are in Judea flee to the*

mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! **There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people.** They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. **Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.**

(Lk.21:20-24 NIV)

The temple was destroyed, and it will not be rebuilt until the end of the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled. Therefore, we must heed the prophecy of the remaining two questions.

THE END OF THE AGE

Jesus' second point was concerning the signs of the end of the age:

*And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. **Sin will be rampant everywhere**, and the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And **the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world**, so that all nations will hear it; and **then the end will come.*** (Mt.24:10-14 NLT)

The Scriptures state that the Gospel will be preached throughout the world before the end will come. Those who are dedicated to Bible translation interpret this Scripture to mean that the Bible must be translated into every language and each dialect. Wrong! Revelation states that the Gospel must **be proclaimed** in the whole world:

*Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, **with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation and tribe and language and people.** He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."*

(Re.14:6-7 NRSV)

Another **misinterpretation** is that missionaries need to go to every ethnos, but with organizations like TransWorld Radio, people can hear the Gospel in a language that they can understand without a missionary present. The prophecy states that one person from every ethnos will hear the Gospel.

Other signs of the end approaching are being fulfilled around us today. In many countries, we see betrayal of Christians by church-goers. Today, in western culture, we find sin rampant even in the churches, as many forsake the assembling together as believers. However, many false prophets will also come and deceive the church. An example of this is found in 1 Thessalonians 4. Paul prophesies three heavenly signs prior to Jesus' return on the clouds: a commanding shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet call of God. In Paul's day, false teachers took these three heavenly signs and deceived the people, causing them to give up their faith:

*Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. **They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.*** (2Ti.2:17-18 NIV)

If the resurrection has already taken place, then why believe? Not taking part in the rapture signifies that everyone left behind will not enter heaven. Jesus told a parable about His return. Five wise virgins were prepared, and five were foolish because they were unprepared. All the virgins were looking forward to the coming of the bridegroom/Jesus. Jesus came and took those who were ready, but the foolish virgins who tried to come later were told:

*The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. **And the door was shut.** Later the others also came. **'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'** "But he replied, **'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'*** (Mt.25:10-12 TNIV)

It is clear from this parable that there will not be a second chance:

You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected. (Mt.24:44 NLT)

When some Christians were deceived into believing that the first resurrection had taken place, they gave up the faith. Paul responded to this false teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:

*As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way; **for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one***

destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, **so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God.** (2Th.2:1-4 NRSV)

Paul states, that before the resurrection will take place, the antichrist must sit in God's temple, claiming to be the Messiah. Paul's sign agrees with Jesus' signs of the coming of the end:

Therefore **when you see the 'abomination of desolation,'** spoken of by Daniel the prophet, **standing in the holy place**" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (Mt.24:15-16 NKJV)

Jesus is referring to a specific person that is described in Daniel's vision—the antichrist, who is set up in the temple:

From the time that **the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up**, there will be 1,290 days. "How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days! (Da.12:11-12 NASB)

Before the blessing of God comes, the temple must be rebuilt and the antichrist must be in the temple and he will claim to be God. Since the temple was destroyed in A.D.70, it must be rebuilt. Daniel prophesied about the re-consecrating of the temple:

He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; **then the sanctuary will be re-consecrated...** The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, **for it concerns the distant future.**" (Da.8:14&26 NIV)

The Scriptures warn the saints to have patience while living under the antichrist and instructs them not to get the mark of the beast; otherwise, they will be eternally damned:

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "**If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand**, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, **who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.** Here is **the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.** (Re.14:9-12 NKJV)

The worship of the beast and the receiving of his mark will cause church-goers to be eternally damned. While speaking to a friend who held a pre-tribulation rapture position, I asked him, “If tomorrow the government required a microchip to be placed under the skin of the hand or forehead, would you get it?” Without hesitation, he responded, “Of course I would get the chip; we will not be here but in heaven when the antichrist comes.” Just as the Jews crucified their Messiah because of the misinterpretation of prophecy, many church-goers will be deceived by false teachers and receive the mark:

*For **false christs** and **false prophets** will rise and show great signs and wonders **to deceive, if possible, even the elect.** See, I have told you beforehand.* (Mt.24:24-25 NKJV)

In order to prevent the elect from being deceived, the Bible gives us specific events that need to be fulfilled before Christ’s return. In Revelation, we read of the first resurrection:

*Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw **the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus** and for the word of God. **They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark** on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life and reigned with Christ** a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) **This is the first resurrection.** **Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection.***

(Re.20:4-6 NRSV)

In the first resurrection are those who were beheaded for refusing to worship the beast and for refusing his mark; hence, the mark of the beast will be enforced on the earth before the first resurrection and the rapture. Many Christians are unaware that there are two resurrections; the first one is accompanied by the rapture, when we meet the Lord in the clouds:

*And **the dead in Christ will rise first.** Then **we who are alive** and remain **shall be caught up together with them in the clouds** to meet the Lord in the air.* (1Th.4:16-17 NKJV)

The second resurrection happens after the thousand year reign, when the devil is thrown into the lake of fire:

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white

throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw **the dead**, small and great, **standing before God**, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And **the dead** were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up **the dead** who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up **the dead** who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast **into the lake of fire. This is the second death.** And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast **into the lake of fire.** (Re.20:10-15 NKJV)

In the second resurrection, only the dead will be judged. Therefore, the temple must be rebuilt, for the antichrist must reign from it to force people to receive the mark of the beast. Do not be deceived, but always stay within the Scripture:

*Learn from us the meaning of the saying, "**Do not go beyond what is written.**" Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.* (1Co.4:6 NIV)

CHRIST'S COMING

The signs that precede Christ's coming are important because through these events we know that the end is near. Christ comes with a trumpet blast, but prior to His return, we find:

*Immediately after the anguish of those days, **the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.** And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with **the mighty blast of a trumpet**, and they will **gather his chosen** ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven. (Mt.24:29-31 NLT)*

The great cosmic upheaval is recorded in Revelation at the opening of the sixth seal:

*I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and **the sun became black** as sackcloth of hair, and **the moon became like blood.** And **the stars of heaven fell to the earth**, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then **the sky receded as a scroll** when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. (Re.6:12-14 NKJV)*

Since the heavenly bodies are disrupted at the time of the sixth seal, we know that the rapture of the church and the first resurrection has not yet taken place. Another sign found in Matthew 24 is the blast of a trumpet:

*And He will send His angels **with a great sound of a trumpet**, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* (Mt.24:31 NKJV)

After the great cosmic upheaval in the sixth seal, seven angels are given seven trumpets in the seventh seal:

*When **the Lamb opened the seventh seal**, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and **seven trumpets were given to them.*** (Re.8:1-2 NRSV)

Remember, Paul speaks of three heavenly signs in 1 Thessalonians:

*For the Lord himself, with **a cry of command**, with **the archangel's call** and with **the sound of God's trumpet**, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.* (1Th.4:16-17 NRSV)

However, in 1 Corinthians, Paul is very specific about which trumpet:

*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trumpet**. For **the trumpet will sound**, and **the dead will be raised** incorruptible, and **we shall be changed**.* (1Co.15:51-52 NKJV)

Through the first four trumpets, the heavens are continuing to wreak havoc on the earth. The first trumpet was hail with fire raining down on the earth—a large meteorite shower? With the second trumpet, something like a huge mountain all ablaze was thrown into the sea—an extremely large meteor? With the third trumpet, a great star blazing like a torch fell from the sky onto the land—a comet? If these astronomical events happen, a large quantity of dust particles will be dispersed into the atmosphere. These particles would cause the earth to receive only one third of its light. This event is the fourth trumpet. After the sixth trumpet but before the seventh trumpet, a voice of the archangel is recorded:

*Then I saw another **mighty angel** coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and **he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion.***

When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And then the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.” Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, “There will be no more delay! **But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished**, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.”

(Re.10:1-7 TNIV)

After the mighty archangel sounds the seventh trumpet, the last of the series of trumpets is given:

*The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon. **The seventh angel sounded his trumpet**, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “**The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord** and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”*

(Re.11:14-15 NIV)

With the sounding of the last trumpet, all the people of God are rewarded, and God’s wrath is about to come:

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet... And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. **The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people** who revere your name, both great and small—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

(Re.11:15-18 TNIV)

Paul told the Thessalonians that they had to wait for Jesus, the One Who rescues from God’s wrath:

*For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and **to wait for his Son from heaven**, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, **who rescues us from the wrath that is coming**.*

(1Th.1:9-10 NRSV)

God has promised that He will shorten the time that the church will be on earth so that they will not experience the wrath of God:

*If the Lord had not cut short those days, no-one would survive. **But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.***

(Mk.13:20 NIV)

God promises us that we will not suffer wrath:

***For God did not appoint us to wrath,** but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

(1Th.5:9 NKJV)

After the seventh trumpet, the seven bowls of God's wrath are poured on the earth:

*Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and **pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath** of God."*

(Re.16:1 NRSV)

The rapture of the church and the first resurrection must happen between the seventh trumpet and the first bowl of wrath. One false doctrine is that the coming of Christ will happen secretly, and yet we read:

***For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west,** so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

(Mt 24:27 NKJV)"

The Scriptures tell us that every eye will see Jesus coming on the clouds—even the Jews:

*Behold, **He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him**, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*

(Re.1:7 NKJV)

