

Go, Make Disciples

Unit 1: Text: Genesis 1:1- Genesis 2:3

Title: God and Man

Foundation: God's Transcendence and Imminence

Further Reading: Psalm 33; Isaiah 55:9-11

Scripture Memory: Romans 11:33-36

Additional Resources: (See attached)

Unit 2: Text: Genesis 2:4-25

Title: God and Man (Part 2)

Foundation: God's Goodness

Further Reading: Psalm 36:5-10; Psalm 16; Acts 14:17

Scripture Memory: 1 John 1:5-7

Additional Resources: (See attached)

Unit 3: Text: Genesis 3:1 – Genesis 4:16

Title: The Transgression

Foundation: Original Sin

Further Reading: Romans 5:12-18; Romans 3:10-26

Scripture Memory: Matthew 15:17-20

Other Resources (See attached)

Unit 4: Text: Revelation 21-22

Title: The End of the Story

Foundation: The Disciple's Triangle

Further Reading: Romans 12; Deuteronomy 6

Scripture Memory: Romans 12:1-2

Unit 5: Text: Genesis 6-9

Title: The Covenant with Noah

Foundation: The Holiness of God

Further Reading: Psalm 99; Isaiah 6:1-13; Revelation 4:1-11

Scripture Memory: Isaiah 55:9 (repeated)

Unit 6: Text: Genesis 12-22

Title: The Covenant with Abraham

Foundation: Faith

Further Reading: Romans 5:1-11 (Repeated); Galatians 3:1-14; James 2:14-26

Scripture Memory: Hebrews 11:1 and 6

Unit 7: Text: Genesis 23-47

Title: Joseph

Foundation: Providence

Further Reading: Romans 8:28-39; Daniel 4:28-35; Psalm 139

Scripture Memory: Romans 8:28-35

Unit 8: Text: Exodus 1-20

Title: The Covenant through Moses

Foundation: The Law and the Christian

Further Reading: Psalm 19:7-11; Psalm 119:9-16; Romans 7:7-25; Galatians

3:16-29

Scripture Memory: Romans 8:1-4

Unit 9: Text: 1 Samuel 15-18; 2 Samuel 7; 1 Kings 8

Title: The Kingly Covenant

Foundation: Repentance

Further Reading: 2 Samuel 11 and 12; Psalm 51

Scripture Memory: 1 John 1:8-10

Unit 10: Text: Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-53

Title: Isaiah's Suffering Servant

Foundation: Principles of Interpreting the Bible

Further Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-2; Psalm 119; Jeremiah 23:25-40

Scripture Memory: Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Unit 11: Text: Matthew 1 – Matthew 5:16

Title: The Sermon on the Mount (Part 1)

Foundation: Jesus, the Son of God

Further Reading: John 1:1-18; Colossians 1:15-20; John 14

Scripture Memory: John 1:1-4 and 14 & 18;

Unit 12: Text: Matthew 5:17-48

Title: The Sermon on the Mount (Part 2)

Foundation: Jesus Christ: One Person, Two Natures

Further Reading: Romans 8; Luke 15

Scripture Memory: Colossians 1:15-17 and 2:9-10

Unit 13 Text: Matthew 6

Title: Kingdom Righteousness

Foundation: Spiritual Disciples: Fasting; Justification by Faith

Further Reading: Romans 7; 1 Corinthians 5:14-21

Scripture Memory: 1 Corinthians 5:17-21

Unit 14 Text: Matthew 7

Title: Living in the Fear of God

Foundation: Spiritual Disciplines: Prayer; Sanctification

Further Reading: Colossians 3:12-4:6

Scripture Memory: Matthew 7:24-27

Unit 15 Text: Matthew 13

Title: The Kingdom

Foundation: Spiritual Disciplines: Fellowship; The Atonement

Further Reading: Jude; Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 14

Scripture Memory: Luke 9:23-26

Unit 16 Text: John 1-12

Title: That you might believe

Foundation: The Lord's table

Further Reading: John 1-12

Scripture Memory: John 8:12; John 10:11; John 14:6

Unit 17 Text: John 13

Title: Kingdom Relationships

Foundation: Spiritual Disciplines: Service; The church

- Further Reading:** Ephesians 2 and 4, I Cor 12:12-31
Scripture Memory: John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 2:9
- Unit 18 Text:** John 14:1-14 and John 15
Title: The Believer's Spiritual Secret (Part 1)
Foundation: The trinity
Further Reading: 1 Peter 2:11-3:22
Scripture Memory: John 15:1-11
- Unit 19 Text:** John 14:15-31 and John 16
Title: The Believer's Spiritual Secret (Part 2)
Foundation: The Holy Spirit
Further Reading: Acts 1:6-10, Acts 2
Scripture Memory: Galatians 5:22-25
- Unit 20 Text:** John 17
Title: The Unity of the Body
Foundation: Eternal Security; Personal Worship
Further Reading: John 6:16-71; Ephesians 1:3-14
Scripture Memory: Psalm 1
- Unit 21 Text:** John 18-21
Title: The Disciple's Restoration
Foundation: Suffering and the Disciple of Jesus
Further Reading: 1 Peter 4; 2 Corinthians 4; Mark 6:16-30
Scripture Memory: Philippians 3:7-14

Before You Begin...

Books do not make disciples. Only disciples can make disciples.

The principles of this book will point out the next steps of discipleship. But you need more than this book. You need a guide—a spiritual guide. Jesus was that to the 12 disciples. Moses was a guide to Joshua. Elijah was a guide to Elisha. Paul was a mentor to Timothy. This book can be used with benefit individually. However, it will be most beneficial to you if you seek out a believer who is older and wiser than you, someone you respect. Ask him to go through this book with you. Sit with him at least once a week as you work through the lessons. Talk over the things you are learning. Ask him (or her) his opinions about the lesson. As Proverbs says “iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens the countenance of another.” Discipleship is learning from those who have gone ahead of us.

If possible, use this book in a group setting. A group of five is ideal. It gives each person time to share his views and ask questions. Establish your meeting time and keep to it, no matter what.

You will want to go through this book fast. Don't. Take the necessary time to meditate on the passage. Read the “further reading” sections with care. Note questions you have and discuss them with your mentor or small group. It is also very important to memorize the passages indicated. Each lesson should take about a week if you are able to work on it for one half hour a day.

If you have grown up in a church some of this material will not be new to you. I think you will find that the perspective of the book is different from what you may have heard in churches. However, this book was not written for the believer who grew up in the church. It was written for Jesus' scattered followers who are coming to him from the highways and byways of the Middle East and North Africa. It is written for the scattered sons of Abraham now returning to the faith of their father. Your faith and perseverance are a continual example to me. You assure me that Jesus is alive and his power is at work. It's an honor for me to be with you on the path of discipleship. So, let us press on. There is much to do, much to be. The only limitation is our own unwillingness to embrace the cross and follow him.

Lesson 1

God and Man (Part 1): Genesis 1:1-2:3

Preparation:

Man is mind-boggling. On the one hand we see man doing the most noble and daring acts to demonstrate his mercy and solidarity with his fellow man. On the other hand, he can sink to the lowest depths of deception and rivalry. One example will suffice. Man, genius that he is, has developed nuclear energy. With that energy he can light up a whole city providing heat, light and health to millions of his neighbors. However, he can take that same source of energy and create a destructive device which will turn that entire city and everyone in it into a pile of rubble. What a contradiction is man!

We tend to absorb the views around us. Very commonly the media teaches us that man can resolve his own problems. Movies and novels depict man solving great crises such as wars and hurricanes. Man struggles to build stronger buildings, perfect medical technology and push forward in fields of learning. The mood of our age can be optimistic about man and his potential. Unconsciously we may begin to think that man is his own solution.

Perhaps the other side of the coin is more apt to describe your way of viewing man. You've seen the destruction of wars, families torn apart by pride and arrogance, discrimination against you (or others) just because of the color of your skin or the country of your origin. Even your close friends and family have turned their back on you. Perhaps you've given up hope for man. Your best defense is to build high walls and fortify yourself in your castle against those who would like to destroy you.

The oldest book in the world has some wisdom to impart to us about man and about the world he inhabits. The main lesson the Bible teaches is that man is a creature in relation to his creator—God. This is the beginning point.

Read Genesis 1-2:2 slowly and carefully. We will ask you to respond to some questions as you read. Please follow the instructions carefully.

Pray the following prayer or a similar one of your own.

God, I come to you and to your word needing light and understanding. Please open my mind to understand. Change my emotions to reflect your perfect will and cause me to change and grow based on what I will study today. Amen.

Examining the Scripture:

1. Now read through Genesis 1:1 to 2:2 carefully. In the space below write any phrase that is repeated more than once. Also write the passage where you find that phrase.

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2. Usually when a phrase is repeated in the Bible, it is a signal to pay attention. It was important to God as he inspired men to write to emphasize these truths. What do you think was the reason for the repetition of these phrases?

3. Genesis 2:2: The earth was formless and empty. Was this before God created or after? In other words, did God create order out of the formless and empty earth or did he create the formless and empty earth itself?

4. What relation do you see between the first three creation days and the last three creation days? Write what was created on those days in the chart below.

Day 1:	Day 3
Day 2:	Day 4:
Day 3:	Day 5:

5. What distinguishes the creation of man from the rest of creation? List at least three observations.

Reflecting on the Scripture

6. Consider man's noble position in creation. Man comes at the end of the creation. He is given the role of ruling creation. Mankind is also given all the plants for food. God has created man in his (God's) image. Take a few moments to write out what you think it means for man to be created in the image of God. After doing that, read our response in the answer section of this lesson.

Our Answers

1. "And God said..." verse 3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29.
"And there was evening and there was morning, the first day." Verses 5, 8, 18, 19, 23, 31.
"And God saw that it was good" verses 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.
2. "And God said": This emphasizes God's great power. He did not exert any effort. He merely thought and spoke. Whatever God spoke happened. "And there was evening and there was morning the nth day." Perhaps this is a way to divide the account of creation. It suggests that there is a system and an order to what God is doing. We'll examine it further later.
"And God saw that it was good:" What God did had no defect in it. It was perfect, like God. God is not only all-powerful. He also does all things well.
3. After. God's creation was not merely an organizing of previously existing material. The Bible teaches that God created material and proceeded to organize and order it in the creation days.

4.	<table><tr><td>Day 1: Light, separating the light from the darkness.</td><td>Day 4: The heavenly lights (sun, moon and stars)</td></tr><tr><td>Day 2: An expanse called "sky" separating the waters below the earth from the waters above the earth.</td><td>Day 5: The animal life of the sea and the animal life of the sky (birds)</td></tr><tr><td>Day 3: The dry land separated from the sea. Vegetation was created on the land. Plants bore seed according to their kind.</td><td>Day 6: The animal life of the earth including man.</td></tr></table>	Day 1: Light, separating the light from the darkness.	Day 4: The heavenly lights (sun, moon and stars)	Day 2: An expanse called "sky" separating the waters below the earth from the waters above the earth.	Day 5: The animal life of the sea and the animal life of the sky (birds)	Day 3: The dry land separated from the sea. Vegetation was created on the land. Plants bore seed according to their kind.	Day 6: The animal life of the earth including man.
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In the first three days, God separates. In the second three days he fills the separated entities. To put it another way. He creates homes on the first three days. Then he gives the homes inhabitants on days 4, 5 and 6.

[figure 1.1]

5.
 - a. Man was created in the image of God. Note that God uses the plural form when speaking of himself, “let us make man in our image...” This is the first hint in Scripture of a God who is one but who also has a plurality in his nature.
 - b. Man was to rule over the rest of the created order: fish, birds (day 5) and cattle (day 6).
 - c. “Mankind” was composed of the two sexes “male and female” (verse 27). Even though each individual is a complete person, God intends for the marriage relationship to be an expression of completeness.
 - d. Man enjoyed a blessing from God. It includes fruitfulness (man will multiply on the earth) and dominion (man will rule over the creation).
 - e. Man is given the plants for food.
6. Man’s being created in God’s image gives him a unique position among the animals. We will focus more on the creation of man in Lesson 2, however, for now, it is important to note a few foundational concepts related to man as created in God’s image.
 This does not mean that man is a god nor that man is all-powerful. What it means is that God’s attributes (his holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth, orderliness, justice etc.) are also present in mankind. It was God’s intention for man to be distinguished from the animals. He describes this distinction as “God’s image” in human beings. It is a very noble position that God has granted to human beings in the first chapter of Genesis. Mankind is the ruler of the earth and the sole possessor of the “image of God.” This noble position leads us to a very important question: Does contemporary man live in this honorable manner? If not, what happened to mankind that he fails to live out this nobility? These are key questions which this study will seek to answer. For now, it is enough that we highlight them and determine to pursue our study of God and his relationship to man.

Foundations: God’s Independence

In this section we will highlight some of the doctrines which this lesson has emphasized. These are doctrines that other students of the Bible have identified over the centuries. In order to get a fuller picture of some of these doctrines, we will refer to parts of the Bible other than the Genesis passage you have read.

God’s independence or self-existence: God’s existence is not dependent on anyone or anything else. Man, on the contrary, is dependent upon God for his existence. Genesis 1 begins with the words “In the beginning, God...” The Bible does not attempt to explain God’s origin because this cannot be done. God always was and always will be. Man’s origin is very different. He was created by God and made to be dependent on God. For this reason, this attribute of God is called one of his *incommunicable* attributes. That means simply that God does not share this

attribute with man. Man is dependent. God is independent (self-existent).

Not only is God independent in his being (he exists independently of man), he is also independent in his actions and his virtues. This does not mean that God is totally unpredictable or that he has an evil side. Rather, it means that God sets the standard for what is good. It means that God is not answerable to man or any other being for his actions. Rather man is answerable to God.

When man attempts to be independent, he is usurping the place of God. Man must answer to God for his actions. God is not obliged to answer to man.

How about you?

In all probability, you know that God is independent. You also understand that he sets the standards for what is right. Yet, if you are honest with yourself, you will recognize that you have rebelled against that standard many times. Much like your father, Adam, you have chosen your own way, in effect, trying to make yourself independent and God, dependent! If we embrace the truth that only God is independent and that we are totally dependent on him, our only response must be to accept his standard for our life with our whole heart.

Read **Romans 11:33-36 and Psalm 33**. Both express thoughts related to God's independence.

Memorize **Psalm 90:2**.

Pray, confessing to God that he alone is independent. Recognize your dependence and reaffirm your desire to follow his ways whole-heartedly.

Lesson 2

God and Man (Part 2): Genesis 2:4-25

Preparation:

Take a few moments to answer the following questions. They are intended to help you determine your present beliefs about the subjects in this lesson:

1. My attitude toward my work is:
 - a. My work is awful. I would quit now if I could.
 - b. If I didn't have to work to earn money, I wouldn't work at all.
 - c. I enjoy my work despite its difficulties.
 - d. I see my work as God's perfect will for my life.

2. I think of marriage in the following way: (circle all that apply)
 - a. Marriage is the way God intended for us to populate the earth.
 - b. The wife must submit to the husband in all major decisions.
 - c. My spouse and I can each have our own private life.
 - d. I and my spouse are like one person.

3. When a person sins he deserves to:
 - a. be punished
 - b. be forgiven
 - c. be given another chance, as long as it's not a big sin
 - d. die

4. I believe that man today is:
 - a. about the same as God created him in the beginning
 - b. is further away from God than he was in the beginning
 - c. is closer to God than he was in the beginning
 - d. is smarter now than he was in the beginning

Have you ever asked yourself why those relationships that are the dearest to us are also often filled with tension and conflict? Why is divorce so common? Why are family disagreements so unpleasant? Shouldn't there be peace in these relationships?

God made man for relationships. Man was given a special relationship with God himself. He was also given a special partner—the woman—with whom he was to share a thrilling and fulfilling relationship.

In this lesson, we read the exciting story of how man meets woman and we'll learn something about God's intention for that relationship.

Read Genesis 2

Pray the following prayer:

God, you are the creator of the universe. By your power you have made all that exists. In these moments I pray that you would reveal your light to me. Help me to

understand this book written so long ago. Bless my study and give me the ability to focus my thoughts on what I am examining. Thank-you. Amen.

Examining the Scripture

Again, please answer the following questions writing your answers in the blank provided. Our responses can be found at the end of the lesson, however, please reflect on your own answer and write it down before referring to our responses.

1. Genesis 2 goes into more detail about the sixth day of creation, specifically, the creation of man.¹ From where does man derive life? What observations can you make about God's provision for man.

2. God gave man a job to do. What was it? Are you surprised that work was part of this perfect world that God had provided for man?

3. God gave a specific prohibition concerning one of the trees. What was it? Also, what would be the result if man broke this prohibition?

4. Do you think that God's sentence of death for eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was fair?

¹ Genesis 2:2 says that God "rested." The word "rested" can also mean that God ceased his creative work. The Bible does not teach that God became tired after his work. Rather, he completed his work and ceased from it.

5. Immediately after this love warning concerning the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, God again makes a declaration. What is it? What does this demonstrate about God (specifically, his intentions toward man)?

6. What, if anything, does the naming of the animals suggest to you about man's intelligence?

7. Verse 20 indicates that none of the animals would be a suitable helper for man. God then does a new creative act, producing woman from a man's rib. Adam proceeds to name this new creature "woman" because she was taken out of man. What words would you use to describe Adam's emotions when God presents the woman to him?

8. "They will become one flesh." Describe in your own words God's intention for this first marriage.

Our Answers:

1. Man received life when God breathed into him the breath of life.
Man was placed in a garden which had been prepared by God (v.8)
God gave man beautiful surroundings aesthetically (the trees were pleasing to the eye).
God provided for man's physical appetites (the trees were good for food).
God provided man with a helpmate suitable for him.
2. Man was to tend a garden. Actually, it should not surprise us that work was part of this perfect world. Work in this world was not burdensome but fulfilling. In a sense it was a joint labor with God to care for and tend his creation. God was entrusting man to preserve his great creative work. Not only does man occupy a place of nobility (as we discovered in lesson one), but he also has been given a noble task or calling.
3. Man was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If he did eat, he would die. Note that there had been no death in God's world until now. Perhaps the death sentence seemed strange to the man. What would death look like? He had no previous experience to compare to death.
4. Everything God has done until now was for human beings. It would therefore be logical to assume that even this new rule was for man's good. God's laws are not given to destroy our fun or limit our potential. Rather, God gives mankind laws which protect and preserve him. For this reason, we could consider this death sentence more of a warning given to man in love. God makes it very clear that Adam will certainly die if he eats of this tree. Secondly, man was given a place that provided for his aesthetic, physical and social needs. Human beings were given the marvelous gift of companionship in marriage. All the other trees in the garden were given to man freely. There was but one tree that was prohibited. In view of all this, it was more than fair. We should consider it a warning given to the man out of God's wisdom and love for him.
5. God declares it is not good for Adam to be alone and that he will make a helper suitable for him. This declaration shows that God is very concerned to provide all that man needs. He knows man's needs better than man himself does and he acts to meet those needs in the best possible way. This first provision of marriage was God's reaction to the deep need of human beings not to be alone.
6. Naming the animals was more than merely putting a label on them. This man gave each animal a name which was fitting for it. Naming an animal or a thing in the Old Testament times meant placing it in an appropriate category. Adam was given the job of naming the animals according to their various relationships one to another. So, even though man had just been created, he was intelligent and immediately began putting his mental energy to work in caring for God's creation.

7. Verse 23 is actually poetry. Man breaks out in a poetic song to celebrate this new companion: “Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” Adam sees himself in woman and yet he sees someone else. He is overjoyed with his new companion.
creation.
8. It is clear that the two are meant to exist in a relation of utmost intimacy. If you look back at Genesis 1:27, you will notice that God created man of two genders—male and female. Man and woman are intended to be a complete person. The woman is the bone and flesh of the man. The statement that both the man and the woman were naked and felt no shame is revealing. In the physical sense, nothing was hidden between the man and the wife. The same would apply to their emotional and mental makeup. The man and the woman were completely open to one another and existed in perfect harmony.

In this lesson, we have learned about man’s situation in the Garden which God created. He was created with tremendous knowledge (naming the animals). He had all his physical and aesthetic needs met by the wonderful trees of the garden. Finally, he had the perfect companion in woman. This man was given one law by God which was also intended for his good. There was one tree of the Garden from which he should not eat. In lesson three we will study man’s reaction to God’s many gifts.

Foundations: God’s Goodness

In this lesson, we have seen an attribute of God which is often questioned. We must lay this foundation well as it is critical to a thorough understanding of the message of God to man. This attribute is simply the **goodness of God**. God deals kindly with all his creatures. This is good news. God surrounded Adam and Eve with all they needed to be healthy and happy. As you know, they made a terrible decision when they began to doubt that God was good.

We refer to God’s goodness as a *communicable attribute* of God because we can also find the attribute of goodness in man. We must remember that while God is perfect and infinite in his goodness, man is imperfect and finite.

Do you believe that God is good to you specifically? Can you recognize that He has ordered your life and surrounded you with good things? The tendency to doubt God’s goodness will handicap your faith and ultimately make you unfruitful. Can you affirm without any reservation that God is good to you? This does not mean that bad things don’t happen to you. Rather, are you secure in the belief that whatever happens to you, God will show you his goodness.

The disciple must lay hold of the fact that the life he has been given by God is good. It is God’s design for him. Many waste their time and energy wishing for a life different from that they have been given. Embrace your life as it is, your family, your spouse, your friends, your country as God’s good gift to you. Let God’s goodness become a rich source of confidence to you. Read Psalm 36:5-10, Psalm 16, Acts 14:17 and I John 1:5. Meditate on God’s goodness. List evidences of his goodness to you and thank him!

Foundations: Marriage

From the very beginning of the Bible, we learn what a special relationship marriage is. God designed Eve especially for Adam. He recognized that there was no one else in the world like her—uniquely suited for him. Their nakedness had no hint of shame. Both the man and the woman were totally open with one another, having nothing to hide either emotionally or physically.

Jesus reaffirms that marriage is ordained by God to be between two people and to last as long as both of them are alive.

The apostles emphasized the importance of marriage and family relationships. Read Ephesians 5:22-6:4. Here the model for the marriage relationship is Jesus' relationship to the church. He loves the church and gives himself up for it (husbands are commanded to do the same for their wives). The church submits to this loving and serving leadership (wives do the same toward your husband).

Whether you are married or not, understand that marriage is God's idea. He intends it to be a source of pleasure and joy for his people. If it is not that, we have probably abandoned his standard for marriage and, somewhere along the way, we've adopted our own standard.

Here are two radical steps you can take to improve your marriage:

1. Take a day with your spouse and list all the areas of your marriage relationship (e.g. raising the children, paying the bills, physical relationship, relations with the in-laws, etc.). In each area ask yourselves if you are acting as "one flesh"—united in heart and purpose. The goal is to communicate openly and lovingly. Each partner should express his desires for this area openly and freely. Try to express how you feel without suggesting that your spouse is at fault. After sharing your feelings together, pray about each area and begin looking for help in the areas where there is disagreement.

2. Find a couple whom you respect for their godliness and obvious love for each other. Invite them over and ask them for their secrets (how do they work together as a couple, how do they raise their children, who takes care of the finances? Etc.) Ideally, you can do this as a couple. However, if that is difficult, the two men could meet together separately from the women. (If you are not married, but contemplating marriage, you will benefit from this exercise as well.)

Lesson 3

The Transgression: Genesis 3:1-4:16

Preparation:

1. After man sinned God
 - a. moved him down from paradise to earth to populate it.
 - b. clothed Adam.
 - c. punished Adam.
2. The first emotion that Adam and Eve felt after eating the fruit of the tree was:
 - a. Defiance
 - b. Pride
 - c. Shame
 - d. Guilt
3. The first thing Adam and Eve did after eating the forbidden fruit was:
 - a. Blame the devil.
 - b. Blame each other
 - c. Blame God
 - d. Hide from God
4. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, their work was affected in the following way:
 - a. They were given a totally different job by God.
 - b. They still tended the garden, only now it was harder.
 - c. They had to raise their own fruits and vegetables outside the garden
 - d. There was no change in their work.
5. True or False: Adam and Even died when they ate the fruit.

Read Genesis 3:1 through 4:16.

Pray the following prayer or a similar one:

Father, God, I come before you because I know that you are Truth and Light. I have heard and accepted many ideas that are not true and right and I ask you to cleanse my mind by washing it with your Word. Cause me to grow in my understanding and in my obedience to you. Open my mind now and teach me. Amen.

Examining the Scripture:

Answer the following questions in the space provided. You may wish to consult our answers at the end of this lesson, however, write out your answer first. This gives you an opportunity to examine your own beliefs and understanding. Also, it is possible that you will observe truths in God's Word which we have not thought to state in our answers.

1. Compare Genesis 3:1 with 2:16 and 17. What differences do you observe? Describe the character of the serpent.

2. Is the woman's reply to the serpent in 3:3 truthful? If not, what precisely about her reply is not truthful?

3. Describe the serpent's response to the woman in 3:4-5. What do the serpent's words imply about God? What kind of God is the serpent presenting? Is it the true picture of God?

4. What about the fruit attracted the woman?

5. What was Adam and Eve's first realization after eating the fruit? (3:7) What is strange about this realization? What was their reaction to this realization?

6. What was their new reflex toward God? (3:8) What does this suggest to you about the effect of sin on man's relationship with God? What was God's reflex toward them? (3:9)

7. Adam laid the responsibility for eating the fruit on Eve (verse 12). Was it her responsibility? (Refer to 2:16)

8. In 3:15, God says “I will put enmity between you and the serpent.” In your opinion, what was God’s purpose in doing this?

9. In 3:15, God says “he will crush your head and you will strike at his heel.” Exactly who will crush the head of the serpent? Who will strike at whose heel?

10. List the negative effects this act had on the woman.

11. List the negative effects this act had on the man.

12. In 3:20 Adam named his wife Eve because she would be the mother of all the living. Does this seem strange in light of what has just happened? Why or why not?

13. In 3:22-23, Adam and Eve are banished from the garden. Is this a punishment from God? What reason is cited for God's banishing man from the garden?

14. In 3:21 God makes clothing for Adam and Eve. Where does this clothing come from? How is it different than the clothing Adam and Eve made for themselves?

15. Based on 4:1-16 describe the actions of Adam and Eve's two sons. Is it surprising that the state of humanity has degenerated so quickly. How do you explain that?

Our Responses

1. God's negative command was preceded by a positive command. He gave Adam and Eve liberty to eat from any tree of the garden. When the serpent stated the command, he stated it as though God had prohibited them to eat of any tree of the garden. Additionally, God's prohibition concerned only one tree of the garden. It was prohibited because eating it would bring death to Adam and Eve. The character of the serpent could be described as crafty (verse 1) and

deceptive.

2. She actually adds to God's words. She says God prohibits touching the tree.
What is important here is that God's clear command is being compromised by both the serpent and the woman. When God gives commands, we are to be confident that they are for our good. We are not to add to them or detract from them.
3. The serpent is accusing God of lying. "You will not surely die." Rather, God is afraid that when you eat of the fruit, you will become like him. The serpent paints an untrue picture of God. The serpent portrays a god who is fearful of losing his position and threatened by man. Nothing could be further from the truth.
It has been rightly said that the most important thoughts we think are our thoughts of God. Our conception of God forms our values and behaviours which shape our lives. For the serpent, the power and subtlety of this temptation lies in the fact that he skewed Eve's understanding of God.
4. The woman was attracted by three qualities of the fruit. First, it was good for food. It was satisfying to human appetites and cravings. Second, it was pleasing to the eye. It was aesthetically pleasing. Third, eating of this fruit gives knowledge. It was intellectually stimulating.
Interestingly, the defining characteristics of temptation remain the same in our day. We crave physical satisfaction and pleasure and knowledge. None of these things are wrong in and of themselves. What is wrong is obtaining them in ways not permitted by God.
5. They realized they were naked. It is striking that they were naked before eating the fruit. However, after eating the fruit, nakedness was shameful. Nothing in their outward state changed. Their inward state, that of innocence, was now polluted by sin. The result was shame. Their immediate reaction was to seek to cover themselves. They used the leaves of the figs in the garden to cover their bodies. In the same way, we have shame as a result of our sin. Our natural result is to work hard to try to cover our shame without dealing with the real problem—our sin.
6. Adam and Eve's first reflex toward God was to hide. This is due to their shame. There is no outward evidence of his eating the fruit. However, Adam knows that his actions cannot be hidden from God. The effect of sin always drives us from God. Adam tried to hide his nakedness from his wife just as she tried to hide hers from Adam. Disobedience to God caused the man and woman to hide themselves from each other. It also caused them to hide themselves from God. Sin destroys our relationship to God. We want to hide from Him.
God's reflex toward Adam was to come and search for him. Please note that the voice calling in the garden was not Adam's voice calling on God for help. Rather, it was God's voice calling for Adam. Although man has disobeyed God, God takes the initiative to search out Adam and Eve. God

desired that Adam confess what God already knew.

7. No. The command was given to Adam directly. He alone was responsible for his disobedience. Later in the Bible, the eating of the fruit will be referred to as “Adam’s transgression.”
You may ask if the woman was aware of God’s command to Adam not to eat the fruit. Remember that Eve recited the command adding to it when the serpent questioned her. Eve knew about God’s command to Adam. Both parties are responsible.
8. Adam and Eve had just obeyed the serpent. In so doing, they entered into an agreement with him. In effect, they were saying, “we choose your ways over the ways that God designed for us. You, O Serpent, are more trustworthy than God.” Of course, this agreement would lead to Adam and Eve’s total destruction. God intervenes. He places enmity between the serpent and Adam and Eve. In essence, God determines that the man will not be subjected to the serpent’s deception. Rather, the man will return to God. Rather than being a friend and servant of the serpent, man will be the friend and servant of God.
Please note that man does not deserve this kind action on God’s behalf. God initiates it for no apparent reason. This kind of intervention by God is referred to later in the Bible as God’s grace—God does good things for man when man deserves God’s wrath and punishment.
9. The seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. In other words, a descendant will come from Adam and Eve who will kill the serpent. A blow to the head of a snake is deadly. God declares that Adam and Eve will triumph over the serpent through her seed (descendant). The rest of the Bible will demonstrate exactly who is the chosen seed of Eve who will destroy the serpent.
It is the serpent who will strike at the heel of the descendants of Adam and Eve. A serpent striking at the heel can do damage, but it is not a mortal blow. God has acted to limit Satan’s power and assure man the victory.
10.
 1. She will have increased pain in childbearing.
 2. Her desire will be for her husband and the husband will rule over her.The Bible has much to say about the relationship between the man and the woman. We will read more about this in subsequent lessons. For now, it is enough to note that woman’s subordination to man was a result of Adam and Eve’s transgression. This subordination is transformed to a wonderful new arrangement as we progress through the history of God’s interaction with man. (See Ephesians 5:22-33)
11.
 1. The ground was cursed so that the man would have to labor to get his food.
 2. Man will return to the groundUntil this act, man had been provided for freely from the garden. Man’s work was not toilsome, but a pleasure. The fall introduced a new element of drudgery to man’s work. The ground would no longer freely give it’s

produce.

12. Yes, it is strange. It seems that Eve might be named the mother of all the dead. After all, God had proclaimed that on the day Adam and Eve eat the fruit, they would die. Instead, Adam says that Eve will be the mother of all living.
I suggest that because God intervened, Adam realizes that he has a future and a hope. He knows that the head of the serpent will be struck by his descendant. He also knows that God has not put his life to an immediate end.
13. If man eats of the tree of life, he will live forever. This may sound like a good situation for Adam and Eve, however, when one considers they will live in their guilt and shame and sin for eternity, it would be a terrible situation for them. In order to prevent that, God acts. He banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden. Death will result from their transgression, but death will become the gateway to a new existence—in the presence of God, perfected.
14. The clothing is from skin. God must have killed an animal. This must have been the first time Adam and Eve have seen death or even any act of violence toward any of God's created order. Even animals were not killing one another for food at this stage. The fact that God Himself kills in order to cover Adam and Eve again suggests his kind intentions toward them and points the way to another sacrifice which will cover man's sin once and for all.
Note that Adam tried to cover his sin by covering his shame (his nakedness) and hiding from God. This did not succeed. Our sins are always well-known to God and they usually become apparent to others as well. However, God did provide a covering that was acceptable. God does not increase man's shame, rather, he himself acts to bring healing and restoration to man.
15. Cain murdered his brother. This is a dramatic illustration of the effect of sin on man. Previously his world and his relationships were harmonious. Sin enters the world and death comes right on its heels. Cain is jealous of Abel because his offering was acceptable to God. So, not only are human relationships strained, also Cain, the murderer, has no peace with God.
Sin is a downward spiral. When sin becomes master over us, we quickly sink deeply in sin.

Foundations

The Bible teaches that Sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience to God (commonly called "the fall"). Adam and Eve were not willing to be subject to God. They were representative of all mankind. As a result, Sin continues to effect all man. The result of the fall is referred to as the doctrine of **original sin**. David wrote "in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5) Man is not born innocent. He is born with the effects of sin in his soul.

Original Sin includes two elements: guilt and pollution. First of all, all mankind (descendants of Adam) are guilty of sin. The name “Adam” simply means “man.” Adam was the representative of all mankind. He was the corporate head of man. His sin was the sin of man of which you and I are a part. Secondly, from Adam I inherit a nature which is no longer righteous. Rather, it is polluted--disposed to rebel against God and reject his loving standards. The doctrine of original sin explains why no human being (except Jesus Christ) can claim to be free of sin.

However, it is not only Adam’s sin that renders me guilty and polluted. I myself have also rejected God’s standards. This rejection is called **actual sin**. Any time I fail to live according to God’s standards (his commands) or actively reject them, I prove God’s word—I am a descendant of Adam and I rebel against God just like my Father, Adam, did.

Perhaps your mind is struggling to accept that you and all human beings are guilty from Adam’s sin. It might help to remember that many decisions are made for us through our leaders. Assume you are a young man and the president or king of your country has decreed that your country will go to war. Every able young man is to present himself to fight in the army. Are you free to tell your president or king that you choose not to fight? Of course not! You are at war. You are implicated by the decision of your leader. Thus you go to war out of solidarity with your country and its people. In much the same way your father and mother made decisions for you when you were younger. You did not decide where you would live, what school you would attend, etc. Those decisions were made for you and you lived with their consequences.

In much the same way, Adam and Eve were the corporate heads of humanity. The Bible teaches that they had every incentive not to sin. Yet, they chose, as our true representatives, to sin. If you and I had been in the garden, we would have made the same choice, because we are like our Father and Mother—Adam and Eve. For that reason, the Bible is right when it says that we are guilty in Adam.

Finally, look at the world around you. If original sin were not true, we should expect to find some societies where there is no sin. The universality of sin begs the question “where did sin come from?” The answer is that it originated with Adam’s transgression.

Is there no hope? Certainly there is. The story of the Bible relates how God redeems his people and makes them righteous a second time. However, a true and right understanding of **original and actual sin** will help you understand the wonderful thing that God has done for you in Jesus Christ. It will also give you courage to consider carefully God’s standards of righteousness and freely admit that neither you nor any other human being, except Jesus Christ, has met those standards. Just as God clothed Adam and Eve, he is also willing to clothe us with his righteousness. However, we must first admit that we are helpless and hopeless without his covering of us

Read **Romans 5:12-18** and **Romans 3:10-26** for a New Testament view of original sin.

Actual sin: Actual sin is all sins (inward and outward) that flow from original sin. Read **Matthew 15:19**.

