

NOTES:

Lesson 4

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A FOREGONE CONCLUSION

Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat the forbidden fruit, or they would die. They were both convinced that eating the fruit would bring death. Hence, for Adam and Eve, ingesting the forbidden fruit would be an act of suicide, and giving some to another person would be murder. Yet Eve ate the deadly fruit and then gave some to her husband. We know that Eve was convinced that the fruit would cause death, for she told the serpent:

We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die. (Ge.3:2-3 NKJV)

God never said that they would die if they touched the fruit, but Eve feared the fruit so much that she exaggerated its toxicity. To ingest something that is undoubtedly deadly is a sign of mental and emotional instability. Yet when the serpent told Eve that she and Adam would not die but would actually become like God, Eve believed the serpent and overlooked the grave consequences. Why did Eve believe the serpent over God?

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Ge.3:4-5 NASB)

The serpent directly contradicted God and insinuated that God gave the command to prevent Adam and Eve from becoming like Him. Eve believed Satan, doubted God, and ate to her spirit's death. Why was Eve so gullible? People can be influenced to change their minds in ways that the average person would find absurd. Jesus Himself knew that man was erratic. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, the

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

1. Why did Joshua tell the Israelites that they could not keep the law?
2. Why does the Bible use all inclusive phrases to explain that natural man is helpless because of sin?
3. What are the two responses to continual defeat by sin?
4. What are the two methods of achieving righteousness?
5. What does the verb tense of "died" in Colossians 2:20 indicate about us and the basic principles of the world?
6. What is the difference between trying and relying?
7. What must we do to attain the righteousness for which we hope?
8. What is the difference between the covenant of law and the covenant of grace?

God promises to transform our natures from the sinful to the divine. We do not have to achieve righteousness by our will, for we receive righteousness by 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. **See to it that no-one takes you captive** through hollow and deceptive philosophy, **which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*** (Co.2:6-8 NIV)

Therefore, we must die to the basic principles of this world (abandon our reliance on ourselves) and rely on God's grace. We must ask Christ to transform our lives by His Spirit. Only the presence of Christ, Who indwells us by His Holy Spirit, can change our actions from sinful to righteous:

*I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or **by believing what you heard?** Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, **are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*** (Ga.3:2-3 NIV)

people were declaring Him their King by shouting "Hosannah!" But a few days later, the same people were condemning Jesus to death by shouting "Crucify Him!" According to the Gospel of John, Jesus knew man's fickleness early in His ministry; consequently, He would not entrust Himself to them:

*But **Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.** He did not need man's testimony about man, **for he knew what was in a man.*** (Jn.2:24-25 NIV)

Jesus knew that man was controlled by his soul—that man's opinion, desire, and resolve could change at a moment's notice. Remember that man's intellect gathers and processes information, that his emotion searches within himself to discern what he feels like doing, and that his will enacts his desire through his body. Because Eve feared the fruit, she maintained her distance from it, and she refused to touch the fruit. But when Eve believed Satan's lie, her desires changed, and she picked the fruit and ate it. Man is inconsistent. His desires change when the right incentives are offered. Joshua addressed the inconsistency of man when he was about to die. In Joshua's final dissertation to Israel, he asked them to renew their covenant with God and urged them to worship and serve God alone. The people responded:

*Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods. . . . **Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.**"* (Jos.24:16&18 NRSV)

When Joshua heard their response, he warned Israel that they could not possibly serve God:

*Then Joshua said to the people, "**You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins.**"* (Jos.24:19 NASB)

Joshua's evaluation of Israel may seem harsh. Nevertheless, their inconsistent behavior in the desert—alternating between rebellion and obedience—proved their fickleness. Joshua knew that Israel was unable to serve the Lord. An example of human inconsistency is King David. The Scriptures teach that David had a heart that sought after God:

*"He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, **a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.**'"* (Ac.13:22 NKJV)

Even with a heart that sought after God, David committed adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife; plotted against Uriah; and had him murdered.

What was David thinking? Even though David had a sensitive heart toward God, he still committed some very grave sins that deserved the death sentence by the law of God.