At Jesus' ascension, the angel foretold that Jesus will return to the earth (not on the earth) on the clouds:

*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, **and a cloud received Him** out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, **who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.**"*

(Ac.1:9-11 NKJV)

Jesus ascended in the clouds and will return on the clouds. Daniel speaks of the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom:

*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one **like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.** He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was **given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of***

every language **worshipped him**. His dominion is **an everlasting dominion** that will not pass away, and **his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed**. (Dan.7:13-14 NIV)

The Messiah was to come with the clouds of heaven. The third sign recorded in 1 Thessalonians 4 is a loud command to One sitting on the clouds:

*Then I looked, and behold, **a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man**, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And **another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."** So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. (Re.14:14-16 NKJV)*

Only after the voice of the archangel, the sounding of the last of the seven trumpets, and the loud command to the One Who is sitting on the cloud is the earth harvested of the saints. Therefore, the signs surrounding Jesus' return on the clouds take place in Revelation 14, after the seventh trumpet but before the bowls of God's wrath.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Consider what prophecies address the nation of Israel. For example, Jerusalem must be free from Gentile presence:

*And **Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled**.* (Lk.21:24 NKJV)

A time will be when no more Gentiles can be saved. Revelation records a specific time period:

*Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for **it has been given to the Gentiles**. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.*

(Re.11:1-3 NKJV)

At some point, all the Gentiles will either have received the mark of the beast and be eternally damned, or have been persecuted as Christians for refusing the mark. Then, Israel will again return to God:

*"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not become conceited: **Israel has experienced a hardening***

*in part until the **full number of Gentiles** has come in. And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'* (Ro.11:25-27 NIV)

After the full number of Gentiles come in, a great movement of Jews will accept Christ as their Messiah:

*Now if **their stumbling** means riches for the world, and if **their defeat** means riches for Gentiles, how much more **will their full inclusion mean!*** (Ro 11:12 NRSV)

If we Gentiles became rich by receiving Christ when Israel rejected Him, how can we Gentiles become richer when Israel accepts Christ as the Messiah? Only when the Jews accept Jesus in a great movement will we together with them become richer and experience the rapture and the resurrection:

*Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. For if **their rejection** is the reconciliation of the world, what will **their acceptance be but life from the dead!*** (Ro.11:13-15 NRSV)

Many people insist that when the nation of Israel returns to God, they will be an identity all of their own—the nation of Israel. However, when reading about the mystery of God, we find:

*In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight **into the mystery of Christ**, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. **This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*** (Eph.3:4-6 TNIV)

The mystery is exposed in the word “together.” The mystery of Christ is that Gentiles and Jews are heirs together, members together of one body, and sharers together of the promise in Christ (Messiah). Jesus said:

I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. (Jn.10:16 NASB)

Just as there is only one flock comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, there is also only one olive tree:

*And if the people of Israel turn from their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God has the power to graft them back into the tree. You, by nature, were a branch cut from a wild olive tree. So if God was willing to do something contrary to nature by grafting you into his cultivated tree, **he will be far more eager to graft the original branches back into the tree where they belong.*** (Ro.11:23-24 NLT)

We do not join Israel, but rather, we join Christ. If Israel is going to be saved, it will be through Christ:

*Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the **revelation of the mystery hidden for ages long past**, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, **so that all nations might believe and obey him.*** (Ro.16:25-26 NIV)

The mystery is that all the nations may believe and obey Him—not just Gentiles but the Jews as well. For, Christ must be in all who are saved:

*I have become it's servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in it's fullness- **the mystery that has been hidden for ages and generations**, but now is disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, **which is Christ in you**, the hope of glory.* (Co.1:25-27 NIV)

To suggest that Israel will become a separate identity apart from the Gentiles is unscriptural. No other way to the Father exists but through Christ. The mystery of God is fulfilled when all things are placed under Christ:

*He made known to us **the mystery** of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, **to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*** (Eph.1:9-10 TNIV)

When will the times reach their fulfillment? The Bible gives us the exact time—when the mystery of God is revealed as Jew and Gentile are raised:

*In the days when **the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet**, the **mystery of God will be fulfilled**, as he announced to his servants the prophets."* (Re.10:7 NRSV)

The time of fulfillment is at the sounding of the last of the seven trumpets; at which time, Christ will come back for His church—one body comprised of both Jews and Gentiles.

THE CHURCH IN THE LAST DAY

I found it interesting that no passages in Revelation say that the "church" was in heaven. In fact, the apostle John never uses the collective sense of the word "church" in the entire book, but only specific congregations were mentioned in Revelation 1-3 and then again in chapter 22. However, I found synonyms for the Body of Christ, which will still be on the earth throughout the seals and trumpets:

- **martyrs for the word of God:** Rev.6:9; 16:6; 20:4
- **servants:** Rev.19:10; 6:11; 7:3; 11:18; 19:2; 19:5; 22:9
- **brothers:** Rev.19:10; 6:11; 22:9
- **souls with white robes:** Rev.7:14; 6:10; 7:9
- **saints:** Rev.14:12; 8:4; 11:18; 13:7; 13:10; 16:6; 18:24;
- **those with God's seal:** Rev.9:4; 14:1
- **those who obey God's commandments:** Rev.14:12; 12:17; 22:9
- **those who hold to the testimony of Jesus:** Rev.14:12; 19:10; 12:17; 17:6; 20:4
- **those that are pure:** Rev.14:4
- **those in the Lord:** Rev.14:13

All these terms describe the church. As I looked up the above mentioned synonyms, I was surprised by the fact that they were on the earth during the plagues of the seals and the trumpets, which are during the reign of the antichrist. On the other hand, these synonyms were absent during the seven bowls of God's wrath. Consequently, even though the exact word "church" is not used in Revelation to describe the church on earth, it is not used to describe it in heaven either. The word "church" is simply NOT USED. We know that Christians will be on the earth during a large part of Revelation and will face the wrath of man. Jesus said:

*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. **In the world you will have tribulation;** but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* (Jn.16:33 NKJV)

The church has always faced tribulation as supported by the parable of the sower:

But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; "yet he has no root in himself,

*but endures only for a while. **For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word**, immediately he stumbles.* (Mt.13:20-21 NKJV)

Paul warned the church of his day:

*For, in fact, **we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation**, just as it happened, and you know.*

(1Th.3:4 NKJV)

The church was never told that they would escape tribulation; rather, they were told that they would not suffer the wrath of God—the bowls of wrath. In fact, Revelation speaks of saints who came out of the great tribulation—implying that they were in the great tribulation:

*Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "**These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* (Re.7:13-14 NASB)

However, were the saints in heaven because the rapture had taken place, or were they in heaven because they were beheaded for refusing the mark of the beast? It is written:

*And I saw the **souls of those who had been beheaded** because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. **They had not worshipped the beast** or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life** and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. *This is the first resurrection.* (Re.20:4-5 NIV)*

Christians will die in the cosmic catastrophes that are mentioned in this study. Will that be any different from what we experience now—Christians dying in earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and famines? I believe the Bible speaks clearly on some events concerning whether Christians will be on the earth during the end time. However, other events are less clear and rather obscure, preventing us from taking a dogmatic stance. Therefore, as the end approaches, we must always be ready to reconsider our position in light of the Scriptures and the events unfolding around us—lest we be deceived like the Pharisees who crucified the very Messiah that they were actually seeking.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. Why does the Scripture warn Christians about being misled in the end times?
2. What astronomical signs precede Christ's return?
3. In 1 Thessalonians 4, what three signs will take place in the spiritual realm at the time of our resurrection?
4. In 2 Thessalonians 2, what must take place on earth before our resurrection?
5. What is the mystery of God that is revealed at the resurrection?
6. At what point in Revelation are synonyms for the church not found?
7. What is the punishment for receiving the mark of the beast on the hand or forehead?
8. What takes place in Revelation 14:14-19 after the seventh trumpet but before the bowls of God's wrath are poured out?

THE DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Christ will judge us by

Day 1: Read the parable of the fig tree, Luke 13:6-9 and Mark 11:13-14. What was the master's reaction to the fig tree's unfruitfulness?

Day 2: Read parable of the workers, Matthew 20:1-16. What is the significance of all the workers receiving the same wage?

Day 3: Read the meaning of the parable of the weeds, Matthew 13:36-43. Where were the weeds planted; when were they removed; and where did they end up?

Day 4: Read the parable of the virgins, Matthew 25:1-13. What happened to the virgins who were not ready?

Day 5: Read the parable of the three servants, Matthew 25:13-40. All the servants belonged to one master, yet what happened to the lazy servant?

Day 6: Read the prophecy about the sheep and the goats. What were the differences between them, and where did the goats end up?

Day 7: Read the parable of the unfaithful servant, Luke 12:42-48. What did the servant do, and where was the servant sent?