Just as Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent, we tend to blame others for our sin. Perhaps we have been the victim of someone else’s sin. Rather than turn away from that sin to be healed, we have now adopted the evil practice of

which we once were a victim. Also, our environment has probably encouraged us to rebel against God's standards. In order to gain freedom from sin, we must own our responsibility for it. We can no longer blame our upbringing, our environment, our parents, our circumstances, etc.

Now search your own heart before God. Realize that nothing is hidden from Him. Admit to yourself and to him that you have rejected his standards many times. Boldly ask him to clothe you and cover your shame. Accept his righteousness which he has given to you freely in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Lesson 4

Summation: Revelation 21-22

Preparation

Although the Bible was written over a period of about 1500 years by more than forty authors, it is one book. Many of the themes you've been studying in the book of Genesis are carried all the way through the Bible until they find their conclusion in Revelation.

In this lesson, we are going to look at the end of the story. As you become familiar with both the beginning and the end of the story, you will be able to see how the whole Biblical revelation is moving toward one end. Consider it as a long journey. You know where you are now. You also need to know where you are going. If you don't, you're bound to get lost in the process. In Genesis we've learned how man began and how the tragedy of sin changed him forever. In Revelation, we're going to see man's destiny.

The questions will focus on Revelation 21:1-8 and Revelation 22:1-5.

Examining the Scripture

1. In Revelation 21:1-4, there is a new creation story. List five truths about this new creation (you may find more than five).

2. What is the condition for drinking the water of the spring of life?

3. Revelation 21:7 gives a condition and two promises. What are they?

4. In Revelation 21:22-27 there is a further description of the city. What does the Bible say about each of the following:

The temple:

The light of the city:

The respect given to this city by earthly rulers:

Those who enter the city:

5. Read Rev 22:1-5: Items mentioned in these verses have a counterpart in the first chapters of Genesis. Write the similarities and differences you see between the following items and their counterpart in Genesis:

The River:

The city:

The tree:

The fruit/leaves of the tree:

The division of night and day:

6. Revelation 22:3-4: Write the words of this verse below and then write out what you view to be their importance.

7. Who is speaking in chapter 22 (see verse 16)? What does he say about himself? What implications can we draw from what he says?

8. What important truths are taught in the last chapter of the Bible about the Bible itself?

Our Responses:

1. Five truths about the new creation from Revelation 21:1-4:
 1. The first heaven and earth have passed away. In their place has come a new heaven and earth. We are not totally sure if this means there will be a totally new heaven and earth in another place or if it is referring to the renewal of this one.
 2. Jerusalem, the holy city, is seen descending out of heaven. The old creation centered around a garden. The new one centers around a city. Note that this is not the earthly Jerusalem. It is a “new Jerusalem” which descends

from heaven. It is the Jerusalem which fulfills the hopes and dreams of the old Jerusalem.

3. In this new creation, God will dwell with men. Remember that God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. That original purpose of creation—communion between God and man—is restored in this new creation.
 4. There will be neither pain nor death. God will “wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Mourning is over in heaven. The Bible clearly states that there will be no more death. God’s pronouncement was that the day Adam ate the fruit, he would die. Now God removes death.
 5. The old order of things has passed away. God’s goal is to bring about a new world that is radically different from this one. In this new world there will be no more pain and suffering, no more death and dishonesty, no more oppression and injustice, no more tears.
2. Very simply, God says that whoever is thirsty can drink of that water. This means that the only condition for drinking of the water of life is desire.
 3. In Revelation 22:7, God says that he who overcomes (that is the condition) will inherit all this (the city and the scene which is being described). Then God makes the promise that the one who overcomes will also become a son of God. The Bible is not speaking about biological sonship. Rather, it is seeking to express the closest possible relationship between God and his people.
 4. The temple: There is no temple. There is no need of one because God and the Lamb (Jesus Christ) are its temple.

The light of the city: There is no sun or moon there. God’s glory and the Lamb give it light.

The respect given to this city by earthly rulers: They bring their wealth and splendor into this city. I take this to mean that the kings of the earth will willingly give offerings to this city.

Those who enter the city: No one who does what is shameful will enter this city. Those who enter must have their name written in the Lamb’s (Christ’s) book of life.

5. The River: In Revelation, the River is called a “River of Life.” In Genesis there is also a river which is divided into four separate sources. The river is not named in Genesis but it was the river which watered all of Eden.

The City: There was no city in Genesis. The setting there was a garden.

The tree: It is similar in that there is the presence of a tree which is called “The tree of Life” (see Genesis 2:8-9). The tree is watered by the “River of Life” as it is on both sides of the river. However, there is no Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Revelation.

The Fruit or Leaves of the Tree: In Revelation, the leaves of the tree are for the “healing of the nations.” Also, the tree bears a new crop of fruit each month (12 crops for the 12 months of the year). In Genesis 3:22 God

banishes man from the garden so that he will not take from the Tree of Life and live forever. In doing this, God made a way for man to be redeemed. Death would come to Adam, but it was also through death that redemption would take place. In Revelation, man is redeemed and made perfect. Then there will be free access to the Tree of Life which will produce fruit continually (12 months out of the year).

The division of night and day: In Revelation there is no night, neither is there need of the sun or moon because God himself will give light in that place. In the original creation, God created the Sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night. He divided the darkness from the light.

6. Revelation 22:3-4 “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of god and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”

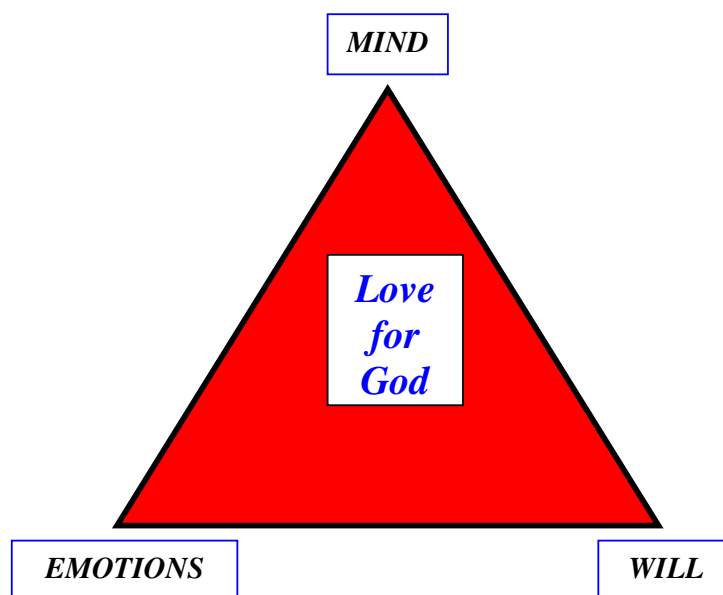
There will no longer be any curse. The curse which is the result of sin will be removed. The original curse of God as a result of Adam’s sin is found in Genesis 3:14-19. By cursing the serpent and the ground, God determined that this earth would not be a comfortable home for mankind. Now, the curse is removed. This new place will be man’s comfortable home forever. What is more, God and the Lamb will be in this city. His people will see his face. Not only will man no longer be living in a cursed world, he will now be living in the presence of God.

7. Jesus is the person who is speaking (verse 16).
He says that he is the “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He also says twice that he is coming soon (22:7, 12 and 20).
Our implications: In three different ways, Jesus insists that he is the beginning and the end. This means that Jesus has always existed in the past and will always exist in the future. For our study, it implies that Jesus was present and active when the world was created just as he will be when the world as we know it comes to an end.
8. What is said about this book: First of all, there is a blessing for all who keep the words of the prophecy of this book (22:7). Finally, there is a stern warning that no one should add or detract from the words of this book (22:18-19). There is a finality to the book of Revelation. It is intended to be the closing book of the Bible which must not be added to or taken from.

Disciple's Triangle

Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment. He did not say that all are equally important. He picked a specific commandment from the Old Testament and said that this was the most important one of all. This is the standard that God requires of us. The commandment is taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Jesus' quote of that commandment is found in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind." Jesus summarized the law of God in one succinct statement—that we are to love the Lord our God with all our being.

You have begun a discipleship course. The aim of this course is to teach you to be a disciple (a learner) from God and Jesus Christ. The course is built around a study of the Bible—God's Word. However, it is possible for you to study the Bible in great detail and depth and still not grow in your love for God. As you study the Bible you need to keep the disciple's triangle in mind.



As we react to the teaching of the Bible we need to grow deeper in our Love for God in three areas. Picture our love for God as a stool which is supported by three legs. If any of the legs is short or damaged the stool no longer fulfills its function. All three must be strong.

The first area is our mind. The mind is the gateway of all the information we receive. As disciples of Christ we are to love God with all our mind. The apostles demonstrate this as they defend the faith against errors. Stephen demonstrates his love for God with his mind by reciting the history of God's dealings with his people (Acts 7:2-53). Apollos demonstrated this in the book of Acts as he taught about Jesus accurately (Acts 18:25). We are to think right thoughts about God, man and the world around us. This course emphasizes the role of our minds in loving God.

The second area is equally important. We are to love God with all our emotions. Emotions are our feelings. Consider the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears and then wiped them with her hair in Luke 7:36-50. What a show of emotion! Jesus was seated with a Pharisee who had great knowledge of the Old Testament. Jesus points out to the Pharisee that the woman was forgiven much because she loved much. Jesus commends the woman's deeply emotional love for him.

The third area is our will. It concerns what we do. Again, the Bible is abundantly clear. We can know all about God and even have feelings of affection for him, but if our actions are not impacted, then we cannot claim to have a full and mature love for God. Jesus scolded his hearers saying "why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say." (Luke 6:46) He then proceeds to compare those who hear his words and do not do them to a foolish man who built a house on the sand. It was destroyed by the wind and storms. On the other hand, the wise man hears Jesus' words and does them. His house is founded on a rock and will therefore withstand the storm.

To be a disciple means to love God with all our being. Bow before him wherever you are. Tell God of your personal desire to be a disciple. Ask him to enable you to love him with all your mind, emotions and will. If you are sincere in asking, he is more than willing to take you far on the road to becoming a disciple.

Lesson 5

The Covenant with Noah: Genesis 6-9

Introduction

There are many helpful ways to approach studying the Bible. Some people study the Bible in historical eras. Others study book by book.

Our approach in this initial discipleship course is to study the Bible through God's covenants. In this way, you will be able to understand the history of God's establishing his relationship (his covenant) with man. A covenant can be defined simply as a God binding himself to his people through a solemn promise. In the Biblical covenants, God gives promises to his people and establishes conditions which his people must accept in order to remain in relationship with him. The covenant is the relationship of God to his people.

We will see that there are a number of covenants in the Scripture. Each covenant broadens and further defines the preceding covenant. God's dealings with his people build on the old covenant to establish a new covenant. The final covenant is established by Jesus. We can list the Biblical covenants as follows:

1. The covenant with Adam: The Covenant of Commencement, Beginning (Genesis 1-3)²
2. The covenant with Noah: The Covenant of Preservation (Genesis 6-9)
3. The covenant with Abraham: The Covenant of Promise (Genesis 12-18)
4. The covenant with Moses: The Covenant of law (Exodus 20)
5. The covenant with David: The Covenant of Kingdom (2 Samuel 7)
6. The covenant through Jesus Christ: The Covenant of Consummation, Fulfillment³

The Bible does not teach that the preceding covenants were "abrogated" by the later ones. Rather, all the conditions of the covenants were fulfilled in Christ. He is the consummation of all the covenants. For this reason, a study of the Bible through the covenants helps us to understand exactly what Jesus came to do.

Sometimes the six covenants mentioned above are referred to collectively as the covenant of grace. It stands in contrast to the covenant of works. As we have studied in the past lessons, Adam was given a commandment—one simple commandment, not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam failed that test, breaking God's **covenant of works**. Immediately after that, God begins to reveal new hope for Adam. We saw the beginnings of the **covenant of grace** in that God promised there would be enmity between the seed of the woman and Satan. Also, God himself clothed Adam and Eve. Most importantly, God promised that Adam and Eve's seed (descendant) would crush the head of the serpent.

² Although Genesis does not use the term "covenant" in the case of Adam and Eve, we will see that God's relationship with them bears all the marks of a covenant. Also, Hosea 6:7 refers to God's covenant with Adam.

³ The titles of the covenants are taken from *The Christ of the Covenants* by O. Palmer Robertson.

So then, the covenant of works was broken by Adam. Since that time, God has been working out a covenant of grace with man. He has revealed that covenant progressively throughout the Bible until it came to a climax in Jesus Christ.

The next lessons deal with God's covenants in the Old Testament.

Preparation:

As preparation for this lesson, read Genesis 4 and 5. Record your answers to the following questions. You can consult our answers at the end of the lesson after writing your own.

In Genesis 4, we read about the interaction of Adam and Eve's sons. Describe .1
this interaction.

At the end of chapter four we read of one of Cain's descendants named .2
Lamech. Describe Lamech's action and his attitude after having committed
this act.

In chapter five, the Bible relates the descendants of Seth's line. One phrase is .3
repeated after each individual is named. What is that phrase? What purpose
does the repetition of this phrase serve?

Do you notice any individuals that stand out in the line of Seth in chapter 5? .4
What is significant about them?

Based on your reading of Genesis 4 and 5, what observations can you make .5
about the line of Cain and the line of Seth?

Examining the Scripture

Read Genesis 6-9. Answer the questions below.

In Genesis 6:5-8, we read the setting of the story of the flood. First, contrast .1
God's emotions in regard to man and his creation with those he expressed in
Genesis 1 after creating man.

What distinguishes Noah from the rest of the creation? .2

Does God's determination to destroy include only man or other things that he .3
created as well? Why?

In Genesis 8:20, Noah performs an act of worship. What is it? .4

How does God react to this act of worship? .5

When God determines not to destroy man, he gives a strange reason, "because .6
the inclination of his heart is only evil all the time." How do you explain this
strange reasoning of God?

As you read Genesis 8:20, does it bring to mind anything in the creation .7
account (Genesis 1 and 2)?

What does God's blessing of Noah in Genesis 9:1 have in common with his .8
blessing of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28?

Look at Genesis 9:2 and then look back at Genesis 1:28. If God had told man .9
to rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature, why
does he now say that the fear of man will fall on these creatures?

Our Responses to Preparation Questions:

1. Cain murders Abel out of jealousy. This was due to God's acceptance of Abel's offering and his rejection of Cain's. Cain does not confess his sin when God confronts him. God places a curse on Cain in punishment for his sin.
2. Lamech killed a man for wounding him. Instead of sorrow for his act, he boasts about it and presumes that God will protect him. It is an attitude of pride and insolence. You remember that Adam and Eve were ashamed of their sin and tried to hide it. Notice that mankind is going down in a spiral of sin. Rather than Lamech being sorrowful and shameful for his sin, he is prideful and arrogant.
3. "...and he died." It is probably a reminder of God's original promise of death to Adam as a result of sin. Perhaps the hope was that one of these descendants of Adam through Seth would be the one who would crush the

serpent's head. Alas, such is not the case.

4. Yes. In verse 22, Enoch walked with God. Also, in verse 24, Enoch "walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." Finally, Lamech said of his son, Noah, "he will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed."
5. It seems that the line of Cain turned out bad. The line of Seth kept hope alive. Noah was to give rest to men from the curse the Lord had pronounced on the ground.
We must not infer from this that God blesses us if our parents were good. In fact, he often blesses us despite our parents' shortcomings. However, we will notice in our study of the covenant that God makes and keeps his covenant with families.

Our Responses to Examining the Scripture:

1. In Genesis 6:5-8, God is grieved that he made man because man is evil all the time and every inclination of his heart is evil. It even says that God's heart was filled with pain. In Genesis 1, immediately after creation, God pronounced that his creation was very good. It seems that his emotions changed radically from being pleased with man and his creation to being grieved about man.
Once again we see the spiral of sin. The people of earth have become extremely evil, so much so that God is grieved. Once man begins down the road of rebellion against God, his heart becomes hard and rebellious. Sin grows worse and worse until God intervenes and judges.
2. Noah "found favor in the eyes of the Lord." Noah was different from the multitudes whose heart was only evil all the time. You may assume that Noah found favor with God because he was good. The text says that he was a righteous man and walked with God (verse 9).
Remember that God promised Adam that one of his seed would crush the serpent's head. I suggest that God preserved Noah and gave him a love for Himself. In this way, God demonstrated his faithfulness to his promises.
3. God's grief and his determination to destroy are not limited to man. It also includes all the created things (men, animals, creatures that move along the ground and birds of the air). Why? Although the Bible does not tell us plainly, we may deduce that God's original intention for man to rule the world was disrupted by the entrance of sin. In any case, God's determination to destroy also included the animals he had created.
4. He sacrifices. The Bible says that God smelled the pleasing aroma of the sacrifice. This does not mean that God has a nose that smells.⁴ Rather, it emphasizes that God was pleased by the fact that Noah offered a sacrifice. It

⁴ Often, the Bible uses human images when speaking of God such as "God's hand, God's arm," etc. This does not mean that God has a human body. Rather, God is communicating with us in language we can understand.

demonstrates Noah's affection for God and his desire to worship God.

5. God promises that he will never again destroy the earth by a flood. This is a reassuring promise for man. God knows that man's intentions are evil. Yet, he promises to allow man to live. He also assures man of consistent seasons: summer and winter, day and night forever. God will never again interrupt the order of nature he established to destroy man.
6. God knows that destroying the earth will not fully destroy the evil in man's heart. Therefore he determines to give mankind a secure place to live until such a time as a full solution to the evil in his heart can be brought about. God's covenant with Noah is sometimes called a "covenant of preservation" because God acts to preserve mankind and the world from destruction due to sin and rebellion against him.
7. Yes. The most obvious connection is "day and night." God separated the darkness from the light and made two lights (Genesis 1:16): one to rule the day (sun) and one to rule the night (the moon). These lights were specifically to mark the seasons of the year (1:14) Also, "seedtime and harvest" reminds us of God's making plants bearing seed according to their kind (1:11-12).
8. In both instances, Adam and Eve and Noah are told to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.
9. It seems that when sin entered the world, there was a disruption of man's original commission to rule over the animals. We don't know exactly what the nature of man's relationship to the animals was between Adam and Noah. We do know that God caused the fear of man to fall on the animals after the flood. Notice that this is a partial restoration of what was lost by Adam's transgression. It is a preparatory step in the covenant of God's grace.

Foundations: The Holiness of God

You may wonder why it was that God was so displeased with man. Was man really so bad that God had to completely destroy all of mankind except Noah and his family? The Bible plainly teaches us that God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are high above our thoughts. Therefore, we should expect to struggle when trying to understand some of the things that God does. When we begin to understand something of God **holiness**, his actions become more understandable.

What do we mean when we say God is holy? There are two ideas behind this Biblical word. The first is "separateness" or "otherness." There is a distinction between God and every created thing (including man). God is different. We will see later in this course that God revealed himself to mankind through Christ. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that God is different. In some ways, God is incomprehensible. In fact, the deeper we grow in our knowledge of God, the more we realize that we cannot fully comprehend him. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9)

The second idea behind the word “holiness” is “purity” or “righteousness.” God’s very nature is holy. That means there is no evil in him. He is perfectly good and righteous all the time. “How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.” (Psalm 31:19) Some people view God as cunning and cruel, even vindictive. This view of God is a poor foundation on which to build one’s life. We must come to God with the assurance that he is utterly good, pure and righteous. It is only when we are totally secure in God’s righteousness that we can begin to place our faith totally in him, even when difficulties challenge that faith.

So then, by saying God is holy, we mean that he is both apart from us and that he is perfectly good and righteous.

Because God is holy, he does not tolerate evil. Remember that God warned Adam and Eve that the result of their rebelling against him would be death. God is life. When we turn away from him, the inevitable result is death. Man, in the time of Noah, had chosen to rebel against God. The earth was filled with violence. However, rather than completely destroy man, God entered into a covenant with one man—Noah. He instructed him to build an ark, which became the means of saving mankind from destruction. Because God is holy he punishes sin severely. Because God is holy he intervenes to save mankind. This is the continual refrain of God’s relationship with man. His holiness brings sure and certain punishment for sin. His holiness also brings mercy to all who look to him for forgiveness.

Holiness has been described as the sum total of all the attributes of God. To understand Jesus Christ and his work on the cross, you must have a good grasp of God’s holiness.

It has been said that we become like what we admire most. Perhaps this is why God calls us to be holy. As we renew our mind and come to a fuller understanding of his holiness, we respond by worshipping (admiring) him. As we worship him, we actually take steps toward becoming like him, not that we fully share in his holiness in this life. However, we do imitate him by separating ourselves from sin and consecrating ourselves to him.

Read the following passages carefully. Notice the references to God’s holiness. Spend some time meditating on them. Then, ask God to take you to a deeper understanding of his holiness.

Psalm 99

Isaiah 6:1-13

Revelation 4:1-11

Memorize: Isaiah 55:9

Lesson 6

The Covenant with Abraham

One of the New Testament writers states that “without faith it is impossible to please him (God).” What is this all-important quality without which, a human being cannot please God?

The story is often told of a high-wire walker. He stretched his wire across the mighty Niagara Falls. Crowds applauded as he walked across the wire defying the raging waters hundreds of meters below. He even pushed a wheelbarrow across the wire to the approval of the onlooking crowd. He addressed the crowd, “Do you believe that I could actually transverse this wire pushing a wheelbarrow with a man inside?” The crowd enthusiastically replied “yes,” encouraging the performer in his courageous feat. The following question took the crowd by surprise. “Since you believe I am able to do this, I will need one of you to volunteer to be that man!” The crowd was strangely silent. As long as no commitment was required, the crowd enthusiastically expressed their confidence in the performer. When a risk was required, there was no one who was actually willing to sit in the wheelbarrow while being pushed across the wire.

Perhaps this demonstrates the difference between mere belief and true faith. Belief in God is quite easy. It requires no commitment. Faith in God does not merely believe he exists. It believes he is active in our lives. Faith gives us a willingness and a desire to act on God’s promises—to embrace them as the necessary foundation on which to build our lives.

One man is referred to as the father of faith—Abraham. Once again, this lesson is taken from the pages of Genesis. The story of Abraham is found in **chapters 12-22**. Please read these ten chapters in one sitting. Reading all ten chapters will enable you to see how God challenged Abraham to believe him, how Abraham responded and the fulfillment of his faith as he neared the end of his life. Ask God’s Spirit to teach you as you read. Remember that your own life can only please God as you embrace his promises by faith and act on them, as did Abraham.

After reading this passage, go back and answer the following questions from the indicated passages.

1. In Genesis 12:1-4, God gives Abraham a commandment and a promise containing seven parts. What was the commandment and what was the seven-part promise?

*Notice Abraham's habit of building an altar. We see it in 12:7,8; 13:18;

2. Obviously, it was difficult for Abraham to leave his father's household. Do you think that God's blessing was worth this difficult step of separation from Abraham's father's household?

3. In Genesis 12:10-20 we learn an interesting fact about Abraham. Basically, he tells a lie concerning his wife. In your opinion, why would the Bible include this negative story about a man who was a hero of faith?

4. In Chapter 13, both Abraham and Lot make a choice. Describe their choices.

5. Chapter 14 demonstrates that God has continued to bless Abraham. What indications do you see of this in chapter 14?

6. In Chapter 15, Abraham is troubled because he does not see the fulfillment of God's promise to him. He is troubled about two things in particular and even asks God about them. What are they?

7. In 15:12-16, God gives Abraham a preview of the next 400 years and his descendants. Put yourself in Abraham's place and imagine how surprising this would be. God tells Abraham that his descendants will be slaves for 400 years and then return to the land God is promising Abraham. What can we learn from this about the way God fulfills his promises? Also, what is the reason God gives for not giving the land to Abraham's descendants immediately?

8. After Abraham questions God about these things, God conducts a ceremony. He instructs Abraham (then called Abram) to bring some animals. He cuts the animals in two and arranges them opposite each other. Then Abraham falls asleep and God speaks to him. "A smoking firepot and a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram." (15:18-19) What do the firepot and the torch represent? Try to describe what is transpiring between God and Abraham.

9. In Genesis 17, God reaffirms his covenant with Abraham. He changes his name from Abram to Abraham (meaning "father of many"). In this passage God gives Abraham a sign of the covenant that is to be given to Abraham and all his descendants. What is it? How did Abraham respond to God's directives?

10. In Genesis 22, we find the famous story of the near sacrifice of Isaac, the son of the promise. What characteristics depict Abraham in this moving story?

Our Responses:

1. The commandment was: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”
The seven-part promise was:
 - I will make you into a great nation
 - I will bless you
 - I will make your name great
 - You will be a blessing
 - I will bless those who bless you
 - I will curse those who curse you
 - All peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.
2. We have said previously that God is good. That means that his desires for us are for our good. Certainly God’s rich blessing to Abraham was to reassure this man of faith that he was not just leaving his Father’s household with no reward. Surely God would be his great reward and fulfill all his promises to Abraham.
The same is true of faith today. It is costly, at times, to follow Christ. Yet, the decision to do so is worth all the cost it involves. We are given rich and precious promises to entice us to seek our all in him.
3. The Bible is full of stories of the downfall of good men. Abraham believed God enough to leave his family, however, it seems his faith faltered when he entered into Egypt. He reverted to telling an untruth in order to protect himself. The presence of this story in the Bible does not condone Abraham’s lie. Rather, it reinforces the authenticity of the Bible record. Abraham, though a great man of faith, was also a man like us. He had moments of weakness. In spite of this, God fulfilled his promise, protecting both Abraham and Sarai and using this situation to bring blessing to them as he promised.
4. Abraham chose to give Lot his choice of the land. In effect, this meant that Abraham was willing to take the barren, desert land and leave the fertile land with his nephew. Lot, although one would expect him to choose the poorer land out of deference to his uncle, chose the fertile good land. Abraham’s willingness to graze his flocks in the barren land was a posture of faith. He trusted God to fulfill his promises and for that reason he did not resort to fighting with Lot over the good land. He was willing to give away the fertile land, trusting that God’s hand of blessing would remain on him as he had been promised.
5. First Abraham had 318 trained men. Obviously, his strength has increased. Secondly, he was able to recover Lot and the stolen goods. Thirdly, he had a generous supply of goods such that he was able to give a tenth to Melchizadek, the priest of God most high. Finally, Abraham took an oath not to accept riches from the king of Sodom. This act demonstrates Abraham’s great confidence in God’s provision on the one

hand and on the other hand it shows his unwillingness to forge any alliance with the king of Sodom.

6. First, he does not have a son. This was incredibly important for a Middle Eastern man. With no son, his name would not be perpetuated. Secondly, Abraham wants some assurance that he will, in fact, take possession of the land he has been promised.
7. God does not fulfill his promises on our terms. Abraham might have expected to have the land immediately. Such was not God's plan. Rather, he is working out a long-term plan. His word will be fulfilled, but in God's time, not in Abraham's.
God states that the iniquity of the Amorites (one of the resident peoples of the land of Palestine) has not yet reached its full measure. This fact is often overlooked. God is just and holy. He punishes peoples and nations for their sin. Archeological discoveries indicate that the evil practices of the inhabitants of Palestine included child-sacrifice, idolatry, religious prostitution and divination.⁵ God's bringing Abraham's descendants to the land will fulfill his promise to Abraham and will also exercise his punishment on the inhabitants of the land.
8. First, the torch and firepot represent the very presence of God. Over and over again in the Old Testament, God's presence is marked by fire and smoke (See Ex. 3:2, 14:24; 19:18 and 1 Kings 18:38). Normally when ancient peoples made a covenant, they cut animals in two pieces. Then the two parties making the covenant walked between the pieces. It was a way of saying, may my fate be like these animals if I break my word to you. Theologians call it a "self-maledictory oath" meaning that a curse is pronounced on oneself should he fail to keep his promise. It was a very solemn promise called **a covenant**. Notice that in this covenant Abraham does not walk between the pieces. Only the presence of God walks there. In effect, God is saying to Abraham, "if my word to you fails, then I, the God of the universe, will cease to be. My word to you is as sure as my very existence."
This is a beautiful image of God's covenant with man. God pronounces a curse on himself if he fails to keep his covenant with Abraham. He requires no action of man (Abraham does not walk through the cut pieces) but rather asks man simply to believe that what He has said, He will do.
9. It is circumcision. Circumcision is a symbol of purification in the Old Testament.
Abraham immediately obeyed God. He was immediately circumcised as well as all the male members of his household. Notice in verse 27 that it is not only Abraham's blood relatives that are circumcised, but also those he had purchased. Even at this early stage we see that those who benefit from the covenant are not only Abraham's family but all those who are of his household, even if they were purchased from a foreigner.

⁵ NIV Study Bible. Note on Genesis 15:16.

10. First, Abraham immediately obeys, even though his obedience is costly. Secondly, Abraham believes God will provide for the sacrifice (verse 8). Knowing God's promise, Abraham must know God well enough to know that His word will not fail. Abraham was willing to act counter to all his emotions because of his knowledge of God. True faith will overcome emotions and enable us to do what our emotions would prevent us from doing. Finally, because of his obedient faith, Abraham again hears the words of God's covenant promise. "In your seed all nations on earth will be blessed."

Foundations: Faith

"Just accept it by faith." We often hear this or a similar expression today. However, what does it mean? If someone asks us to accept something by faith, do they mean that we should turn off our brain, refuse to think and simply accept what is offered to us? Is this true "faith?"

Abraham was the father of faith. His life has much to teach us about true faith.

First, **faith rests on the knowledge of God.** As Abraham obeyed God, he was given greater and greater revelation of God's purposes. This knowledge is not merely intellectual knowledge although there is a rational element involved. It is also an experiential knowledge. Through experience of God's faithfulness, our trust in him grows. Abraham knew that God would not let his promise fail. He had made a covenant with Abraham and promised him an heir and to make him a blessing to all nations. It was this assurance of God's faithfulness, that gave Abraham the boldness to offer up his son as a sacrifice when commanded to do so. Abraham knew that God could not break his word.

So then, faith, rather than discarding reason, actually seeks reasons to believe. Having faith in God drives us to seek out his ways, to try to understand God's activity throughout history and in our lives. It is only as we have a proper understanding of God that we can have true faith in God. Peter says "we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (2 Peter 1:16) Therefore faith rests on sound empirical evidence. The gospel is based on events which transpired in history. These events have been passed on to us by eyewitnesses. We do not believe because it makes us feel better. We believe because the events are true. We trust God because he has proven himself to be trustworthy.

Is it possible to believe in God and still not have saving faith? Yes, of course. James says that "even the demons believe and tremble." (James 2:19) Faith, the kind of faith the Bible speaks of requires information, intellectual assent and personal trust.

Information: Suppose I invite you to my home and provide a map. Unknown to you, the map is not accurate. You search and search for my house. Unable to find it, you return home disappointed and confused. Having right and true information is essential to faith. Christian faith starts from the assumption that Jesus is a reliable source of truth—more reliable than modern day philosophies and thinkers. His actions and words are self-authenticating. He claims to be truth and his life substantiates his claim. To have faith, you must have a reliable source of information. That source is Jesus Christ.

Intellectual ascent: Some of the world's greatest leaders have been influenced by Jesus Christ and his teachings without ever coming to faith in him.

They have appreciated him as a moral teacher or even a prophet, but have failed to accept what he said about himself. Phillip questioned Jesus, “show us the Father and it is enough for us.” Jesus replied, “have I been so long with you Phillip and yet you have not known me? He who has seen me has seen the Father.” Faith in Jesus requires us to accept all that he says about himself.

Either his words are convincing and true, or they are the words of madman and a liar. If Jesus was not telling the truth, he was more than just a liar, he was a lunatic. No one can claim to be the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) if he is merely a man. Such a statement would disqualify him from being an honest person.

Personal Trust: It is possible to believe that Jesus really was all he claimed to be and yet not internalize that commitment and make Christ the authority of our lives. Knowing about Jesus is not enough. Believing what he said is not enough either. There remains a step of personal commitment. In Abraham’s life this is seen in his immediate obedience to leave his home, to circumcise his household, to sacrifice his son.

Does your life demonstrate a personal trust in Jesus Christ? Are you actively obedient to Him? As you read the following passages about faith, search your own heart. Ask yourself if the same faith of Abraham is present with you. Confess your failings to God and ask him to lift you up to new heights of faithful obedience.

Memorize: Hebrews 11:1 and 6

Read the following passages:

Romans 5:1-11

Galatians 3:1-14

James 2:14-26

Lesson 7: Joseph

Preparation:

Read Genesis 23-36

You remember that God revealed to Abraham that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years. Genesis 23-36 give the account of the descendants of Abraham—Isaac and Jacob. You will notice that these men are presented as they really are—the good and the bad. God’s promises to Abraham were not based on the fact that his descendants were good men, rather they are based on God’s unchanging word and His own goodness.

Introduction:

The story of Joseph is an amazing example of God’s providential care for his people. Joseph is the great grandson of Abraham. We will see how God’s care is expressed to Joseph and more importantly, how it is expressed to the descendants of Abraham through Joseph.

Before we begin, take a few moments to reflect on these questions:

1. When bad things happen to me I usually
 - a. try to change my circumstances
 - b. resign myself to the will of God
 - c. grumble and complain to myself or anyone who will listen!
2. True or false: If God really loves me, he’ll keep me from getting into any trouble. Why or why not?

3. To live with integrity means to live with complete honesty. Our outward life matches our private life. Do you think that people live this way in our day? If so, think of a person you know who is an example of integrity. Describe what it is you appreciate about him or her.

Examining the Scripture

Read Genesis 37 and 39-47

1. Describe the factors that led to Joseph's being hated by his brothers.

2. How do their brothers cover their duplicity before their father?

3. In Genesis 39, Potiphar's wife requests that Joseph sleep with her. His response is in 39:8-10. He refuses out of loyalty to whom?

4. The incident with Potiphar's wife resulted in Joseph's being put in prison even though he was totally innocent. While there he interacted with Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. It is interesting that Joseph asks them why they are so dejected. Certainly he had ample reason to be discouraged. When he discovered they had dreamt, he offered to listen to their dreams and interpret them. Summarize what this passage shows us about Joseph's attitude concerning his imprisonment.

5. Chapter 41: Two full years had passed. It seems the cupbearer had forgotten Joseph's good deed. However, he did remember and bring Joseph before Pharaoh to interpret his dream. Notice verse 15-16. What is Joseph's response to Pharaoh's request.

6. Joseph's humility and faithfulness were rewarded by God. He was made the ruler of Pharaoh's household and the second ruler of Egypt. Joseph has two sons. The names of these sons reflect Joseph's experience in Egypt. How?

7. Chapters 42-45 give the intriguing story of Joseph's encounter with his brothers. Joseph has adapted so well to the language and dress of Egypt that his brothers do not even recognize him. In 45:4 and following Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers. What purpose does Joseph see in his being sent ahead of his brothers to Egypt?

Joseph provides an example of a person who suffered while doing what was righteous. In that way, he becomes a foreshadow of Jesus Christ who suffered evil at the hands of men in order to bring about a greater good for God's people. This pattern is seen often in the Bible. Suffering and evil give way to God's goodness and blessing.

As our minds try to make sense of the suffering and evil in the world, Joseph reminds us that there is a design behind it all. Suffering does not happen randomly. We are before the face of a loving and all-powerful God who will not let any of his covenant promises fail. Even if we wait long to see their fulfillment, we will see it and rejoice just as Joseph did in his day.

Our Responses to Examining the Scripture

1. First of all Joseph was favored by his father. This understandably provoked the jealousy of the other brothers. The reason given by the text is that Joseph was born in Jacob's old age (37:3). It is also true that Joseph was one of only two sons born to Rachel. You may recall that Rachel was Jacob's first love and that he was actually tricked into marrying Leah (Rachel's older sister) first.
As if this were not enough, Joseph also relates his dreams publicly which clearly indicate that both his father and his brothers will bow down before him. As a result, the brothers are filled with envy and anger and determine to put an end to their young brother and his dreams.
2. They take the coat—a gift to Joseph from their father—and dip it in blood. They leave Jacob to deduce that Joseph has been eaten by a wild animal. Throughout the story, the brothers' duplicity stands in contrast to Joseph's integrity.