Man's history has proven that if the completion of God's will is dependent upon man, then it will not come to pass. Solomon, the wisest man in the Old Testament, summarized mankind's inability to stop sinning:

*For there is **not a just man on earth** who **does good and does not sin**.* (Ec.7:20 NRSV)

In the whole earth, not a single man was without sin; for even the most righteous people in the Old Testament sinned. The New Testament shares this view of natural man:

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

Without Christ, a man can please God one moment and violate God's law the next moment. Even when man tries to do good, his actions are tainted with sin because his motives and attitudes are wrong. Consequently, even man's good deeds are corrupted by sin:

*We have all **become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.*** (Isa.64:6 NRSV)

When God destroyed the world by the flood, He summarized the condition of mankind during the first two thousand years—the era of conscience:

*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)

When man lived by his conscience, his nature could be summarized by the following sentence: "Every inclination . . . was only evil all the time." When Solomon dedicated the temple, he summarized the condition of mankind during the next two thousand years—the era of law. Praying to God, Solomon concluded:

There is no man who does not sin. (1Ki.8:46 NASB; 2Ch.6:36)

Until Pentecost, all mankind failed to obey God because they lived by the "basic principles of this world": if something needs to be done, then man must do it himself. While under the law of the covenant, man had

*God. Now **it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.*** (2Co.1:20-21 NIV)

The record of human history and our personal experience may say that we cannot overcome sin, but our faith is in God:

*Now may the God of peace Himself **sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame** at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*** (1Th.5:23-24 NASB)

God promises to achieve holiness in our lives, and this promise is the hope to which we must cling:

*Now **faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*** (He.11:1 NASB)

We must abandon the basic principles of this world and cry out to God. We must believe that God will fulfill His promise and keep us from falling into sin:

*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)

Our temptations are not any different than Israel's, but our covenant is different than the old covenant. In the old covenant, man was responsible to implement obedience. However, in the new covenant, God has promised to transform our lives into His holiness. We will accomplish victory over sin when we yield our will to God:

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God. (2Co.7:1 NRSV)

We must die to the basic principles of the world (self-effort) before we are ready to call out to God and rely on His promises. God has promised us everything that we need to live holy lives and to escape the corruption of our pasts:

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 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.1:3-4 NRSV)

*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.8:6-8 TNIV)

The old covenant was based on the law and the basic principles of this world. Israel was responsible to keep the covenant of the Ten Commandments that were written on stone. In effect, the principle of law states, "Do this, and you will live." In the new covenant, the principle of grace through Christ states, "I have given you life; now walk in it!"

*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)

The law came through Moses, while grace came through Christ. New Testament grace was not experienced in the Old Testament:

*For **the law was given through Moses**, but **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**.* (Jn.1:17 NKJV)

Grace empowers Christians to live lives that please God. Christians live righteously by grace when they place their faith in God's promise to empower them. Abraham also lived by faith. He was promised a son through his wife Sarah, but both he and Sarah were beyond the age of childbearing. Regardless of this fact, Abraham believed that he and Sarah would have a son, because he knew that what is humanly impossible is possible with God:

***He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief**, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and **being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform**.* (Ro.4:20-21 NKJV)

Just as Abraham was convinced that God could and would do as He had promised, we too must be fully convinced that God will do in our lives what He has promised. God states that we will live holy lives through the indwelling of His Spirit; hence, we must confess our inability and profess God's promise and ability:

*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*

to obey God by his own willpower. Jeremiah, a prophet in the Old Testament, identified the reason for man's inconsistent life:

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

The heart of natural man is corrupt and determined to disobey God. The apostle Paul described the condition of natural man after Adam ate the forbidden fruit:

*As it is written: **"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, 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.3:10-12 NIV)

Many people believe that they are acceptable to God by their own strength, but they have deceived themselves. Man by himself cannot obtain eternal life, for he cannot achieve a holy life by his own efforts. Therefore, mankind fail to attain holiness because they live by the power of their souls.

MAN'S EFFORT VERSUS GOD'S GRACE

The basic principles of this world form the foundation of the humanist's creed: Mankind are the only solution to their problems; if given enough time and money, they will overcome every issue that they encounter. However, the Old Testament explicitly supports that mankind cannot even keep themselves from personally violating each other. When a person accepts that he cannot overcome his habitual sin, he reacts in one of two ways, depending on his personality. If the person is passive, depression will overcome his soul; and he will say, "Why try to overcome this?" However, if the person is strong-willed, determination will rise within his soul; and he will say, "I will overcome this." Shortly after I became a Christian, I knew these two responses very well. I would oscillate between giving up and rising up, yet neither reaction enabled me to overcome my sins. As a young Christian, I still lived by the principles of this world. I found that I could overcome some sins by my willpower; however, others I could not. The Bible states that everyone has sins that easily ensnare him:

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and **the sin which so easily ensnares us**, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.* (He.12:1 NKJV)

Habitual sins are strongholds in people's lives, but not everyone has the same habitual sin. Each person has different sins that he cannot overcome by the power of his soul. These sins convinced me early in my faith that I was powerless on my own:

*For **while we were still helpless**, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while we were yet sinners**, Christ died for us.* (Ro.5:6-8 NASB)

We were broken when we realized that we could not overcome sin by our own willpower.