Memory verse:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

2Corinthians 5:10

LESSON 13

ETERNAL JUDGMENT

JUSTICE

When considering justice, one of the greatest difficulties is that there are always two views: that of the victim and that of the perpetrator of the crime. For the victim, justice is only met if the full measure of the law is served on the perpetrator. However, for the perpetrator of the crime, justice is only met if the minimum sentence of the law is served. These views are clearly revealed when one speaks to the friends of the victim or the friends of the perpetrator. One seeks severity, while the other seeks leniency. A case in point: a husband and wife killed three teenage girls. Years later, the police offered the wife a reduced sentence if she collaborated with them to convict the husband. After the deal was struck, video evidence was found that not only made the wife's testimony unnecessary but also implicated her to have a more active role in the deaths than what was previously thought. When the public became aware of what the wife's involvement was and of the deal that the police made, they did not celebrate that she was shown mercy. On the contrary, the public was incensed and claimed the courts were unjust in giving her an abnormally light sentence. In their opinion, justice had not been served anywhere near to the full extent of the law. Later, her husband was tried, found guilty, and given the maximum sentence for his crimes. Did the public claim that the courts were unjust for not showing the husband the same leniency as the wife? No, they did not! They felt that justice was served through the maximum sentence allowable for his crimes. Mercy sets aside justice, and justice sets aside mercy. They are contrary to each other. God is just; He will punish men for breaking His Law. God is perfect, and sin is imperfection. If He allowed imperfect people in heaven, then heaven would be no better than the twisted world we live in. God cannot tolerate sin and must punish us according to His

Law. In His mercy, God gave Adam and Eve a stay of execution until they had children. Eventually, they died:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro.6:23 NASB)

Many people believe that physical death is the final punishment—in which they either expire or live with God forever. However, since man is a spiritual being, even the evil people will live forever:

All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. (Re.22:7-8 NLT)

God is just, and since everyone has sinned, God must send everyone to their second death, the lake of fire. The point is that I cannot die for your sin because I am under the sentence of death for my own sin. You cannot die for my sin, because you are under sentence for your own sin. Only a perfect man could die for our sin. Since only God is perfect, He became a man and took our judgment on Himself by physically dying and descending into hell. However, God, having created both hell and life, arose from the dead, and He will pay our penalty for sin if we make Him Lord of our lives:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. (Jn.5:24 NASB)

Many of you have asked Jesus to pay your debt for sin, to be your Savior. However, many others have rejected Christ and will pay for their sin to the full measure of the Law:

There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. (Jn.3:18 NIV)

You do not suffer His wrath in the lake of fire for rejecting Christ, but you are sent there as the penalty for the sins you have committed:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. (Jn.3:36 NRSV)

God is merciful, He paid the ultimate price, but He is still just. Those who reject His offer will pay the penalty themselves. Once in hell, no

one can escape. Therefore, since God is love, He died for us. But since God is just, He unleashed His full wrath upon Himself. If we do not accept His act of love, we will experience the full measure of His justice.

THE RIGHTEOUS, THE UNGODLY, AND THE SINNER

For Christians, an accepted Scriptural truth is that sinners, those who do not believe in Christ, will physically die and, after the judgment, be sent into the lake of fire:

The soul who sins shall die. (Eze.18:20 NKJV)

Yet these same Christians are unaware that they too will die and then face judgment:

Each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.
(He. 9:27 NLT)

In fact, the Bible teaches that the judgment will begin with Christians:

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" (1Pe.4:17-18 NIV)

Christians will be judged first; after which the ungodly and sinners will be judged. The previous verse identifies three types of people: the righteous, the ungodly, and the sinner. The righteous will go to heaven, while the ungodly and sinner will go to hell. We need to know the Biblical differences between these three terms. Many Christians will say that all Christians are the righteous, apart from their actions. Many do not qualify that in the church we have both those who are born again and those who are mere church-goers. The righteous will be saved from hell. What does the Scripture mean with the term "righteous":

Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. (1Jn.3:7-8 NRSV)

True Christians are righteous because they do what is right. Let me clarify that Christians are not saved by doing what is right, but by Christ living in them. Consequently, if Christ lives in us as Lord, controlling our lives, then we will start doing what is right. In this way, our righteous actions are the evidence that Christ lives in us and that we are going to heaven:

For by that one offering he **forever made perfect those who are being made holy.** (He.10:14 NLT)

If we are not in the process of becoming holy like Jesus, then we will not be found perfect before God in the judgment. Since all true Christians have Christ living in them, we can be assured that we are saved because His transformation of our lives from sinner to saint can be easily seen:

*We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. **Those who say, "I know him,"** but do not do what he commands are liars, and the truth is not in them. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. **This is how we know we are in him:** Whoever claims to live in him **must live as Jesus did.***

(1Jn.2:4-6 TNIV)

If you are not becoming like Jesus, then you will not spend eternity with Jesus. If your life is being transformed, you can have confidence that on the day of judgment you will go to heaven:

*This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have **confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.***

(1Jn.4:17 TNIV; 1Jn.3:2)

God cannot allow people who willfully continue to sin in heaven, for then heaven would become no different than this wicked earth. God's purpose in saving us and allowing us to continue to live on earth is to share the Gospel and to make us holy—in preparation for heaven:

*For God knew his people in advance, and **he chose them to become like his Son.** so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

(Ro.8:29 NLT)

If we are not becoming like Jesus, Who is God, we are classified as ungodly. A person can claim to be a Christian; however, if he is found to be ungodly, he will suffer hell. An ungodly person is different from a sinner. "Sinner" was a term used in archery for someone who missed the center mark on the target. A sinner in Christianity is someone who knows what God has commanded but does not do it—missing the mark. A sinner is different than an ungodly person because an ungodly person does not know that they are missing God's mark—His commands. There is no advantage; both the ungodly and the sinner will be sent to the same place—hell:

All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the

*law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but **the doers of the law** who will be justified.* (Ro.2:12-13 NRSV)

The ungodly who do not know the Law will be sent to hell with those sinners who know the Law but do not keep it. Since the righteous are both becoming like God in holiness and are obedient to His commands, they prove that Christ lives in them. For the first two thousand years of man's existence, from the time of Adam to the death of Noah, God did not give man a set of laws but allowed them to live according to their conscience. Since they had no law to break, they are not classified as sinners but as ungodly—not being like God. Enoch, who lived during that period of time, concluded:

*Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, **"to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."*** (Jude 1:14-15 NKJV)

Today, there are many people who claim to be Christians but remain ungodly. Many false teachers say that Christ paid for everyone's sins, and it does not matter what a person does once he believes in Christ. Since they believe that the commands of the New Testament are optional, they feel free to choose to live as they like without consequence. They teach church-goers to appease God by acknowledging His existence apart from living to please Him. These false teachers sear the consciences of naïve people, causing them to fall away from Christianity:

*But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times **some will fall away from the faith**, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars **seared in their own conscience** as with a branding iron.* (1Ti.4:1-2 NASB)

Since these church-goers' consciences no longer question their actions or consider their sin, they are ungodly and will suffer the fate of the ungodly:

*When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. **But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin**, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. **You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that.** I*

meant that you are **not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin**, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people. (1Co.5:9-11 NLT)

The church is commanded to cut off from fellowship all those who claim to be Christian yet continue to sin. However, this is seldom practiced in the church of today. Many churches still consider Christians to be mere sinners, and they not only give excuses for their continuation in sin, but they also develop a theology to rationalize it. The Bible consistently classifies Christians as saints who sometimes sin:

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But **if anybody does sin**, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* (1Jn.2:1 TNIV)

Sin is possible for a born again Christian but not probable. Just recently, a church-goer was telling me that it did not matter whether or not he had sinned because 1 Corinthians 3 states that he would still go to heaven. Whether his life was comprised of wood, hay, or straw (which he concluded was sin), or of gold, silver, and costly stones (which he concluded was holiness), it did not matter. He believed that even though all he had done in this life was burned up, he would be saved. This misinterpretation of Scriptures is typical; however, let us consider 1 Corinthians 3 in its context. This Scripture is addressing a preacher building the church through teaching:

*What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? **Only servants, through whom you came to believe**—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. **I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.** So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and **each will be rewarded according to his own labor.*** (1Co.3:5-8 NIV)

The context is a missionary, building the church. This Scripture switches from farming to building, stating that the Corinthian church is both God's field and building:

*For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. **You are God's building.** Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now **others are building on it.** But whoever is*

building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.

(1Co.3:9-11 NLT)

The Christians in Corinth are the building, and Jesus is the foundation. Paul, as an apostle, started the Corinthian church, and Apollos continued building upon that foundation by teaching Biblical principles. The passage warns us that we must be careful with what we teach:

Now if **any man builds on the foundation** with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, **each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.** (1 Co.3:12-13 NASB)

Even though Paul started the Corinthian church with a good foundation, Apollos could build with either gold, silver, or precious stones (the transforming truths of God's Word), or upon wood, hay, or straw (the trivial knowledge found in God's Word). In the end, the judgment will reveal what kind of people were in the church—whether church-goers or born again Christians. For in the judgment, the people in each congregation will either go to heaven or burn in hell:

If **what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward.** If **the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.** (1Co.3:14-15 NRSV)

The Scripture says that it is possible for everyone in a church to go to hell, yet the minister be saved because he himself is born again. For what was built was burned up, and in the context of this passage of Scripture, the building was the Corinthian church. The context denies the interpretation that the sin of a person was burned up, for the Scripture specifically states that the Corinthian Christians were the building:

For **we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.** (1Co 3:9 NKJV)

The passage is not addressing sin in a person's life but the importance of teaching the transforming truths from God's Word. The Scripture following this passage is clear that if a person claims to be a Christian but continues to sin, he will not enter heaven:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards **nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the**

kingdom of God. And that is what **some of you were**. But **you were** washed, **you were** sanctified, **you were** justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and **by the Spirit of our God.** (1Co.6:9-11 NIV)

If a church-goer continues to sin, he will go to hell, no matter what assurances false preachers or teachers have given:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that **those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Ga.6:19-23 TNIV)

If your life has the fruit of the sinful nature, you will go to hell, but if it has the fruit of the Holy Spirit, you will go to heaven. Our actions will never save us, but they are the evidences of whether Jesus lives in us:

It is written: "**Be holy, because I am holy.**" Since you call on a Father **who judges each man's work impartially**, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. (1Pe.1:16-17 NIV)

After death, we will all face judgment. If our lives are not becoming like God in true holiness, we won't go to heaven:

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord. (He.12:14 NIV)

If you are an ungodly church-goer that willfully continues to sin, then the evidence proves you are not a Christian:

No-one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; **he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.** (1Jn.3:9 NIV)

God is very clear that Christians cannot continue in sin:

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "**The Lord knows those who are His,**" and, "**Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.**" (2Ti 2:19 NASB)

Therefore, a Christian is righteous because Christ lives in him, enabling him to do what is right, but the ungodly (who do not share God's holy character) or the sinner (who willfully breaks God's commands) will go to hell.