3. Joseph refuses out of loyalty to his master. Notice that he could have easily seen himself as a victim of cruel circumstances. Notice there is not a hint here of Joseph blaming his master. He never says “well, I know that his enslaving me was wrong to begin with so that justifies me in committing this wrong.” Breaking his loyalty to his earthly master is understood by Joseph to be a sin against God (verse 9). Integrity is doing what is right even when no one is looking. Joseph is far away from his family and home. Yet he recognizes that God is with him and is blessing him. He cannot allow himself to sin against God.
4. Joseph plainly told the cupbearer and baker that the interpretation of dreams belonged to God. But wasn’t this the same God who had allowed Joseph to be imprisoned unjustly. Why does Joseph not blame God who could have put an end to his unjust suffering? In very bad circumstances, Joseph is proactively seeking to serve others and give glory to God. Even though he is suffering, he has not ceased to trust in God to work in his favor. True faith in God sees beyond negative circumstances to a faithful God. It perseveres believing that God will fulfill all his promises.
5. Joseph responds, “I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the interpretation.” It was the perfect opportunity for Joseph to showcase his ability and even promote himself to the king. The book of Proverbs instructs “Let another praise you and not your own mouth, a stranger and not your own lips.” (Proverbs 27:2) Joseph was no longer the proud little brother who bragged about his dreams. He was truly humble. He knew that his abilities were from God. He determined that God would get the glory for his abilities even though God had permitted him to endure very difficult circumstances.
6. The first was named “Manasseh.” This sounds like the Hebrew word for “forget.” God’s goodness to Joseph has caused him to forget his bitter suffering and the mistreatment he has received from his brothers. Notice that God’s goodness heals Joseph from the wounds of his past. It does not mean that he has totally forgotten the past. Rather, it means that he has overcome the past by God’s good favor. The second son is named “Ephraim” which sounds like the Hebrew word for “twice fruitful.” Again, God has more than made up for Joseph’s suffering. He has not only become fruitful, but twice fruitful! Joseph entered Pharaoh’s service at age thirty, thirteen years after coming to Egypt.
7. Joseph is aware that God had sent him to Egypt to save the lives of his father and brothers. Joseph is fully aware that he was mistreated and abused by his brothers. He is not naïve in saying that the affair was in the hands of God. Rather, he recognizes that God’s hand is at work in all the events of life. God permitted Joseph’s suffering in order to bring about a greater good—the salvation of Jacob and his family. Thus the covenant promises made to Abraham were kept alive by Joseph. The seed of Abraham would continue to be a blessing to the nations of the earth.

Foundations: Providence

Providence is God's loving care expressed to us in all that happens. Theologians have defined it in this way: Providence is "that work of God by which He preserves all His creatures, is active in all that transpires in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end."⁶

The Bible demonstrates over and over again that God is the author of all that happens in the world generally and in our lives specifically. He is not distant from us nor does he leave events to fall out according to chance and fate. God is governing the world according to his will.

Perhaps you are asking, if God directs all that happens, does he then force us to do what we do not wish to do. If providence is true, then human beings must not be free! On the contrary, God does not force human beings to do what is against their will. Rather, he is at work through their wills as he governs all that comes to pass in this world. Human beings act freely yet our actions are secondary in producing the causes we intend. The action of God is primary. God works out his will through our action and decisions. We refer to this as the doctrine of "concurrence" meaning that our will works concurrently with God's. Joseph's brothers provide an excellent example of the doctrine of providence and concurrence. Even though Joseph's brothers acted in an evil way towards Joseph, God used the result of their actions to produce his will and desire—the salvation of Jacob's family.

In reflecting over your own life, you will probably be able to recognize the concurrence of your own will and that of God. Decisions you have made have brought you to a place of greater dependence on God. His purposes have been accomplished through your actions and decisions.

As we saw earlier, learning new truth should effect not only our mind but also our will and emotions. If Providence is true it means that I can have a deep confidence and assurance (emotions) about my future and the future of my loved ones. God is watching over me. None of his good purposes for me will fail. It also means that I do not have to scheme and deceive to bring about what I perceive to be a good result. I should not lie in order to extract myself from a difficult situation. Christians do not believe that the ends justify the means. I can tell the truth in any situation and trust that God will bring about the right end. This deep confidence in God's good providence is the foundation for integrity. Integrity means very simply that I do the same thing whether in public or in private. My secret actions are no different from my public actions. This kind of wholeness is the foundation for Christian character and growth. Essentially, it is what the Bible refers to when it speaks of "the fear of the Lord." As we trust God's providence to bring about what is for our good, we learn to fear or reverence God more than man. "The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor." (Proverbs 15:33)

Spend a few moments recording some instances of God's providence in your own life. He is a loving and caring God—a true father. Thank him for that and remember Joseph when you are tempted to think that evil is happening randomly.

⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, p. 111.

Memorize Romans 8:28

Read:

Romans 8:28-39

Daniel 4:28-35

Psalm 139

Lesson 8

The Covenant Through Moses

Preparation:

The writer of the Psalms declares “O how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day.” (Psalm 119:97) Clearly, the law of God was a source of great delight.

A missionary in the islands of Papua New Guinea was trying to describe the word “sin” to a primitive tribe. She asked if the tribe had certain actions which they all agreed were wrong. “It is wrong to steal. It is wrong to kill. It is wrong to sleep with someone else’s wife. We must always show respect and honor to our elders and especially our parents. We must tell the truth.” This tribe who had no previous exposure to the Bible had an instinctive sense of right and wrong which agreed closely with the ten commandments which God gave through Moses.

Unlike the primitive tribe, modern man does not embrace God’s law. He casts it aside and considers it a shackle—a restriction of his personal freedom. Is the law good or bad? Is it a restriction of freedom? What use does the law have for a follow of Christ? Is it true that we are free from the law? What does that mean exactly?

In this lesson, we will look at a new form of the unfolding covenant of God’s grace. It is the covenant which God established through Moses with his people. Before going any further, take a few moments to reflect on the following questions.

1. Think of a time when you clearly disobeyed a rule. How did it make you feel?
2. My understanding of God’s law is (check all that you think are true):
 - a. Jesus did away with God’s law. I no longer have to obey it.
 - b. During Moses’ time, the people were saved by keeping the law.
 - c. Jesus kept the law in my place.
 - d. We should keep some of the law, but some of it only applied to the people in Moses’ time.
 - e. I don’t know what the law of Moses is.

Introduction

Approximately 400 years had passed since Jacob brought his family to live with Joseph in Egypt. Since that time, the children of Abraham have increased greatly and have been subjected to forced labor by the Egyptians.

Exodus 1-18 gives the background of the covenant God would make with his people through Moses. It is the story of how God brought Abraham’s descendants out of slavery in Egypt and began to establish them as a nation. Read these chapters in one sitting and note the following points.

2:24-25: God remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Again, God's faithfulness to his own promises compels him to act.

3:14: God makes himself known as "I am that I am." This awkward name is really only one word in Hebrew: "Yahweh." God declares to Moses that he is the God of Abraham. However, he also reveals himself by this name-Yahweh. The name speaks of God's self-existence. (Lesson 1 dealt with the self-existence of God. Return to it to refresh your memory.)

4:24-26: Moses' life was threatened by God's displeasure. It seems that Moses' failure to circumcise his son as God had commanded Abraham was serious. Zipporah, Moses' wife, quickly performed the procedure and God's wrath was stayed.

The Hardening of Pharaoh's heart: In the first five plagues, Pharaoh is said to "harden his heart." After the sixth plague, the Bible records that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. (9:12) Remember that God's actions in providence are "concurrent" with man's. Pharaoh bears responsibility for his hard heart. God continues to work out his plan even through the hard heart of the ruler. Nine times Pharaoh's heart is hardened by God (4:21, 7:3; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8). Nine times Pharaoh hardens his own heart (7:13-14,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,34-35).

The Plagues are directed against Egyptian gods. This is especially evident in the last two plagues. Pharaoh was the earthly representative of the Egyptian sun God (Aten or Ra). The sun is darkened in the ninth plague (10:21-23) and the firstborn of the Pharaoh is killed in the tenth plague.

At the end of the plagues, God tells his people to celebrate the Passover. It involves the sacrifice of a lamb and the spreading of blood on the doorpost of each home. Exodus 12:13 states that the blood will be a sign for the Lord such that the children of that house will not be destroyed. Passover becomes the "meal of the covenant" just as circumcision was made the sign of the covenant.

Examining the Scripture

Read the introduction to the covenant in Exodus 19.

1. Why do you think that God was so insistent that no one come up to the mountain? (19:12-13)

2. In Exodus 20, can you see how the commandments could be divided into two groups?

3. Write the first four commandments in your own words. (You may write only the first line).

The first commandment deals with God's preeminence. The words "before me" literally mean "before my face." God is not saying I am first in a long line of loyalties. Rather, he is saying, in my presence there are no other Gods—no other loyalties. Jesus demanded this kind of loyalty when he said "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me." (Lk 9:23)

The second commandment reminds us that God is different from ourselves. We cannot fashion anything in his likeness, indeed we must not in obedience to this command. Jesus said that "God is Spirit and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24)

The third commandment reminds us that God's name is holy. We are not to use God's name in oaths (swearing). God's name represents him—his person. So, by extension, all that God reveals about himself is to be treated as holy.

The fourth commandment reminds us that we are designed to work six days in seven. Working is part of this commandment. However, one day in seven is to be reserved for worship and rest. We are not permitted to spend all of our time in our own labors and pursuits. The New Testament has much to say about the "Sabbath." See Jesus' correction to the Pharisees in Matthew 12:1-12.

4. Now write out the second six commandments in your own words.

The fifth commandment is to honor parents. This is a duty of Christians.

Even if our parents are not believers we are to be respectful and obedient towards them. It was said of Jesus that he lived in submission to his father and mother. (Luke 2:51)

The sixth commandment forbids taking someone else's life. The implication is that God is the giver of life. It is his alone to take and not ours. This is probably not referring to warfare as God, in other places, permits his people to engage in warfare. Rather, it is an expression of personal hatred and vendetta. This commandment also forbids the taking of life out of convenience as in common in our day through abortion (taking of life prior to birth) and euthanasia (taking the life of the old or those who are considered "useless" to society). Jesus took this commandment even further and prohibited insulting words and hatred. (Matthew 5:21-22)

The seventh commandment forbids any type of sexual intercourse (heterosexual or homosexual) outside the bonds of marriage. Jesus, again, takes this one step further to forbid lustful thoughts (Matthew 5:27-30). It is not only impure actions that are condemned, but also impure thoughts.

The eighth commandment protects our and our neighbors right to own things. It forbids taking what is not rightfully ours. This applies to tax evasion and use of other people's property without their permission.

The ninth commandment requires us to tell the truth and protect our neighbor's good name. We are not to speak in a way that injures him or slanders his reputation.

The tenth commandment requires us to be fully content with our own condition and not envy or desire what has been given to our neighbor.

5. Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment. He replied directly: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength." (Mark 12:30) In your opinion, why didn't Jesus give one of the ten commandments as the most important?
6. Jesus goes on to say that the second commandment is "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:31) What relation does this commandment have to the ten commandments?

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 says the following:

And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good."

To know and love the law of God, we must know and love the giver of the law—God himself. In knowing him, we realize that his commands are not burdensome. They are given for our good. While God is holy and mighty and rules the

universe, he is also the gentle shepherd of our souls. All that he has commanded is for the good of his people.

“O how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day.”

Make God’s law your meditation all the day!

Our Responses to Examining the Scripture

1. Often in the Bible, the presence of God is portrayed as a fire. The presence of this fire is dangerous for man because God is holy and man is not. Many of the prophets who had visions of God’s presence fell down as though dead. God’s concern for the people is that the holiness of His presence does not overwhelm and kill them. For this reason he commands them to keep their distance.
2. Yes. The first four commandments (verses 2-12) deal with our relationship to God. The latter six commandments (verse 13-17) deal with our relationship to other human beings.
3.
 1. “You shall have no other Gods before me” in my words: Don’t come into my presence with any other god.
 2. “You shall not make for yourself an idol.” Don’t ever think that I (God) can be represented by an image, picture, sculpture, etc.
 3. “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.” Remember that my name and everything about me is holy—separate and special.
 4. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” Work six days. Devote the seventh day to resting and worshipping me. Leave your own work on that day.
4.
 5. “Honor your father and mother.” Be respectful and obedient to your parents.
 6. “You shall not murder.” Don’t take any human life.
 7. “You shall not commit adultery.” You are to have no sexual relations except with your own spouse.
 8. “You shall not steal.” You may only have what is yours. You can’t take what has been given to someone else.
 9. “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” Always say the truth about others. Do not injure their reputation.
 10. “You shall not covet.” Be happy with what I have given you and don’t desire what I have given others.
5. This commandment is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 6:5. The ten commandments are also quoted in Deuteronomy 5. This commandment is a summary of the first four commandments which have to do with our love for God.
6. The second commandment is a quote from Leviticus 19:18. It is a summary of commandments five through ten. By giving these two

commandments Jesus is summarizing the ten commandments and reinforcing their importance.

Foundations: The Law and the Christian

Some Christians are under the mistaken impression that the Old Testament is a book of law and the New Testament is a book of grace. We have seen in this course that the Old Testament is replete with indications of God's grace. There is both grace and law in both Testaments. (Notice Paul's law-like principles in Ephesians 4:25-6:9) The difference is that the revelation of God progressed through history and reached its climax in Jesus Christ. Thus Christians believe in the doctrine of "progressive revelation."

Therefore, it is essential when we are studying the Old Testament to interpret it in light of the New Testament—the teaching of Jesus Christ and the apostles. We will refer to this principle many times. The New Testament interprets the Old, not vice versa. Then, an important question in discussing the Christian's relation to the law is "what did Jesus teach about the law?" We will also want to consider what the apostles taught about the law.

First, Jesus taught that he fulfills the law. He said "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 away from the Law, until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18)

Not only did Jesus fulfill the law, he himself claimed to be the lawgiver. Over and over again in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says "you have heard it said... , but I say unto you." In many of these passages Jesus is commenting on the law. He asserts his own authority above that of the Old Testament law.

In another case Jesus releases Christians from some of the law. Although we have not studied it in this course, many of the Old Testament laws deal with food regulations. Jesus had this to say when questioned: "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (*Thus He* declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man." (Mark 7:18-20)

So how do we determine which laws still apply to Christians and which are we released from? We can divide the law of the Old Testament into three different types of law: **the moral law, the ceremonial law and the civil law.**

The **moral law** is the ten commandments. These ten commandments are the nucleus of the covenant of Moses. This is seen in the fact that God wrote these commandments in tablets of stone and gave them to Moses. They were carried with the people as they moved from place to place. These commandments apply for all time. Concerning the fourth commandment, after Jesus' resurrection, the New Testament indicates that Christians began to meet for worship on the first day of the week, sometimes called "the Lord's day—the day of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1

Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10). For that reason, it has been the habit of Christians to observe the Sabbath on Sunday.

The **ceremonial law** was an elaborate system of sacrifices made by priests during the Old Testament. Jesus was the final sacrifice, called by John the Baptist “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) The book of Hebrews states that the Old Testament ceremonies were but a shadow of the things to come. The reality which those shadows point to is in Christ. Christ is greater than Moses and greater than the temple of the Old Testament. For this reason, Christ has fulfilled the ceremonial law of the Old Testament. Jesus’ last words on the cross were “it is finished.” (John 19:30) He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. As believers in Jesus we should never return to the system of sacrifices of the Old Testament.

Finally, the **civil law** was a group of laws given to govern the Old Testament people of God. One example was that a “parapet” was to be built on the roof of houses. (Deut 22:8) These laws were binding on the people of Israel as a nation. Today, Christians derive principles from these Old Testament laws. We do not seek to imitate the Old Testament Civil law, but to discover the principle behind the law (in the case of the parapet it was for the protection of visitors and children) and apply that principle in our modern day setting.

Three Legitimate Uses of the Law

In the New Testament there were two extremes to be avoided. The first was “antinomianism.” This is a total disregard of the law. The second is legalism. This is the belief that man is justified before God by keeping the law. Christians recognize that the law is good and from God. However, we know that we are justified by the only one to ever perfectly keep the law and offer his perfection for us as an atoning sacrifice—Jesus Christ.

Christians point to three positive uses of the law. The first is to be a “tutor to lead us to Christ.” (Galatians 3:24) By carefully looking at the law, we are led to see our need of a savior. The law demonstrates God’s perfect standard. We realize that we cannot perfectly keep that standard. We must have a savior.

The second purpose for the law is to restrain evil. No law can change the human heart. However, a general knowledge of God’s standard affords some protection against the evil desires of man. Many civil laws are based on the enduring principles of the Old Testament law (e.g. “Do not murder, do not steal, etc.). The presence of God’s law keeps man accountable to live to a standard.

The third purpose of the law is to reveal what is pleasing to God. The law is useful to us in order grow in sanctification—becoming more like Christ

When Christians say we are saved from the law, they mean we are saved from God’s curse, pronounced on Adam, for his failure to keep the law. Jesus has kept the law perfectly. The law is good. It is I who am sinful and in need of a Savior. The law points me to that Savior.

Were the Old Testament Christians saved by keeping the law? No. That is evident by the fact that they did not keep the law. The New Testament makes it clear that the law has shown every man to be a sinful and in need of a Savior. (Romans 3:19-20) How then were the believers of the Old Testament made right with God? We live after Jesus Christ. We look back to him for our salvation. The believers of the Old Testament lived before him and looked forward to him for their salvation. Their sacrifices pointed to a coming Messiah. As they offered sacrifices for their own sins, they recognized that they could not keep the law and they needed a substitute to bear the penalty of their sin. There are not many ways of salvation throughout history. "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)

Memorize :

Romans 8:1-4

Further Reading:

Psalm 19:7-11

Psalm 119:9-16

Romans 7:7-25

Galatians 3:16-29

Lesson 9

David: The Kingly Covenant

Introduction

In sports, there are sometimes surprises. I remember when the team I was supporting entered the national tournament. They were not very good and everyone expected them to be eliminated in the early rounds. To everyone's surprise, the team began to win. As they won, they got better and better. To my utter shock, this team went all the way to the national championship and won! What a day of celebration! Everyone was happy because the underdog had come out on top. The team that didn't have a chance went all the way!

David reminds me of that team. He was a nothing, a shepherd, the youngest of eight brothers. But David's story is different from the team mentioned above in that God was involved in this story. David's heart was to please God. The Bible calls him "a man after God's own heart." (1 Samuel 13:14)

It is in David that we find the next unfolding of the covenant of God's grace. The descendants of Abraham have now settled in the land. About 400 years have passed since the Exodus from Egypt. During most of that time, the people were ruled by judges. However, a king has now come to the throne. His name is Saul. He is the first king of Israel. The only problem is this king has disobeyed God and God has determined to remove him as king. In his place, he chooses David.

Preparation

Read 1 Samuel 15-18

1. 1 Samuel 15 describes why the kingdom was removed from Saul. In your own words, what was the reason Saul was rejected as king.

2. 1 Samuel 16:7: "God looks on the heart." Saul had distinguished himself by his height, but his heart had drifted far from God. David, on the other hand, was not the most outstanding of his brothers. Although he was handsome, it was not his appearance that qualified him to lead God's people, rather it was the condition of his heart.

3. In 16:13 we find that the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power on the day of his anointing. Perhaps it was this Spirit that allowed David to excel in all that he did. In this chapter, his skill in music is apparent.

David, of all the subjects of the kingdom, is chosen to play the harp for King Saul—a strange and interesting work of God’s providence as the anointed king is in the presence of the reigning king.

4. Chapter 17 relates one of the most famous stories of the Bible. Read it and enjoy the victory of an underdog!
5. Chapter 18 relates other aspects of David’s relationship to the royal family of Saul. What are they?

6. Notice the strange progression in 18:28. As Saul realizes that the Lord is with David, his own hatred for David begins to grow.
7. From this point on Saul pursues David wishing to take his life. Saul does not succeed in this pursuit. In fact David twice spares Saul’s life. Thus David’s honor and integrity is intact as he refuses to do harm to Saul, “the Lord’s anointed.”

Examining the Scripture

Now read 2 Samuel 7 and I Kings 8 carefully and answer the following questions.

1. Verses one and two of 2 Samuel 7 reveal a lot about David’s desires. What do you observe?

2. 7:5-7: The Lord’s word to Nathan the prophet is a bit unexpected. Why do you think God would prohibit David’s building a temple?

3. 7:8-9 rehearse the history of what God has done for David. What did God do for David?

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4. In 7:9-16, God declares what he will do for David in the future. Write out God's promises to David.

5. This passage began with David proposing to build a house for God. It ends with God saying that he will establish the house of David. What conclusions can we draw from this? Does it remind you of God's actions in any of the previous covenants?

6. Now, we are left to ask the question, who is this son of David who will build the house of God and have an everlasting dynasty? Read 1 Kings 8. Who built the temple referred to in this passage?

7. If Solomon built the temple, then surely it was his dynasty that was to last forever. In fact, this did not happen. The kingdom split after Solomon died and the Davidic dynasty ended when Israel was exiled to Babylon. Did God's word fail? Does the New Testament help us answer this question? Who was the descendant of David who would rule forever?

As you can see, the Old Testament is carefully laying the groundwork for a new covenant which will be established with Jesus. He is the descendant of David. He is the one who has an eternal dynasty. This is why he declares "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:19) It is critical to understand that God did not somehow change his mind and start working in a totally new and different way in the New Testament. Rather, he was implementing his plan all through history. That plan was to find its culmination in Jesus Christ.

Our Responses to Preparation

1. Saul was rejected because he did not fully obey the Lord.⁷

Although God used the Israelites to punish peoples and nations for their wickedness, he also used other nations to punish the Israelites. When the descendants of Abraham were unfaithful to the promises of the covenant, God send the Assyrians to attack and exile them in 722 BC. Later, the remainder of the Israelites were exiled to Babylon in 586 BC. Jeremiah's Lamentations depict the horrid conditions which existed in Israel as a result of God's judgment. God is not capricious in meeting out justice. He is the author of justice: "Will not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25)

5. First, David and Jonathan (Saul's son) become close friends, covenanting together. Secondly, David marries Michal, Saul's daughter. .

Our Responses to Examining the Scriptures

1. David has a desire to serve God. He feels it is unfair for him to live in a house of cedar while the ark of God (symbolizing the presence of God to the people of Israel) dwells in a tent. Thus, his heart is moved to provide a home for God's ark.
2. In ancient times, it was the practice of kings and rulers to build large temples for the gods of their people. Perhaps David understood that, as ruler of Israel, he should build a temple for the God of Israel. However, this is not God's first priority. Rather God points to the fact that he has moved from place to place in a tent with his people Israel.⁸ This is a common refrain of the covenant—God will be with his people and he will be their God (Gen 17:8; Ex 29:45; Lev 26:45; Jeremiah 24:7; 31:33). This refrain reveals to us God's purpose. He will establish his people and dwell among them. The name "Immanuel" is often used for Jesus Christ. (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23) The meaning of the name is simple: "God with us." Jesus was the perfect embodiment of this covenant promise—God will dwell with his people.
3. He promoted David: from shepherd to king.
He accompanied David wherever he went (remember that the Spirit of the Lord had come upon David after his anointing).
He gave David victory over his enemies.
4. I will make your name great (verse 9)
I will provide a place for my people (verse 10)
I will give rest from enemies (verse 12)
I will establish a house for you (David, verse 11)

⁷ It is important to note the reason why God's command was so harsh against the Amalekites. In Judges 6:3 the Amalekites needlessly destroyed Israel's crops.

⁸ Again, we see God using human language to communicate with us. Obviously, he was not enclosed in a tent. Rather, the tabernacle (a tent) was the place he met with his people. 1 Kings 8:27 tell us that the highest heaven cannot contain God, how much less an earthly dwelling!

I will raise up your offspring to build a house for me. His kingdom will endure forever (verse 13)

5. It is God who takes the initiative in his covenant relationship with man. Although David desires to do a service for God, in the end, it is God who will do the service for David. Rather than David offering God a house, God will offer David an ever-lasting dynasty. This is similar to the covenant with Abram in Genesis 15. While Abram sleeps, God passes through the cut pieces of animals. He establishes the covenant based on his own merit and name.
6. Solomon. The son of David by Bathsheba.
7. Let's begin by remembering our principle of interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. The gospel of Matthew was written to Jews. It begins with the genealogy of Jesus, introducing him as "the son of David." Through Joseph, his genealogy is traced back through David to Abraham. The gospel of Luke gives the genealogy of Mary, Jesus' mother. It traces Jesus' lineage through David through Abraham to Adam. (Luke 3:23-38). The people of Jesus' time wondered if this could be *the* Son of David. (Matt 12:23). Many times, in the gospels, Jesus is referred to as "the Son of David." Peter's sermon at Pentecost makes it absolutely clear that the Son of David whose dynasty will last forever is Jesus Christ! (Acts 2:25-36)

Foundations: Repentance

When the Bible speaks of David as a man after God's own heart, it does not mean that David was perfect. On the contrary, David, at one point in his life was found guilty of adultery and murder. That story is found in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. What is striking is that God did not remove David from his throne as he did Saul. In fact, David's sins may be even more repulsive than Saul's!

Still, David was God's chosen servant. This is evident in his David's reaction to his son. David's heart was soft toward God. When he was confronted with his sin, he immediately confessed, repented and asked for God's forgiveness. Saul, on the other hand, also failed to obey the Lord. However, he sought to excuse his sin by blaming it on the people (This recalls Adam who blamed Eve for his sin, who in turn blamed the serpent). Saul was also concerned with his image in front of the people. Even after admitting to his sin he pleads with Samuel to come with him to worship the Lord before the people. (1 Samuel 15:20-31). True repentance does not try to present a positive picture to those looking from the outside. David's repentance was complete. He humbled himself before God, owned his guilt and pronounced God to be completely righteous in all his judgments. His confession of sin is found in Psalm 51. This Psalm has become a model of repentance.

It begins with **an unconditional plea for God's mercy**. A repentant heart does not bargain with God. We do not sit down with God at a negotiating table asking him to give a little so we can give a little. As we have already learned, God is holy and his standard is perfect holiness. The repentant heart realizes that he has nothing to bring

to the negotiating table with God. God's mercy is his only hope. He casts himself on that mercy.

In repentance there is also **a hatred of sin** as the thing which brings God's displeasure. David could say "my sin is ever before me." He likens repentance to a cleansing. He knows that his breaking of God's law has left him dirty. He is driven to God to get rid of the ugliness of his soul. David knows that his soul is in great danger. He prays "take not your Holy Spirit from me." We often make light of sin or make excuses. David looks his sin in the eyes. He realizes it is an enemy of his soul and he must get rid of it at all costs. Jesus said that if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and cast it away from you. The God of the Bible calls us to spare no effort to get rid of sin.

Finally, a repentant heart desires **permanent change**. The essence of all growth in Christ is change. Repentance is the first step in that change. David pleads: "create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me." He prays that his nature will change from a selfish sinful nature to a godly and righteous one. David is confident that he will be used of God again to "teach transgressors your ways." As we resolve to hate our sin and rely on God for his unconditional mercy, we place ourselves in a position to be changed by God.

So, David was not chosen for his good looks or his intelligence. He was not even chosen because he had great leadership qualities. He was chosen because he was a man after God's own heart. Is that your aspiration today? Do you wish to be a woman or man after God's own heart? If so, search your heart. Ask God to reveal the corners of selfishness and the seams of pride. Let him show you where you have sinned against those you love most. Then, like David, cast yourself on his mercy. Hate the sin enough to flee to God. Remember that God's forgiveness is not something we hope for. It is assured to us in Jesus Christ. If we have turned from our sin we can be absolutely sure that God has forgiven us on the basis of his word.

Memorize: I John 1:8-10

Read: 2 Samuel 11 and 12 and Psalm 51.

"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." (2 Chronicles 16:9)

"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (1 John 1:8-10)

Lesson 10

Isaiah's Suffering Servant

Introduction

“If only I had...” Those are words of regret, words that express a mistake and a wish to correct it. The Bible records the history of Abraham’s descendants. The stories of the Bible give us the vantage point of history. As they say “hindsight is 20/20!” We read the stories of the Old Testament and say, “if only they would have reacted another way, if only they would have believed the promises of God, if only they would have remained true to the covenant.” It is easy to be critical of God’s wayward Old Testament people.

“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)

These stories were written, not to entertain, but to teach. You and I have the Old Testament to teach us about God, about His ways with mankind.

The prophetic books of the Old Testament are some of the most beautiful and the most difficult parts of the Bible. This lesson looks at one part of the prophecy of Isaiah—four particular passages called the “servant songs.” They are a high point of Old Testament history as the prophet Isaiah looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. Before looking directly at those passages, we need a little background about Isaiah and the context in which he is writing.

Preparation

After Solomon’s reign, Israel had divided into two kingdoms in 930BC. The northern kingdom was based in Samaria and called “Israel.” The southern kingdom was based in Jerusalem and called “Judah.” Judah was ruled by the Davidic dynasty.

Assyria was a very powerful nation covering modern day Iraq. Feeling threatened by Assyria, Israel and Aram (based in Damascus), tried to invade Judah in order to make a stronger alliance against Assyria. Isaiah instructed Ahaz, king of Judah, not to form an alliance. He also predicted that Israel would be destroyed by the Assyrians and it happened just that way in 722 BC. (See Isaiah 7)

Ahaz (the Davidic king of Judah) felt that his best line of defense was to align with Assyria. (See 2 Kings 16) He did that contrary to Isaiah’s advice. He did many other wicked things such as sacrificing his son and worshipping other gods. In the end, Ahaz became a puppet king of Assyria and the dynasty of David lost its power forever.

Hezekiah was Ahaz’ son. He desperately wanted to regain his sovereignty. However, rather than rely fully on the Lord as Isaiah instructed, Hezekiah looked to Egypt to help him break away from Assyria. (Isaiah 30-31) Later he also entered in an

agreement with Babylon. (Isaiah 39) This was the last straw! Isaiah had told Hezekiah to wait on the Lord and not to look to foreign powers for help (Isaiah 30:15). Because Hezekiah (the kingdom of Judah) was unwilling to rely fully on the Lord, they would be exiled to Babylon. (Isaiah 39:5-7) This took place as Isaiah prophesied in the year 586BC.

The suffering servant passages are located in the second part of Isaiah, after Isaiah has prophesied the downfall of Judah and the Davidic dynasty. Despite the unfaithfulness of God's people, God begins to reveal through Isaiah that He will not be unfaithful to his own promises. God will take the initiative and fulfill his covenant with his people.

Examining the Scripture

As you read the following passages in Isaiah, ask God to reveal to you the heart of this suffering servant. Focus on his character and qualities. Pay attention also to his task.

In Acts 8, Phillip meets an Ethiopian who is reading from the suffering servant passages of Isaiah. The Ethiopian asks who these passages are speaking about—the prophet himself or someone else? Philip proceeds to explain Jesus Christ to the Ethiopian. The New Testament believers saw that these songs clearly spoke of Jesus Christ. As you read, realize that you are reading a description of Jesus Christ more than 600 years before his birth.

Read Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12

Isaiah 42:1 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.

2 "He will not cry out or raise *His voice*, Nor make His voice heard in the street.

3 "A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice.

4 "He will not be disheartened or crushed, Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law."

5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk in it,

6 "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations,

7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon, And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.

8 "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.

9 "Behold, the former things have come to pass, Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim *them* to you."

1. What word is repeated three times in the first four verses? What, then, is the first aspect of the suffering servant's task?

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2. What is the location of the suffering servant's activity?

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3. Describe the personality of this suffering servant. What qualities are striking?

Now the second Song of the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 49:1-13.

Isaiah 49:1 Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me.

2 And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me, And He has also made Me a select arrow; He has hidden Me in His quiver.

3 And He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory."

4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice *due* to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God."

5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength),

6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

7 Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, *and* its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers, "Kings shall see and arise, Princes shall also bow down; Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You."

8 Thus says the LORD, "In a favorable time I have answered You, And in a day of salvation I have helped You; And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, To restore the land, to make *them* inherit the desolate heritages;

9 Saying to those who are bound, 'Go forth,' To those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' Along the roads they will feed, And their pasture will be on all bare heights.

10 "They will not hunger or thirst, Neither will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them, And will guide them to springs of water.

11 "And I will make all My mountains a road, And My highways will be raised up.

12 "Behold, these shall come from afar; And lo, these *will come* from the north and from the west, And these from the land of Sinim."

13 Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, And will have compassion on His afflicted.

4. In verse four, the servant expresses his concern? What is it? What are his emotions as he looks at the result of his labor?

5. Verse 6 gives God's response to the servant's concern. The response begins with the phrase, "it is too small a thing..." What exactly is too small?

Isaiah 50:4-9

Isaiah 50:4 The Lord God has given Me the tongue of disciples, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens *Me* morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.

5 The Lord God has opened My ear; And I was not disobedient, Nor did I turn back.

6 I gave My back to those who strike *Me*, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.

7 For the Lord God helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I shall not be ashamed.

8 He who vindicates Me is near; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up to each other; Who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to Me.

9 Behold, the Lord God helps Me; Who is he who condemns Me? Behold, they will all wear out like a garment; The moth will eat them.

6. What is the new element that is portrayed in the role of the suffering servant in this passage?

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Isaiah 52:13 Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted.

14 Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, So His appearance was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men.

15 Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand.

NAS Isaiah 53:1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *state* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke *was due*?

9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

10 But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it* and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

7. This passage begins with the servant's exaltation before speaking in detail about his suffering. In the passage above circle each word that indicates some aspect of the servant's suffering. Meditate on these words as you read the passage.

8. There is a new element to the servant's suffering that has not appeared in the other passages. What is it?

9. It is paradoxical that the suffering servant is actually punished by God (verses 4 and 6). Is this fair? Why does God do it?

10. What will be the result of the servant's mission?

Our Responses to Examining the Scripture

1. It is the word "justice." The suffering servant's role will be to establish justice in the earth. Like our own day, Isaiah's time was full of injustice—nations raging against nations and corrupt rulers holding their people hostage. The suffering servant would faithfully establish justice.
As followers of Jesus Christ, we should also be concerned to establish justice on the earth. The Christian should be the first to strive for justice for all people regardless of race, religion or country of origin.
2. He will establish justice "in the earth." Also, "the coastlands" will wait expectantly for him. In verse 6 he is said to be a "covenant for the people and a light for the nations." This is a recurring theme in the suffering servant songs. His task is not limited to the confines of Jerusalem or Judah. It would have been difficult in Isaiah's day for his hearer to imagine a suffering servant that would be a light, not only to Israel, but to all the nations.
3. There is a gentleness in this servant (verse 2-3). At the same time there is a persevering courage. The servant will not be disheartened or crushed. Though he is neither brash nor overbearing, he patiently pursues his objective until it is completed.