Under the law, the Israelites could not do what was right; nor could they stop doing what was evil. However, the law was not the cause of Israel's failure:

*Therefore **the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.*** (Ro.7:12 NKJV)

The law merely stated **what** Israel was required to do, but the basic principles of the world summarized **how** man should keep God's law. Naturally, we assume that if someone asks us to do something, he expects us to do it. Likewise, God gave Israel the law, and Israel was responsible to keep it. God wrote the law on two tablets of stone, but Israel had to apply it to their lives:

*Moses describes in this way the **righteousness that is by the law**:
"The man who does these things will live by them."* (Ro.10:5 NIV)

Israel knew what God required of them; however, knowing His will is very different from doing His will. Israel could not keep the law, for their approach was incorrect:

*Israel, **who did strive for the righteousness** that is based on the law, **did not succeed in fulfilling that law.** Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but **as if it were based on works.*** (Ro.9:31-32 NRSV)

Israel strived to achieve righteousness by keeping the law by their own resolve. However, their souls did not have the capability to obey consistently. To be asked to do something that we cannot accomplish is a form of bondage:

*So also, when we were children, we were in **slavery under the basic principles of the world.*** (Ga.4:3 NIV)

*will be humbled, but **all who humble themselves will be exalted.*** (Lk.18:9-14 NRSV)

The Pharisee trusted in himself and in his ability to attain righteousness. But the tax collector knew that he could never attain righteousness on his own and therefore appealed to God's mercy. Only when we realize our inadequacies are we willing to call out to God to justify us. It may seem natural to live by the basic principles of this world. But we must die to their methodology and learn the elementary principles of God's kingdom:

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, **you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God**, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk **is not accustomed to the word of righteousness**, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice **have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*** (He.5:12-14 NASB)

We can live by the basic principles of the world—self-reliance; or we can humbly submit to the elementary truths of God's Word—God-reliance. For example, a young boy wanted to build something on his own. His father knew that his son could not possibly complete the project without his help. The father watched his son struggle but eagerly waited for his son to ask him for help. Finally in frustration, the son cried out, "Dad, please help me!" His father replied, "I thought that you would never ask." Our independence and self-reliance—living by the basic principles of this world—must cease; for we will never achieve obedience to God by ourselves. God is waiting for us to ask Him for help. Christ came to do for mankind what they could never do for themselves:

*"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)

Christ is God's solution to man's weakness and failure. The era of law teaches us that we cannot achieve righteousness by our efforts. Since Israel could not keep the covenant of law, God established a new covenant in which He promises to work righteousness in us through Christ:

*But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, **since the new covenant is established on better promises.** For if there*

their efforts counteracted their ability to achieve righteousness. Consequently, they created a legalistic method to achieve righteousness:

*I can testify that **they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*** (Ro.10:2-4 NRSV)

Our efforts to keep God's law will never enable us to overcome sin. Rather, we will overcome if we call on God to fulfill His promises. Once we realize that we cannot keep the commands of God by our own efforts, we are ready to ask God to transform us into His righteousness:

*But **what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss** for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, **that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.*** (Php.3:7-9 NKJV)

Paul realized that he could not please God by his own effort. His brokenness became the turning point in his life because he then called on God for the righteousness that He promised. In the same way, only when we realize that we cannot attain righteousness by our effort, will we be ready to consider another way—surrender. Brokenness (surrender) may seem like defeat, but we must realize our helplessness and hopelessness before we are ready to rely on Christ.