JUDGMENT

The church is composed of the righteous, who are becoming increasingly holy, as well as the church-goers, who are the ungodly and sinners. In the parable of the weeds, Jesus taught that the ungodly and the sinners in His kingdom will be separated from the righteous:

*Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, **so it will be at the end of the world.** The Son of Man will send his angels, and **they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.** And **the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace,** where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth... That is the way it **will be at the end of the world.** The angels **will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous.*** (Mt.13:40-42, 49 NLT)

When Jesus returns, each of us will be judged:

Each of us shall give account of himself to God. (Ro.14:12 NKJV)

The Scriptures clearly present the judgment of the church. They speak of Christians facing a judgment. Those found guilty will get what they deserve:

*For **we must all stand before Christ to be judged.** We will each receive **whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.*** (2Co.5:10 NLT)

God specifically warns Christians that those who deliberately continue to sin will suffer hell with the unbelievers:

*If **we deliberately keep on sinning** after **we** have received the knowledge of the truth, **no sacrifice for sins is left,** but **only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire** that will consume the enemies of God.* (He.10:26-27 TNIV)

If we claim to be a Christian but continue to live a life of sin, we will experience hell, for we are discrediting Christ as well as ourselves:

How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." and again, "**The Lord will judge his people.**" ***It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*** (He.10:29-31 NASB)

The Scriptures state that **we, the church,** will be judged, and God will avenge those who dishonor Jesus or the Holy Spirit:

*But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For **we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*** (Ro.14:10 NKJV)

These Scriptures are clear that the church will give an account at the judgment seat of Christ and that there are two possible outcomes:

*There **is only one Lawgiver and Judge**, the one **who is able to save and destroy.*** (Ja.4:12 TNIV)

Christians will either be saved or destroyed. Many people sin in secret, thinking that their actions won't be found out, yet the Scriptures teach that we will be judged for these secret sins:

*And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, **through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.*** (Ro.2:16 NLT)

The Bible teaches that some Christians' sins will be discovered and disciplined by the church in this life. However, other sins will not be revealed until the judgment seat of Christ:

*Remember, **the sins of some people are obvious**, leading them to certain judgment. **But there are others whose sins will not be revealed until later.** In the same way, the good deeds of some people are obvious. And the good deeds done in secret will someday come to light.* (1Ti.4:24-25NLT)

God will judge us and expose not only what is done in secret or under darkness but also the motive behind the action:

*My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. **It is the Lord who judges me.** Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. **He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of people's hearts.** At that time each will receive their praise from God.* (1Co.4:4-5 TNIV)

To do good for the wrong reasons (for the praise of men) or to do evil for the right reasons (because we were able to justify our actions to ourselves) makes little difference. Christ will judge both actions as evil, and He will punish not only according to the actions but also according to the motives. Jesus clearly taught that His followers will be judged:

*For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then **he will repay everyone for what has been done.*** (Mt.16:27 NKJV)

In many of Jesus' parables on the kingdom of God, people were sent to the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth—hell. An obvious example is the parable of the net: the sea is the world, and within the net is the kingdom of God. There is a judgment of all the fish in the net—a sorting of the good from the bad:

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like **a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind**, "which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and **gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away**. "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, **separate the wicked from among the just**, and cast them into **the furnace of fire**. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Mt.13:47-50 NKJV)

People may play games of hypocrisy in the church and fool man. But you cannot play your games with God and escape detection. God knows your heart; each will get his reward according to his motives, thoughts, and behavior. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy:

*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, **you hypocrites!** You are like whitewashed tombs, which **look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean**. In the same way, **on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness**. (Mt.23:27-28 NIV)*

The Pharisees looked good outwardly but were full of evil thoughts and intentions. Jesus will judge us for our hypocrisy as well. We may consider everyone in the church to be servants of our master Jesus, but Jesus taught that some who appear as servants will be sent to the place of the unbelievers after the judgment:

***The master of that servant will come** on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and **appoint him his portion with the unbelievers**. (Lk.12:46 NKJV)*

When Christ comes on the clouds in the first resurrection and rapture of the church, He will judge each one of us. There will be two possible outcomes:

*For **he will repay according to each one's deeds**: to those who by patiently **doing good** seek for glory and **honor and immortality**, **he will give eternal life**; while for those who are **self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness**, there **will be wrath and fury**.* (Ro.2:6-8 NRSV)

Many Christians are unaware that there are two judgments. The final judgement, before the great white throne of God, is the judgment of unbelievers where only dead people are judged:

I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. (Re,20:11-13 NKJV)

The first judgment is the judgment seat of Christ. Not only those who are dead and resurrected, but also those who are living and raptured are present. Both will be judged:

*He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is **He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead**.*
(Ac.10:42 NKJV)

God gave the judgment of the church to His Son because He is our Lord:

*The Father judges no one but **has given all judgment to the Son**, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.* (Jn.5:22 NRSV)

The Scripture teaches that Christ will judge the living and the dead when He returns for His church:

*I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **judge the living and the dead at His appearing** and His kingdom.*
(2Ti.4:1 NKJV; 1Pe.4:5-6)

We are not saved by doing more good than bad. Our actions are like the visible part of an iceberg. A captain of a ship knows that at least twice as much ice is under the water than seen above. In the same way, our actions are the evidence of the condition of our heart. If Christ lives in our hearts, we will act as Christ did:

*For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. **For every tree is known by its own fruit.** For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. **A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil.** For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. **But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?***
(Lk.6:43-46 NKJV)

When Jesus lived on earth, He prophesied exactly what will take place at His judgment seat:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats." (Mt 25:31-32 NKJV)

This passage is not a parable. When Jesus gathers Christians from every nation, He will judge them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Notice that both animals are clean and have played a significant role in Israel's community. The clean animals signify the church. This judgment is not the judgment between the church and the world; otherwise, it would be a separation of the sheep from the dogs or the goats from the pigs:

They prove the truth of this proverb: "A dog returns to its vomit." And another says, "A washed pig returns to the mud." (2Pe.2:22 NLT)

Both the sheep and the goats are considered subjects of the King:

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:' (Mt 25:34 NKJV)

The sheep kept the command of Christ to love each other, while the goats did not and thus received a different end:

Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' (Mt.25:41NKJV)

The sheep were born again Christians, and the goats were church-goers—both recognized Jesus as their King. However, the church-goers who refused to live like Christ went to hell:

Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Mt.25:44-46 NKJV)

Therefore, the Scriptures warn us that we will be judged by Christ and that those who refuse to repent will share the same end as the devil.

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Some who are reading this are convinced that once a person believes that Jesus died on the cross, he is secure in heaven. But does our faith rest in the acceptance of the historical fact of Jesus' death, or does our faith rest on the promise that Christ will live in us and transform our lives? The Christian life is about the resurrected Christ living in us:

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Co.3:3-4 NKJV)

Since it is Christ who lives in us and transforms our lives, then our transformation is the evidence of Christ's presence within us:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Ga.2:20 NIV)

Christ living in us makes our actions to be a reaction of His presence and His control over our lives:

May the God of peace... equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (He.13:20-21 NIV)

Our obedience does not earn our salvation but is the result of God's influence over us, empowering us to do His will:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Php.2;12-13 TNIV)

Jesus clearly taught that only He can transform our lives:

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn.15:4-5 NRSV)

Our transformation is not something we accomplish; rather, God does it in us. Even though Paul made decisions, he gave God the credit for the decisions he made:

By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1Co.15:10 NRSV)

We are not saved by being changed, but we changed because we are saved—Christ lives in us:

He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1Jn.5:12 NASB)

God promised that it is He, and only He, that will keep us strong until the end:

Now you **have every spiritual gift you need** as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. **He will keep you strong to the end** so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. **God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says.** (1Co.1:7-9 NLT)

God make the promise based on Christ living in us, a fact which will cause us to continue to live like Him:

We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold firmly till the end our original conviction. (He.3:14 TNIV)

The Gospel message is not once saved always saved; rather, God's people will persevere to the end because Christ lives in them. You cannot separate your actions from your salvation because Christianity is a personal relationship with Christ living in you. If Christ lives in you, you will remain faithful to the end:

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—**if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved** away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, (Co.1:22-23 NKJV)

The moment you stop living the Christian life and return to a life of wickedness, you prove that you never had Christ in you:

They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, **they would have remained with us.** But by going out they made it plain **that none of them belongs to us.** (1Jn.2:19 NRSV)

A race is not about the start; it is about the finish. You might have repented and been baptized at the beginning, but did you continue to repent of sins throughout your life, growing to become like Him?