4. His toil and effort have been in vain, useless. As followers of Christ we will be plagued with similar thoughts—our labor has been in vain. The truth is that God himself guarantees the success of the servant's work. The result of our labor will be given by God as well, even if the immediate results are not apparent.
5. For the servant to restore Israel and Judah is too small. This is the question that is on the mind of all the inhabitants of Jerusalem where Isaiah is prophesying destruction and exile. They want to know what will become of the Davidic kingdom, the temple of Solomon and the law of Moses. God responds that the servant's role will go far beyond the mere restoration of Israel and Judah. His salvation will be a world-wide salvation, reaching to all the nations of the earth!
So too our ministry as followers of the suffering servant is to extend his kingdom to all the nations far and wide. This song of Isaiah teaches us that Christ's glory will be seen among all nations, not merely our own church or neighborhood. It is a call to disciple the nations.
6. Suffering. His back will be beaten, his beard plucked out. He will also be humiliated and spit upon.
7. 52:14 marred; 53:3 despised, forsaken of men, man of sorrows, acquainted with grief; 53:4 stricken, smitten of God, afflicted, 53:5 pierced, crushed, chastening, scourging; 53:7 oppressed, afflicted; 53:8 oppression; 53:10 crushed by the Lord.
8. The servant is rejected by his own people. He is disowned. In 53:3 "we did not esteem him." In 53:4 his people judged that he was "smitten of God."
9. It is not fair. The servant has done nothing to deserve this treatment. Yet it is fair, completely fair. The servant accepts to bear the punishment of us all (verses 6 & 8). Here, Isaiah prophetically sees that Jesus, as the suffering servant of the Lord, will bear the punishment of the Lord for the sins of his people. He will suffering in the place of sinners. Israel and Judah have failed. The Davidic dynasty has broken the covenant. Yet God himself will again act. He will bear the sins of his people. He will redeem them from their rebellion and return them to fellowship with himself.
10. Verse 10: "He will see his offspring, He will prolong his days and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand." Verse 11: "He will see it and be satisfied...He will justify the many" Verse 12: "Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great."
The servant does not suffer in vain. The purposes of God will prosper in the hands of the servant. This passage has a note of triumph. The servant will prosper in what he comes to do. He will not fail. His success is expressed in that he "justifies many." That is, Jesus makes many people righteous by his death and resurrection.

Foundations: Principles of Interpreting the Bible

I once heard of a Christian who was very confused about life. He had pressing problems and he asked God to give the solution. He sat down before his Bible and prayed, “now God show me what to do.” He opened his Bible and the first verse that met his eyes was this: “And he threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:5) This was not very encouraging for the troubled believer. He decided to give it another try. Opening his Bible again his eyes met the passage, “go and do the same thing.” (Luke 10:37)

This believer was not receiving instruction from God. The truth is that he was misusing the Bible. In order to grow in our faith, we must learn how to interpret the Bible properly. Following are some of basic principles that should be followed in interpreting the Bible.

[fig 10.1-one meaning many applications]

1. A Bible passage has one meaning, but many applications.

Many times Christians have commented on a passage saying “this is what this passage means *to me*.” Although they mean well, the truth is that the meaning of the Bible is not personal. Its application can be very personal, indeed, it should be. Its meaning, however, is tied to the context in which it was written. Once we understand that meaning, we can then make application to our own situation. A safe rule of thumb is “*the meaning of Scripture is the author’s intention when he wrote it.*” Therefore, our first reflex in Bible study is not to apply it to our lives. It is to understand the intention of the author *so that* we may apply it to our lives with wisdom.

[figure 10.2]

2. Understand the Bible in its historical and literary context

When we read Isaiah, it is essential that we understand the historical context in which Isaiah was writing. The disobedience of Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah sets the stage for understanding the prophecies of exile. The prophecies of exile give the necessary background to understand the servant songs. The same is true of the New Testament. When I read Galatians, I must understand that the church in Galatia was being influenced by the teaching of Judaizers (those who said that one had to be circumcised and follow all the Jewish law in order to follow Christ) which was a contradiction to the very gospel Paul had preached. Therefore Paul was justified to say “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you.”

In the same way, we should understand particular verses of the Bible in their literary context. A famous Old Testament scholar says that understanding the context of a passage is more important than reading it in its original language (Greek or Hebrew). First of all, we should seek hard to **understand the overall message of the book**. To do that we need to know about the historical situation, the author and the recipients. After understanding the book, we have a good framework to **understand the paragraph** that we are reading. The paragraph’s message should be consistent with the message of the entire book. Finally, we come to our verse, or a particular

phrase of the verse. **We must seek to understand it within the message of the paragraph and the book.** Having understood its message to its original readers, we can then derive the principle of the verse and make application to our lives.

Here's an example. The book of Judges ends with a wild story of the men of the tribe of Benjamin kidnapping the women of Shiloh to take them as their wives. How on earth can we apply this to our lives? Does God expect Christian men to go out and take women by force to marry them? Of course not. At least one of the purposes of the book of Judges was to demonstrate that Israel needed a king. The refrain which is repeated over and over is "Israel had no king in those days. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25) So, this story of kidnapping the women of Shiloh is a negative example. It demonstrates that when there is no king, the people will live in chaos. How do we apply it? We are not to be people of chaos. We are to live in submission to our king who has ascended his throne at the right hand of God. Do you see that trying to apply the passage without understanding the meaning of the book would be a serious mistake?

[figure 10:3]

3. Understand the Bible according to its literary genre.

The Bible contains many types of literature—narrative, poetry, letter, apocalyptic, lament, didactic, etc. You may have heard it said that you cannot always interpret the Bible literally. This is a misleading statement. The Bible should always be interpreted with due consideration of the type of literature. For instance, when Joel prophesies the outpouring of the Spirit, he says that "the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes." (Joel 2:29) Is this a problem? Peter quoted this verse on the day of Pentecost saying the outpouring of the Spirit was what Joel was speaking of. Yet, the moon still exists. It hasn't turned to blood. The sun still shines. It hasn't turned to darkness. The solution lies in the type of literature. Joel is speaking poetically. The images he uses express that this day will be a day of massive changes, inaugurating a new era. Pentecost was that!

Isaiah says that "the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save, nor his ear so dull that he cannot hear." Is this a contradiction with Jesus' teaching that God is spirit? Of course not. Isaiah is using poetic imagery to describe God. Interpret the Bible literally, but remember to consider the literary genre.

Another aspect of this principle is that we take care not to make the Bible too symbolic. Certain passages are intended to be understood mystically. For instance, Daniel tells us that Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a large statue was symbolic of earthly kingdoms. This is clearly a symbol. Daniel writes in an apocalyptic style. However, not all the Bible is full of symbols. I recently heard a teacher say that the three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan river together with the three cities of refuge on the west side of the Jordan total six cities. Six is often used symbolically in other parts of the Bible. This teacher concluded that the six cities of refuge had a symbolic meaning of incompleteness. If the teacher had given adequate attention to the type of literature, he would have seen that the Pentateuch is primarily narrative (not poetic or apocalyptic). Therefore, to assign a symbolic meaning to the number six is probably not a solid exegesis of the passage.

Other types of Biblical literature include teaching, narrative, poetry (Psalms, Job), Proverbs, parable, apocalyptic. Generally, the narrative and teaching sections of the

Bible shed light on the poetry, parable and apocalyptic sections.

[figure 10:4]

4. Interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. Interpret the unclear passages in the light of clear passages.

We have already stressed this principle in this course. It is built on the conviction that *God's revelation was progressive, not static*. Throughout time, God was interacting with his people. God's people in the Old Testament were unfaithful to his covenant. Rather than reject his Old Testament people, he gave a new covenant which would include people of all races—all those who are children of Abraham, not by natural descent, but by faith. As we will see in subsequent lessons, the sign of the covenant would no longer be circumcision. It is now baptism. The covenant was not only for the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Rather, the true Jew is the one who is circumcised in heart, whose praise is from God (Romans 2:29) such that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28) Furthermore, the temple was the Old Testament center for worship as it was the center piece of God's presence. However, the temple no longer stands. Jesus plainly foretold this: "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers." (John 4:21,23) When we interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, we won't feel the need to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. We realize that Jesus Christ is now the presence of God among his people.

Hebrews makes this point forcefully. The pinnacle of God's revelation is Jesus Christ. In Him all the shadows of the Old Testament find their fulfillment. (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1) Jesus rebukes the Pharisees of his day, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me." (John 5:39)

Some New Testament passages can be very troubling until we apply this principle of interpretation. For instance, is Jesus advising us to hate our parents when he says, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:26) In the context many people are following Jesus due to his popularity and power. Jesus wants to make abundantly clear to his real followers that there will be a cost. For some, the cost may even be the loss of family members. However, he is not instructing us to hate our parents. In fact he rebuked the Pharisees for failing to honor their parents. (Matt 15:3-6)

It is good to realize that our own culture and language is very different from that of the Bible. That cultural gap of 2000+ years will make understanding the Bible a challenge in some situations. For that reason, understanding how the Bible was understood by those people who first heard (or read) its message is very important. The following chart illustrates.

Figure 10-4

5. The delight of understanding the Bible is reserved for those who will obey it.

Perhaps Jesus' closing statement in the sermon on the mount captures this idea best of all. Hearing his sayings and not doing them is tantamount to building a house on the sand. During the first storm, the house will collapse. It is only the one who hears **and** obeys the teaching of Jesus whose house stands firm.

James expresses it this way: "the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:25)

Finally, it is the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible. It is He who will teach it to those who follow Christ. As Jesus promised, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:13)

Memorize

Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Further Reading

1 Peter 2:1-2

Psalm 119

Jeremiah 23:25-40

Lesson 11

The Sermon on the Mount: Part I

Introduction

When the aged apostle John came to the end of his life, he said, “this is the message we have heard from Jesus...” John completed that statement. Now you complete it. Put in your own words what was the message we have heard from Jesus. Take a moment and do it in the space below—a one sentence summary of Jesus’ message. Then you can look at the end of this chapter for what the apostle John said was the message of Jesus.

When John sought to summarize Jesus’ message, it was a message about God. It was good news that “God is light and in him is no darkness at all.” Could it be that our failures of faith, our besetting sins, our love of the world and its enticements is simply because we have failed to understand the message of Jesus about God?

In the past lessons, we have been studying God. We have looked at a series of covenants that God made with his people in the Old Testament. In each one, we found God moving toward man, establishing a relationship with mankind. Now we come to the fulfillment of all the covenants. Until now, we have been peering through a dark glass. In Jesus Christ, all doubt is removed. Now we see a God who gives to the uttermost. We look in astonishment at a God who would so love us that he would give himself to die for us.

The ultimate goal of this curriculum is for you to live more like Jesus. In order to live like Jesus, you will need to see God the way Jesus did. It is the life and teaching of Jesus that mediates God the Father to us. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” As Jesus lifts our eyes to see and understand God as he really is we begin to realize that we are safe with God. All of life is transformed by a right understanding of God.

[figure 11.1]

Join in this prayer:

Father, it is possible that I have misunderstood you. Certainly, I have not understood you fully. Now as I look to the one who said “if you have seen me, you have seen the Father,” I ask you to correct my understanding of you. Let me see you more clearly, love you more dearly, follow you more nearly. Amen.

Preparation

Read Matthew 1-4

Our reading of the first chapters of Matthew is to set the stage for our study of the Sermon on the Mount. The Gospel of Luke has additional material. If you are new in following Jesus, you should probably read Luke 1-4 as well.

1. Why would Matthew choose to place a genealogy at the beginning of his gospel?

2. List all the fulfilled prophecies in the first four chapters of Matthew. What is Matthew trying to teach us about God by including these prophecies?

3. Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. There he fasted forty days. The number forty is significant. What other Biblical episode does it bring to your mind?

4. Jesus defeated Satan by using the word of God. It is striking that Satan himself uses the Word of God to tempt Jesus in the second temptation. Do you believe that the Word of God is your best defense against Satan and his temptations? Meditate on this truth and commit yourself afresh to memorizing the Word of God.
5. In Chapter four, Jesus begins his ministry which includes speaking and action. What is his spoken message? What acts does he perform?

6. Jesus' call to his first disciples in Matthew 4:19 is beautiful for its clarity and simplicity. Jesus meets the men where they are—as Galilean fishermen. He proposes to them to adopt his course, which he likens to

fishing. The response is immediate and total. He is still willing and able to make fishers of men of all who will follow him.

Examining the Scriptures

Read Matthew 5:1-16

Now we are up against a challenge, because we have read these words many times before. I want to suggest that you will come away from this study with a different understanding of the beatitudes than you have had previously. In order to arrive at this different understanding, a few concepts need to be in place.

First, do you consider Jesus to be smart? I know he is your savior, but that is not the question. How do you rank Jesus in intelligence? Having come to Jesus, we are convinced that he is the Son of God and our Savior. However, failure to see him as knowledgeable about humanity and the essential answers to life's quandaries prevents us from trusting him fully. Our modern day devices and gadgets have created the illusion that our ideas are more advanced than those of Jesus' time and therefore Jesus' ideas must, of necessity, be less advanced than the most learned people of our day. We would rarely admit to such presumption, but if we search our hearts and minds we will find it to be true. One writer put it this way:

It is not possible to trust Jesus, or anyone else, in matters where we do not believe him to be competent... At the literally mundane level, Jesus knew how to transform the molecular structure of water to make it wine. That knowledge also allowed him to take a few pieces of bread and some little fish and feed thousands of people. He could create matter from the energy he knew how to access from "the heavens," right where he was... He knew how to transform the tissues of the human body from sickness to health and from death to life. He knew how to suspend gravity, interrupt weather patterns, and eliminate unfruitful trees without saw or ax. He only needed a word. Surely he must be amused at what Nobel prizes are awarded for today.⁹

If you believe in Jesus' intelligence you will see that the sermon on the Mount is more than challenging religious expressions or pious maxims. Jesus is teaching a way of life, contrary to our own value system, yet intensely practical, wise and intelligent. The sermon on the mount will become your own personal constitution if you see it in this light.

Matthew 5-7 constitutes the first of five long speeches of Jesus in Matthew. Jesus goes up to a mountain. Moses brought his law (the ten commandments) down from a mountain. Now Jesus, in giving the terms of his own law climbs a mountain. However, instead of receiving a law from God, He Himself opens his mouth and begins to teach.

1. Each of the beatitudes begins with the word "blessed." Jesus has already announced the nearness of the Kingdom (4:17). With himself as the king, Jesus now proceeds to define what the "good life" of the kingdom is. It is

⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, pp 94-95.

critical that we understand the formula of the beatitudes. When Jesus says “blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God,” is he commanding you to be poor in Spirit? Why or why not.

2. In your opinion, what is poverty in spirit?

3. Now write out the beatitudes in the grid below. Write the condition in the first column and the result in the second. Begin with beatitudes one through four. Remember that Jesus is not commanding us to be a certain way. Rather, he is pronouncing his blessing on those for whom it was previously unthinkable to enjoy the blessing of God. After writing out the beatitudes, what relation can you discern between the first three?

[figure 11.2]

4. Now look closely at beatitudes five, six and seven. Do you see a relationship between these statements?

5. In the second beatitude, the mourners are promised comfort. Who are those who mourn and what is Jesus telling us?

6. The meek shall inherit the earth. This is a quote taken from Psalm 37:11. Define meekness.

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7. The three qualities of beatitudes five, six and seven are “mercy, purity of heart and peacemaking.” Meditate on the following passages to come to a fuller understanding of these qualities of the “blessed.” Then write your own definition of these qualities.

Mercy: Matthew 18:23-25. Define mercy:

Purity of heart: Luke 7:37-48. Define purity of heart:

Peacemakers: James 3:13-18. Define peacemaking:

8. The last beatitude concerns persecution (verse 10). Jesus, knowing all things, knows that the way of life he is teaching will not be acceptable to many people. He knows the heart of man and knows that the person who would set his course to live such a life will endure persecution. The suffering of the righteous will be a continuing theme as we work our way through Jesus’ teachings.
9. Notice that the rewards of each of the beatitudes are given by God. This is the true meaning of the word “blessed.” It means that we are congratulated by God, rewarded by him. Two of the beatitudes have the same reward. Which two are they? What is the reason for the repeat of the reward?

10. Finally, following the teaching of Jesus makes his people different. Jesus refers to this difference using two images: salt and light. As salt preserves and gives flavor, so Jesus’ followers preserve and flavor the society they live in. They are light, reflecting God’s light to the society around them. Contrary to popular opinion, it is not the powerful, the rich or the famous who are essential to the well-being of the world. It is the followers of Jesus who practice his teachings.

Response to Introduction

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

Our Responses to Preparation

1. Matthew is writing primarily to a Jewish audience. At the outset, he wants to convince his readers that this Jesus is a fulfillment of prophecy. He begins with Abraham and traces Jesus' line through David.
Also note that several ladies are mentioned in the genealogy (Tamar v.3, Rahab v.5, Ruth, v. 5, Uriah's wife, v. 6 and Mary v. 16) . This would be highly unusual for a Jewish genealogy. At least three of these women are non Jews. God's activity in bringing the Messiah into the world was not limited to men or to Jews.
2. Matthew 1:22-23 is in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14
Matthew 2:6 is a fulfillment of Micah 5:2
Matthew 2:15 is a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1
Matthew 2:18 is a fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15
Matthew 2:23 is a fulfillment of an Old Testament idea. Although the town of Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament, being a Nazarene held the idea of scorn and derision. Therefore, this name is in keeping with Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus would be "despised and rejected of men." (Isaiah 53:3). Also the Hebrew word for "branch" is very similar to the word for Nazarene. Perhaps Matthew intends that Jesus is the "branch" referred to in Isaiah 11:1 (a branch from Jesse, the father of David).
Matthew 3:3 is a fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3
Matthew 4:14-16 is a fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1,2.
Matthew refers to these prophecies to demonstrate God's faithfulness. Jesus' birth and life were all foretold in the Old Testament. He is the fulfillment of the unfolding covenant. God keeps His word.
3. The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Deuteronomy 8:1-5 refers to this as a "testing time." It is significant that Jesus' first reply to Satan is a direct quote from this passage: "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." (Deut 8:3) The physical descendants of Abraham had failed in their test of obedience. They grumbled against God. Jesus, the true seed of Abraham did not fail. He defeated Satan in the wilderness.
4. Question for meditation only.
5. "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near" is the spoken message. The condition to receiving the kingdom is repentance.
The other aspect of Jesus' ministry is his acts of healing. He healed the sick and preached the good news of the kingdom (v. 23). His acts of healing were a visible demonstration of the power and reality of the kingdom.
(Note that verse 17 begins with the phrase "from that time on..." It occurs two other times in Matthew 16:21 and 26:16. In all three situations,

Jesus is embarking on a new phase of his ministry. For that reason, some students of Matthew have concluded that this small phrase constitutes a key to understanding how the book of Matthew is divided.)

Our Responses to Examining the Scripture

1. No. This phrase is not in the form of a command. Jesus could have easily said “be poor in spirit.” He does not. Rather it is a pronouncement.
2. Poverty is a word used for those who are deprived of means to meet their own needs. Spiritual poverty refers to those who have no spiritual means. Jesus is not telling us to become people of no means. Rather, he is saying that in the new kingdom that he is inaugurating, even those without means have access to the good and happy life. In chapter 4 we read that Jesus was healing the sick. He had called fishermen to be his disciples. As he looked around at these (not the religious leaders of the day) he could say clearly that his kingdom would give happiness and joy to those who are spiritual nothings—to people who have no spiritual knowledge or understanding. His kingdom will not only bring blessing to the pious expert in the Old Testament law. It will also bring blessing to the ignorant and uninformed. Can you see why it was called the gospel (good news)? That’s why it is so important that we not make the beatitudes to be commands. If they are commands, then we have merited the kingdom by our obedience to them. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus blessing comes to those who have no means to access spiritual blessing, to those who have nothing (folks like you and me).
3. The relation I see is that the first three beatitudes describe people who are devoid of resources, namely, the poor in Spirit, mournful and meek. They are needy people. These people are not blessed because they are poor in spirit but despite their poverty. The beauty of Jesus’ kingdom is that it comes not to the deserving ones but to the undeserving ones. The surprise in these beatitudes is that it extends to those who have absolutely no resources. The fourth beatitude is a summary statement. These are the people who, while not having resources, are hungry for righteousness. The only condition for entry into the kingdom is a desire for righteousness. “Whosoever will may come.”
4. These beatitudes describe people who have resources. However, the resources are not what we might anticipate—money, powerful personalities, material possessions, places of honor. Rather these are the resources of Jesus’ kingdom: mercy, purity of heart and peacemaking. These are the people who supply the kingdom of God. They are blessed. They possess the hidden resources of the kingdom of God. However, their use of these kingdom resources will lead them into persecution and rejection. Therefore, the eighth beatitude is a warning of persecution—a declaration and assurance that those persecuted ones are part of the kingdom as well. The chart below demonstrates this thought.

[figure 11.3]

5. Mourning brings to mind people who have been in a disaster or lost a loved one. This beatitude demonstrates that Jesus could not be pronouncing a commandment. How could he command us to mourn. Rather, he is saying that for those for whom human comfort is impossible, he will provide comfort. The kingdom is near for those who have suffered disaster such as the loss of a child or have been deprived of their possessions. Jesus' kingdom is open to all!
6. The meek are those who do not assert themselves. They shrink back and run away. Jesus opens the kingdom to them. Although Jesus quotes the Old Testament in this beatitude, he also draws a contrast between the way many of his fellow Jews understand the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the land of Israel was taken through warfare. Jesus promises the "earth" to those who wouldn't think of taking anything by force. His kingdom is working by new standards and policies. Even the faint-hearted and weak are now "blessed," happy and can enjoy the good life in this new kingdom.
7. Mercy: The foregoing of one's rights in order to show kindness to one who is in an inferior position rather than the exacting of justice.
Purity of heart: Being aware of the true state of one's motives and a refusal to present oneself falsely to others.
Peacemaking: The ability to reconcile between two conflicting parties. This requires that one have credibility and trust from both parties. It is a highly needed skill in the kingdom of God.
8. For your meditation
9. Beatitudes 1 and 8 have the reward "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If our understanding is correct (that the two groups of people the beatitudes deals with are those who have no spiritual resources and those who have resources), then Jesus may be saying that both groups are equally welcome and blessed in his kingdom. Our blessing is not due to our merit, even the spiritual qualities that we possess. Our blessing is by his grace. All are welcome—the "nothings" and those who having progressed in the faith, now have resources—the resources of the kingdom.

Foundations: Jesus, the Son of God

After Jesus' baptism in Matthew 4, a voice is heard from heaven. It declares "this is my son whom I love; with him I am well-pleased." (Matthew 3:17) In addition John 1:14 refers to Jesus as "the only begotten of the Father." Many people have difficulty understanding exactly what this means. In our discussion of this crucial issue, we'll follow this outline.

- I. What did "Son of God" mean for the Jews at Jesus' time
 - A. He was the Messiah—the son of David.
 - B. He was equal with God
- II. What it does not mean
 - A. Jesus was the "physical" son of God.
 - B. Jesus had a beginning.

- III. What the history of Christianity has determined it to mean
 - A. The Doctrine of the two natures in one person
 - B. The Nicene creed.

- I. What did “Son of God” mean for the Jews at Jesus’ time?

The title “Son of God” had a special meaning for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the Jews. They were very familiar with the Old Testament as they heard it continually in their synagogues. They knew that this title was applied to one who would be the son of David. This great king, who would come through the line of David, would be special. He would not only be the son of David, but the Son of God. “I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.” (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

Furthermore, when the Jews heard Jesus speak of God as his “Father” they were outraged. Who could claim such an intimate relationship with God? Their reaction was to try to kill Jesus. They understood that Jesus calling God his Father made him equal with God. “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” (John 5:18)

- II. What it does not mean

In our day, there are new problems associated with the title “Son of God.” Some assume this to mean that Jesus was God’s physical son. They may understand Christians to believe that God had physical relations with Mary to produce a “son.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the miraculous power of God. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35)

In the case of a physical son, common physical traits are apparent. What I mean is this. If you put me beside my father, you will notice that our eyes look alike, our nose is the same shape, we are about the same height, etc. Of course, we know that God the Father does not have a body. Jesus taught that “God is spirit.” (John 4:24). Since Jesus is God’s Son, the *spiritual* traits of God are apparent in Jesus. That’s why Jesus could say “anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9) The spiritual traits of God were in Jesus. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

[fig 11.4]

Secondly, some are under the mistaken impression that Jesus’ existence began when he was born. Not so, according to the Bible. Jesus became a human being when he was born. We refer to this as the “incarnation.” However, Jesus existed in eternity past with God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things

were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (John 1:1-3, 14)

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.” (Colossians 1:15-18)

When we celebrate Jesus’ birth, we are celebrating his incarnation, the beginning of his humanity. However, we are not celebrating his beginning. He, like God the Father, had no beginning and will have no end!

III. What has Christian history determined this title, Son of God, to mean.

In the fourth century after Christ, a serious debate took place. The two sides were represented by two Egyptians. One was Arius and the other Athanasius. Arius held that Jesus was a creature and should not be worshipped. Arius believed that Biblical monotheism meant that God was one both in *being* and in *person*. He (Christ) was superior to human beings, but not equal with God.¹⁰ Athanasius, held that Jesus was “of one essence” with the Father. The Council of Nicea met in 325 and adopted the views of Athanasius which are expressed in the four points below.

1. “Christ was very God of very God.” Jesus is God in the same sense in which the Father and the Holy Spirit are God. The persons of the trinity may have different tasks, but they are equal in “god-ness.”
2. Jesus was “one essence with the Father.” This particular formula won out over the other formula which was “of similar substance with the Father.” To say Christ was “of one substance” with the Father aligned with Jesus’ own teaching, “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)
3. “Christ was begotten, not made.” Jesus was not created as other things and people were. He existed from all eternity as the Son of God.
4. “Christ became human for us men, and for our salvation.” Athanasius knew that Christ could not have brought human beings salvation if he had only been a creature. By saying that Christ was God, Athanasius knew that he was safe-guarding the Biblical teaching on salvation.

The Nicene Creed was one of the earliest statements of the Christian church of her belief. It was formulated in 325 and later expanded at the Council of Constantinople in 381. As you read the creed, remember that it was a joint statement of all the churches of that time. Many of the leaders there had endured persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. The faith as expressed in this creed stood strong against all persecution and false teaching. It continues to stand strong today!

¹⁰ Arius’ views anticipated the modern day sects of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again with glory to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets, in one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Memorize:

John 1:1-4;14 & 18

Further Reading

John 1:1-18

Colossians 1:15-20

John 14

Lesson 12

The Sermon on the Mount: Part II

Introduction

Consider the story of a young man who stood before a judge. The young man was being convicted on several counts of robbery. The people in the courtroom felt pity for the young man who had obviously gone astray from the straight path. Everyone hoped that the judge would be merciful. When the judge rendered his verdict, there was no mercy, the young man was given the maximum sentence the law would allow. Not only was he obliged to repay the value of the stolen objects, he was also subject to hard labor as punishment for his crime.

As the young man's head drops in despair, the gavel falls and the court is adjourned. While the onlookers wait for the judge to exit, they are taken by surprise. He rises to his feet, removes his legal robes and takes his place beside the young man. He asks the officer to remove his handcuffs and place them on himself. The judge has handed down the just legal sentence. However, in mercy, he now takes the place of the despondent young man. The onlookers are shocked at such a display of affection from the judge. The young man turns to embrace the judge and utters but one word: "Dad!"

In Jesus Christ, God comes to humanity. He keeps the law and then pays the penalty for us lawbreakers. He has been perfectly just and yet rich in mercy.

In this lesson, we will look at Jesus' teaching in reference to the law of God. It reveals much to us about who God is and how we should live. It also reveals that we have broken the law many times, perhaps every day of our lives. Jesus shows us how high God's standard really is. He doesn't stop there. He will go on to take our punishment for breaking the law and finally perfect us to meet that holy standard. That is the purpose, after all, God dwelling among his people.

Pray this prayer as you begin.

Father, you alone are righteous. As I come to you, help me to come with a pure heart, not hiding my sin, not covering it up. Let me see the light of Christ. Draw me ever closer to him. Let me see you through the light he gave. Open my mind and heart and plant your truth deep within. Amen.

Examining the Scripture

Read Matthew 5:17-48

1. In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus gives a new dimension to our understanding of the law. He says that He has come to fulfill the law. Why is this important to state prior to the rest of his teaching on the law?

2. Verse 20 says that our righteousness must surpass that of the Scribes and Pharisees. What do you know about their righteousness? (see Matthew 23) How, in your opinion, might our righteousness surpass theirs?

In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus takes six statements from the Old Testament law. Each time he begins by saying “you have heard it said, but I say unto you...” In Jesus’ day, the Scribes and Pharisees were famous for expounding the Old Testament. It is clear that Jesus is asserting his own authority above the Scribes and Pharisees. He alone has the right to determine the meaning of God’s word.

3. Matthew 5:21-26: Jesus quotes the fifth commandment “You shall not kill.” The word “raca” may mean “empty.” It probably refers to calling someone “stupid or ignorant.” The Sanhedrin was the Jewish high court. Based on this passage, summarize Jesus’ teaching on the sixth commandment.

4. According to verses 23-24, what is our necessary preparation for worshiping God?

5. Matthew 5:27-30 treats the subject of adultery. Jesus quotes the eighth commandment but applies it more broadly than we might expect. Even those who look lustfully are guilty before God’s law of adultery. Jesus suggests a radical cure for adultery. Why, in your opinion, does Jesus say to gouge out our eye or cut off our hand if we are offended by it? (to be offended by our eye means that it leads us into sin)

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6. Jesus takes up the subject of divorce in verses 31-32. He refers to part of the Old Testament law (Deuteronomy 24:1—not the ten commandments as previously). What is the one condition under which Jesus permits divorce?

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7. Matthew 5:33-37 deal with the subject of oaths. Jesus said not to swear at all. Why do you think he took such a strong stand?

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8. Verse 38 is a quote from Exodus 21:24. It was a general principle of Old Testament justice that the punishment was not to be greater than the offense. If someone is struck so that they lose an eye, an eye (not more than an eye) is to be taken from the striker in punishment. This was a legal matter. Notice that Jesus makes immediate application to individuals. He is not commanding the state (the government) to do this—that would bring about total chaos. If we lived this way, on a personal level, would our lives end up in chaos? Is it practical to live this way?

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9. Matthew 5:43-48: The Old Testament tells us to love our neighbor in Leviticus 19:18. The Bible does not command us to hate our enemies although certain Psalms express the writer's desire for revenge on enemies (see Psalms 137 and 140). In typical fashion, Jesus goes beyond the Old Testament expectation of what was acceptable behavior. His kingdom brings radical change to the heart of man such that his follower is commanded to love his enemies, not only his friends. What example does Jesus use to demonstrate that even corrupt people love their neighbors? Why was this example particularly effective to his audience?

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10. Who is the model for us in seeking to love those who don't love us?

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11. “Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Can human beings actually do this? Why or why not?
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Our Answers to Examining the Scripture

1. Jesus’ public message to the world began with the announcement that the Kingdom of God was near (at hand). His Sermon on the Mount began by stating that those who are not considered happy and blessed are indeed happy and blessed in his kingdom. It is a kingdom that blesses even those who are spiritually poor. As he begins to comment on the law, we will see that Jesus’ law is even more difficult to obey than the law of Moses, in fact, it is impossible. By stating at the outset “I am the fulfillment of the law,” Jesus makes the law accessible to us. Yes, even we can obey the law because He himself is the fulfillment of it. Consider how we would look at the Sermon on the Mount if Jesus had said, “think not that I came to abolish the law. I did not come to abolish it, but to add to it.” In fact, that would not be good news at all. It would be dreadful news. Jesus fulfills the law. What you and I cannot do, he has done. As you read Jesus’ summation of the law in this chapter, meditate on that fact.
2. The Greek word for Pharisee means “the separate ones.” They were known for their scrupulous obedience to the law. Therefore they kept separate from others who were not as obedient to the law. Thus they accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath when he healed. Jesus said they would “strain out a gnat and swallow a camel” The gnat was the smallest of the unclean animals prohibited for a Jew to eat. The camel was the largest! Jesus is figuratively saying that their minute obedience is not obedience at all. They were distinct in their dress (they wore phylacteries in which they carried the law of God.) However, they were not “clergy.” Most of them had common vocations.

Our righteousness must surpass that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Two aspects of our righteousness are important.

1. Our righteousness is the righteousness of Christ. By believing in him, we become one with him. This is made clear in other passages of the Bible. (See Romans 5:18-19)

2. The righteousness of the believer is in the soul, the inner man. It begins on the inside and permeates all of life. The righteousness of the Pharisees was external. Jesus rebuked their seeking glory one from another and not the true glory which comes from God alone. (John 5:44)

We must realize that external signs of religious piety may or may not reveal our heart. Jesus condemns the Pharisees' show of their piety. He constantly calls his followers to a heart-righteousness.

3. Murder is prohibited by the Old Testament. Jesus says that the same penalty will be given for those who are angry at their brother. So, the heart of the commandment is to forbid us from being angry. However, if we take into account other parts of the Bible we discover that there is a righteous anger which is not forbidden. Jesus demonstrates this in Mark 3:5. The anger that is spoken of is an abusive anger. It comes out of our mouths through insults. The two insults are "Raca" (empty-headed) and "fool." Some have thought that these are degrees of insult, "fool" being worse than "Raca". However, this is not evident from the language Jesus uses. He is saying that any kind of anger towards your brother that results in your insulting him makes you liable to punishment on earth (the council and the Sanhedrin) as well as eternal punishment (the fires of hell). When you insult another human being out of anger you have transgressed the Old Testament covenant "you shall not kill." Jesus, again, takes aim at the heart of the commandment: our own heart attitude toward others. It is not merely physically harming a person that is prohibited by God, it is any evil intention toward them, usually manifested by our words.
4. We must verify that we have not offended our brother (I take this to mean any of our acquaintances, not only a brother in Christ). Note that Jesus requires us to go and settle the disagreement if we are aware that our brother has something against us. If he has something against us, it is not only his problem, it is also our problem. We are to do all in our power to settle it before coming to God to worship him. (Matthew 18:15-17 gives Jesus' advice on what you should do if someone has sinned against you.)
5. Jesus is speaking in hyperbole. It is a purposeful use of a surprising word or phrase in order to create effect. However, we should not let this lessen the impact of Jesus' words. Jesus intends to startle us. Rather than give into lust, this passage tells us we are to do everything in our power to avoid it. This may mean that we are to walk out of a movie, turn off the television, remove images from our internet server, discipline ourselves not to look lustfully at people of the other sex. Do all in your power not to sin. The obvious question is: have I done all in my power to avoid sin?
6. Marital unfaithfulness. This means adultery. Jesus has more to say about marriage in Matthew 19:3-12. He says that God established marriage when he created Adam and Eve. He joined one man and one woman in marriage. What God has joined together must not be separated.¹¹ That is why God makes divorce so difficult. Divorce is not a solution to disagreements or fights. God only allows divorce under the most serious circumstances—adultery!

¹¹ Paul adds one other condition for divorce. If one partner refuses to live with another because of his or her faith, Paul says "let him leave. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances." (1 Cor 7:15)

7. Jesus had many things to say about our words. Read, for example, Matthew 12:34-36; Matthew 15:17-20. Adding oaths to our words to strengthen their force means either that we are unsure of what we are saying but don't want to admit it or that we are afraid that our words are not convincing. In order to make our words convincing, we swear. Jesus wants us to speak the total truth without relying on an oath to strengthen what we are saying. In other words, our words are to demonstrate that we are people of integrity.

8. I think so. In fact, I think if we don't live this way, we are likely to drive ourselves crazy. Why? If we set our minds on getting revenge each time we are wronged, our whole life will be about revenge and how to get it. Jesus' teaching frees us from that. Just as God forgives those who wrong him, we too are to forgive those who wrong us. His teaching is liberating.