One day, Jesus told a parable about the two perspectives of righteousness: a Pharisee and a tax collector. These two people represented the two ends of the spectrum of righteousness—reliance on self and reliance on God:

*He also told this parable **to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous** and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, '**God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.**' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, '**God, be merciful to me, a sinner!**' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves*

The basic principles of this world enslave man, for the law reveals God's standard but does not equip man with the knowledge or ability to attain God's standard. Man has to die to the basic principles of this world. In other words, man must realize that he cannot stop his sensual indulgence by his own effort. Then he must stop trying on his own and must rely on God to empower him to overcome his sins. The following verses teach that Christians have died to the basic principles of this world:

*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!"**? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on 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.2:20-23 NIV)

In Colossians 2:20, the Greek verb tense of "died" is the aorist tense, active voice, indicative mood—in simple English, we translate it as the past tense. The aorist tense indicates an action that is apart from time, for we died with Christ before the beginning of time. However, the active voice indicates that we did something to achieve death to the basic principles of the world. What did we do? We waited. Once we accepted that we could not restrain our sensual indulgences by our own efforts, we asked God to help us and waited for Him to accomplish victory in our lives. We responded like a drowning man. A drowning man knows that he cannot save himself. Therefore, he cries for help and waits to be rescued. As Christians, we call out to God and wait, because we will hinder God's grace if we strive to be righteous by our own efforts through the law:

*You **who are trying to be justified by the law** have been **alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.** For through the Spirit **we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.*** (Ga.5:4-5 TNIV)

The only time that a person has to wait is when he is reliant on someone else. To wait while we call out to God puts the principles of the world to death. God also waits until we stop trying by our own efforts and start relying on Him to enable us to overcome our sins. A lifeguard does not help a drowning swimmer until the swimmer stops thrashing in the water. The panicking swimmer might drown the lifeguard as the

swimmer clings to him for life, thus hindering the lifeguard's ability to swim. Our self-reliance counteracts our trust in God to deliver us. As long as we try to overcome sin by our own efforts, we are not seeking God's help. Consequently, we are left to our own resources which will ultimately fail, meaning that we will continue in sin and ruin the testimony of both us and the Holy Spirit. We must wait, call on God, and rely on the Holy Spirit to transform our lives into God's holiness:

But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
(Isa.40:31 NKJV)

Either we wait, asking and trusting God to keep His promises; or we doubt His promises and continue to strive for holiness by the principles of this world. Many Christians feel that they must change themselves; but they only restrict the Holy Spirit's help, making their situation worse. Hence, Christians must have humility. Christians show humility when they recognize their inability and ask for help from God in their time of need:

God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. . . . And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.
(1Pe.5:6-7&10 NASB)

The Scriptures teach that if we humble ourselves before God, admit our inability, and rely only on Him, His grace will give us victory over sin at the proper time. Therefore, we must wait in prayer to become righteous. Humility, God's way to victory, is contrary to the basic principles of this world, which demand that we strive by our own means to become righteous.

RELIGION WILL FAIL

Paul was taught from childhood to be a Pharisee. To please God, Paul lived by the basic principles of this world:

*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: **circumcised** on the eighth day, **a member** of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, **a Hebrew** born of Hebrews; as to the law, **a Pharisee**; as to zeal, **a persecutor** of the church; as to righteousness under the law, **blameless.***
(Php.3:4-6 NRSV)

With all his religious rightness, he failed to keep the law of God by his own resolve. In Romans, Paul confessed that he was not only unspiritual but also incapable of doing good before Christ came into his life:

*We know that **the law is spiritual**; but **I am unspiritual**, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. **For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do.** And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, **but it is sin living in me.***
(Ro.7:14-17 TNIV)

No matter how much Paul desired to keep God's law, sin proved to be stronger than his willpower. Paul's intellect knew what God wanted, and his desire sought to please God. However, his will failed to obey God. Even though Paul zealously observed Judaism (its rituals, traditions, and theology), it did not enable him to achieve holiness. The basic principles of religious observance will never enable us to overcome sin:

*But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that **you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles**? Do you wish to be **enslaved by them all over again**? You are **observing special days and months and seasons and years!** I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. (Ga.4:8-11 NIV)*

Our rituals and traditions will not achieve the righteousness that we seek. We may feel God's presence when we experience dynamic worship in church, but the music will stop. We may fast from the basic necessities of life for a time, but we will eat again. We may study the depths of theology, but we will have to face the regimen of everyday life. Consequently, worshipping, fasting, and studying will not enable us to have victory over sin. The Pharisees thought that the daily routine of reading the Scriptures would transform them:

***You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life**; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and **you are unwilling to come to Me**, that you may have life.* (Jn.5:39-40 NASB)

The Pharisees used religion to pursue eternal life, but they actually rejected the One Who came to save them, Jesus Christ. They did not become right with God even though they kept all the right religious rituals. The Pharisees broke down the laws of God to the smallest components, for they thought that their lack of understanding was the reason for their failure to keep the law. Israel refused to believe that