Anyone who runs ahead and **does not continue in the teaching** of Christ **does not have God**; whoever **continues in the teaching** has both the Father and the Son. (2Jn.1:9 NIV)

The Bible never teaches that our eternal life is based on one decision in our past, but it is based on every decision we make to the end:

We want each of you **to show this same diligence to the very end**, in order **to make your hope sure**. (He.6:11 TNIV)

Peter addresses those who once believed and then turned their backs on the Gospel:

When people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. (2Pe.2:20-21 NLT)

A person, who made a decision for Jesus and then later rejects Jesus, is considered worse off than the sinner who never heard of Jesus. Jesus taught that only those who die while living the Christian life will be saved:

All men will hate you because of me, but **he who stands firm to the end will be saved**. (Mt.10:22 NIV)

To do the will of God for a while has no merit. We need to persevere; otherwise, we will be destroyed in hell:

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay." And, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (He.10:36-39 TNIV)

People who call themselves Christian cannot give up living the Christian life, or they will be destroyed:

Do not be deceived: **God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.** (Ga.6:7-9 NIV)

Jesus warned that Christians who live in the last days must remain faithful to the end in order to be saved:

*At that time **many will fall away** and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and **will mislead many**. Because lawlessness is increased, **most people's love will grow cold**. But **the one who endures to the end, he will be saved**.* (Mt.25:10-13 NKJV)

Therefore, the Scriptures teach that we are saved if Christ lives in us to the end; but if we return to our sinful life, we prove that Christ never indwelt us.

SEVEN CHURCHES

Is everyone who claims to be a Christian, a Christian? No! When Jesus addressed seven of His churches in Revelation, He did not say, "I will see you all in heaven!" To the church in Ephesus, Jesus said:

***I have this complaint against you. You don't love me** or each other as you did at first! **Look how far you have fallen!** Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. **If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches**.* (Re.2:4-5 NLT)

Jesus is threatening to remove an entire church out of His kingdom. To the church in Smyrna, Jesus said:

***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life**. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death**.* (Re.2:10-11 NKJV)

Jesus told them that if they are not faithful until death, they will experience the second death in the lake of fire. To the church in Pergamum, Jesus said:

*Likewise, **you also have those** who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. **Repent therefore!** Otherwise, **I will soon come to you and will fight against them** with the sword of my mouth. (Re.2:15-17 TNIV)*

Jesus threatened that unless those who held to the teaching of the Nicolaitan's repented, He, Himself, would fight against them. To the church in Thyatira, Jesus said:

*Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and **those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent** of her doings; and **I will strike her children dead**.* (Re.2:21-22 NASB)

Jesus said that unless His servants who were lead into sin repented, He would not only cause distress in their lives but would also strike them dead. To the church in Sardis, Jesus said:

*"I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but **you are dead**. Wake up, and **strengthen what remains and is on the point of death**, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. Remember then what you received and heard; **obey it, and repent**. If **you do not wake up, I will come like a thief**, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.* (Re.3:1-3 NRSV)

Christ considered the church in Sardis to be dead, and He commanded them to repent. To the church in Philadelphia, Jesus said:

*I am coming soon. **Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown**. **All who are victorious** will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it.* (Re.3:11-12 NLT)

Jesus is warning that if they do not hold on to what they have, they will lose their crown of life. To the church in Laodicea, Jesus said:

*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I **am about to spit you out of my mouth...** **Be earnest, therefore, and repent.*** (Re.3:15-16, 19 NRSV)

The Laodicean church practiced the religion of Christianity without the person of Christ living in them. In all these addresses, Jesus told the churches that unless they changed, they would not be accepted in heaven. Since some people in these churches forfeited their salvation, then we know that some who claim to be saved, may not be. Jesus taught:

***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven**. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, '**I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.**'* (Mt.7:21-23 NRSV)

These people believed they were part of the church as evidenced by their prayer: "Lord, Lord." However, they did not do the will of God to the end. Jesus will say, "Away from me." Therefore, people may think they are saved, but God has the final judgment of all mankind, both inside and outside of the church.

THINKING IT THROUGH:

1. What is the difference in definition between the righteous, the ungodly, and the sinner? Where does each spend eternity?
2. Why does judgment begin with the family of God?
3. How can a Christian's conscience be seared, and does this searing remove his accountability?
4. If Christ judges us on the basis of our actions, do we earn our salvation?
5. Can a person think that he is a Christian and still spend eternity in hell?
6. Can a minister be saved and yet have his congregation end up in hell?
7. Can a Christian deliberately continue to sin? What are the consequences if he does?
8. In the seven letters to the seven churches, could some of the people in these churches end up in hell? For what reasons?

EPILOGUE

GOSPEL WORLDVIEWS

PERSPECTIVE

The final command or our prime directive from Jesus was given moments before He ascended into heaven:

*Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.** (Mt.28:19-20 NRSV)*

The command to make disciples of the whole world is easily understood; however, we must communicate the Gospel in such a way that people can comprehend the significance of our words. While most Christians agree that Jesus is the only way to have eternal life with God, unbelievers perceive the Gospel from totally different perspectives. The apostle Paul used different approaches in reaching both the Jews and the Gentiles:

*For indeed **Jews ask for signs** and **Greeks search for wisdom**; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews **a stumbling block** and to Gentiles **foolishness**, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the **power of God** and the **wisdom of God.** (1Co.1:22-24 NASB)*

Jews looked for the miraculous in order to believe that the message was from God, while Gentiles looked for wisdom which resonated with them. Hence, Paul knew what spoke to each of their hearts and altered the way he shared the Gospel accordingly. We need to be sensitive to the worldview of the people we are sharing with and discern how to present the Gospel in an understandable way. There are three basic worldviews that need to be understood when sharing the Gospel: guilt, shame, and fear. Each person has a primary worldview based on where he lived during his formative years, his parents' culture, and the entertainment to which he was exposed. Each person also has a secondary worldview which is determined by the experiences in his life. Usually, the third worldview has little influence on him. This epilogue is to help you understand the concept of worldviews so that you can effectively communicate the Gospel of Christ.

AN EXAMPLE

What three things would you group together?



X



X



X

Most North Americans would probably group the plate, spoon, and knife together—dinnerware. What about the next group of objects:



X



X



X

If you were raised in the western world, you would most likely group the saw, the hammer, and the axe together—tools. Nonetheless, is this the only way to group these two sets of objects? Not all people think comparatively. In the first group, we see dinnerware, and in the second, we see tools; hence, we group them accordingly. Some people, like Muslims, see things differently. They think relationally; hence, they would look for an association between the objects—relational logic. A person with relational logic would view the plate, the orange, and the knife together. After all, what good is a spoon when eating an orange? In the second group of things, he would try to find an association within the objects. Consequently, he would place the saw, the stack of wood, and the axe together. For it is obvious; what good is a hammer when cutting fire wood? When we present the Gospel to Muslims, we must adapt our presentation of the Gospel and present it from a relational perspective. If we do not learn to adapt the Gospel, the people will hear but will not understand the significance of our words. While the Holy Spirit can still speak to their hearts, we must avoid any of the hindrances that prevent understanding.

THREE GOSPEL WORLDVIEWS

There are basically three Gospel presentations that are used for the three worldviews. Worldviews imply that many people perceive the world differently than we do.

The **western guilt-based** Gospel resonates with people raised with a western influence—North America and parts of Europe. A guilt-based Gospel is a legal model based on guilt and pardon. It focuses on “I”: I did wrong, I am guilty, I will be punished, and I need a pardon from the sentence of hell for my sin. For most of us who grew up in North America, this presentation speaks clearly to our specific worldview.

An **eastern shame-based** Gospel resonates with people raised with a Muslim or Asian background. A shame-based Gospel is a relational model based on shame and honor. Actions are not perceived as right or wrong, but as honoring or dishonoring. A lie is not perceived as wrong, if the truth will dishonor a person. A shame-based Gospel presents mankind as having dishonored God by sin, which separates them from Him. They need to restore God’s honor in order to reconcile their relationship with Him. A shame-based person will not understand the guilt-based Gospel because it is focused on “I.” The shame-based mindset focuses on others, those whom they have dishonoured—God.

A **southern fear-based** Gospel resonates with people from an animistic or ancestral worship background, typical in South America and Africa. A fear-based Gospel is a spiritual model based on the power and the fear of an unseen realm. God is not a consideration because they are obsessed with appeasing the demonic realm, which can invoke loss of property, health, or life. A fear-based Gospel focuses on the fact that the whole world is under the power and authority of Satan and his realm and that people need to be rescued from those spirits who seek to destroy them. A fear-based person does not think about sin but, rather, whether they have offended a spiritual being. He is focused on appeasing demons who he believes are seeking to destroy him.