In Jesus' examples he speaks of personal situations where harm is done to us. For example the striking on the cheek with the back of the hand was a sign of despal (similar to hitting on the back of the neck in the Middle East today). However, there are other situations where we are the guardians of other people. We already mentioned that if the state or other institutions acted in this way, chaos would be the result. In the same way, we should not act this way in regard to our children. If someone is harming our children, we are responsible to defend them. Jesus does not say that we should turn the cheek for other people. We are to have a healthy respect for them and their well-being.

One writer has suggested that rather than look at Jesus' teaching as a new law, we should see it as an example of how the righteous person would act in a situation of personal harm. After all, if we view it as a new law, it is possible to keep the law (turn the other cheek) and do it with the wrong attitude. This writer suggests the following four ways that a follower of Jesus who has been wronged may react.

1. They may "turn the other cheek." That is to say, they may remain vulnerable to the harm rather than try to defend themselves.

2. They may let him have their shirt. They will make a conscious effort to try to help those who have won a case against them in court, perhaps giving even more than they have been sued for.

3. "Go with him two." If a policeman requires their assistance, they will go beyond the call of duty. (Roman soldiers had the right to compel non-Romans to carry their gear and supplies for up to one mile. Jesus says, rather than go one mile, offer to carry his supplies two miles.)

4. "Give to him who asks of you." The follower of Jesus will give to the needy.¹²

9. He says that even the "publicans and pagans" love their own and greet them. The Publicans were employees of Rome who collected Roman taxes from the Jews. (Matthew, the writer of this gospel was a tax-collector, called Levi in Luke 5:27-32). Usually, they were Jews who were siding with the Romans. Many of the Jews viewed them as traitors, the lowest of the low! Jesus says, "look, even people you consider

¹² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 177.

despicable love their own. My standard is to love those who are unlovable—your enemies and people who hate you.”

Take a moment now to consider someone who is difficult for you to love because he or she is different from you. Ask God to soften your heart to love them.

10. Very simply, it is God. Jesus says that God “causes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain to the righteous and the unrighteous.” God expresses his love in tangible and real ways to wicked people. God is our example. Our standards are taken from Him, not from the way people around us act. Also, the final exhortation is “be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Jesus clearly intends us to model our own actions and behavior after God.

Can you see that God took initiative to love you when you were unlovable?

11. First, Jesus is adapting an Old Testament idea. In Leviticus 20:26, God commands his people: “you are to be holy to me, because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.” God always commanded his people to reflect his perfection (holiness) by their own behavior toward one another and toward outsiders. Jesus reviews the best models of holiness that are available at the time in Matthew 5:20—the Scribes and Pharisees. His conclusion is that their holiness simply doesn’t measure up to God’s standards. His teaching corrects this serious lack. Jesus’ words should not be taken to mean that one day, before the end of this life, our struggle with sin will cease and we will discover ourselves to be perfect as God is perfect. Rather, we must keep this goal before us until the end of our lives. We are to be like God in our conduct. On days when this standard seems impossible, it is good to remember that Jesus himself is called “our righteousness.” Where we have failed to follow his teachings, there is forgiveness (I John 1:9) and his righteousness becomes the well to which we go to drink deeply, be refreshed and continue on our way. His righteousness is available to us. His goodness becomes our own. Finally, we must never forget that righteousness is a gift. It is produced in us by God as we live in faith. We will never be able to transform ourselves. As we look to God, Christ will indwell us by faith and we will be transformed becoming more and more like him!

Foundations: Christ: One person, two natures.

In the last lesson, we looked at the meaning of the term “Son of God.” In this lesson, we will look further into the nature of Christ. There are many sects which have broken with the church over this issue. It is a very important one. We will follow the outline below in our discussion.

- I Statement of the doctrine
- II. Jesus was a real human being
 - A. Some have thought him to be more than a human being
 - B. The teaching of the historical church on Jesus’ humanity
 - C. Some Scriptures that prove Jesus’ humanity

- III. Jesus was God
 - A. Some have thought him to be less than God
 - B. The teaching of the historical church about Jesus' divinity
 - C. Some Scriptures that prove Jesus' divinity
- IV. Our response to this truth
 - A. Assurance of salvation
 - B. Confidence before God
- I. Statement of the doctrine

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man. In so doing, he was, and forever will be God and man in two distinct natures and one person.¹³ If we view this doctrine as a line, the errors concerning it have occurred on either side of the line. On the one side, some have believed Jesus to be more than a man (not fully human) and on the other side some have held him to be less than God.

[figure 12.1]

- II. Jesus was a real human being

We have already mentioned Arius' view that Jesus was the highest of the created order. He did not believe Jesus was fully God, but neither was he fully human. Other sects such as the Gnostics in the early centuries of the church held that Jesus was not fully human. The Sabellians (4th century) held that Jesus was a mode in which God expressed himself. Today, most people do not struggle to believe that Jesus was fully human. They fall on the other side of the line—failing to believe he was and is fully God.

The clear teaching of the historical church on this issue is that Jesus was fully human. In one of the church councils they used the term “consubstantial with us” in his humanity. It is a way of saying that Jesus is every bit as human as you and I. Jesus did not “change” into a human person. Rather, he assumed humanity. His incarnation meant that he became fully human without diminishing his deity.

These Scriptures speak clearly of Jesus' humanity: He calls himself man as do others (John 8:40; Acts 2:22; Romans 5:15; 1 Corinthians 15:21). He came “in the flesh” that is, in human nature (John 1:14; I Timothy 3:15; I John 4:2). He was subject to human wants and sufferings (Matthew 4:2; 8:24; 9:36)¹⁴

- III. Jesus was fully God.

Again, Arius suggested that Jesus was less than God. He said Jesus did have a beginning and was of a similar essence to that of God rather than the same essence. This denial was carried on by the Ebionites in the days of the early church and the Socinians in the days of the Reformation. In our day, Jehovah's witnesses and other sects do not accept the full divinity of Christ.

¹³ A paraphrase of Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 21.

¹⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, p. 182.

The church councils determined that as Jesus was consubstantial with us in his humanity, so he was consubstantial with God in his deity. Therefore Jesus was not only just as human as you and I, he is also just as divine as God the Father! But these two natures are joined in one person. It is important to note that Jesus is not a split person, God and man. Rather he is one person, the only God/man. Christ's humanity and his deity exist "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." Thus the two natures of Christ come together in one person—our Lord Jesus.

Many Scriptures indicate Jesus' deity. Here is a sampling: Isaiah 9:6, Micah 5:2; Jer 23:6; John 1:1-3, 14, 18 25-27; 20:28; Matthew 9:6; 14:33; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:1-3.

IV. Our response to this truth

If we believe the truth, our lives should change. As we look at the nature of Jesus, we are challenged to change in a number of ways. First, as a human being, his temptations and suffering were real. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) We can never say that God does not understand what we are going through. The Bible makes it very clear that he endured the whole range of human emotions. He was fully man. As man Jesus fully identified with our suffering and as God he has the power to help us in our need.

Our faith that Jesus is fully God will help dispel confusion in our lives. Although Jesus did not answer all the questions we may have, he did give us sound principles to build our lives upon. We can be confident that his teaching is far more valuable and wise than the advice of today's sages and gurus. He is the mentor par excellence! We can build our lives according to his teaching and be perfectly sure that we will be blessed in the end.

Also, as Jesus is fully God, we are given great confidence to know our own worth before God. The offering up of Jesus Christ is a testimony to us of God's great love for us. Although we were once alienated from him, it was important to him to get us back. He did so at great cost. We know that he loves us for he has shown his great love to us in Jesus Christ.

As you go about your daily routine, reflect on these truths. Jesus, the Messiah-king who is fully God and fully man has promised that he will never leave you or forsake you. Since he is for you, who can be against you!

Further reading:

Romans 8

Luke 15

Memorize:

Colossians 2:9-10

The Sermon on the Mount (Part 2)

Kingdom Righteousness

Lesson 13

In the early centuries of the church, the leaders of that church insisted that Christians are people who live “before the face of God.” In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, he demonstrates what is meant by that saying. In Matthew 5 we saw the standard of righteousness of the disciple of Jesus. Jesus Christ’s standard is clearly higher than the Old Testament law. He takes his standard of righteousness right to the heart of man. This is critical to our understanding. Outward conformity to the law is not enough. Jesus requires there to be a change of heart. In fact Jesus teaches us that the Kingdom of heaven (the presence and reign of God) is available to us now. Our right actions are motivated, not by fear, but by the oneness of our hearts and minds with the kingdom of heaven (God).

In Matthew 6, Jesus is teaching us that his follower will live with a constant awareness of the presence of God. This is part of Jesus’ announcement of the Kingdom in Matthew 4:17 (Remember that the sermon on the mount is Jesus’ first teaching about the kingdom of God). In this part of the sermon, Jesus warns us about two traps that will hinder us and block our growth. The first is the desire to have the approval of others. Jesus talks about this in reference to our good religious works. The second is the natural desire to build our security around our material wealth.¹ The follower of Christ has a distinctly different attitude toward his possessions. Jesus nowhere suggests that his follower abandon the world and live as a recluse. But he does clearly teach that the follower of Jesus should have a different attitude to his possessions, his time, his religion, indeed all of life. Growth in Christ is simply this, realizing the continual presence of God in and near you such that all of life is changed to reflect that reality. The sermon on the Mount directs us to the first steps in making these changes.

It is important not to get the cart before the horse. The Christian doesn’t change in order to draw near to God. Rather, the follower of Christ comes to the realization that God is near. God has drawn near through his Son and now He has given us His Spirit who dwells within us. The change in our attitude is a result of the nearness of God, the coming of his Kingdom. We do not enter the kingdom as a result of our changed lives and attitudes. Rather, our lives and attitudes change as a result of our having entered the kingdom.

Consider the story of a pauper who lived all his life as a beggar. After the poor man died, it was discovered that his house was built on top of a mine containing precious diamonds. Although he begged for his daily food, the man had in his possession the resources to make him a wealthy man. The only problem was he never knew it and never acted in accordance with the great wealth he possessed! Jesus teaches that the Kingdom

¹ Willard, p. 188.

is ours. If we do not live in its beauty and peace, then we have no one to blame but ourselves. Have you accepted your responsibility to live continually in the presence of God regardless of your circumstances? Are you looking to someone else to improve your lot in life? Clearly Jesus teaches in Matthew 6 that every follower of his can live in the presence of God. Each of us is responsible before God to grow in our awareness of his presence and draw on the richness of it.

Paul said it this way: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

Begin your reading in this lesson with a prayer similar to the following one. Do not rush through the questions. Do it in a quiet place where you have time to contemplate the nearness of God.

Prayer: Father, I know that you are near me. I realize that my life often does not reflect that reality. I go to your word and the teaching of Jesus to change, to grow, to know you. Open my mind to understand what is being said. I pray that as Jesus Christ dwells in my heart through faith, that his Kingdom will be manifested in and through me. In his name, Amen.

Examining the Scripture

Read Matthew 6:1-34

Verses 1 through 18 discuss three acts of righteousness—giving, prayer and fasting. It is significant that these three are also three of the five pillars of Islam. All religions have recognized these acts as good deeds and all religious systems instruct us to be actively doing these things. Clearly, Jesus assumes that his followers will be doing these things as well. The distinctive teaching of Jesus about these good deeds is the motivation for them and, as a result, how we actually carry them out. However, Jesus is striking at the heart of religious showmanship. It is not only prayer, fasting and giving to the poor that may cause others to show us honor. In our day, such things as academic degrees, rank and position among believers and even an advanced knowledge in some branch of the faith may distinguish us. Jesus warns us not to seek honor from men but only that honor which comes from him (See Matthew 23:8-11).

1. Read Matthew 6:1. Summarize Jesus’ teaching in the space provided below.

2. Continue to summarize Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:2-4.

3. Why, in your opinion, does Jesus insist on secrecy of good works? Is this a contradiction with the teaching we saw in Matthew 5:16? "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

4. In Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus gives two specific prohibitions about prayer. What are they?

5. Have you seen examples of prayer which contradict Jesus' teaching either public prayers for show or adding many words to prayer somehow thinking that God will be more inclined to answer?

6. In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus instructs his disciples how to pray. The prayer has an address and then six petitions. Write them out below. Do you see a natural division in the prayer?

7. Use the space below to meditate on each petition of this prayer. Write out briefly what you feel the essence of each petition is teaching us.

Our Father in heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your Kingdom come

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one

8. Matthew 6:16-18: Here Jesus lays down his guidelines for fasting. What are they?

In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus deals with the practical issues of day to day living. He teaches about what preoccupies us most—our money, clothes and possessions. The importance of this teaching cannot be overestimated. Please

approach it carefully always examining your own life and beliefs in the light of Jesus' teaching.

9. Matthew 6:19-21: Summarize Jesus' teaching below.

10. Is this teaching impractical? Is Jesus teaching us to be irresponsible with our possessions? Why or why not?

11. Matthew 6:22-23: If the eye is good, the whole body will be full of light. How does this saying relate to the preceding and the following verses?

12. Matthew 6:24: Jesus makes himself extremely clear. It is impossible for us to serve God and pursue money at the same time. Money is a tool to be used in the pursuit of God (see Luke 16:9-12). It is not the object of our pursuit. What adjustment do you need to make in your attitude toward money and material possessions?

13. Matthew 6:25-34: In this passage Jesus gives his teaching on worry. He specifically mentions two things we should not worry about—our clothing and our food. He then gives two examples from nature—the birds and the lilies of the field. How does Jesus connect the two examples with the things we worry about? What is he teaching us about the nature of God?

14. Matthew 6:33-34. This is the summary of all that we have studied in this lesson. We are not to seek our glory from men through doing righteous acts such as prayer, fasting and giving to the poor. Nor are we to seek this worlds goods even though our need of such things is legitimate. Rather, our eye is to be single—full of light. We are to look to God, seeking him, his kingdom and his righteousness. As we do this, he will provide for us generously, abundantly. Take a few moments now. Meditate on these verses and allow God’s Spirit to speak to you about areas in your life that need to change. Use the space below to write out what you feel God would have you do.

Our Responses

1. A summary of Matthew 6:1: When you do good deeds, don’t do them for the eyes of any human being. When you do that, you can be sure that God won’t reward you.
This verse sets the tone for what is to follow. Jesus is teaching us that our good works, whatever they are, are not to be done for men’s applause. If we do that, God himself will politely stand aside so that we may receive what we are seeking. However, he will not reward us with his presence. The verses that follow give three illustrations of righteous deeds: giving to the poor, praying and fasting. In each of these, remember that the nearness of God (his kingdom) dictates that we do these works (as well as any other good works) for his sake alone and not for men’s approval. Jesus taught his followers to live their life before an audience of one—God!
2. If you give to needy people, don’t make a show of it in a meeting or in your discussions with other people. Hypocrites do this and it is the only reward they will get. When you do it, do it secretly. God will see it and you can be sure that he will reward you for it.
3. Jesus insists on secrecy because this is a sure way to verify that we are not doing it so that others will see us. He wants us to get to our bottom line

motivation. Why are we doing this? If it is to gain favor from those around us—our peers, our overseers, our leaders, our colleagues, then we can easily have that reward—their approval. However, if our motivation is to serve and love others out of an overflow of God’s love within us, then our good deeds will be in secret and our reward will be from God.

Of course, Jesus is not contradicting his former teaching about letting our light shine before men. In that passage, Jesus makes it clear that light, by its very nature cannot be hidden. “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” Indeed, if the light is in us, people will notice. However, we are not to do the works in order that others take note. People’s observation of a believer’s good works is not the reason he or she does them. It is merely a by-product good works. However, the reason he does good works is because his greatest value is to draw near to God, to know him more and give him glory.

Is it possible for the left hand not to know what the right hand is doing? No. One writer has suggested that what is meant is that our good works become second nature. We do them as naturally as speaking our native language. In this way, we ourselves are often unaware that we are doing good deeds. This is the reality of the person whose heart is in God’s kingdom. His good deeds flow naturally, spontaneously from within. He does them calling no attention to himself, for he himself is scarcely aware that he is doing them.²

4. First, we are to pray in secret, having gone into our room and closed the door. Secondly we are not to pray empty words and phrases, thinking that will somehow insure that God will hear us. Many religions and cults advocate repeating phrases over and over. We would not do this if we were talking to a person sitting with us in the same room! In the same way, Jesus tells us that such practices are not fitting for God’s children. This is a pagan approach to prayer which doesn’t fit with the new reality of the Kingdom—God is with us.

Some may say, but I have no room of my own. I share my room with siblings or family members. Whenever we read the Bible, we should search for the principle behind its teaching. Jesus’ instruction that our prayers be in secret is to verify that our motivation in praying is God alone. We should not be motivated to pray simply because others are praying and certainly not because others are watching. The Psalmist says “My soul thirsts for you, O God.” It is this desire for God and his presence that must drive us to prayer. It matters little whether we are in an empty room or on a crowded street. Our hearts can secretly cry out to our Father in heaven.

Figure 13:1 (solitary prayer)

5. Your answer.
6. The address: Our father in heaven
Petition 1: Hallowed be your name
Petition 2: Your Kingdom come

² Ibid, p. 192.

Petition 3: Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Petition 4: Give us today our daily bread.

Petition 5: Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors

Petition 6: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one

Verses 9 and 10 are concerned with God—our approach to him (Our Father), his name, his kingdom and his will. Verses 11-13 are concerned with ourselves—our needs, our relationships and protection from temptation.

7. ***Our Father in heaven:*** Jesus was the first of the prophets to teach us to pray to God as “our Father.” This must have been very unusual for those who first heard this prayer. Our approach to God is to be one of intimacy. We are to realize that God loves us. He desires that we come to him. He wants to meet our needs. Although our earthly fathers may have been cruel and unfeeling, we must not transfer those ideas to God, our Father. He is a compassionate and kind God who always has ample time for us.
Hallowed be your name: The name of God represents his person. Jesus says that in our prayers we are to set apart God’s name as a holy name. This recalls the third commandment “you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” God’s name is sacred, holy. This is the balance of the follower of Christ. God is near to us and loves us dearly as a Father yet he is also holy. Even our use of his name should demonstrate that truth.
Your kingdom come: We will have more to say about the kingdom of God in this course. For now, note that although Jesus has proclaimed that the kingdom is near (Matthew 4:17), still he instructs us to pray for the coming of the kingdom. God’s kingdom is among us and yet it has not been fully realized.
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven: This prayer implicates us in action. We cannot idly pray this prayer. We must be committed to seeing the will of God done on earth. In praying this prayer we are stating that we will work for justice for the oppressed and for truth. We will be involved in seeking mercy for those who are suffering. We will not be associated with dishonest business practices or political corruption. We want the perfect will of God on earth even as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread: There are two possible meanings to the word “daily.” The first is the most common, that we are asking God for today’s need of food. Jesus instructs us to ask God for this provision. In turn, we also must realize that what we receive is from his hand. It recalls God’s provision of the manna for the descendants of Abraham in the wilderness. The second possible meaning of this word is “the coming day,” such that the petition would read “give us this day tomorrow’s bread.” If this meaning is correct, we are instructed to ask God to begin giving us the blessings of his coming kingdom this very day. It shows our desire to receive God’s blessing at the present time and not only in the future when his kingdom has fully come.
Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors: The follower of Jesus

realizes that his sins, although great, have been forgiven. This realization has an immediate result in that we forgive others the small offenses they have committed against us. See Matthew 18:23-35. Are you holding grudges against others and refusing to forgive them? We cannot pray this prayer sincerely unless we are willing to forgive.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one: The follower of Christ is aware of his own weakness and asks to be delivered from temptations. Victory over temptation often comes from our refusal to go near it. James 1:14 makes it clear that one of the sources of temptation is our own lusts. The disciple of Jesus must be continually growing in his self-awareness. In this request, we ask God not to lead us into temptation. This demonstrates that we are aware of our own weakness and our tendency to wander away from God's truth.

8. What is striking is how little Jesus says about fasting. We repeat that Jesus' assumption is that his disciples will fast. He gives only one guideline for fasting. Make sure that you don't look like you are fasting to other people. Once again, we are to fast to God alone and for his pleasure. The Bible has more to say about fasting and we will look at it in the "Foundations" section of this lesson.
9. Do not build up a big bank account or worry about having a house full of goods. In this earth those things cannot last. Moth and rust or even thieves can take them away from you. Rather, you should be concerned about storing up good things in heaven. There, the good things you store up can't be taken away from you.

It is important to notice that Jesus' warning is not only for the rich. Poor people sometimes are more worried about wealth in this world than the rich. Jesus' instruction applies to you whether you have little or much.
10. Jesus is not teaching us to act irresponsibly. Remember that we must always understand passages in the Bible in light of other teachings in the Bible. For instance in Mark 7:10-13, Jesus condemns the Pharisees' teaching which devoted family goods to the temple when they should have been used for the care of parents. Jesus is not teaching us to carelessly throw away our money and possessions. Rather he is teaching that the purpose of our life is not the pursuit of these things. Life in the kingdom is a life that is aware of God's nearness and his intention to bless us. The word "heaven" is sometimes used as a substitute for the name of God. Thus, Jesus is probably not telling us to lay up treasures in heaven as a future dwelling place. Rather, he instructs us to invest our treasures in God. When God is our most valued treasure, no force on earth can take him away from us (See Romans 8:31-38) Our primary pursuit should be God's kingdom, God righteousness, God himself!
11. In the Middle East, the eye often refers to "envy" or what the person desires. The word used for "good" can also be rendered "sound" or "single." Jesus is

saying that our desires are to be sound. We are to be single-minded, focused on the presence of God in our lives. If that is the case, our entire lives will be flooded with light. However, if our desire is not sound and single, then darkness will prevail resulting in confusion, doubt and ultimately leading us away from God.

12. Your answer.

13. The birds and the lilies are provided for by God himself. God does not fail to provide for them. In fact, they never go hungry and they are never poorly clothed. The obvious implication is that your clothing and your food does not depend upon you. What good could worrying about it possibly do? Your food and clothing is provided by God. God, by his very nature, gives. He gives liberally and beyond what we deserve. If he is so giving to the lilies and the birds, will he not also provide for your needs and provide for them abundantly.

Again, this does not mean that followers of Christ are to do nothing to provide for their own needs. On the contrary, they are to be the most industrious of all people. However, their work is not as a result of fear that they will not have provision. They know that God is near. His kingdom is among them. He will provide for all their needs.

14. Your answer.

Foundations

The Spiritual Disciplines: Fasting

Disciplines are practices we engage in to draw near to God. Like anything we wish to do well, we must train ourselves to live the Christian life. This training will help us to lay aside sinful desires and gradually be conformed to the image of Christ. The starting point for the disciplines is joy. When we realize that the greatest joy comes from conforming our lives to Christ, then we are motivated to engage in the disciplines actively. If we want true freedom from our own self-interest and fear, the disciplines provide practical steps. The disciplines include fasting, prayer, study, service, celebration, fellowship, submission, solitude and confession. The next lessons will explore various spiritual disciplines.

The Bible does not prescribe set times of fasting for followers of Jesus. However, fasting was common in Jesus' experience as well as the apostles'. In the Middle East, our thinking about fasting is governed by the Islamic fast of Ramadan. However, there are clearly different reasons for fasting as followers of Christ. Four different types of fast are listed below.

1. A partial fast from food while drinking water. In Luke 4:2 we are told that Jesus ate nothing during his forty day fast. Therefore Satan tempted him to produce food. We can infer that Jesus' fast was a fast from food only.
2. A total fast from all food and drink (Acts 9:9; Esther 4:16).
3. A partial fast from certain kinds of food (Daniel 10:3)
4. Corporate fasts when a group of people fasts together (Leviticus 23:27; 2 Chronicles 20:1-4; Ezra 8:21-23)

The Bible has left us a great deal of freedom in regard to fasting. Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount assume that his followers will fast. Once he was asked why his disciples did not fast. He replied "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast (Matthew 9:15). Most interpreters understand the bridegroom's being taken away to refer to Jesus' ascension into heaven. Thus we find the apostles fasting after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension (Acts 13:2,3). However, we should be careful not to make a new law of fasting. Jesus has left us a great deal of liberty.

Fasting can be an aid in worshipping God. We draw apart from this world's niceties in order to set our hearts and minds upon God. Fasting is a difficult discipline and should normally be done in consort with other disciplines such as service or prayer. If we find fasting making us angry and annoyed with others, we must realize that we are missing the purpose of the fast. In such cases it would be better not to fast. As Isaiah reminds us, our fasts are to contribute to a true worship of God through serving others.

"Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard." Isaiah 58:4-8

Foundations

Justification by Faith: The Effect on our Works

- I. God's standard is perfect obedience to his law
- II. Sin renders us unable to obey the law.
 - A. Radical depravity.
 - B. Definition of sin: Guilt and shame
- III. Christ accomplished redemption from the curse of the law

- A. Christ fully kept the law on our behalf
- B. Christ became a curse for us delivering us from our sin and its effect.
- IV. Good works are the result of faith.
 - A. Our good works are a result of God's initiative to reconcile us to Himself
 - B. Our good works reflect God's goodness to a lost world

Middle Easterners frequently use the word "ma'alesh." It can be translated in a variety of ways, but the basic meaning is "overlook it, it doesn't matter." While we may use this phrase with our fellow human beings, we dare not use it in our dealings with God. We have seen that God is holy and perfect. He established a standard of righteousness for his people. When Jesus came, he did not negate that standard. He did not remove it. In fact, he raised the standard. His teaching showed us how utterly impossible it is for us to act consistently in a way that pleases God. In our attempt to please God, we come to the end of dead end street. On the one hand, we can please God if we simply keep his law but on the other hand we cannot please God because we have not kept his law. What is God's solution. Does he simply utter "ma'alesh?" Does he tell us to try harder? Does he allow us to do enough good works to wipe the slate clean and start all over?

The cruel deception held by many is that good works do away with bad works. This is a lie and a deadly enemy to our souls. We must resist it firmly. God's standard is not doing good things. It is a righteous standard that demands that we be holy people as he is holy. We must recognize that we fall hopelessly short of that standard. In fact, we are unable to attain that standard. Why?

Christian theology has taught the radical depravity of man. This means that sin, effects every aspect of man's being. David said that "I was born in sin and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51:5) This does not mean that man is as wicked as he can possibly be. We can all imagine that we could be more evil than we are. What it means is that sin has effected the very core of our being. No part of us is left untouched by sin. Therefore, although we are able to do good deeds, these deeds are unacceptable to merit God's favor because they are produced by sinful, depraved people. To illustrate, assume that you filled your car with 20 liters of gasoline. However, along with the 20 liters of gasoline was one liter of water. Would your car function normally? After all, it has 20 liters of gasoline to only one liter of water? Surely such a small amount of water would not effect the motor. No. In fact it will ruin the motor. It would be impossible to start the engine without taking out all the fuel—gas and water—and then refilling it with pure gasoline. Our good works are corrupted by something that is totally foreign to the nature of goodness, it is our sin. Sin ruins the good works that we desire to do and makes them unacceptable to a just and holy God.

Sin has two aspects. The first is guilt. When we sin, we become guilty before God. We deserve his punishment. I cannot take away this guilt by my efforts to do good any more than I could take away the fine for a traffic violation by stopping consistently at every red light for the rest of my life. Once I have violated the law, I am indebted to the law. The debt must be paid. Praying, fasting or making a pilgrimage cannot take away my sin. Something much greater is needed.

The second aspect is the shame that sin produces. This shame is a type of pollution to our souls. You will remember Adam and Eve's response when they disobeyed God. Their first instinct was to hide from God. They were ashamed of their nakedness and tried to hide from each other. It is sin that brings shame on human beings. This is the shame that causes us to run away from God. This is why we find ourselves disposed towards sin. "We are sinners not because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners."³ Paul exclaims "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." (Romans 7:15) What is needed to make us better is not a few good works, but a massive and radical change. Jesus referred to this radical change as a "new birth."

How is it that Jesus could accomplish this radical change for us? First, Jesus kept the law perfectly. He did all that the law required and he did it as a man. Although he had a human nature, he did not have a radically depraved nature like our own. Therefore, he was the only human being ever to fully keep the law of God. This is why God states from heaven "this is my Son whom I love, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17) Jesus' resurrection from the dead was the seal of God's approval on his life (Romans 1:4). He broke the bonds of death and went free after having endured the punishment of God for our sins.

Secondly, even though Jesus perfectly kept the law, he willingly accepted to bear the curse of God on our sin. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." (1 Peter 2:24) No other substitute would be sufficient. Jesus had to be perfect in his obedience to God in order to redeem a radically depraved human race. You remember that God pronounced to Adam and Eve that the result of their disobedience would be death. "When you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17) When Jesus died the shameful death on the cross, he was bearing man's punishment and shame.

Our response to Jesus determines our eternal destiny. The Bible makes it clear that we can unite ourselves to Jesus Christ by faith. The Bible refers to this new status as being "in Christ." When we are in Christ, we are joined with him in his death and resurrection. (Romans 6:3-6) Because of this reality Christians possess a new life. (2 Corinthians 5:17). This new life begins here and now. It does not mean that we suddenly stop sinning. It does mean that our basic desire is no longer for sin. It means that we have a new principle working in us. We desire to be like Christ. The fight is long and will not end until we are made perfect after death, but our new life has now begun. Good works come as a result of this new life. It is our nature to please God. It is an overflow of gratitude from a life that has been made new in Christ—a life free from the guilt of sin and pollution of shame! Thus the Christian's good works are not an attempt to earn God's favor, but a joyful expression of thanks to Him.

Further Reading

Romans 7
2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Memorize:

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

³ Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, p. 146.

The Sermon on the Mount (Part 3) Lesson 14

Living in the Fear of God

“If you love me you will obey what I command.” (John 14:15)

Jesus’ words fly in the face of contemporary thought. Love is often pictured as freedom. If I love someone or something, then I will give them total freedom. In contrast, Jesus says that true love for him will be characterized by obedience to all that he commands. Is Jesus being harsh? Self-centered? Inconsiderate of our needs?

Love is built upon trust. In order to grow in my love for my spouse, I must trust that she has only my best interest at heart. The same is true of the parent/child relationship. I remember that my Father used to insist that I obey him absolutely. It was difficult for me, especially during my teenage years. I often wanted to rebel. Yet, as I grew older, my Father grew wiser (at least he got wiser in my estimation). My Father insisted that I obey him because he loved me unreservedly. He wanted the best thing for me and he had enough wisdom to know what the best thing was—wisdom I did not have at that young age.

Imagine yourself standing before Jesus trying to explain why it was that you did not do what he commanded. Would you tell him you knew better? Perhaps you would say that his words seemed outdated. Maybe you would point to your superior knowledge of contemporary culture. All of that is ridiculous. Jesus demands our total obedience. However, it is not a capricious or self-centered demand. He demands it because he loves us without reserve. He has demonstrated that love. The way of life that Jesus taught is the best way for us. We reject it at our peril. This is what we mean by the “fear of God.” It is an understanding that Jesus knows what is best for us. That knowledge enables us to accept the truth of his words and obey them willingly. The fear of God is trust, reverential trust built on an assurance of God’s love for us. Proverbs teaches us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

In Matthew 7, we will see Jesus exhorting us to live our lives in the fear of God. It is a reverential, trusting love that draws us near to God to live in his presence and walk with him. As you approach your study, realize that this fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. In order to walk with God in the freedom and joy he intends, this foundation must be well laid. Ask God to do that now, using these or similar words:

Father, you know the beginning from the end. You know me intimately and completely for you created me. Nothing that concerns me is hidden from you. In fact, nothing at all is hidden from you. So I come to you confident in your knowledge. I am also confident in your love. I know that what you command me must be for my good. Grow within me this reverent, trusting love for you. Let me walk with you. Apply your truth to my heart. Change me for your glory and my good, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

Examining the Scripture

Read Matthew 7 carefully.

1. Matthew 7:1-12: In this passage Jesus gives a golden rule. It is a summarizing principle of his teaching on relationships with other people. Write it in the space below.

2. We could summarize the teaching of Matthew 7:1-5, by simply saying “do not judge or condemn others.” The passage indicates the reason why we should not judge others. Think about this reason (or reasons) for a moment and write it in the space below.

3. Do you think Jesus was talking about condemning other people in our words or in our thoughts as well? Is it possible to live without condemning others?

4. Why do we condemn others?

5. Matthew 7:6 is somewhat difficult to understand. In the context (7:1-12), Jesus is talking about relationships and how his disciples should relate with others. First of all, the disciple of Jesus must not condemn others (1-5). Verse 6 also gives a negative example of how we relate with other people. With this background, try to summarize Jesus’ teaching in the space below.

6. If this understanding is correct (that we should not attempt to force our good things upon others), what implications does that have for our relationships?

7. In verses 7-12 Jesus relates his instruction for how we should get what we need. What is it that he instructs us to do?

8. What is the promise that Jesus gives concerning how God will respond to our asking?

9. Now we return to the Golden Rule: "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." Spend a few moments meditating on this verse. Have you practiced it in the past? What damaged relationships have you left behind due to your disobedience to Jesus' teaching. Take some time now to confess to him and determine to treat others exactly as you would want to be treated. Use the space below to make a note of specific action steps you should take to mend relationships.

-
10. Jesus is now coming to the end of his sermon. He leaves us with a warning concerning the way of life he is teaching in Matthew 7:13-14. What is this warning?

11. Read Matthew 7:15-27 and try to determine exactly what is meant by this narrow gate. What, in your opinion, is the narrow gate by which one enters into life?

12. There are, of course, false ways. Matthew 7:15-23 gives two tests for discerning the narrow way from the broad way of the majority. What are these two tests.

13. Finally read Matthew 7:24-29. The house of the wise builder will stand firm because it has been founded on the rock. The wise builder is the wise “doer” of Christ’s commandments. In your opinion, what do the winds and waves represent? What is Jesus teaching us about practicing his commandments?

Our Responses:

1. It is in verse 11: In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.

2. We are not to condemn others because we have similar faults and even greater ones. Following Christ means that we are aware of self. We seek to know ourselves objectively and evaluate who we really are. One cannot be a follower of Christ and hide behind a mask. We must be aware of the sin that lies deep within each of us—lust, envy, passions, evil intentions. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” (I John 1:8)

We get a glimpse of Jesus’ humor here as well as the fact that he was a trained carpenter. He says that our brother’s fault is like a small speck—a piece of sawdust that only irritates the eye. Our own fault is likened to a plank. Is Jesus really saying that my faults are bigger than everybody else’s. I suggest that the plank refers to what we know to be true about ourselves. When we see our own faults, they are huge—like a plank. By contrast the small fault we see in our brother is like a speck of dust. The fault we see in our brother is only a small portion of the reality. So, why should we condemn him when our own condemnation is even more deserving?

3. Jesus always spoke of matters of the heart. I believe he was addressing not only what we say about others, but also the way we think about them.

It is very difficult to live in this way and it will require that we retrain ourselves. Perhaps the best way is to simply memorize this passage and quote it to yourself each time you think a condemning thought about another person. The important thing is that you don’t simply treat it as a nice moral teaching and then make no effort to actually implement it in your practical life. This teaching is intended to change the way we think and act.

This does not mean that we are to close our eyes and naively pretend that everyone is wonderful. See Galatians 6:1-5 for Paul’s recommendation on how we should approach people who are living in open sin. The spiritually mature person is to restore him gently being mindful of his own sin. The absence of condemnation of others is not naïve. As Christians we realize that the sin which lies within us also lies within everyone else around us. Remembering our own depravity will help us fight the tendency to condemn others (see Matthew 18:23-25) We are not surprised by the evil of the human heart. However, we recognize that the only judge who can condemn or justify the sinner is Jesus himself.