GUILT-BASED SOCIETIES

Western cultures are guilt based. Their general tendency is towards independence and self-centeredness. Once a person sins, guilt is experienced instantaneously, because it involves no one but the person and his actions. Since this is a legal perspective, the focus is on the punishment that a person will receive when his actions are uncovered. Today, people deal with guilt by denying a creator, for without a creator no moral absolutes exist, and everything is morally relative. To do bad for a good reason is no different than doing good for a bad reason. For, the end can justify the means, or the means can justify the end. In this way, guilt is appeased by one's ability to personally justify his actions as possessing some good. However, since there is a creator, God, and He has made everything, He not only gets to make the rules but is also the judge of all men. For those who conclude that there is a God, their natural tendency is to divert their guilt away from themselves. This tendency is clearly seen in the first sin of our very first forefather. God told him not to eat of one tree in the center of His garden. When Adam disobeyed, God confronted him with his sin, and he responded:

*The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, **she gave me fruit from the tree**, and I ate."* (Ge.3:12 NKJV)

When God confronted Eve about the fruit she had eaten, she responded:

*And the woman said, "**The serpent deceived me**, and I ate."* (Ge.3:13 NASB)

Because of their guilt, both Adam and Eve tried to divert the responsibility of their sin on another through blame—lessening their guilt. Since guilt is focused on "I" and the act, a person can have three typical responses to guilt:

- The **first response is denial**: "I did not do it." Denial of the act forces our accusers to prove our guilt.
- The **second possible response is blame**: "I did not do it; she did it." Diverting the guilt from ourselves onto someone else or diverting the responsibility of the act to someone else reduces guilt.
- The **third response is admission**: "I admit I did do it." I am guilty of sin and appeal to God for mercy.

These three responses are a direct result of guilt, which can be seen in 1John 2:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. (1Jn.1:8-10 NIV)

Confession is the acceptance of the responsibility for the act: I did it, and I am willing to accept the consequences but humbly appeal for mercy. In sharing the Gospel for guilt, we present the need for both an admission of guilt and an appeal to God for pardon/mercy. In the guilt-based Gospel, we present Christ as the **Redeemer**, One Who will pay our penalty for sin should we ask Him:

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1Pe.2:24 NASB)

Therefore, Jesus bore our sins on the cross, and eradicated our record of sin so that we can come before God justified.

SHAME-BASED SOCIETIES

Eastern cultures are shame-based societies whose general tendency is towards community and responsibility. Shame is not instantaneously experienced once a person sins. Since sinful actions affect other people, shame is not experienced until the committed sin is made public. Because eastern culture is relational, the focus is sin's effect upon others and how those affected will respond. The way people deal with moderate shame is through separation; the person is cast out of the community. However, for great shame, the person must die in order to remove his shame from the community. Since shame is based on the reaction of community, once a person is away from their community, there is great freedom to do as they wish. In this way, people can only avoid shame by only committing sinful deeds when away from their personal community. However, since God is all-knowing, all sinful actions are perceived by Him, and He is dishonored by disobedience to His commands. We can see how God will respond to a person who dishonors Him when we consider the first sin of our very first forefather,

Adam. God told him not to eat of one tree in the center of His garden, and mankind dishonored God by eating the forbidden fruit. God responded by separating Himself from man:

*So the LORD **God banished him from the Garden of Eden** to work the ground from which he had been taken.* (Ge.3:23 NIV)

Adam dishonored God once, and he was eternally separated from God's presence. Since shame is reflected by the reaction of others, there are three typical responses to shame:

- The **first response to shame is rejection/separation**: A shameful act **made public** will not be tolerated by the family as the father states, "I no longer have a son!"
- The **second response to shame is revenge**: Honor killings and suicide remove the shame by removing the person's remembrance.
- The **third response to shame is reconciliation**: Someone mediates on behalf of the offending person, negotiating terms that would restore the honor of the dishonored person.

Since shame is based on others' responses, the severity of punishment is directly related to the rank or position of the person who is dishonored. For example, if I were to dishonor you publically, you might respond by no longer associating with me. If I were to publically dishonor President Assad of Syria, I would likely be tortured to death. If I were to dishonor the eternal God, the consequence would be eternal:

*Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, **others to shame and everlasting contempt.***

(Da.12:2 NIV)

The Gospel focus is on Christ as our **Mediator**. The mediator cannot have dishonored the person with whom he is mediating, and he must be of equal position to that person in order to exert influence:

*For there is **one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus**, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.* (1Ti.2:5-6 NKJV)

Christ came to mediate reconciliation for our relationship with God. However, not only did He act as mediator, but He was also the means by which God's honor was restored:

*For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, **the righteous** for the unrighteous, **in order to bring you to God.*** (1Pe.3:18 NKJV)

The second focus is that Christ's voluntary death as a perfect man restored God's honor and thereby reconciled our relationship with Him. Both the Quran and the New Testament state that only Jesus is perfect. When Jesus freely gave up His life to reconcile mankind to God, He ended the separation between man and God. God responded by giving man a position of honor that was greater than before the fall: He adopted us as His children:

*See what love the Father has given us, **that we should be called children of God;** and that is what we are.* (1Jn.3:1 NRSV)

Therefore, Jesus restored God's honor on our behalf so that we might be restored to God and adopted as His children.

FEAR-BASED SOCIETIES

African and South American cultures are typically fear-based societies, whose general tendency is submission to the spiritual realm. When God sent Adam and Eve out of His garden, He sent them into the world. Satan was the guardian cherub of the world:

You were in Eden, the garden of God... You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. (Eze.28:13-14 NIV)

Consequently, when mankind was banished into the world, they came under the control of Satan:

*We know that we are children of God and that **the world around us is under the control of the evil one.*** (1Jn.5:19 NLT)

Living under the control of the demonic realm is reality for a person in a fear-based society. He is constantly aware of the power of spiritual beings and lives in fear of them. He does not question whether that realm is real, for he knows people who have died as a result of offending the demons. Since the spiritual realm has a hierarchal structure, people seek out more powerful spirits who can protect them from lesser spirits who are seeking revenge. A clear indication of people living under fear is the wearing of amulets for protection, in case they have offended a spirit. If they offend another person, they naturally assume that the individual has put a curse on them or their possessions. Their response

to that possibility is to either appease the spirit through sacrifice or seek the protection of stronger spirits. This protection comes at a great cost, because they sacrifice the food which is so needed, the animals they depend on for survival, or even the life of one child so that the rest might survive. The fear of offending a spiritual being can be seen at the fall of man. When Adam and Eve offended God by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, their response was typical of a fear culture:

*They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam **and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD** God among the trees of the garden.* (Ge.3:8 NKJV)

Since Adam and Eve knew that they had offended a great spiritual being, they hid from Him, for they knew that they could not stand against Him. There are three typical responses when offending a spiritual demon in a fear-based society:

- The **first response of Adam and Eve was flight**: They tried to hide. In animistic cultures, when people offend spirits, they will relocate to an area out of the offended spirits' control.
- The **second response to violating the spiritual realm is to fight**:. They go to a shaman for an amulet and call on more powerful spirits to protect them from the ones that they have offended.
- The **third response of violating the spiritual realm is to submit**: They offer the spiritual beings what they want to make peace with them, and they will sacrifice anything they ask because of the fear of losing their lives.

The Gospel for a fear-based culture focuses on the truth that man was banished from God's protection in the garden, but that Christ died as a sacrifice to appease God's wrath and restore us to God:

*For **he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son.*** (Co.1:13 NKJV)

God created the spiritual realm and has authority over it. By placing ourselves under Christ's authority as Lord, He will deliver and protect us from Satan's realm. Jesus taught this principle to His disciples:

*For when a strong man like Satan is fully armed and guards his palace, his possessions are safe—until **someone even stronger attacks and***

overpowers him, strips him of his weapons, and carries off his belongings. (Lk.11:21-22 NLT)

We present Jesus as a **Deliverer** to a fear-based society, just as Moses delivered Israel from the Egyptians. Jesus did not only come to free us from self and sin, but He also came to free us from Satan:

*We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; **the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.*** (1Jn.5:18 NIV)

Because Christ defeated Satan, the Gospel for fear presents people with a way to escape the power of Satan by returning back to God.

A FINAL NOTE:

We cannot assume that a person has a certain worldview because of their ethnicity; we must listen and discern. I have witnessed to an American who had an affair with a person, who was in the occult and was controlled by demons. I have witnessed to a Canadian prostitute who was overcome with shame. I have witnessed to a Muslim who killed so many men that he was overcome by guilt. God gave you two ears and one mouth. With one ear, listen to what the person is saying, while with the other ear, listen to what God is revealing to you about the person. Even though I presented clear distinctions between worldviews, they are not always obvious. We must always be attentive to the direction of the Holy Spirit when presenting the Gospel. Included are three Gospel presentations in everyday speech. May God richly bless His Word.

THE GOSPEL FOR GUILT

When I meet a westerner, I casually ask, “Have you ever sinned; have you ever done things that you knew were wrong?”