4. Our reason for condemnation usually lies in our own inferiority and insecurity. We assure ourselves of our worth by denigrating or belittling someone else. One does not have to consider such words deeply to see that they are poles apart from authentic discipleship to Jesus Christ. Assurance of Christ’s love and acceptance can free us from condemnation of others. To be fully happy and blessed by another’s advancement is a mark of true maturity. Are you truly happy when others prosper and succeed?

5. Jesus uses a hyperbole—overstatement to create an effect. He is not saying that these people are like pigs and dogs. Rather, he uses pigs and dogs to show the stupidity of trying to give them something holy and useful. They simply will not be able to benefit from it and the one who gives it will be harmed in the process. The emphasis is not so much on the pigs and dogs as it is on the idiocy of someone actually giving them pearls and holy things. So, we can summarize this idea as follows: “Do not try to force the good things you have on others who are not ready for them. They won’t benefit from your good things and you will only hurt yourself in the end.”

It seems unlikely that Jesus would compare certain classes of people to dogs or pigs. Remember that earlier he taught that God causes the sun to rise on both the evil and the good. He exhorts us to be like the Father in this respect. So, Jesus is not asking us to withhold good things from evil people. Rather, the crux of the issue is the people’s preparedness to receive good things.⁴

6. Amazingly, God respects human will and the mind’s freedom to choose its own options. We cannot force others to come to our conclusions. This is a way of manipulating people. We can only share our valuable and holy things with minds that are prepared to come to the same conclusions. This is a work of God’s spirit. To try to shortcut it is to try to forcefeed pearls to swine! It simply will not work.

This is especially important for relationships of new believers from non-Christian backgrounds with their parents and families. Normally, we should resist the temptation to evangelize our families. We forget that we have taken months and years to come to our convictions. We should not foolishly expect that they will come to the same conclusions after an hour conversation. Normally, our changed behavior should be our first witness to our new faith. Only after the Spirit of God has prepared our families should we share with them in greater detail. It has been said “preach the gospel all the time and when necessary, use words.” Remember that your life is a living gospel. Let people read your life, then when they ask about the source of your hope, you’ll be in a good position to tell them.

7. Very simply, it is by asking. We are not to condemn other people either in the way we think or in what we say. Nor are we to try to force our best ideas on them when they are not ready to receive them. We often think that this teaching only relates to prayer. Prayer is part of what is intended as is made clear by verse 11. It seems that the asking, seeking and knocking mentioned in verse 7 have as much to do with our relationships with others as with our relationship to God. By asking others, we respect their opinions and leave the freedom of decision to them rather than trying to manipulate them through condemnation (trying to impose on them a sense of guilt) or prematurely forcing our conclusions on them. We simply lay out our request with humility and a respect of the other person’s right to choose.

⁴ Willard, *Divine Conspiracy* pp 228-229.

8. As parents desire to give good things to their children, so God desires to give good things to us. Jesus encourages us not to be afraid to ask God for the things we desire. We are not to worry and fret over them (6:25-34). Nor should we condemn and manipulate others for what we are seeking. Prayer is Jesus' answer. Jesus has declared that God is willing to answer our prayers and give us all that we need.
9. Your answer.
10. The warning is that the majority of people will not accept his teaching. If you purpose to live according to the teaching of Jesus, you will be one of the minority. However, you can also be assured that Jesus' teachings are the way of life. It is the narrow gate that leads to eternal life which few find.
11. The narrow gate is obedience. Some assume that it is correct beliefs, knowledge of the Bible, faithful church attendance, self-sacrifice, etc. Jesus is abundantly clear that only those who obey him are his disciples. It is an obedience which flows from a love for the Father and a transformed heart which we spoke about in chapters five and six.
12. The first is fruit. The fruit is the result of the actions or teaching. In this case, religious leaders are in view (false prophets). Jesus says we are to look to the outcome of their teaching. Does it lead to the same conduct and behavior that Jesus has taught us in the Sermon on the Mount, or does it lead to vanity, self aggrandizement, perversity? The fruit of a teaching will clearly demonstrate if it represents the narrow way to life or the broad way to destruction.

The second test of the narrow way is obedience. This, according to Jesus, cannot be faked. Beware of those who boast in miracles, prophecies and the exorcism of demons as the fruit of their life in Christ. There is nothing wrong in these great acts, however, if the person points to this as the sure indication that he is one of Christ's followers, he is on the wrong road. Rather, Jesus insists that obedience is the mark of the true disciple. This is an unmistakable mark which can be identified quickly and easily by even simple and uneducated believers. Doing what Christ says is the true mark of the disciple.
13. The house is solid, built upon a rock. However, it still must face adverse conditions. The follower of Jesus is not removed from the storms of life. However, it is following Jesus that will give us the inner strength to stand strong in the midst of life's adversities. Jesus says "in this world you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) The path of following Jesus is the choice of the minority. It is a way that has adversity, but it is the only way that leads to eternal life.

Foundations

The Spiritual Disciplines: Prayer

Volumes have been written on the necessity and privilege of prayer. Reading these books can be a great encouragement to prayer. However, reading about it is no substitute for actual prayer. Being a disciple of Jesus is really quite simple. It means that we have apprenticed ourselves to Jesus Christ to learn the way he lived his life and become like him. In order to be an apprentice, we must of necessity spend time with the master. We must observe his reactions, seek to understand the reason for them and then react in similar ways as our character is gradually conformed to his. This is the essence of prayer. It is spending time in the presence of God for the purpose of enjoying him and growing in Christ-likeness.

So how does one embark on such a discipline? First, the Bible does not lay down prayer rules. It does provide models for us--both people who pray and actual prayers.

Models to Emulate in Prayer

Jesus was the primary model for all of life and godliness. The Bible only records selected episodes related to Jesus' prayer life. Still, they are enough to be highly instructive.

1. Jesus prayed regularly. His normal custom was to rise early and pray alone (Mark 1:35).
2. Occasionally, he took his closest companions with him for prayer (Luke 9:28-36).
3. At least once in his life he spent an extended period in the desert presumably for prayer and fasting (Matthew 4)
4. After exhausting days, Jesus spent time in solitude, presumably in prayer (John 6:15).
5. Before important decisions (e.g. calling his disciples) Jesus spent the entire night in prayer (Luke 6:12-13).
6. At transition points of Jesus' ministry, he was found praying alone (Luke 9:18-20).
7. When facing immense persecution and misunderstanding, Jesus poured out his heart to his Father in prayer (John 17).

Prayer can be categorized into many types: confession, adoration, intercession, thanksgiving, etc. However, most of the Biblical prayers are comprised of elements of all the various kinds of prayer. The best advice is probably not to worry about the outward form of prayer or about the specific choice of words. Prayer is the spontaneous overflow of our heart's desire. Words come easily when desire is strong. Come before God with an earnest desire to be in his presence. Set aside a time and place where you can be reasonably free from distractions (Jesus chose the early morning hour). Then spend time in the presence of God. Share your desires with him. Tell him your concerns and express your thanks to him. Don't worry about the length of time you spend in prayer. Just spend the amount of time you feel is necessary to express yourself to God. Many disciples have found it helpful to actually write their prayers. Writing out our prayers

helps us to focus our mind while praying. It also provides a record of prayer so that when God answers we will be encouraged to continue.

Various postures are used for prayer in the Bible. Some pray while kneeling. Others pray while standing with their hands lifted toward heaven. Still others pray lying face down on the ground. Different postures can be used to express the different states of our heart when we approach God. In confession, lying facedown might be most appropriate. If we are expressing our praise to God, standing with uplifted hands is good. Kneeling is good for intercession. While there is no law, we do well to remember that our bodies as well as our souls should be expressive of our attitude toward God. For this reason, it is good to vary our posture—not always sitting to pray (even though the Bible does record sitting as a posture for prayer in 1 Kings 19:4)

Following are some outstanding examples of prayers in the Bible. Note that the Psalms are a book of various kinds of prayers. They are frequently quoted by Jesus.

- Psalm 51: A prayer of confession of sin.
- Psalm 103: A prayer of praise and thanksgiving
- 1 Kings 8: A public prayer of dedication of the temple
- Matthew 6:9-13: the Lord's prayer
- John 17: Often called Jesus' high priestly prayer because he intercedes for his disciples and for us who will believe on him in the future.
- Ephesians 1:15-18: Paul's prayer for the Ephesians.
- Revelation 5:9-10: Prayers of the saints in heaven.

Finally, the apostle Paul instructs the followers of Jesus to “pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Obviously, this does not mean that we are to pray verbally or even consciously twenty-four hours a day. It does mean that our relationship with God is open and free such that we can and do express our hearts' desires to him at any moment.

Foundations: Sanctification

- I. Sanctification: A process
- II. Sanctification is God's will for us
- III. The two parts of sanctification
 - A. Mortification of the old man
 - B. Quickening of the new man
- IV. Sanctification affects all of life
- V. Sanctification requires our participation

Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness. (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 35)

Our last lesson discussed justification and its relationship to our good works. Justification happens at a point in time. Sanctification, on the other hand, is a process. It begins at justification and it will continue until we die or until Jesus returns. After a baby is conceived, it must remain in the security of its mother's womb until it is born.

Even after birth, growth must take place if the baby is to live a normal life. New life is conceived in us when we are justified. However, we continue to grow and develop becoming more and more like the new person we are called to be throughout all our earthly lives. When we see Jesus Christ, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is (1 John 3:2). At that point, our sanctification is complete and a new phase begins which is glorification.

Many disciples of Jesus struggle with finding God's will. They seek to know God's will as to who they should marry or what city they should live in. This is well and good. However, God's will for every believer is our sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3). This is the main objective that God wants us to pursue each day and each moment of our life as Jesus' disciples. Moreover, we have assurance from God that he will complete his sanctifying work in us. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

There are two parts of sanctification. The first is called mortification of the old man. In the Bible it is referred to as the crucifixion of the old man with Christ (Gal. 2:20). The old man is our human nature which is inclined to sin. It does not die suddenly, but gradually. (See Romans 6:6 and Galatians 5:24) We don't immediately lose our old bad habits and sinful patterns just because we've been justified. If we had a pattern of lying, stealing or committing adultery when we came to Christ, we will have to exert continual effort to lay aside those old patterns. Throughout life, we are called to reckon ourselves as dead to sin but alive to God through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:11). This "reckoning" is our responsibility. We are to live in the light of the reality that our new nature is not given to sin. Our business here on earth is to prepare ourselves for that sinless existence after Jesus returns.

The second part of sanctification is the quickening (or making alive) of the new man. This part happens at the same time as the mortification of the old man. As our old, sinful nature is put to death, God raises a new nature in its place. The Bible refers to this as our "being raised together with Christ." (Romans 6:4-5; Colossians 2:12)

As sanctification takes place in the inner life of man, it affects the entirety of man's nature—intellect, emotions and will. Our sanctification should affect our body as well as our spirit. Our body is not disconnected to our soul. Rather the body is the instrument through which the soul carries out its acts. Therefore, sanctification does not merely affect man's spirit. Our bodily actions are also affected—our words, where we go, our habits, what we look at, etc.

Finally, although sanctification is God's work in us, it is a work in which we cooperate. The Bible is clear that God requires us to pursue his will through obedience to his commands. In order to grow in sanctification, Scripture exhorts us to find fellowship with other Christians (Hebrews 10:25). As we grow in Christ-likeness, we will need to be in fellowship with other believers. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17) Part of this fellowship should be meeting together for worship with the breaking of bread. Jesus promised that as often as we eat this bread and

drink this cup we show forth his death until he comes again. We are also exhorted to meditate regularly on the truths of God's word. "How shall a young man keep his way pure, by keeping it according to your word." (Psalm 119:9).

As we apply ourselves to these things, we will begin to see the process of sanctification move forward in our lives. The old nature of sin will become weaker and, in its place, the new nature of righteousness will begin to have more influence on our actions. We must never forget that sanctification is a lifelong process. After all, the essence of growth in Jesus Christ is personal change. We have come to Jesus, not to change only one time, but to become people who are continually changing and growing.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
2 Corinthians 3:18

Futher Reading

Colossians 3:12-4:6

Memorize:

Matthew 7:24-27

The Kingdom: Matthew 13

Lesson 15

Until now we have looked at Jesus' initial teaching about the kingdom. He proclaimed that the Kingdom was near in Matthew 4:17 and 23. The Sermon on the Mount is the constitution of the Kingdom. It contains the principles by which the Kingdom operates. What is this Kingdom? How does it grow? Are the church and the Kingdom one and the same? What are its characteristics? Is it earthly? Is it heavenly?

The titles "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" are probably used interchangeably in the Bible. They both mean the same thing.

Where is the Kingdom? Luke 17:20-21 answers this question.

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

God's kingdom is not demarcated by the boundaries of any earthly political state. Rather, the Kingdom is within the people of God. In fact, the kingdom of God is the rule or reign of God. He reigns in our lives and over our affairs.

There is a lot of confusion about what this Kingdom is, how it grows and what role we have to play in it. Matthew 13 is Jesus' most detailed teaching on the Kingdom. Here, if we are attentive, we will find principles to help us throughout our Christian life. The teaching of Matthew 13 can help us avoid many pitfalls. As we understand the true nature of the Kingdom, we will spare ourselves a great deal of agony and confusion.

Father, as I look to Your word, I ask your Holy Spirit to come and be my teacher. Please illumine my heart by your Holy Spirit so that I may understand your Kingdom. Let me be a faithful subject of you, my king and a fruitful disciple of Jesus. Give me the courage to face my wrong assumptions about your kingdom and to be transformed in my mind, will and emotions. Let me increase in love for you and follow you more closely. Through Jesus my Lord, Amen.

Examining the Scripture

Read Matthew 13 in its entirety. The chapter contains seven parables. A parable is simply a scene taken from every day life to depict a spiritual truth. Jesus uses parables masterfully. Each of the parables would have been readily understood by his audience. Each of the seven parables depicts an aspect (perhaps more than one) of the Kingdom. The first parable is unique. The other six parables can be divided into three groups of two. You will see that parables 2 and 7 are similar. Parables 3 and 4 are similar and should be treated as a group. Numbers 5 and 6 are also very similar. The outline below demonstrates.

1. The Parable of the sower
2. The parable of the weeds
 3. The parable of the mustard seed
 4. The parable of the yeast
 5. The parable of the hidden treasure
 6. The parable of the pearl of great price
7. The parable of the net

1. In Matthew 13:1-23, Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven. He likens the Kingdom to an agricultural scene which would have been very familiar during his day. On the surface, it seems that Jesus is trying to make his teaching accessible to the people. He wants them to understand. However, verses 11-17 express a different view. According to these verses, a particular group of people understand the secrets of the kingdom while another group does not. Who understands and who does not? Why?

2. What does verse 13 tell us about the reason Jesus spoke in parables?

3. Verses 14-15 quote Isaiah 6:9-10. Are the people referred to in this passage responsible for their calloused hearts and closed eyes?

Before we look at the parable of the sower, take a moment to thank God because he has blessed your eyes to see and your ears to hear. Remember that prophets longed to see and understand these things. Yours is a great privilege—to see and understand Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom.

4. In 13:3-9, the sower sows seed on four different kinds of soil. What is the determining factor in the production of the crop?

5. Fill in the following chart:

Type of Soil *Problem* *Crop Production*

6. What do the following elements of the parable represent according to verses 18-23?

The Seed: _____

The Soil: _____

7. According to Jesus what are the four kinds of responses to the message of the kingdom?

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

8. Now read the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30) along with its explanation (Matthew 13:36-43). [When Jesus says “the Kingdom of Heaven is like..., the Kingdom is like the whole scene which follows, not merely like “a man.”] Jesus makes the meaning of this parable very clear to the disciples.

Parable image

Representation in life

The sower	
The field	
The good seed	
The enemy	

The harvest	
The harvesters	

9. The second parable deals with the results of the Kingdom message throughout history until Jesus' return. The parable of the net in Matthew 13:47-50 resembles the parable of the weeds. There is no presence of the enemy in this parable, but the result is still the same—good and bad fish are caught together as good wheat and poisonous weeds are harvested together. In the second and seventh parable, Jesus is warning us about a Kingdom reality. In your own words, what is he warning about?

10. In Matthew 13:31-33 we find the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast. The mustard seed was the smallest seed used by farmers in Palestine in those days. Yeast, as well, is characterized by its small size. A very small amount of yeast is sufficient to work its way through a large lump of dough. Note that Jesus does not give us an explanation of these parables. In your opinion, what aspect of the Kingdom is small?

11. Do you think that this parable is meant to be understood as applying to an individual (i.e. The Kingdom starts small and insignificant in our hearts and then grows to have a great impact in our lives) or on a corporate level (i.e. the Kingdom started insignificant in the world but is growing to have a great impact on the world.)? Why?

12. In Matthew 13:44-45 Jesus uses two other word-pictures to describe aspects of his Kingdom. [Please note that the kingdom is not like the treasure or the merchant, but the entire parable is meant to reflect the kingdom.] The following explanations may help to clarify the meaning of these parables.

Because the country was invaded often, rich people would bury their treasure in the fields. The person who unearthed the treasure was probably a day laborer who worked for a set wage. He buried the treasure “in order to

forestall the possibility of the present owner claiming to have buried the treasure himself.”⁵

“Pearls were fished in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Indian Ocean. The word used marks the merchant as a wholesale dealer, a big businessman who traveled to such places, not a small-time shop-keeper.”⁶ The merchant was an expert in pearls. He had seen the most valuable and the least valuable.

In both parables, there is an exchange, a business transaction what is it? What motivates this transaction in both cases?

13. In your view, what Kingdom realities does Jesus express in these two brief parables.

14. Each kingdom reality is related by means of two separate parables. Now try to summarize from memory the Kingdom realities which Jesus teaches:

Kingdom Reality from Parable 1 (The parable of the sower)

Kingdom Reality from parables 2 and 7 (The weeds and the fishnet)

Kingdom reality from parables 3 and 4 (mustard seed and yeast)

Kingdom reality from parables 5 and 6 (hidden treasure and pearl of great price)

⁵ Knox Chamblin, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 124.

⁶ Ibid.

Our Responses:

1. The disciples understand the secrets of the Kingdom, but the crowds do not. Jesus says that the disciples “have been given” to understand the kingdom. Spiritual insight is God-given. Paul says “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18)
2. Jesus spoke in parables because the people did not understand the secrets of the Kingdom. This is different from saying he spoke in parables to prevent them from understanding. Jesus knew that understanding was given from God. His parables were intended to help them towards understanding the Kingdom. For those who were given understanding from God, the parables revealed Kingdom realities. For those who did not have God-given understanding, the parables were mysterious. So, there are two elements to our understanding of the Kingdom—the first is teaching. This is represented in the parables. We must gather new information on the Kingdom. The crowds had access to this information in the form of the parables. However, the information did not reveal any truth to them because they did not have the second element—God-given understanding. The crowds did not have this. The disciples did.
3. Yes. Some people wrongly assert that if spiritual insight is God-given, then the people are not responsible. However, the Bible presents a different view. Human beings are responsible for their hard heart. God is willing to heal (verse 15) but people are not willing to turn to him. Theologians refer to this doctrine as “concurrence.” It means that God works out his will but does not override or abuse the will of human beings. Both human will and God’s will are working concurrently (at the same time). While spiritual understanding is God-given, the parables made that understanding accessible to the people. They refused to pursue that understanding due to their hard hearts and closed eyes.
4. It is the type of soil. The same seed is sowed by the same sower. The only difference is the type of soil.

5. ***Type of Soil*** ***Problem*** ***Crop Production***

Path	Birds ate seed	None
Rocky ground	Shallow roots; sun scorched the plants	Quick crop that did not last due to shallow roots
Among thorns	Thorns choked plants	Crop grew but was

		killed by thorns
Good soil	No problems	30, 60 and 100 fold crop

Note that in the rocky ground probably refers to a layer of rock just under the soil. Therefore, the ground looked like good ground. The plants came up normally, but the roots were prevented from going deep by the rocks. The sun scorched the weakened plants and foiled the crop. Note well that quick production of fruit is not necessarily a good sign. According to this parable it may be a sign of shallow roots!

6. The Seed: the message of the kingdom

The Soil: the heart of the one who hears the message of the kingdom

7. (1) The hard soil is the hardened heart. This seed never penetrates this soil because it is snatched away by the evil one (Satan).

(2) The rocky ground: This heart appears to be receiving the good seed. In fact, it looks to be very productive soil. The plant springs up quickly. However, it dies just as quickly due to a lack of depth of the root. Jesus specifically relates this soil to those who fall away from him due to trouble or persecution. Their shallow roots don't give them the staying power they need.

(3) The thorny ground: This ground receives the seeds, but the plants are choked when they come up. Jesus relates this ground to the person who has worldly cares and concerns.

(4) The good ground which produces an abundant harvest—30, 60 or 100 times the amount that was sown.

- 8.

The sower	The Son of Man (Jesus Christ)
The field	The world
The good seed	The sons of the Kingdom (disciples of Jesus)
The enemy	The devil
The harvest	The end of the age (when Jesus returns)
The harvesters	The angels

9. The kingdom has an enemy. This enemy has a strategy to imitate the good seed (the sons of the Kingdom). Of course, the seed of the enemy is not good seed at all. The word used for the weeds is a special type of poisonous plant that resembles wheat. The warning is that not everyone that looks like a disciple of Jesus is his disciple. Not every group that looks like a church is a

true church.⁷ This is a significant Kingdom reality which we would do well to ponder. God has seen fit to leave the poisonous plant which looks like the good seed in the field with the good seed. The time of separation is at the end of the age. Until then Christians are to be discerning. This recalls Jesus' conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. He warns that not everyone who says to him "Lord, Lord" will enter the Kingdom of heaven. Entrance into the Kingdom is not through doing miracles or prophesying or even casting our demons. Rather, those who do the will of the Father will enter his Kingdom. This is a continuing reality of Christ's Kingdom. Jesus' disciples included Judas Iscariot. The early church included Ananias and Saphira. The Galatian church was being threatened by the Judaizers. Jude warned against false doctrine. The same is true in our own day. The lesson of the parable is be vigilant, do not believe every teaching and do not follow every teacher.

Also, the separation of the good from the bad is to take place at the end of the age. The church will contain both true and false disciples in this world. When Jesus returns, he will vindicate his disciples and all others will be punished. These parables help us remember to wait for God's vindication rather than taking matters into our own hands (Romans 12:19)

10. Not only are the mustard seed and the yeast small, they are virtually invisible. Both are hidden. The seed is hidden in the ground and the yeast is hidden in the lump of dough. However, both have a powerful effect. The mustard seed becomes the largest of the garden herbs (sometimes reaching up to 10 feet high) and the bit of yeast leavens a large lump of dough. So, the kingdom starts small and seemingly insignificant but it works powerfully.
11. I prefer the latter view—that the Kingdom began small historically but continues to have a mighty impact on our world. The branches of the mustard plant recall Daniel 4:21. The birds that come to rest in it may refer to the nations of the earth. Also, verse 31 refers to the field which represented the world in the former parable.

Remember that Jesus' ministry was located in and around Galilee and Judea. Although he encountered many different peoples such as Jews, Greeks, Samaritans, Syrophoenicians, Romans ,etc., his was not a world-wide ministry. Yet, he fully expected the Kingdom to have a far-reaching impact on the world. Today, followers of Christ number over 1 billion from every political nation of the world. The good news of the Kingdom has affected the entire world.
12. In both cases, the finder of the treasure joyfully sells all that he possesses in order to obtain the treasure. The motivation in both cases is the great worth of the treasure.

⁷ Knox Chamblin, *Commentary on Matthew*, p. 121. *Although the church is not mentioned by name, the bad seed is sown among the good seed. Therefore we should expect the bad seed to appear in the church, not only in the world.*

13. First, the Kingdom is of greater worth than any earthly treasure. Both the pearl merchant and the laborer who found the treasure in the field sell their possessions without hesitation in order to obtain the newly found treasure. Secondly, the Kingdom does require an exchange. There is a cost to following Jesus, being his disciple and living in his Kingdom. The emphasis is on the great value of the Kingdom, but we cannot forget that obtaining the pearl of great price is linked to a joyful abandon—selling all the other pearls. Indeed, this is a sign of a true disciple of Jesus. He ceases to cling to other valuable possessions. Like the apostle Paul, he considers them all to be rubbish in view of the surpassing value of gaining Christ Jesus. The false disciple will never make such a choice. The true disciple of Jesus Christ is characterized by joyful abandon to him.
14. Kingdom Reality from Parable 1 (The parable of the sower)

Penetration of the Kingdom into human hearts: Understanding of the message of the kingdom is God-given for hearts that are prepared.

Kingdom Reality from parables 2 and 7 (The weeds and the fishnet)

Pretenders in the Kingdom: There are imitation disciples who appear to be part of the Kingdom. They will not be removed until Jesus returns to judge.

Kingdom reality from parables 3 and 4 (mustard seed and yeast)

Progress of the Kingdom: The Kingdom begins small and hidden. However, it grows steadily and powerfully.

Kingdom reality from parables 5 and 6 (hidden treasure and pearl of great price)

Price of the Kingdom: No earthly treasure is comparable to the value of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Foundations

Spiritual Disciplines: Fellowship

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

When we speak of fellowship, we are referring to the bond between believers which is created by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The gathering of Jesus' disciples is unlike any other. It is in the context of fellowship that our spiritual gifts are exercised (See 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, I Peter 4). Areas of our life to which we are blind suddenly become visible. We are mentored and guided by those who are older and more mature in the faith. Practical areas such as our marital relationship, discipline of our children, our speech, etc. are helped as we rub shoulders with other believers. Our vision is rekindled and our witness is strengthened.

Jesus' prayer in John 17 is that we (his disciples) will be one even as he is one with the Father. Fellowship poses a great challenge to many disciples of Christ as relationships between believers can become strained. The temptation is to go it alone—to take the attitude that it is me and God against the world. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus had intimate relationships with Lazarus, Mary and Martha. He shared his life with the twelve disciples, three of whom (Peter, James and John) were considered the “inner circle” of his friends. The great apostle Paul was a man who had many intimate relationships. Close friends from many different backgrounds accompanied him on his travels (Acts 20:4-5). He gave attention to developing these relationships (See Romans 16:1-23).

If tension in relationships causes a break in our fellowship, Scripture gives us some guidelines for reconciliation.

1. “Above all, love one another deeply for love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8) Seek to develop love for God's people which is not self-serving. Look to serve others and assist in their growth and happiness.
2. Remember that much of what offends you is due to your own preferences and background. Romans 14 carefully exhorts us not to do anything that would offend another brother. Seek to be aware of your own behavior which others might find offensive. Do not excuse it by saying “I'm just that way.” Purpose to change.
3. If you are aware that you have offended someone, Scripture commands you to go to him and be reconciled (Matthew 5:23-24) before engaging in an act of worship.
4. If another believer has sinned against you, Scripture compels you to go to him and show him his fault in private, just between the two of you. Only if he refuses to listen are you to take other believers along. If he persists in his sin, then the church as a whole has to deal with him. (See Matthew 18:15-18)

If you have been a follower of Jesus for very long, you will understand why fellowship is called a “discipline.” It requires us to set aside our preferences and our background in order to find our place in the body of Christ—not an easy task! It has been pointed out that although regular attendance of the meeting of the church does not make a believer mature, it is often the best indicator that a believer will stay the course of his faith. Spend a few moments reflecting on your relationships with other followers of Jesus. Which one of the four guiding principles listed above do you need to give

attention to? Finally, ask God to direct you how to use your gifts to serve other believers in your area in practical ways.

Foundations: The Atonement

- I. Introduction
- II. Definition
- III. Two aspects to atonement
 - A. Substitution
 - 1. Objection of injustice of God
 - 2. Objection of personal atonement
 - B. Satisfaction
- IV. The roles of Father and Son

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming he said to some of his followers “look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) In that simple sentence John expressed the longing of the Old Testament that came to fruition in the new. What was needed was a solution to sin. “Taking away the sin of the world” is the essence of the atonement.

The word “atonement” is first used in the Old Testament (Exodus 32:20; Leviticus 1:4). The root meaning of the word is “to cover.” In that sense it means a “covering” for sin and is defined as “reconciliation.” In a very real sense, God covers the shame caused by our sin. The word used in the New Testament (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17), has a very similar meaning. The idea of “appeasing” God’s wrath is also seen in this word. Therefore, atonement for sins contains the two ideas of covering sins and thereby restoring God’s favor to the sinner.

There are two aspects to the doctrine of the atonement. The first is expressed in the words “on behalf of”—that is to say that the atonement is substitutionary or vicarious. Jesus made atonement “on behalf of” or “in the place of” the sinner. Many have raised objections to this substitutionary atonement. Usually the objection says that this doctrine does not adequately hold forth God’s justice as the innocent person suffers while the guilty person goes free. However, perfect justice is done. In the city where I live, fines for traffic violations are paid when one goes to renew his driver’s license. Suppose that I approach the window to renew my license only to be informed that I have to pay a fine of 1000 pounds! There is no way I can pay such an amount. I am confused and bewildered. To my great astonishment, a kind man behind me in line puts down 1000 pounds. I try to thank him and even offer to repay him. He insists that he merely wants to do a kindness for me. In such a case, would the government of my country refuse to renew my license because someone else had paid my fine? Of course not. The fine is paid and I can renew my license.

God has revealed that atonement by a substitute is not only valid, it is the only way that real atonement can be made for sin. The substitutes payment of a penalty for a sin he did not commit presents no moral dilemma as long as the judge/lawgiver accepts the substitute. In this case, the judge/lawgiver is the substitute. Some who voice this objection do not understand that God is one in the holy trinity. Therefore, there is no

sense of competition in the work of the atonement. The Father's wrath is not working against the Son's mercy. Both Father and Son work together in perfect harmony to accomplish the atonement.

Only Jesus Christ could accomplish the atonement. Most objectors to the vicarious atonement hold that each person is responsible for his own atonement as no laden person can bear the sin of another. Jesus is not a "laden" person. He is God in the flesh and therefore is perfectly able to bear sins. He had no guilt of his own. As the giver of the law, he steps in to take the punishment that justice would mete out to sinners. Additionally, if each person bears the punishment for his own sins, when can he actually stop bearing the punishment? Is it not true that our sins are deep within us? Even if making atonement for our own sin were possible, we would sin again in our pride. Personal atonement is impossible. Sin separates from God and only God can remove that separation (Isaiah 59:1-2)

The second aspect of atonement is that it satisfies the righteous demands of a holy God. God's declaration was that death would be the punishment for sin. The Old Testament saints enacted this declaration each time they offered a sacrifice. The cross was not a drama played out on a stage. It was the real death of the incarnate Son of God. It was a sacrifice sufficient for us. God has accepted us in Christ. We enjoy the smile of his favor and the assurance that we are forgiven because of Christ's death.

The atonement was a work of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Remember that the trinity is one essence in three persons. The Father conceived and effected the atonement. The Son carried it out in History and the Spirit applies the atoning work of Christ to our hearts and lives. We must resist the tendency to see God the Father as an angry Father while the Son acts compassionately to redeem mankind. Rather, it was God's intention for man to be redeemed. The atonement was the idea of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The story is told of a young man who stood before a judge convicted of his crime. The young man had asked for mercy from the judge. He trembled as he waited to hear the verdict of the wise, old judge. When the gavel fell, the judge pronounced the maximum sentence for the crime committed by the young man. But as the young man was about to be escorted out of the courtroom, the judge stood to his feet, removed his robes and descended from his judgment seat. He approached the young man and embraced him kindly. The judge ordered that the handcuffs be removed from the young man and placed on his own hands. He ordered the officer to take him rather than the young man to the prison cell. The officer was incredulous and asked for an explanation. The judge said "this young man is my son. I will pay the debt he owes." The one who judges you and me is perfectly just and holy. He will not overlook our sin. Yet, he is also our loving Father and has descended to us to take our guilt upon himself. This is the beauty of the atonement.

The life-changing truth of the atonement is that you and I now are seen as righteous and holy people because we are in Christ. Our guilt is removed. More than that, we have now won God's special favor. He considers us his own sons and daughters, uniquely loved and cherished!

Further Reading

Jude
Matthew 25:31-46
Romans 14

Memorization

Luke 9:23-26

Introduction to the Gospel of John

“That You Might Believe”

Lesson 16

The gospel of John stands alone among the gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the synoptic gospels. That is because they tell many of the same stories about the life of Jesus. Mark is thought to have been written first. It is possible that Luke and Matthew used Mark as a source and added other material. John, on the other hand, is arranged in a completely different way.

John was called the disciple whom Jesus loved. It is clear from his gospel that he had an intimate relationship with Jesus. He states the purpose of his gospel as follows: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31) His purpose is to lead us to a new life in Jesus Christ. The word “life” is used in John’s gospel 36 times. Closely linked to the theme of “life” is “light” (used 17 times in John).

John’s prologue (or introduction) is one of the clearest statements of Scripture expressing who Jesus is and what he came to do. (See John 1:1-18) The prologue introduces the main theme of the book. The following chart illustrates.

<i>The Terms</i>	<i>Used in the Prologue</i>	<i>Used in John</i>
Life	1:4	36 times in John
Light	1:4-5, 7-9	23 times in John
Believe	1:7-12	98 times in John
World	1:9-10	78 times in John
Truth	1:14,17	25 times in John

John records Jesus saying a number of “I am statements.” These are interspersed throughout the gospel and merit careful meditation. One of the most striking declarations of Jesus was “before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58) Following is a list of Jesus’ other “I am” statements.

Jesus says I am....

- The bread of life (John 6:35)
- The light of the world (John 8:12)
- The door (John 10:7)
- The good Shepherd (John 10:11)
- The resurrection and the life (John 11:25)
- The way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)
- The true vine (John 15:1)

This outline of the book of John is easy to memorize. It gives you a quick overview of the various sections of the book.

- I. The prologue (1:1-18)
- II. The Book of signs (1:19-12:50)
- III. The Book of glory (13:1-20:31)
- IV. The epilogue (21:1-25)

The prologue and epilogue are similar in length and content. They form the book ends which contain the content of the book itself. In the prologue, 1:11 can be considered a digest of the book of signs: “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” Again, 1:12 can be considered a digest of the book of glory: “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” The book of glory is given this name in relation to Jesus’ prayer in John 17:1: “Father, glorify your son that your son may glorify you.”

John’s gospel gives evidence of careful forethought in the structure. He writes about seven signs or miracles that Jesus did which demonstrate his power and authority over every area of life. These seven signs constitute the book of signs. (part II in the outline above.)

- 1. Turning water to wine (John 2:1-11)
- 2. Healing the Nobleman’s son (4:46-54)
- 3. Healing the paralytic (5:1-16)
- 4. Feeding the multitude (6:1-13)
- 5. Walking on water (6:15-21)
- 6. Healing the man born blind (9:1-7)
- 7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44)

It is difficult to choose an outstanding chapter of John because each chapter contains deep insights and spiritual principles that have given freedom and new life to millions. The third chapter stands out as Jesus dialogues with Nicodemus—a Jewish religious leader. Chapters 13 through 17 contain the Upper Room Discourse (sometimes called the farewell discourse), so-called because it is the record of Jesus’ last words with his disciples before his death which took place in an upper room. These chapters will be the focus of our study as we draw to the conclusion of our course on discipleship. They are replete with teaching and principles which nourish the soul.

This lesson will give an overview of the first 12 chapters of the book of John focusing on the seven signs.⁸ The following lessons will go into more depth on chapters 13 through 17 as Jesus speaks clearly with his disciples.

⁸ The analysis in this lesson is largely drawn from John R.W. Stott, *The Story of the New Testament*, p. 75-80.

Read John 1-12 in one sitting before doing this lesson. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you from God's Word and guide your reading and meditation.