All wrongdoing is sin. (1Jn.5:17 NRSV)

“Have you ever told a lie or borrowed something you did not return? Have you ever looked at someone or something and desired it in your mind? If you did, you broke God’s Law and will be held accountable”:

9. *You shall not give false testimony.* (Re.21:8)
8. *You shall not steal.*
7. *You shall not commit adultery.* (Mt.5:28)
10. *You shall not covet.*
3. *Do not misuse my Name.* (Ex.20:2-17 TNIV; Deut.5:6-21)

Whether you steal a cookie, a car, or someone’s spouse, all are the same to God—you have sinned. To break the least of the commands of God makes you guilty of breaking the law:

*For whoever **keeps the whole law** and yet **stumbles in one point**, he has become **guilty of all**.* (Ja.2:10 NASB)

God is perfect, and sin is imperfection. If God allowed imperfect people into heaven, then soon heaven would be no better than earth. God is holy—absolute moral perfection—so He cannot let sinful people go to heaven:

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; **without holiness no-one will see the Lord**.* (He.12:14 NIV)

For example: Have you ever had a person who bothered you—was in your face? You know the type of person; he always makes fun of you, insults you, or threatens you. You do not want to spend time with him because of who he is. Our sin is always in God’s face:

*For **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.* (Ro.3:23 NASB)

God sends sinful people to a place where He never goes—hell. God really created hell for the devil and his demons, but He will send sinful people there so that they are no longer in His face:

*Away with you, you cursed ones, **into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons**.* (Mt 25:41 NLT)

However, God did not create mankind to destroy them but to live with Him forever. God cannot let sinful people into Heaven. God has no choice but to punish mankind to the full measure of the law—the lake of fire:

*But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, **you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath**, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God will repay everyone according to what they have done.*" (Ro.2:5-6 TNIV)

Knowing the law does not help us, for the law states that any sin sentences us to the full punishment by God:

*For there is no partiality with God. For **all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law.*** (Ro.2:11-12 NASB)

Justice will always give us the punishment required by the law. The moment we die, we await the judgment:

*Each person **is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.*** (He.9:27 NLT)

Our physical death closes the record, and we will be judged for what we did on the earth:

*For **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, that each one may receive what is due to him **for the things done while in the body**, whether good or bad.* (2Co.5:10 NIV)

Once we die, there is nothing we can do to change the outcome for our sin. But God did not create us to destroy us but to have a relationship with Him. God is absolute love and wants to forgive us:

God is love. (1Jn.4:16 NLT)

However, equally, God is absolutely just and must punish us for our sin:

God is just: (2Th 1:6 NIV)

These attributes cause a dilemma because justice demands that we be punished according to the law, but love desires to forgive. To love and show mercy violates God's justice. However, to be just and send man to hell violates God's love and mercy. Mercy is counter to justice, and justice is counter to mercy. God's solution for the dilemma was that since only God is perfect and it was man who sinned, God came into the world to be a man, live a perfect life, and let evil men kill Him. Since He did not sin, His death is a credit that could pay our penalty of sin:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall **we be saved from God's wrath through him!** (Ro.5:8-9 NIV)

Let me give you a simple example of how this works.

While I was driving home, I was thinking about something else. When the speed limit dropped, my speed did not. A policeman clocked my speed on his radar and issued me a ticket. I thought I would plead my case to the judge. I said to the judge, "Your Honor, I am a good man" and then proceeded to list many of the good things I had done. "Can you let me go?" If the judge was just, would he let me go? No! The judge being a just man said, "You committed the crime; you must pay the fine: \$200." I said, "Your Honor, I do not have \$200." The judge said, "No problem, you can serve two days in jail this weekend." I pleaded, "Your Honor, I would prefer not to go to jail." The judge countered, "Either you pay \$200 now or spend two days in jail this weekend. Which is it going to be?" My friend who was seated beside me said, "Your Honor, may I speak? I have \$200 in my wallet; can I pay his fine?" The Judge replied, "I do not care who pays his fine, for once it is paid on his behalf, justice is served, and he is free to go." My friend paid the fine, and I left the courtroom a free man.

Since man sinned, only the death of a perfect man could pay our penalty for sin. I cannot pay your penalty for sin because I have sinned. You cannot pay my penalty for sin because you have sinned. Since only God is perfect, He became a man (Jesus), lived a perfect life, and allowed evil men to kill Him in order to pay our penalty:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro.6:23 NASB)

Jesus offers to pay your penalty for sin as a gift if you will humble yourself and ask Him to pay your penalty:

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Ro.10:9 NASB)

Once Jesus died, mankind did not have to suffer the punishment for their sin. However, if you do not ask Jesus to pay your penalty of sin, God is still just, and you will get what you deserve:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. (Jn.3:36 NIV)

Jesus is the only perfect One who came and died to pay our penalty so we can escape going to hell:

*Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. **No one can come to the Father except through me.**”* (Jn.14:6 NLT)

From the moment I asked Jesus to pay my penalty, all my sins were paid for as if they had never happened. However, that is only half of the story. God created man to have a relationship with Him. When I asked Jesus to pay my penalty, I also asked Him to come into my life. At seventeen years of age, I left my family, dropped out of high school, and joined the army. I wanted to see the world and experience life in an evil way. In the army, I prayed, “Jesus, I believe You died on the cross for my sin; please forgive me and come live in me.” Suddenly, while in the army, I stopped my drinking—the majority of people in the army drank alcohol. I stopped my swearing—the majority of people in the army swore. I stopped my womanizing—an extra-curricular activity in the army. Why did I stop doing these things? No one told me to stop. I stopped because my sins were forgiven, and God now lived in me:

*My old self has been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.** So I live in this earthly body by **trusting in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Ga.2:20 NLT)

God cleansed my heart, and His Holy Spirit began to transform my life:

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And **God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted** beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, **he will also provide a way out** so that you can stand up under it.* (1Co.10:13 NIV)

Once I made Jesus Lord of my life, I started to become like Him. Since then, God has been preparing me to live in heaven. Jesus did more than save us from hell; He rose from the dead to live in us and prepare us for heaven by changing our sinful desires to desire holiness:

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. (Php 2:13 NLT)

God promises that if we repent (turn away from our life of sin and turn to Him), and be baptized into Jesus (be immersed in water, giving our lives to Him), then He will forgive us our sin and send His Spirit into our hearts, transforming our lives by His strength:

Peter said to them, "**Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

(Ac.2:38-39 NRSV)

You do not need to suffer in hell; why not receive His offer of life today?

Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

(Ac 4:12 NIV)

Jesus paid the penalty for everyone's sin; all we need to do is ask Him. You must receive Jesus into your life before you die, for after death, judgment awaits everyone:

*He who has the Son has the life; **he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.***

(1Jn.5:12 NASB)

In the same way, God did everything we need to have the penalty for our sin paid. All we have to do is ask Him to pay it. All we have to do is say, "Jesus, I am sorry for my sin. I believe that you died on the cross for my sin. Please forgive me. I invite you to live in me and take control of my life." Why not ask Him today?

*I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, **now is the day of salvation.***

(2Co 6:2 NIV)

THE GOSPEL FOR SHAME

When I meet a Muslim, I usually ask, “Is it true that a Muslim goes to heaven if he does more good than bad? If you died right now, do you know if you would go to heaven or hell? I am a Christian, and I know for sure that I will go to heaven. Do you know why? Can I tell you?” I continue by sharing a shame-based Gospel.

When we sin, we dishonor God by our disobedience:

*O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers **are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.*** (Da.9:8NIV)

Think of the first man, Adam. How many things did Adam do wrong when he was sent out of God’s garden? One! He ate the forbidden fruit! Adam dishonored God by eating the forbidden fruit, and God sent him out of His garden and was never allowed back in again. How many times have you or I dishonored God by our sin? Many times! Every time we sin, we dishonor God, and our dishonor separates us further from God.

*But your iniquities **have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you** so that He does not hear.* (Isa.59:2 NIV)

How can we restore God’s honor and be reconciled with Him? In this world, it is simple to restore someone’s honor. Let me give an example:

Say I was driving in Iraq. I was driving too fast, and I killed a man’s son. I greatly dishonored the family by killing their son. Islam demands a life for a life, so they sought my life. I went into hiding. My family tried to negotiate a blood payment—a sum of money that would restore the family’s honor. Once the blood payment was agreed on and paid, I could come out of hiding and the family no longer sought my life, for their honor was restored through a blood payment.

But what can we give God as a blood payment in order to restore His honor? After all, He created the whole world; He created you and me. God will only accept the voluntary death of a perfect man. I cannot die for your sins because I have sinned. You cannot die for my sin, because you have sinned. However, someone who is perfect can die for both our sins, for he has no sin. Both the Quran and the Injil agree that only one man is perfect—Isa/Jesus, the Holy Child. The Quran states:

He said: "Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord, to announce to thee **the gift of a holy son**. (Qu.19:19 Yusuf Ali)

The New Testament also agrees:

For Christ died for sins once for all, **the righteous** for the unrighteous, **to bring you to God**. (1Pe.3:18 NIV)

Jesus lived a perfect life and voluntarily allowed evil men to kill Him:

The Father loves me because **I sacrifice my life** so I may take it back again. **No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily.** For I have the authority to lay it down **when I want to and also to take it up again**. (Jn.10:17-18 NLT)

Even the Quran agrees that Jesus died when it uses the Arabic word "tawaffa" that is translated "cause me to die." Tawaffa appears 23 times in the Quran. Twenty-two times it means death, and once it means the taking of a soul at death:

I remained among them, and **when You did cause me to die** ^(Tawaffa), You were the watcher over them. You are the witness of all things. (Qu.5:117 W.Khan)

So peace is on me the day I was born, **the day that I die**, and the day that I shall be raised up to life again! (Qu.19:33 Yusuf Ali; note 19:15)

Jesus' death is the only blood payment that God accepts to restore His honor:

Once you were **alienated from God** and were **enemies** in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now **he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death** to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. (Co1:21-22 NIV)

When I was seventeen, I left my family, dropped out of high school, and joined the army. I wanted to see the world and experience life in an evil way. In the army, I asked Jesus to be my blood payment and restore God's honor on my behalf, **and He did**. Suddenly, I stopped my drinking—the majority of people in the army drank alcohol. I stopped my swearing—the majority of people in the army swore. I stopped my womanizing—an extra-curricular activity in the army. Why did I stop doing these things? My friends did not tell me to stop, and the army did not tell me to stop doing these things. I stopped because when God's honor was restored by Jesus' blood payment, I was reconciled with Him, and He sent His Spirit to live in me:

**For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous,
to bring you to God.** (1Pe 3:18 NIV)

My life became holy because God cleansed my heart, and His Holy Spirit began to transform my life. God tells us that He will cleanse our hearts:

**And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins
washed away, calling on his name.'** (Ac 22:16 NRSV)

Baptism is God's way to make our hearts clean. Some question how the death of one man could pay for the sins of everyone in the whole world. Sins are individual acts. Sins can be itemized, accumulated, and calculated. Sins are finite. However, perfection is an absolute. Once a person is perfect, he cannot become more perfect. As an absolute, perfection is infinite. Hence, the death of one infinitely perfect man can pay for the total accumulated sins of the world because sins are finite. In this way, Jesus' death can restore the honor of every person:

**If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your
heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. The
scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."**
(Ro.10:9&11 NRSV)

God is so honored when we accept His way to restore His honor that He adopts us as His children. To be adopted by God is a great honor:

**See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called
children of God; and that is what we are.** (1Jn.3:1 NASB)

Therefore, I know I will go to heaven because I have asked Jesus to be my blood payment. This payment restored God's honor. I know He has accepted that blood payment because He has sent His Holy Spirit in my heart and has begun to change me. If Jesus is not your blood payment, then you will face God in your shame and will suffer for the dishonor you have caused Him:

**And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.**
(Da.12:2 NKJV)

You can either ask Jesus to restore God's honor, or you can face God with your shame. Why not ask Him today?

THE GOSPEL FOR FEAR

When I meet someone fixated upon the power of Satan's realm, I usually ask, "Have you ever lived in fear that you have offended some spiritual being?" Many people around the world live in fear of the unseen. This fear started at the beginning of time when God banished man for disobeying Him. When God created man, He made a beautiful garden and let man have all the fruit of the trees except one tree, which He reserved for Himself:

*And the LORD God commanded the man, "**You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.**"* (Ge.3:16-17 NRSV)

When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, they knew that they offended the greatest spiritual being. They reacted in fear:

*They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and **the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God** among the trees of the garden.* (Ge.3:8 NASB)

When God confronted Adam and Eve with their offense, He banished man from His garden into the world:

So the LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made. (Ge.3:23 NLT)

The world was an evil place which was under the control of the fallen cherub Satan. Satan was created by God to be the guardian of the world, but he rebelled against God and was banished to the earth:

You were in Eden, the garden of God... You were anointed as a guardian cherub... Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God. (Eze.28:13,14,16 NIV)

When Adam and Eve were banished from God's garden because they listened to Satan, they freely placed themselves and their descendants under the authority of Satan's spiritual realm. Thus, mankind became Satan's slaves:

*And he led Him up and showed Him **all the kingdoms of the world** in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "**I will give You all this***

domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. (Lk.4:5-6 NASB)

Jesus never contradicted Satan's claim of authority. Satan is the prince over the world:

We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. (1Jn.5:19 NRSV)

When Satan rebelled, he took one third of God's angels with him. He now commands this vast army in its rebellion against God and His people:

You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. (Eph.2:2 NLT)

Man's battle was never against men but against Satan's realm. Satan and his demons control and manipulate mankind to accomplish his agenda—making men's actions a reaction to a higher power:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph. 6:12 NIV)

The fact that all mankind has sinned proves that we are controlled by the devil to do his bidding. All mankind are born children of the devil:

Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil... (1Jn.3:8 NRSV)

Even though people commit evil, Satan is the one who manipulates them. Let me give you an example.

Both you and I were driving identical cars. I was following you when you passed a group of children walking on the side of the road. As I was about to pass them, I intentionally swerved into the middle of them. Many died, and others were badly hurt. The cars were identical, but the difference was the drivers. What we needed to do to avoid the accident from happening was to change the driver.

Mankind is manipulated by Satan's realm to hurt each other. The world is full of disease, disasters, and depravity because the whole world is under the control of Satan. Satan has deceived man into following him. Satan's agenda is threefold:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (Jn.10:10 NASB)

Satan is a cruel ruler. Our only hope is for someone stronger than Satan to claim us as His own and rescue us from Satan's kingdom:

For when a strong man like Satan is fully armed and guards his palace, his possessions are safe—until someone even stronger attacks and overpowers him, strips him of his weapons, and carries off his belongings. (Lk.11:21-22 NLT)

Jesus came to deliver us from Satan's control. God, Who created both mankind and Satan, became the man Jesus, Who died to pay man's debt of sin and reconcile us back to God:

Once you were **alienated from God and were enemies** in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now **he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight**, without blemish and free from accusation. (Co.1:21-23 TNIV)

When Adam and Eve offended God, they were banished into the world. Jesus died to reconcile us with God and enable us to return back into God's kingdom—thus he freed us from Satan's realm:

He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. **In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.** (Co.2:14-15 NLT)

Jesus defeated Satan by rising from the dead. Jesus offers this gift of freedom to all mankind, should they decide to make Him Lord of their lives and follow Him:

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. (Co.1:13-14 NLT; Ac.26:17-18)

If Christ is our Lord, then Satan no longer has power over us:

*I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and **turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God**, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and **a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*** (Ac.26:17-18 TNIV)

Only by placing ourselves under the authority of Jesus can we have authority over Satan's spiritual realm. Jesus gave His disciples authority over Satan's realm:

*Then Jesus called the twelve together and **gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases**, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.* (Lk.9:1-2 NRSV)

In the Name of Jesus, we have been given the right to offer this freedom to those still oppressed by Satan:

*Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name **they will drive out demons**; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; **they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.*** (Mk.16:16-18 NIV)

Once we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we can go toe to toe with the devil and overcome him by the presence of Christ in our lives:

*I write to you, young people, because **you are strong**, and the word of **God lives in you**, and **you have overcome the evil one.*** (1Jn.2:14 TNIV)

Once part of Jesus' kingdom, we become His ambassadors, bearing His power:

*See, I **have given you authority** to tread on snakes and scorpions, and **over all the power of the enemy**; and **nothing will hurt you.*** (Lk.10:18 NRSV)

Only by inviting Jesus into our hearts as Lord can He evict any former demonic occupants within us and keep them out:

*Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for **the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*** (1Jn.4:4 NRSV)

Once we are part of His kingdom, He promises to protect us:

*We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; **the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them.*** (1Jn.5:18 TNIV)

God loved us so much that He created a way through Jesus to free us from Satan's rule and to become citizens of God's kingdom. Once in Christ, there is nothing we need to fear, for there is nothing greater than God:

*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; **neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.** My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and **no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*** (Jn.10:28-29 NKJV; Ro.8:37-39)

Why not turn your life over to the only One Who can free you and protect you from Satan and his realm?

IN CONCLUSION

The Gospel presented from these three worldviews is the theology of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The examples are not to be memorized but personalized. A short illustration helps keep the person's attention and helps him remember the concept of the Gospel. Some of you might think that you could never share the Gospel with another person. I didn't think I could either. I made a covenant with God that if He would have the person bring up a subject so that I could naturally share the good news of Jesus, then I would share to the best of my ability. Witnessing is not about a perfect presentation but about presenting the truth in a concise manner that is easily understood. I do not feel adequate to present the Gospel, and my presentations are not always smooth or complete. However, God's prime directive is to plant a seed, to share His good news to the best of our ability, and to leave the results to Him. It is that simple.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ron joined the military at the age of seventeen with the hope of adventure. On the flight to boot camp, he heard God's voice: "Ron, are you going to live the rest of your life for yourself, or are you going to live for Me?" By the time the plane landed, Ron made Christ both his Savior and Lord. During his time in the service, he was nicknamed "reverend" because of the radical change in his attitude, behavior, and character. After an honorable discharge, Ron has endeavored to serve his Lord Jesus Christ in instant, absolute obedience. Christians first recognized Ron's prophetic gift while he was working in the inner city. His heart was broken by the church's apathy to the poor and by Christianity's conformity to the world. The Bible defines the gift of prophecy:

*And if I have **the gift of prophecy**, and know **all mysteries and all knowledge**; ...but do not have love, I am nothing.* (1Co.13:2 NIV)

Over forty years ago, Ron decided to follow Christ and has continued to grow not only in the knowledge but also in the likeness of Christ. Five years after becoming a Christian, a non-Christian asked Ron to teach her son the basic truths of Christianity. Searching for a study that taught the key truths of Christianity and finding none, Ron began to write his own one year discipleship course. After many revisions and editions over the years, Basic Discipleship 101 is ready to be published. This study is the first of four books which aims to enable a new believer to grasp the basic tenets of the Christian faith. As God's children, let us learn the basics of life in Christ.