Examining the Scripture

Sign #1: Water Turned to Wine

In John 20:31 we find that John had a specific reason for choosing the signs he chose. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." For this reason, we should expect that the seven signs which were chosen had a purpose. Each one will communicate to us something to build and nurture our faith in Christ. The first sign is found in 2:1-11. Verse six makes a passing reference to the water jars and their use. They were used for Jewish ceremonially cleansing.

1. In John 2 Jesus performs his first miracle (turning water into wine) and cleanses the temple in Jerusalem. What connection, if any, do you see between the miracle and the cleansing of the temple? What is the significance of Jesus' prediction of his own resurrection as the raising of the temple in 2:12-25?

2. In John 3 Jesus encounters Nicodemus. How does this encounter carry forward the same idea of the turning of water into wine?

3. Finally, John 4 carries on the same theme. Note carefully Jesus' answer to the woman's question about where she should worship God. How does this answer correlate to the theme of a new order in serving God? Also, note that the woman had her own religious practices apart from Judaism. She revered the well of Jacob. What do Jesus' comments reveal about the true usefulness and value of that well?

Signs 2 and 3: Two Healings

4. Jesus performs two miracles of healing (John 4:43-54 and 5:1-14). In both cases, he heals by his spoken word. His discourse in 5:19-47 is linked to his miracles of healing. Look specifically at 5:21 and 22. In these verses Jesus gives himself the right to exercise two privileges reserved for God himself. What are these two privileges? The same two privileges can be seen in 5:25-30.

5. What is the dividing line of death and life in 5:24? Remember that Jesus is speaking to Jews who searched the Scriptures with the intent to find life in the Old Testament Scriptures. What effect would these words have on such people?

Signs 4 and 5: Feeding the 5000 and Walking on the Water

6. This sign is found in John 6:1-15. It is the only miracle recorded by all four of the gospel writers. After performing the miracle, Jesus crosses the lake, walking on the water. He is followed by the crowd. Jesus rebukes them. Why?

7. In verses 25-59, Jesus refers to himself three times as “the bread of life” (vs. 35, 48 and 51). Jesus points to himself as God’s true provision of life as opposed to the provision of manna in the Old Testament (verses 31 and 58). Verses 53-57 contain Jesus’ hard words about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. These words caused many of his followers to turn away. In your own words, explain what you think Jesus meant by calling his followers to “eat his flesh and drink his blood.”

Sign 6: The Healing of the Blind Man

8. In John 7-10, Jesus is participating in another Jewish holiday—the Feast of Tabernacles. In 8:12, Jesus states plainly that He is the light of the world. For the Jews of Jesus day, this was a clear reference to a ceremony during the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. Great lamps were set up in the temple recalling the pillar of fire which led the people of God through the wilderness in the Old Testament. Read Exodus 13:21. What was the significance of the pillar of fire? What is Jesus saying about himself?

9. Jesus' healing of the man born blind is found in John 9. It is a beautiful story of Jesus' powerful work of healing. Restoring the sight of a man born blind is a visible portrayal of Jesus as the light of the world. The man's eyes could not perceive light until Jesus touched him and healed him. What is the result of this miracle in the man's life? What is the result in the Jewish leaders?

Sign 7: The Raising of Lazarus

10. John 10 contains Jesus' Good Shepherd discourse. In it, Jesus repeats on several occasions the ultimate proof of being a good shepherd. What is that proof?

11. In Chapter 11, there are two attempts to kill Jesus (verses 31 and 39). At the beginning of chapter 11, Jesus is on the other side of the Jordan having escaped from the Jews' attempts to kill him. When Jesus determines to go and help Lazarus (crossing the Jordan River to Bethany), Thomas says "let us also go, that we may die with him" (11:16). How is Jesus' decision to go to Lazarus related to his teaching about the good shepherd in chapter 10?

12. Meditate on John 11:25-26. Jesus states that he is the resurrection and the life. His are not idle words. Rather, he demonstrates his claim by giving life to Lazarus. Again, there are two results for two groups of people. What is the result of this miracle for those mentioned in verse 45? What was the result for the Pharisees?

The stage is now set for the final chapters of the book of John. Jesus' death and resurrection are foreshadowed in chapters 10 and 11. He is the good shepherd who willingly lays down his life for his sheep. He is also the resurrection and the life. As the Jews begin the search for Jesus, he withdraws with his disciples and begins to prepare them for his death. His great works and teaching have had two opposite effects in two groups of people. His disciples have believed while the Jews have disbelieved and even plotted to take his life. He now prepares his disciples for his death. He will be physically absent from them, but his spiritual presence will continue with them and sustain them.

Our Responses:

1. The water jars were used for Jewish cleansing. However, Jesus puts them to new use. He fills them with wine to bring joy and celebration in the midst of the wedding. Jesus takes the Jewish ceremony and puts it to service for man. It is a visible demonstration of the passing away of the old order (Jewish ceremonial worship) and the coming of the new (new life in Christ). This is exactly what John pointed to in his prologue: "the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."⁹ In the same way, Jesus' cleansing of the temple also demonstrates that he has come to bring a renewal. He speaks of the destruction and re-building of the temple but his real meaning, as understood by the disciples, was the temple of his body. Again, the old Jewish way of worship will pass and a new and greater temple will take the place of the one made of stone—the temple of the body of Christ (See 1 Peter 2:5 and Ephesians 2:20-22 for a description of the present-day temple made of "living stones" (believers) and established on the foundation stone of Christ).

⁹ For some, this is scandalous as wine is "haram." However, one has to remember that in that day, wine was not prohibited. It was a valued beverage in a culture that had no means of refrigeration and precious little access to fresh water sources. The Bible does prohibit drunkenness (Ephesians 5:18) and addictions are to be avoided (1 Corinthians 6:12), but the use of wine in moderation is not prohibited by the Bible.

2. Nicodemus is “Israel’s teacher” (3:10). As such he represents the best and deepest understanding of God available in Judaism. However, Jesus states to him that his need is to be “born again.” The old order of Judaism is insufficient. A new era has come—the Kingdom of God—in Jesus Christ.
3. True worship was not in Jerusalem nor in any other geographical place. In fact, true worship is not determined by location, but by spirit and truth.
The Samaritan well gives water that quenches thirst temporarily. Jesus’ resources will quench spiritual thirst forever.
4. He gives life (5:21) and he speaks judgment (5:22). Judgment does not merely mean “condemnation.” Rather, it expresses Jesus’ right to royal decision and decree. In other words, Jesus has the authority from God to give life. His miracles of healing are the demonstration of this God-given authority.
5. Whoever hears Jesus’ words and believes in the one who sent him has passed over from death into life. This would have been scandalous to the Jews, obviously. Yet, it is consistent with Jesus’ first signs. The new order of his kingdom has come. He is the Judge and the life-giver. Entry into this new kingdom is through Jesus alone and through his words. The old order of scrupulous obedience to the law has proved ineffective and fruitless.
6. He says they followed him because he had provided food for them. He rebukes them saying that they should labor, not for temporal food, but for food that “endures to eternal life” (verse 27). We must always remember that our reason for following Jesus is not primarily the fulfilling of our material needs (food, clothing, etc.) but it is to find Jesus Himself—God’s heavenly bread which meets our deepest needs.
7. Jesus was referring to his death on the cross. His flesh given in sacrifice for us is the real food which reconciles us to God. His blood is the payment for our sins. Eating and drinking are physical acts representative of faith—personal dependence on Christ. By comparing verse 47 and verse 54, we see that “believe” is the same as “eating and drinking.” To “believe” in Jesus Christ is to join oneself to Christ in his death and resurrection. It is a total acceptance and dependence on Jesus as my only hope for salvation.
This passage brings to mind the Lord’s Supper. That is the place where we physically demonstrate our faith as we eat and drink around the Lord’s table. John wrote his gospel late in the first century (perhaps between 80 and 98 AD). Even though Jesus did not institute the Last Supper until just prior to his crucifixion (Luke 22:14-20), it would be natural to assume that John saw in these words of Jesus a reference to the Lord’s supper which the church of his time celebrated regularly. Also, the Jews celebrated the Passover in which a lamb was slaughtered and eaten (See Exodus 12). That lamb’s blood, applied to the doorposts of the house, caused the angel of death to pass over

the families of God's people. Jesus is saying, "I am the Passover Lamb. It is my blood and flesh which brings true salvation."

8. The pillar of fire was the presence of the Lord leading his people. Jesus is saying that He is the presence of God and he is to lead the people of God safely to their destination. Reflect on the meaning that this statement would have for a Jew living in Jesus' time. Jesus is picturing himself as the unique person who leads people into the fullness of God's blessing and the fulfillment of his promises.
9. The man believes in Jesus and worships him. His testimony to Jesus' mighty work in his life is as powerful as it is simple. He declares "whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25). It is a beautiful picture of a simple man whose healing has profoundly impacted his life. His experience of Jesus gives him boldness to stand before the religious leaders of his day and boldly declare his allegiance to this man who restored his sight. On the other hand, the Jewish leaders are hardened in their unbelief. They throw the man out of the synagogue, accusing him of being "steeped in sin at birth." What irony! The religious leaders of the people who are to be their shepherds and care-givers react in anger when a man born blind is healed. This reveals the true motives of the religious leaders. They wish to maintain their position. They fear the threat of one who has the true power of God to heal and restore his people.
10. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11, 15, 17). Jesus is willing, not only to care for his sheep, but to actually give his life for them. This truth is dramatically presented in chapter 11. The sheep refuse to follow the voice of anyone other than their true shepherd. In fact, they run away from false shepherds. Thieves also try to take advantage of the sheep. The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy. By contrast, the good shepherd lays down his life (allows himself to be killed) in order to protect the sheep. Obviously, this is a startling picture of Jesus' coming death of the cross to redeem his sheep—his people.
11. Jesus is visibly demonstrating his willingness to die for his followers. He will return to Bethany (just outside of Jerusalem) in order to bring life to Lazarus. In doing this, he will also take the step that leads to his own eventual death. Jesus' tenderness and care for Lazarus is the same care and tenderness he expresses to all of us—his people. He willingly goes to the place where his death is being planned. He willingly enters the territory of those who will kill him in order to bring life to one whom he loves.
12. Many put their faith in Christ. However, the Pharisees determine that Jesus must die (John 11:47-54). He cannot be allowed to continue in this way.
The raising of Lazarus is a dramatic portrayal of Jesus' work. He delivers

himself to death in order to deliver us from death. Jesus' death becomes our life. He is the good shepherd.

Scripture Memory: Commit these passages to memory. John 8:12; John 10:11; John 14:6

Foundations:

The Lord's Supper

- I. Related passages
 - A. Names
 - B. The Central Meaning
 - 1. Expression of Christ's death
 - 2. Expression of personal and corporate faith
 - C. The Old Testament roots
- II. Who participates and when?
- III. The sacrament (or mystery)
 - A. The Sacrament and the Word
 - B. The elements of a sacrament
- IV. The divergent opinions
 - A. Re-enactment of Christ's death
 - B. Memorial

Related Passages: Luke 22:19-20; Mark 14:22-26; 1 Cor 11:23-29

In the above passages, Jesus institutes the last supper. This simple meal is known by many different names: communion, the Lord's table, the Lord's supper, mass, etc. It is a simple demonstration of a profound spiritual reality. Paul says that by eating this meal, we "declare the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Cor 11:26) Thus, by eating this meal, we are expressing to the world that our life is from Christ. It is his death which has restored us to a right relationship with God. This declaration is both personal and corporate. I do it as an individual, but I also participate with the body of Christ in all times and places who participate in this same meal.

The passages listed above show that Jesus was actually partaking in an Old Testament celebration known as Passover and giving it a new meaning. Passover is described in Exodus 12. It was the meal which celebrated God's covenant with his people in the Old Testament. In this feast, the people of God celebrated God's deliverance from slavery. They sacrificed a lamb and applied some of its blood to the door of their house. Then, they ate the meat of that Passover lamb. God sent death to all the homes which were not protected by the blood of this Passover lamb. All the homes that were protected were spared and given God's mercy instead. When we eat this meal, we declare that Jesus is the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and that his death protects us from God's anger and secures God's mercy for us. So, when we eat, we are not only declaring that Jesus died, but also why he died—to reconcile us to God. When Jesus led his disciples in this supper, he said, "this is the new covenant in my blood." (Luke 22:20) This supper recalls all the Old Testament covenants and represents their fulfillment in a

simple meal of fellowship with our Lord. Remember that the point of the covenants was that God would be among his people, that they would be his people and he would be their God. The Lord's supper is a beautiful and simple picture of our Lord dwelling among us, inviting us to come in to him and eat and drink with him.

You may ask, "well since this is the meaning, shouldn't everyone be encouraged to partake?" The answer to that question is "no." Paul instructs that we are to examine ourselves before taking the meal. He tells the Corinthians that some are sick and some have even died because they partook wrongly. So we have to distinguish between eating the meal as an expression of faith (which is right and good) and eating the meal as a substitute for faith (which is not permitted). The Lord's table is not magic. It is not the meal that saves. Rather, it is Jesus alone who saves. When we come to the table of the Lord, we must confess any known sin, turn away from it and humbly ask God's forgiveness relying only on the sacrifice of Jesus for our salvation. The Lord's Table is for believers who are repentant of their sins and trusting Christ alone for salvation.

Should children eat this meal? There are varied opinions on this matter. The New Testament suggests that the believer should be able to understand the meaning of the meal. (1 Cor 11:27-29) Therefore, I do not think that it is right to give the meal to infants. However, as soon as a child is of age to understand that Jesus died for his sins and he has professed that faith as his own, he should be allowed and encouraged to participate in the meal. Also, the early church practiced the Lord's Supper after baptism. Therefore, I tend to think that a child should be baptized before partaking of the supper.

Theologians have referred to the Lord's Table as a "sacrament" or "mystery." Although we can grasp part of the meaning of this mystery, we will spend eternity trying to understand the depth of it. This mystery communicates profound spiritual truth to the participant. The communication of this truth is in tandem with the Word of God. The Word of God is essential as it explains and interprets the mystery to the believer. The sacrament without the word of God becomes an empty form. The Word engenders faith while the sacrament strengthens it.

There are three parts to a sacrament. The first is the outward or visible sign. In the Lord's table, the visible sign is the bread and the cup. The second is the inward spiritual grace which is signified and sealed. This inward spiritual grace is the life of Christ given to us by his death and resurrection. Finally, there is a union between the visible sign and the inward spiritual grace. This union is brought about, not by any particular virtue in the sign itself, but by God's grace through faith in the participant. Christ is present in the supper spiritually. The elements are given a heavenly reality by the grace of God and the faith of those who participate such that what transpires nourishes the soul of the believer and builds him up in faith. It is a true participation in the flesh and blood of Christ (I Corinthians 10:16). What transpires on earth is transacted in the presence of God through this sacramental union.

Some branches of the church have understood the Lord's table to be a re-enactment of Jesus' death. They presume that the bread of the meal is transformed into Christ's literal body and the cup is transformed into his literal blood. Thus Christ is sacrificed again with each celebration of the meal. Our view is that the Bible teaches Christ died once and for all (I Peter 3:18). His presence at the meal is a spiritual presence. He is there to strengthen and bless the repentant believer who comes to him in faith.

Others have said that the meaning of the supper is merely a memorial. We come together to remember Christ's death and meditate on its meaning. However, when we look at Scriptures closely, we find that the supper is a real participation in Christ's body and blood (I Cor 10:16). Therefore, when we eat this supper, we are doing more than merely remembering.

When you eat at the Lord's supper, remember that you are declaring to God, to yourself and to the believers around you that you are trusting Christ's sacrifice alone to restore you to a right relationship with God. The supper is a reminder that all of life is lived in the presence of a holy God. We can enter his presence because Jesus' death cleansed us of our sin and God has now given us Jesus' holiness. We eat this meal with other believers to declare that we are one with them through Jesus Christ. Thank God for the presence of Christ at that simple meal to nourish and strengthen your soul.

The Ministry of Jesus' Disciple: Lesson 17

John 13

Imagine that you are in the same room with a very great person, perhaps a president or a king. You will probably be slow to speak in this person's presence and quick to listen. You know that his words can change the course of history. Now imagine that this very important person is on the verge of death. You alone are in the room to hear his last words.

What emotions would grip you as you listen for the dying words of this great, historic individual? I can imagine that you would feel a heavy weight of responsibility. You would want to be sure that you heard his words accurately and understood his intention because you would be conveying his final message to an entire generation.

In chapters 13-17 of John, we find ourselves in a room with Jesus and his disciples. Jesus has predicted his death in Jerusalem. He now moves out of the spotlight of public ministry and into the close quarters of that upper room. He has a final message to convey to his closest followers on earth. Those followers will then pass that message on to us, who are, in turn, to pass it on to others.

As you look into these chapters of John, realize that these are Jesus' parting exhortations to his disciples. These are important truths that must not be neglected. We are to give ourselves to these truths with all seriousness and commitment if we are to be disciples of Jesus.

The thirteenth chapter of John contains the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. You have probably heard it and read it many times. Don't let familiarity breed contempt. Ask God to move your heart, mind and will in order to transform you into a disciple of Jesus. Ask God's Spirit to teach you new truths and new insights to apply God's word to your life and change to be more like Christ.

A prayer:

Father, I long to know your Son. I believe that to know you and to know him whom you sent is eternal life. Right now I seek you in Your word. By your grace, change me. Make me into Jesus' image. Fill me with Your Spirit, through Jesus my Lord. Amen.

Examining the Scripture:

1. Read John 13:1-20. Verses 1-3 state a number of things that Jesus knows. Name these things.

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2. Jesus is described as “having loved his own who were in the world.” As a result of this love and with the knowledge referred to in verses 1-3, Jesus now shows them the full extent of his love. What does this refer to?

3. Who would normally be responsible to wash the feet of guests? Why, in your opinion, does Peter initially refuse for Jesus to wash his feet (John 13:5-10)?

4. In verse 13-17, Jesus makes his intentions clear. He instructs the disciples that they are to wash one another’s feet. The ministry of a disciple of Jesus Christ is to do lowly acts of service for other disciples. We cannot be Jesus’ disciples if we do not take his intention to heart and begin to practice this teaching. Take a moment and write down several practical ways that you can serve other brothers and sisters who follow Jesus.

5. In John 13:18-30, Jesus speaks about the disciple who will betray him: Judas Iscariot. He quotes Psalm 41:9. How does this section reveal both Jesus’ humanity and his divinity?

6. In John 13:34-35, Jesus commands the disciples to love one another. What is the context of this command (what precedes it and follows it)? How does the context show that Jesus himself was motivated by love for his disciples?

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7. The true test of discipleship is found in verse 35. Apply this test now to yourself. Does the watching world know that you are his disciple because you love his people as he loved them? List practical steps that you can take to demonstrate your love for God's people.
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8. In Verses 36-38, Jesus confronts Peter. Peter's estimation of himself does not match reality. (See also Luke 22:31-34) Jesus' prediction must have given rise to confusion in Peter's soul. The prediction did, of course, come true. Can you recall a time when you over-estimated your spiritual strength and giftedness? How was this rude awakening used in Peter's life? How was it used in yours?
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Our Responses:

1. Jesus knew his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power. Jesus knew that he had come from God and was returning to God. This does not suggest that Jesus had not known these things previously.
2. I believe it refers first of all to the washing of the disciples' feet. This is, no doubt, a humble and authentic expression of Jesus' love for his disciples. However, it refers in a broader sense to all the events which are soon to transpire—Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. These events, even more than the washing of the feet, demonstrate the depth of Jesus' love for his disciples. The phrase used in verse one—"he showed them the full extent of his love"—literally means that he showed them the fulfillment or conclusion of his love. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life

for his friends.” (John 15:13)

3. This would normally be the job of the household servant. It is a menial task which is not esteemed.
I believe Peter wants to prevent Jesus from washing his feet partly out of his own shame. He certainly realizes that Jesus, the Son of God, should not be performing a menial task. Perhaps his conscience is pricked that he did not take the towel and basin to perform the act of service for the disciples. For Jesus to perform the task will only deepen Peter’s sense that something is not right.
4. Write your answer. Remember that Jesus took the lowest form of service. Remember that he found a practical need that no one else was meeting. Finally, remember the promise of verse 17. If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.
5. The close and trusted friend who ate with him now turns on Jesus and betrays him. Jesus knew that Judas would do this. He warns his disciples in such a way that, when it takes place, they will recognize that Jesus did know and was not taken by surprise. Jesus foreknowledge of the betrayal reflects his divinity.
Even though Jesus knew about Judas’ betrayal, he still suffered human emotions. Verse 21 says that he was troubled in spirit. Have you ever felt betrayed by a close friend? It is a painful experience and one which troubled Jesus deeply.
6. The preceding passage speaks of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. The following passage speaks of Peter’s denial. In the midst of abandonment by two of his closest friends, Jesus commands the disciples to love one another. The love Jesus demonstrates is a love that is not always reciprocated. His love for Judas and Peter leads him to the cross, despite their denials.
7. Write your own answer. Please remember that Jesus’ love was not always understood or reciprocated.
8. Peter was a leader of the disciples. His denial left him guilt stricken and sorrowful (Luke 22:61-62). As a leader, his denial must have also impacted the other disciples. Peter did not wallow in guilt and condemnation. Rather, he demonstrated an eagerness for restoration. Note that he ran to the tomb when he heard of Jesus’ resurrection (Luke 24:12). He also jumped from a boat to go to Jesus on the shore in John 21. It is evident that Peter longed to be restored. He was not content to remain in his weakened spiritual state. He realized that Jesus could embolden him. Jesus could restore him. So Peter’s great fall—his denial of Christ—was also a spiritual turning-point in his life. . We will see more of Peter’s denial and restoration in the coming lessons.

Foundations:

Spiritual Disciplines: Service

The foundation of all the disciplines is joy. We engage in the disciplines to be set free from our own selfish desires, fears and long-standing habits. Service is a key discipline that will take us far down the road to conformity to Christ—the source of our joy. We must remember that all Christians are called to serve. As a disciple of Jesus, I do not have the option to avoid service. Referring to service as a spiritual discipline is a way of recognizing that I need to accept training in service in order to practice it well and effectively.

Here are some guidelines to help in practicing this spiritual discipline:

1. This discipline, like the others, loses its value when it is announced. We are told not to let the right hand know what the left is doing when we serve other people. Service is by nature a discipline practiced in secret.
2. To excel in service you will need to seek areas where others are not serving. Notice that Jesus took up the towel and basin. It was a lowly job usually assigned to a house servant. No one else was doing it. Too often we choose areas of service which are highly esteemed. We desire man's approval. Remember that Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for seeking glory one from another rather than the glory that comes from God alone (John 5:44). In giving service, we have a unique opportunity to seek God's approval for lowly and seemingly unimportant tasks which others may not take note of.
3. Service is God's path to greatness. In saying this, we are not advocating that you should adopt service in order to achieve greatness. Rather, we are saying that God's estimation of greatness is of a different nature than man's. Matthew 20:25-28 makes it very clear: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant." Among his people, Jesus abolishes the hierarchy of leadership. His view is that those who serve are the greatest. To be absolutely clear, the greatest are not those who speak the best, have the highest degrees, give the most money, dress in the nicest clothes, etc. The greatest are the ones who serve.

Those who find themselves in positions of leadership in the church (pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.) should exert themselves to acts of service. We may be tempted to think that our enhanced study or our ability to speak indicates a close relationship with God. That is not necessarily the case. The Biblical teaching is that these are gifts given to us by God to use in his kingdom. We are responsible to develop these gifts and use them wisely. However, the possession of a gift in no way determines the depth of our relationship to the Lord. It is acts of service which draw the leader back to reality. Service is related to humility. It is difficult to make progress in the virtue of humility. Once one thinks he has it, he has demonstrated that he does not. Service allows us to perform acts largely hidden from view. We do them unto God. One cannot participate in lowly acts of service without making progress in humility.

I know a godly woman who gives much of her time each week to small acts of service. She is from an upper-class home. Her family is one of the most respected families in the church in our entire country. Yet, every week she goes out to one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. She washes infants and provides basic medical care for them. By this act of service she is growing in Christ-likeness.

Do you want to grow in humility? Do you want to become more like Christ? Embrace the discipline of service. Find the small and practical act of service that no one else is doing. Adopt it as your own service—not to people, but to God. He who sees in secret will reward you openly!

Foundations: The Church

- I. Definition
- II. Entry
- III. Characteristics and various expressions
 - A. Holy
 - B. Catholic (universal)
 - C. Apostolic
- IV. Life of the church
- V. Marks
 - A. Preaching and teaching of God's word
 - B. Sacraments
 - C. Discipline
- VI. Leaders
 - A. Elders
 - B. Deacons
- VII The true church

When Jesus gives his disciples the command to love one another, he is establishing a new community. That community has been referred to by many names in scripture such as the bride of Christ, the new Israel, the communion of the saints, the body of Christ, etc. The common word used in our day is “the church.” The biblical word from which we get our word “church” is “*ekklesia*” which means “called out ones.” The church is simply believers in Christ who are “called out” of the world to be God’s own people.

One writer has defined the church as follows: “The church consists of all who, through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, have entered into the unique spiritual position of being ‘in Christ’ and thus related to the triune God (2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Cor. 12:13, Eph. 1:22,23). Through the action of the indwelling Holy Spirit, each believer, by virtue of his being ‘in Christ’, is brought into spiritual union with all other true believers, who thus constitute the Body, or the Universal Church (Eph. 4:4-6).”¹⁰

Entry into the church is based solely on one’s faith in Christ. By professing your faith in Christ alone as a sufficient payment for your sins and your only hope of reconciliation with God, you become part of the worldwide church of Christ. Some have been confused about exactly when the church began. Many believe that the church began

¹⁰ A.J. Weibe cited from *Church-Planting* by Wendell Evans.

in the second chapter of Acts with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. No doubt, this was a significant event which has continuing repercussions until our day. However, the Old Testament saints were also part of the church. The same words were used to describe them as were used to describe the believers in the New Testament. They were the “called out” ones. Although they did not have precise information about Christ, their faith was that God would redeem them. They looked forward to Christ’s work on the cross, while New Testament saints look backward to Christ’s completed work on the cross.

Figure 17.1

There are three characteristics of the church. It is to be **holy, universal** and **apostolic**. **Holy** does not mean that once you enter the church you stop sinning forever. Rather it means that the church is given the righteousness of Christ. It is being sanctified (in the process of being sanctified). The church is unique in that it is the only place where the condition for entrance is admitting that you are a sinner and are in desperate need of help. So, the church should not be a parade of people who profess that they are holier than everyone else. Rather, it is a hospital where spiritually sick people come because they know they can find help and acceptance. In this sense the word “holy” does not mean “sinless.” Rather it means “set apart.” The church is a group of people who are God’s own particular people (1 Peter 2:9) Secondly the church is **universal**. The church is no longer made up of only one ethnic group. It is composed of people of all “nations, tribes, peoples and languages.” (Revelation 7:9) Arabs and Japanese are part of the church. Brazilians and Alaskan Eskimos equally belong! Finally, the church is **apostolic**. This means that it is founded on the teaching of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:20 says that the people of God are “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” Teachers in the church do not “invent” their message. Rather, they derive it from the teaching of Jesus and his apostles.

But what does the church look like? Do the people of God have to meet in a special building? The Bible is very liberating. There are no conditions on where the church can meet. In Irian Jaya, a believing tribe may meet under a tree and chant their worship to the beat of the tribal drum! In France the church may assemble in a huge cathedral. In many parts of the world, the church is meeting in apartments, homes and rented buildings. You see, the church is you! You are the building. The Holy Spirit indwells you so wherever the believers gather, that is the church!

It has been rightly said that the church is an organism (a living thing) not just an organization (a structure). This is because the presence of Jesus has been promised to us when we meet together as believers. (Matthew 18:20) Fellowship and service (disciplines in the previous lessons) are birthed in the church. The church in the book of Acts was a community of believers. People watched the church and said “behold how they love one another!” Thus the church is a place where believers help each other and tend to the needy. It has an upward direction—worship to God through the ministry of the word and prayer. It also has an outward direction as the members of the body show love and concern for one another. This is why the image that the Bible often uses to refer

to the church is “the body.” God’s people make up a living body. They are to move and act together to accomplish God’s purposes in the world.

What does the church do when it gets together? Again, there are variations from place to place, but there are three elements that are recognized as marks of the church—the distinguishing characteristics. First, the church teaches and preaches with authority from the **Word of God**—the Bible. Secondly, the church administers the **sacraments**—the Lord’s supper and baptism. Thirdly, the church exercises **discipline**. That is, if a member who professes to be a Christian continually lives a life of sin without repentance, it falls to the church to discipline that individual. This should be carried out in accordance with Matthew 18:15-20.

Finally, who leads the church? Do church leaders get paid by the church or do they volunteer? Who chooses the leaders? Some churches have popes, some have bishops, some have pastors and some don’t have any leadership. The Bible has a lot to say to leaders of the church. I and II Timothy and Titus were written to instruct church leaders. It seems from the Bible that the church should be led by more than one person. The titles used for these leaders in the Bible are interchangeable (elders, bishops, overseers). Paul told Titus to appoint elders (plural) in every city. The Jerusalem and Antioch church in Acts were also led by a group of apostles, prophets and teachers. (Acts 15:6; Acts 13:1) These elders, in addition to being men of godly character, are to be competent to teach God’s word although some may give themselves more fully to teaching the Word than others (1 Timothy 5:17). The qualifications for being an elder are listed in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Acts 6 shows that there can be another category of church leadership when needed. It is the deacon. The Jerusalem church chose 7 deacons (Acts 6:1-7). Further qualifications for deacons can be found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:3. Generally speaking deacons are to be entrusted with the material needs of the church while elders are responsible for the ministry of the word of God and prayer.

Some make a distinction between the visible and the invisible church. The visible church is the church we see on this earth. It is made up of anyone who professes faith in Jesus. However, the Bible is clear that many who profess faith are not true believers. (Matthew 7:22-23) We saw this in some detail when we studied the Kingdom parables of Matthew 13, especially the parable of the four soils and the wheat and tares. By contrast, the invisible church is known only to God and it is composed of all those in all times and places who truly belong to Christ. The presence of individuals whose lives may not appear to be god-glorifying in the church can be deeply troubling. However, we must remember that Jesus warned us that this would be the case. We wait for the day when Jesus will return and those who are his will hear his words “well done good and faithful servant.”

Simply being an individual believer is not enough. When you believe, you become part of the church. Wherever you are, seek out others who have believed. Join them in worship and studying God’s word. Life in Christ is life in his body—the church!

Further reading: Ephesians 2 and 4; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Memorize: John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 2:9

The Disciple's Spiritual Secret: Part 1

Lesson 18: John 14:1-14 and John 15

Throughout history people have done some extremely silly things in an attempt to draw near to God. One monk in Egypt sat on a pillar for years. Apparently, he felt that this was a way for him to get closer to God. Sincere believers in Latin America crawl on their knees for miles in order to do penance in payment for their sins. While the sincerity of these believers is admirable, their lack of knowledge is appalling. Think of it this way. Suppose you are a parent and your child whom you dearly loves comes to you and says, "Daddy, mommy, look how much I love you. I beat myself to prove it. If that's not enough, I'm willing to skip dinner just so you'll know how much I love you and how much I want to be with you." Any loving parent would be heart-broken at such a statement from his child. He would respond "My precious child, you don't have to do anything to prove you love me. I know you love me. Please trust that I love you too. I want to be with you."

These extreme acts of devotion often flow from deep insecurity. Because the believer knows his own sin and degradation, he suspects that God can only be pleased with him if he performs such acts to atone for his unrighteousness. The truth is that attempting to atone for our unrighteousness is an affront to God. God himself has already done that through the blood of Jesus. How could we possibly add anything to it?

Some of us may feel that though we are saved by Jesus' blood, we can now somehow perfect ourselves through doing great works. We take on ministries, commit ourselves to certain disciplines or to certain career choices feeling that this will be the thing that pleases God. The unfortunate truth, again, is that we are merely attempting to add to what God has already done. Not only has he saved us, but he has imputed Christ's righteousness to us. He sees us as totally clean, totally loved and loveable! There is nothing to add to it.

When our minds grasp this reality and it begins to sink into our daily lives, the truth of it can bring us great freedom. Our hearts explode in a love relationship with God. The goodness and love of God begin to overflow within us. The natural result of such an all-consuming love for God is a life which is filled with good fruit and good works.

Jesus presents this idea in a most refreshing way! He knows that we will be tempted to try to "prove" our love to God. He knows that we may begin to suspect that we are just not good enough. His answer is disarmingly simple. The secret to life and godliness is continually abiding in him. There is no other source of righteousness, no other hope for salvation, no other assurance of being holy before a holy God. Jesus is the only way!

In this lesson, we will explore the all sufficiency of Jesus. The next lesson is intimately related to this one as it deals with the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We

will look into the first fourteen verses of John 14 and all of chapter 15. Find a quiet place. Sit before the Lord and ask him to come and be your discipler, your teacher! If you will, he will!

Examining the Scriptures:

Read John 14:1-14

1. There are three commandments in verse 1. What is the relationship between the three commandments? What is the root cause of an anxious, troubled heart?

2. Verses 5-11 contain two questions asked by Thomas and Philip. How does Jesus reply to Thomas' question? Is this an arrogant reply?

3. Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus points to two evidences that he is in the Father and the Father in him. What are these evidences?

4. Jesus says, "believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Do you believe that the Father was and is in Jesus and that Jesus was and is in the Father? What are the implications of such a belief? Jesus pointed out an immediate implication for our prayer life. What is it?

Now Read John 15

5. In verses 1-5 there are two examples of branches that are in the vine. The first bears no fruit. The second does bear fruit. Of course, believers are said to be the branches. Jesus is the vine and the Father is the vinedresser. But what is the fruit? What does “fruit” represent in this analogy?

6. Verse two describes two types of branches which are in the vine. One branch bears fruit normally. The other has an abnormal life. It is not bearing fruit. What is the vinedresser’s (God’s) response to the branch that bears fruit?

7. What is the vinedresser’s response to the branch which is “in the vine” but does not bear fruit?

8. List all conditions for bearing fruit below.

9. What does it mean to “remain in Christ?”

10. In verse 10 we are given a test to determine if we are remaining in the love of Jesus. What is this test?

11. What is his command? Take a few moments to ask yourself if you are obeying this command.

12. What is Jesus' purpose in relating these truths about the vine and commanding us to abide in his love and to love one another?

13. Read carefully 15:12-17. You will notice that the command to "love one another" is at the beginning and end of this section. What is Jesus talking about between the two commands? What relation does that subject have to his command that the disciples love one another.

14. In verse 16, Jesus says, "you did not choose me, but I chose you..." Does this truth enhance or detract from Jesus' intimate love and friendship with his disciples?

15. In John 15:18-25, Jesus warns us that the world will have a reaction to us as a result of his choice of us. That reaction is hatred. Jesus again refers to his words and his works or miracles. What role do these words and works play in the hatred of the world towards him.

Before finishing this lesson, take a few moments to write down some of the things God has been teaching you through this lesson. The principles of abiding in Christ can lead you to a rich life of following Jesus. Don't pass over them quickly. Take time to reread the passage, meditate and ask God's Spirit to continue to teach you from His word.

Our Responses

1. The three commandments are all related. The first is "**Let not your hearts be troubled.**" An anxious heart is caused by a lack of trust in God. The tragic fact is that many Christians suffer from anxiety—a troubled heart. Jesus' promise is that we can overcome anxiety through trust in him. A lack of trust in God is equivalent to a lack of trust in Jesus. The disciples could not help but understand that Jesus was equating himself with God. In the original language, the second and third commandments read: "**trust in God and in me, trust.**" Whatever type of anxiety is troubling us, we need to realize that its root cause is a lack of trust in Jesus. The command of Jesus is not to be anxious and troubled, but to trust him.
2. Thomas asks how they can know the way when they don't know where Jesus is going. The question indicates that Thomas is confused. He is expressing his frustration to Jesus. Jesus uses the question as an opportunity to teach. He knows that what Thomas does not understand now, he will understand after his death, resurrection and ascension—Jesus is going to the Father. Jesus presents himself as the way, the truth and the life. Surely these words, if not the words of God in the flesh, were the words of an insane man! Jesus says that he himself is the embodiment of truth and life. He alone is the way to God. There is no way to add to him. He is the complete and final revelation of God in human flesh. To go to God, one must go through Jesus!
3. First, Jesus' words were evidence that the Father was in him and he in the Father. His teaching was of a different sort. Many throughout his life had

been amazed at his teaching (see Matt 7:28-29; 13:54; 22:22; Mark 11:18; John 7:15). Jesus appeals to this as proof of his being equal with God.

Secondly, Jesus appeals to the miracles he has done. Again, the gospels record many times that the people were amazed at Jesus' signs (see Luke 4:36; 5:26; 9:43)

4. Write your own answer.
Jesus related the answering of our prayers to the fact that he is in the Father and the Father in him. Our works are given birth by our prayer. We can pray with confidence because God is in Jesus and Jesus in God. The God who was once distant, remote, has become near and beloved in Jesus. Jesus promises that our good works will soar to new heights because he is going to the Father. His presence with the Father assures us that God will hear our prayers and that we will show ourselves to be disciples of Jesus as we do the works he has prepared for us to do.
5. Many tend to think that "fruit" means that we are bringing others to Christ. Certainly, that is part of it. But that definition is too narrow. Physical fruit is characterized by having seed within it. Good fruit is whatever our life produces that has within it the potential to reproduce. Think about this in relation to the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23. Any of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) has within it the potential to reproduce in someone else. For instance, I can show love precisely because I have been shown love. I am joyful because God has taken joy in me. I experience peace because I have been given peace with God through Jesus as well as peace with others through my relationships with parents, family members, friends, etc. The bearing of fruit is how we impact the world. Our good and godly thoughts, virtues and actions have seed within them. This seed can spring into life, reproducing fruit at any time or place.
6. The branch that bears fruit is pruned. The pruning of a vine is a violent cutting back of its branches. I remember looking at a vineyard from the window of a train in southern France. A few weeks earlier the branches had been full and leafy. Now nothing was left but a thick stump. All the branches had been cut back. Grape vines require extensive pruning for two reasons. First, so the sunlight can get through the leafy branches to the fruit bearing branches. Secondly, the grapevine uses its energy to produce abundant foliage (leaves). By cutting back the foliage, the vine's energy is directed to the production of fruit—grapes.
Note that this branch bears fruit. If we are fruitful, we can be sure that God will intervene to prune us. This can be very painful as God sometimes takes away what we consider to be "our fruit." We can be assured that God's intention, as the vinedresser, is to see us producing an even more abundant harvest of rich fruit.

7. We must first notice that this branch is “in the vine.” It is not a branch which no longer remains in the vine. Those are dealt with in verse 6. The branch in the vine which bears no fruit is “taken up.” That is the precise translation of the verb *airo*. Many versions of the Bible translate this word as “take away” or “remove.” That is a legitimate translation (although “cut off” is not a good translation). I prefer the translation “take up” which is also a legitimate translation. Why? First of all, it fits. Often grapevine branches grow low along the ground. They gather mildew from the moisture in the ground. The careful vinedresser lifts them up and ties them to a trellis or a line in order to help them grow high off the ground. Secondly, this branch is said to be “in me.” If a person is “in Christ,” God does not cut him off from Christ (see John 10:28-29).

The picture here seems to be that of a follower of Jesus. For whatever reason, this believer is producing no fruit. His life is growing along the ground, being choked and hampered by mud and moisture. God’s response is to elevate that believer, lifting them out of the moisture which is causing fruitlessness. For many, bearing fruit will take place after a process of inner healing. Even while in Christ we may find that the pain of our past hampers us and prevents us from bearing fruit. For this person, the message of John 15 is that the vinedresser is able to elevate you, cleaning off the dirt of your past so that you can become a person who bears fruit.¹¹

8. There is only one condition: remaining in Christ. However, we must also realize that our motivation for remaining in Christ is not to bear fruit. Rather, fruit comes naturally because we remain in Christ. Abiding in Christ is not the means to the end of bearing fruit. Rather, abiding in Christ is the means and the end. Fruit-bearing is the natural result. The image of the branch and the vine is perfectly suited to convey this idea. The branch does not decide independently that it would like to bear much fruit. Rather, its life connection is to the vine. As it draws its life from the vine, the natural result is abundant fruit.
9. All the nourishment and nutrients which the branch receives are delivered to it by the vine. In much the same way, we are to realize that everything necessary for our growth comes to us through Christ. We are to seek all that we need in him and through him. The branch would not consider disassociating itself from the vine in order to search for sustenance elsewhere. All we need is supplied through Jesus Christ. This realization brings rest. No need to run to and fro frantically seeking satisfaction. Our satisfaction is in him.

In practical terms we should give attention to the means that God has appointed for us to grow. We need to be hearing his Word regularly both through our own private study as well as hearing others preach and teach the Word. We must attend to the disciplines of fellowship and service as well. Obviously, the life of the vine gives life to the branches. As we seek the

¹¹ Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine*, pp. 33-41.

nourishment of the vine, we will not be disappointed.

10. If we obey his commandments, we can be assured that we are remaining in his love. As a Father, I have seen the truth of Jesus' words many times. How easy it is to simply say "I love you." Love has consequences. Love means that we entrust ourselves into the care of another person in a loving and giving relationship. Obedience is the test of love. If I entrusted myself to Jesus, I will gladly obey the Words he has spoken.
11. His command is that we love one another. (verse 17)
12. Verse 11 says that he has told us these things that his joy may remain in us and that our joy may be complete. As we have seen before, the commands of God lead us to joy. He is not trying to curb our happiness or impose limitations on us. Rather, God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in him. After all, it is only in Him that authentic joy and satisfaction can be found.
13. He tells the disciples that they are his friends, not his servants. The love he has for his friends will be clearly seen in the laying down of his life. It is also seen by the fact that he has revealed to them the truth from his Father. This would not be the case if Jesus considered his disciples merely as "servants." A servant has no right to know his master's business. Jesus has let his disciples in on his most personal secrets—his relationship to the Father. This kind of intimacy is only available to friends—dearly loved ones.
This relationship of intimacy with Jesus is the foundation for the command to love one another. Disciples can now love one another because they have been truly loved by Jesus. Because we are welcomed into the intimate circle of friends of Jesus we can love one another.
14. Jesus takes the initiative in the relationship to his disciples. It is not false to say that the disciples chose to follow Jesus. They must have made that choice. However, Jesus signals a deeper reality. Their choice to follow him was based on his choice of them. He clearly chose them to be his disciples (Mark 3:13-19), but he also chose them, as Paul would say, before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). Jesus' choosing of us is not dependent on our responses to him. Rather, our choosing to follow him is dependent on his initiative toward us. He chose us while there was nothing attractive in us. He set his love upon us without condition. (See also 1 John 4:19 and Romans 5:8) It is Jesus' words which demonstrate the sin of the world. By hearing Jesus' words, they become guilty of sin. Their knowledge of Jesus renders them without excuse. John expresses it this way: "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19) Jesus' words and actions stand as an eternal invitation. Any and all who love the light can come to him. The fact that many turn away from him only demonstrates that men love darkness rather than light.

15. The miracles (verse 24) play the same role. They demonstrate clearly that Jesus is God's truth and therefore render the world guilty.

Foundations

The Trinity

- I. We believe in the oneness of God.
- II. Scripture drives us to a belief in the trinity
- III. One essence in three persons
 - a. The essence of God is not divided
 - b. The essence of God does not change
- IV. The generation of the Son
- V. How to answer those who object
- VI. Development of this doctrine through history

"You believe in three Gods!" That's the angry objection of some who hold fiercely to God's oneness as the essential element of their faith. Christians believe absolutely that God is one. The key passage which lays down this verity was given by God to Moses. It is in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one!" Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." When asked what is the greatest commandment of all, Jesus quotes these verses (See Mark 12:29-30). The unity of God was not a new revelation that appeared in the seventh century. God revealed himself to Abraham, Moses and all the prophets as one God. Christians certainly believe in the oneness of God.

However, we also discover in God's revelation that the attributes of deity are applied to the Father, to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit. For instance, Jesus states clearly that "he who has seen me, has seen the Father" and "I and the Father are one." (John 14:9; 10:30; 17:11). Also the Holy Spirit is clearly seen to be God. In Acts 5:3-4, Peter equates lying to the Holy Spirit with lying to God. I Corinthians 3:16 states that we are the temple of God, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. I Corinthians 2:10-11 states that the Spirit knows the thoughts of God. The Bible does not use the term "trinity." That is a term that Christians throughout history have used to describe what the Bible teaches. However, it is clear that the Bible teaches that God's unity includes corporateness or plurality. Another way of saying this is that God's unity includes relationship.

The New Testament does have explicit references to the trinity even though the word itself is not used. Jesus' great commission included the command to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul also mentions the members of the trinity in 2 Corinthians 13:14: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Christians refer to the trinity as “one essence in three persons.” That is to say that the essence of God is one—God is unity. This essence is shared by the three persons-- plurality. In other words, to say that the Son is God is to say that the Son has God’s essence. To say that the Father is God is to say that He has God’s essence. However this essence of God—the Godness of God—is not divided such that the Father gets a third and the Son a third and the Spirit a third. No, each person of the trinity has all the essence of God. We must be careful not to say that God’s essence changes from one person to the other. Also to say that God simply acts in three different modes is not accurate. Christians do not believe that God changes from being the Father to become the Son whenever he wants to. No, God is all three of the persons eternally and simultaneously. The three persons of God exist at the same time and yet are distinct from one another as persons. Their distinctiveness is seen in their actions. The Father creates and initiates redemption. The Son becomes incarnate and accomplishes redemption. The Spirit applies the Son’s redemptive work and comforts and guides the believer.

Analogies are not very helpful in understanding the trinity. Some analogies relate to man and his psychological makeup. The mind contains the will, the affections and the intellect. I have found it helpful to use the analogy of love. We are told in 1 John 4:8 that God is love. This is his essence. I have three children. I can honestly say that I love each of them with all my love. I cannot conceive of giving each of them one third of my love. Thus three individuals share all my love. Yet these three individuals are distinct. This will also help us understand that God, from eternity past, existed in this overflowing love relationship. God was love long before he created the world. How and to whom was this love expressed when nothing existed but God? The answer is that God existed as a plurality. Love was flowing between the persons of the Godhead. If there were no plurality in God, one would wonder what was the nature of his existence before the creation.

You may wonder what is meant when Christians say that Jesus is the “only begotten son of God.” Surely if Jesus was “begotten” of God, he had a beginning. No, the Bible says “in the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the word was God.” (John 1:1) Jesus does not have a beginning. Just as light cannot exist without shining, so Jesus is said to “proceed” from God. Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem was not his beginning. It was the only the beginning of his incarnation as a human being.

It is important to note how God revealed this doctrine to us. In the Old Testament there are many hints of plurality in the nature of God. When God creates man, he uses the plural pronoun saying, “Let us make man in our image after our likeness.” This plural form of the pronoun would have been unusual in Hebrew. Unlike other Semitic languages, Hebrew does not employ the royal form of “we.” The Old Testament leaves such references without explanation. Even in the New Testament we don’t have a clear presentation of the doctrine of the trinity. However, we are brought to an understanding of the trinity as we see the three persons of the Godhead acting with the power and authority of God. How could someone other than God forgive sins (Matthew 9:2-3)? How could the presence of a spirit (other than God’s Spirit) cause a group of fishermen to be transformed into powerful apostles who turned the world upside down? God allowed

the truth of the trinity to be revealed to us over time as we observed the way he interacted with his people. We should learn from this as we try to share our faith with friends and family. The trinity will only be understood as they begin to see the reality of God in his mighty works. Ask your friend or family member to examine the Scriptures with you rather than try to argue them into accepting the trinity.

Finally, it took the church a few centuries to come to a clear understanding of the trinity. Some of the church leaders who contributed to a right understanding of the trinity were Irenaeus (130-200), Tertullian (155-220 born in Tunisia), Athanasius (296-373 an Egyptian who was responsible for the triumph of the Trinitarian doctrine) and Augustine (345-430 born in Algeria). The Council of Nicea in 325AD adopted Athanasius' understanding of Christ as eternally begotten of God and thus laid the foundation for the doctrine of the trinity. The Council of Constantinople (381AD) asserted the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Disciplines: The Discipline of Submission

While writing this lesson a friend called me. He has a goal to complete a study program. He related to me that he has shared his desire with two leaders in his church. While the leaders have not prohibited his study, neither have they stated their support for it. My friend shared with me that he has decided to postpone his application for further study until his leaders share his conviction that it is the right thing for him to do.

Hebrews 13:17 states “obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

1 Corinthians 16:15 “You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.”

There is a delicate balance between submitting to those who have authority over us and taking initiative in making independent decisions. The Bible exhorts us to submit to those who have authority over us. This assumes that these leaders are humble and godly (see I Peter 5:1-5)—the kind of leader who humbly helps other believers in their desire to grow in Christ-likeness. This type of servant-leader is not aspiring to position and authority. He has learned from Christ that those who aspire to be great must be the servant of all. It is to this person that the Bible commands us to submit.

Does the Bible require us to submit every decision to church leaders? Of course not. We must realize that some of our decisions should be made in conference with church leaders. Others should be made with counsel from our parents or other family members. Some should be made with advice from professionals in the field concerned. Our church leaders are not to make all our decisions for us. As we grow in wisdom, we are to learn how to take counsel from others so that our life bears fruit to God. The key

question here is, are we willing to submit our views and decisions to those who are wiser than us and have more experience? Christ's disciple has an attitude of submission.

But submission is not only for the church. It is also a necessary discipline in society and in the family. Romans 13:1 states that "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." Does this mean that I must do all my government says without giving thought as to whether or not it is right. Of course not. Peter and John asked if it was right to obey men rather than God (Acts 4:19). When governments become oppressive it is the duty of Christians to work for reform and justice. However, the expectation of the Bible is that followers of Jesus will adopt an attitude of submission to the governing authorities realizing that God has placed them in their position of authority and they must also give an account to God.

Finally, submission is essential in the family. Children are to submit to their parents, wives to their husbands and all are to submit to Christ. This is no excuse for male dominance. Rather it is the commission of Christ and his apostles that the husband lovingly shepherd and encourage his wife and children. It is not a position of power but a posture of service. Men are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. In this sense there is a mutual submission (See Ephesians 5:21-22). The husband will submit himself to the good of the entire family and in this way minister to his wife and children as a loving shepherd.

Life as a disciple of Jesus requires that we be in relation with others. This will require the humility and discipline of submission. Who are you in submission to? Who are the godly servant-leaders that God has placed in your life? How are you reflecting God's command to submit in your family?

Memorize: John 15:1-12

Further Reading: 1 Peter 2:11-3:22

The Disciple's Spiritual Secret: Part 2

The Holy Spirit

Lesson 19: John 14:15-31 and John 16

I have often heard followers of Jesus comment on how they would have loved to be alive when Jesus was on the earth—to hear his teaching, see his miracles and follow him personally. Yet Jesus told his earthly followers that it was for their good that he was going away. After his departure he would send someone called “the counselor.” Consider the greatness of this person whose presence is better for us than the physical presence of Jesus on earth!

In this lesson we will look extensively at the Holy Spirit. Perhaps no other element of the Christian faith has so enthused, encouraged and comforted the followers of Jesus. However, at the same time, teaching concerning the Holy Spirit has also been a source of disagreement between many disciples.

By answering the following true/false questions you may be able to see how well-meaning believers can disagree on teaching related to the Holy Spirit.

1. True/False: I was baptized in the Holy Spirit when I was born again.
2. True/False: I was baptized in the Holy Spirit after I was born again.
3. True/False: The baptism of the Holy Spirit happened at Pentecost (Acts 2)
4. I know I am filled with the Spirit because
 - a. I have the fruit of the Spirit.
 - b. I have the gifts of the Spirit.
 - c. I asked for the Holy Spirit and Jesus promises that God will not withhold the Spirit from me if I ask.
 - d. I believe in Jesus.
5. True/False: Believers in the Old Testament had the Holy Spirit.
6. The Holy Spirit proceeds from
 - a. The Father
 - b. The Father and the Son
 - c. The Holy Spirit doesn't proceed
7. The main role of the Holy Spirit is to
 - a. Convict sinners of their need of Jesus
 - b. Give gifts to believers
 - c. Glorify Jesus
 - d. all of the above
8. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is
 - a. the unpardonable sin
 - b. rejecting Jesus Christ
 - c. worshipping Satan
 - d. I don't know
9. True/False: A believer may experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit many times throughout his life.

These questions are not easy. However, they are worth our most serious reflection. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in and with us now. You could consider the truth of the Holy Spirit to be the most important truth of your life with Christ. If you agree that finding the truth about the Holy Spirit is crucial, bow your knees and pray this prayer before beginning this lesson.

Father, I come to you through Jesus Christ. This wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit is extremely important to me. I want to learn about this great gift. Please be present with me as I read and reflect. Teach me, as you have promised, through the Holy Spirit. Let my life be changed that I may live more and more to your glory. I pray for the filling of your Holy Spirit as I open your Word. Amen.

Read John 14:15-31 and answer the following questions:

1. What title is given to the Holy Spirit in this section? What function will he perform in the life of Jesus' disciples?

2. There are three names given for the Holy Spirit in this passage. What are they?

3. How does this passage describe the relationship between the believer and the Holy Spirit? Does this relationship remind you of the Old Testament descriptions of God's covenant with his people? (Refer to Jeremiah 33 and Ezekiel 34)

4. Now take a quick look back at some of the passages related to the covenants of the Old Testament. Note any similarities between these passages and Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit work: Exodus 33:12-17; 2 Samuel 7:7 and 9; 1 Kings 8:29 and 57; Ezekiel 36:25-27.

5. Read verse 20. The picture is one of unity between Jesus and the Father. It is difficult to imagine a way to state the unity more clearly and succinctly. “I am in the Father.” It is astounding that Jesus says that his unity with us is similar: “you are in me and I am in you.” Given that Jesus has just introduced the idea of the Holy Spirit, what is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the unity of Jesus with the Father as well as his unity with us.

John 16

6. What does Jesus warn the disciples about in verses 1-4. Did this actually happen?

7. In verses 8-10 Jesus points out one main work of the Holy Spirit in three different realms. He will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. To convict can mean either or both of two truths. First, it can mean to demonstrate and prove guilt. Note that this does not imply that the person has any sorrow for his guilt. Secondly it can mean to impress the guilt on the conscious so that one repents and turns from his guilt. In reference to the first realm, verse 9 says that the conviction of sin is because men do not believe in Jesus. Fill in the chart below:

The Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning...

Sin because _____

_____ because Jesus goes to the Father

and Judgement because _____

8. In each of the three phrases above, how is the item named central to the role of the Spirit? For instance, why does the world's failure to believe in Jesus demonstrate it's sin and its need of the Spirit's conviction? How does Jesus' going to the Father demonstrate righteousness? How does the judgment of the prince of this world demonstrate judgment?

9. In verses 12-16, we learn that Jesus had not told his disciples everything. How were they to learn other important lessons? What would be the nature of these lessons?

10. In verses 22-24, Jesus speaks of "asking" and of "joy." What is the relation between the two? What, if any, is the condition for asking things of God?

11. In verses 26-27 we find a principle of prayer. To whom do we pray and why?

The chapter ends with Jesus' exhortation that we take heart. He affirms that we will have trouble in this world but that he has overcome the world. As you come to the end of this study, take a few moments to reflect on difficult situations you are facing. Remember Jesus' words that you will have trouble in this world. Thank him that his victory is available to you even in the difficulties you are facing. Thank him for his promise to live within you and resolve to live "in the Son" being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our Responses:

1. The Holy Spirit is called the “counselor.” In Greek this word is *paracletos*.¹² It refers to one who comes alongside to offer help. The function of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciples is given in verse 25: “He will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” The Holy Spirit would be responsible to make sure that Jesus’ words were not forgotten by the disciples. He would later inspire them to write the New Testament such that Jesus’ teaching would never be lost.
2. (1) The Counselor. Note that Jesus says “another counselor.” This must mean that he was acting as their counselor. The Holy Spirit is coming to take his place in this role of counselor.
(2) The Spirit of Truth. Again, notice that the Spirit bears the same marks as Jesus Christ who said “I am the way, the truth and the life.”
(3) The Holy Spirit. This Spirit is a spirit of holiness.
3. The first phrase describing this relationship is “to be with you forever” (verse 16). Jesus elucidates saying “you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” The Holy Spirit’s presence will be with and in the disciples
4. In Exodus 33:12-17 we read God’s promise that his presence will go with the people of Israel into the land he has promised them. (Although we did not read this passage specifically, we did read about the covenant made through Moses. This passage is a good summary of that covenant.)
In 2 Samuel 7: 7 and 9 God describes himself as having moved from place to place in a tent with the Israelites. In verse 9 he says that he has been with David wherever he has gone.
In 1 Kings 8:29 Solomon prays that God will have his name dwell in the temple among the people of Israel. The name is the symbol of the presence of God. The temple was intended to be the resting place of the presence of God among his people. Verse 57 contains the blessing of Solomon. The blessing is that God will be with his people.
Ezekiel 36:24-27 is the promise of a new Covenant. God says he will place his Spirit within his people. Clearly Jesus’ promise of the coming of the Spirit to live in his disciples is a clear fulfillment of the Old Testament covenants.
5. The unity of God is the foundation for all that he does. The Father and Son share the divine nature which is neither divided nor constructed of parts, but one eternal unity consisting of the persons of the Godhead. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us means that the Father and the Son will also live within us (see verse 23) because of the unity of God. This presence could only be mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. His presence with us is the

¹² Some have suggested that the spelling of this word should be changed to “periclutos” to mean “praised one” to refer to the prophet of Islam. This position is untenable. Three letters of the word *paracletos* would have to be changed (from □□□□□&••• to □□□□□&•••). Not one single manuscript of the New Testament indicates such a change.

presence of God in us. It is the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenants and the longing of mankind since the creation—to return to a right relationship with God.

6. He warns them of coming persecution—a persecution so severe that those who kill the disciples will think they are serving God. In fact, this did transpire. Church history records that 10 of the 11 original apostles died as martyrs.
7. The Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning...

Sin because the world does not believe in me (Jesus)

righteousness because Jesus goes to the Father

and Judgment because the prince of this world is judged.

8. At first glance the parts of these phrases may seem unrelated. When we look closer we see how intimately related they are to the role of the Holy Spirit. In the first phrase, the Holy Spirit convicts the world with regard to sin because it does not believe in Jesus. The Spirit's conviction comes to people. It may lead to repentance and conversion or the heart may grow harder leading ultimately to eternal separation from God. The sin of unbelief in Jesus is the root sin from which other sins (murder, stealing, etc.) sprout and grow. It is at the pinnacle of all human sin and represents the greatest extent of the world's rejection of God.

The second phrase states that the Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning righteousness because Jesus goes to the Father. This is probably a reference to Jesus resurrection and ascension. When Jesus was raised up, God powerfully declared him to be who he said he was. The resurrection was the Father's stamp of approval on Jesus' life and ministry as well as the seal of our justification (Romans 4:25). Also, the evidence of that resurrection is available to all. However, it is only the disciples of Jesus, by conviction of the Holy Spirit, who examine that evidence and allow it to lead them to repentance and obedience.

Finally, the judgment of the prince of this world represents the establishment of justice in the place of oppression and evil. Jesus assures us that the prince of this world (Satan) stands judged. It is the Holy Spirit's conviction that establishes this assurance in our hearts. God's justice will rule as surely as Christ has ascended to heaven and sits on God's right hand. Because the Prince of this world is judged, the disciple of Jesus can live in assurance that right will prevail, oppression will be punished and righteousness will prevail.

9. The disciples would have these things revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. The verse applies to Jesus' original disciples as they would be the first to

preach Jesus' gospel to the world. It also applies to us as his disciples. We must never assume that we have finished learning. The disciple is a continual learner and the Holy Spirit is our teacher. God has much more truth to reveal to us. The nature of the things the disciples would learn is simple: they are "Jesus' things." The Spirit would take the things of Christ and reveal them to the disciples. Our posture is that of a learner. Our school is the school of Christ. Our teacher is the Holy Spirit.

10. Jesus tells the disciples that by asking, they will receive and their joy will be made complete. True joy, then, is related to prayer and asking God to supply our needs. God never prohibits our seeking joy. In fact, he clearly lays out the way we are to seek it. We are to ask him for the things we desire. We are not told to strive after those things, to try to take them from others, to complain when we don't have them, etc. Rather we are to simply ask him.

There is an implicit condition. We are to ask "in the name" of Jesus. This is a powerful phrase which means that when we ask, we are asking in the person of Jesus. You will remember that Jesus said, we are "in him" (14:20). If this condition holds true, if we remain in him as a branch remains in a vine, we are to ask for what we desire. Jesus does not limit our desires. He simply instructs us to abide in Christ. This will determine that our desires are good, wholesome and God-glorifying. If this is true of us, we are to ask God for the things we desire. He will give us those things and make our joy complete.

11. We pray to the Father in the name of the Son. Asking in the name of the Son is not a formula we use at the end of prayers. Rather, it is stating that our life is drawn from the Son and all our concerns are related to him, to his glory and to his kingdom. Our being in the Son effects all that we will ask for and all that we will do with what we receive.

Secondly, we realize that this passage teaches us that we can pray directly to the Father. This is for the simple reason that the Father Himself loves us. The intercession of a saint or some holy person is not needed. Jesus himself states that his intention is not that he will ask for us, but that we ourselves will ask the Father and receive what we ask for.

Foundations: The Holy Spirit

- I. The Holy Spirit in the New Testament and the Old Testament
- II. The Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus
- III. The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
- IV. Does it still happen?
- V. The Reality of the Holy Spirit in our day:
- VI. Questions that need answers.

Since God is one God eternally existing in three persons why do we see so little of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament? Think again. In fact, the Holy Spirit is not missing

from the pages of the Old Testament, but present. The Spirit of God was said to be hovering over the waters prior to the creation (Genesis 1:2). Joseph had the Spirit of God (Genesis 41:38). Bezalel and Oholiab helped in the construction of the tabernacle and its utensils. They were said to have the “spirit of God.” The Spirit of God came upon the prophets (See Numbers 24:2; 1 Samuel 10:10). Visions were given by the Spirit of God (Ezekiel 11:24). The Holy Spirit dwelt among the people of God and was sometimes grieved by them (Isaiah 63:10-11). David pleaded that God’s holy spirit not be taken from him (Psalm 51:11) Joel promised that a day would come when God would pour out the Holy Spirit on all people (Joel 2:28). It is wrong to assume that the Holy Spirit was not active and present throughout the history of the people of God. However, his presence did come with a new power in the New Testament era, so much so that John could write “by this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (John 7:39) Jesus’ ascent to the Father brought a new and great reality—the coming of the Holy Spirit.

When John was sent to baptize, he identified Jesus with certainty because of one thing—he saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus in the form of a dove and rest upon him. John had been told by the one who sent him to baptize that this would be the sign of the Christ. When John saw this sign, he recognized Jesus Christ to be the Messiah of God (John 1:32-34). Furthermore, he prophesied that the role of Jesus would be a special one, far greater than his own role of baptizing with water for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus’ baptism, rather than being done with water, would be a Spirit baptism (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). Furthermore, John commented that Jesus would speak the very words of God as he was given the Spirit of God without limit (John 3:34). Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples in John 14 and 16. He told them specifically to wait in Jerusalem until the promise was fulfilled. “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5)

Acts 2 gives the account of that baptism of the Holy Spirit. It was a momentous event in history. There were visible and audible phenomena associated with the event. The audible phenomenon was a sound like a mighty, rushing wind. The visible was the tongues of fire which came to rest on the heads of the apostles (remember that John promised the baptism of Jesus would be with the Holy Spirit and with fire). Interestingly, God-fearers and Jews from the known world were present. Clearly this is a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy that the outpouring of the Spirit would be on “all people.”

The result of this event was an amazing addition to the number of believers. The Bible says that three thousand were added to the church in one day! (Acts 2:41) This addition was largely due to the preaching of Peter who had denied his Lord only a few weeks earlier. The baptism of the Holy Spirit brought a new power for ministry such that Jesus’ promise was literally fulfilled “He will do even greater things than these because I go to the Father.” (John 14:12) Jesus’ ministry had been powerful. Multitudes followed him and gladly heard his teaching. At Pentecost, that power was continued and even increased as thousands of people joined the church. That power kept everyone in

awe according to Acts 2:43. Miraculous signs and wonders were done by the apostles. The believers shared their goods. They met daily both in their homes and in the temple courts.

You may be asking, but can such things happen in our day? Have they also happened throughout history? These outpourings of the Holy Spirit have been called revivals. They have taken place in various countries throughout the world until the present day. Following is an excerpt written by Jonathan Edwards during the American Great Awakening in the early 1700's. "...many of the young people and children that were professors appeared to be overcome with a sense of the great glory of divine things, and with admiration, love, joy, and praise, and compassion to others that looked upon themselves as in a state of nature; and many others at the same time were overcome with distress about their sinful and miserable estate and condition; so that the whole room was full of nothing but outcries, faintings, and the like."¹³ These outpourings of the Holy Spirit do not only effect individuals, rather entire towns and countries are changed for the better as repentance floods hearts and the joy of the Lord begins to prevail in a given locality.

Recent revivals have taken place in regions of the world as diverse as Uganda, Brazil and Mexico. Again, the result was not only joy and happiness in God, but also societal change. Violence and crime decreased. Drug and alcohol abuse declined. Yes, clearly the power of the Holy Spirit remains at work in our day and we should expect his power to work in and through us.

However, many believers are disturbed by the reality of the Holy Spirit. They suffer with the sense that they are not filled with the Spirit because they see so little of the Spirit's power in them and working through them. What is the answer to this dilemma?

First, remember that the outpouring of the Spirit happened in the book of Acts. The event of Pentecost was prophesied by Jesus and identified by the apostles as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy related to the outpouring of the Spirit. The outpouring of the Spirit was given to the apostles and disciples collectively—as a group. It took place when they were all together (Acts 2:1).

Secondly remember that God, the Holy Spirit, is sovereign. The Bible declares that He is like the wind—blowing wherever he wills. You cannot coerce the Holy Spirit. Rather, he is given freely, sent by Jesus to comfort guide and empower believers. Also, in the matter of gifts, the Holy Spirit is sovereign. The Bible is very clear that the Spirit gives gifts to people as he wills, not as they will (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Thirdly, the Bible promises the Holy Spirit to all who ask for him. If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13) We receive the Holy Spirit by faith. We ask God and then trust him to fulfill his promises.

¹³Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards on Revival*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

Fourthly, we must never come to the point where we feel we no longer need the fresh filling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the infinite God. Receiving him does not mean that we have fully exhausted all the resources he has placed at our disposal. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit numerous times in the book of Acts. We should also anticipate his continual filling.

Finally, one often overlooked truth is that the Holy Spirit is a Spirit who sets his people on a mission—to glorify Christ among the nations. The book of Acts details the amazing story of how the gospel of Jesus spread first to the Jews of Jerusalem, then to the Samaritans and non-Jews and finally to the known world. This great expansion had nothing to do with the Christians' political clout or military prowess. Rather, it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was his presence that thrust the early disciples out to change the world. If you have any misgivings about the Spirit's presence and power in your life, ask yourself if you have made any significant movement towards the nations who have yet to hear of Christ. Is your prayer life concerned with neighboring villages with no witness to the gospel? Have you investigated how you might share the gospel in a place where it is yet unknown. Do you use your finances to make sure the gospel goes out to those who have not heard it before? As you move out in obedience to Jesus' great commission (Mt 28:18-20), you will be forced to depend on the Holy Spirit and prove his presence and power in your life.

Some Questions that Need an Answer:

1. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
2. What is the filling of the Holy Spirit?
3. What is the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit?
4. When does one receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
5. Do I have to have particular spiritual gifts as evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
6. Are there particular outward signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit?

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was accomplished by Jesus Christ after he ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the early disciples such that they were empowered for ministry. The Bible is extremely clear that the Pentecost event of Acts 2 was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. We should be careful not to individualize the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The outpouring was upon all the apostles and disciples. Jesus has poured out his Spirit whose presence and power is available to us now. If we understand Pentecost correctly, we should not think that it is a personal event which will happen to each believer individually. Pentecost, like the crucifixion, happened once for all believers everywhere. Its continuing power is still available to all who believe in Jesus.

Many Biblical characters are said to be "filled with the Holy Spirit." What was it that distinguished these believers from the others around them. Some, like Barnabas, were people of great encouragement. They always were ready to speak to others about

Christ and exhort them to follow Jesus with a resolute heart (Acts 11:24). There are others who were said to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” when they spoke out boldly in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:8, 31; 13:9). One of my favorite examples was the first martyr Stephen. He was filled with the Holy Spirit while preaching boldly to the Jews. As his death by stoning approached, he looked into heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:55) What are we to deduce from all this. The filling of the Holy Spirit is God’s special preparation for us to do great works

The Bible teaches that there is one sin which will never be forgiven. This is a terrifying teaching for some disciples of Christ as they wonder if they have ever committed such a sin. Mark 3:29-30 says: But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.” He said this because they were saying, “He has an evil spirit.” By reading this passage, we notice two things. First, the people who were accusing Jesus were religious leaders—teachers of the law. They should have known better. Secondly, they were not merely refusing to believe in Jesus, rather they were specifically attributing Jesus’ mighty works to Satan. This is the unpardonable sin. When one who is well-versed in the Scriptures and should be familiar with the powerful workings of God, sees them in front of his face and then denies their reality by attributing those works to Satan, that person will not be forgiven. Rest assured that if one has committed such an atrocity, he will never come to Christ in humble repentance. This was proved by the Jewish teachers of the law who continued their pursuit of Jesus until they finally put him to death.

There are many views about when the believer has the baptism of the Spirit. The views divide into two groups: those who believe that the baptism of the Spirit happens simultaneously with the new birth and those who believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit happens subsequent to conversion. Both sides can produce abundant arguments and passages from the Bible to support their views. A few considerations are in order.

First, no one can believe unless the Holy Spirit is present and active in his life. “And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” (Romans 8:9) The new birth is a state which is brought about by the direct working of the Holy Spirit to convict an individual and bring him to faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit is not divided. We do not receive part of him today and then another part at some future time. The Holy Spirit is present in those who believe and follow Jesus Christ.

Secondly, the Bible indicates that there are experiences of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which happen subsequent to faith. In our view the “outpouring” of the Holy Spirit and the “baptism” of the Holy Spirit are two terms that mean the same thing. (See Acts 1:5 and 2:17-18 and 10:45) Just because we have placed our faith in Jesus does not mean that we do not need to come more fully under the control and empowering of the Spirit. Rather, our relationship to God through the Holy Spirit is a dynamic relationship of the new covenant. We should anticipate a growing relationship to God through the presence of the Spirit and a growing experience of his power in our lives as we grow in faith and understanding. The Holy Spirit demonstrates his power and control over our

lives increasingly as we step out into new areas of ministry with bold dependence on God.

So I find there are elements of truth in both views about the Holy Spirit's baptism. Because the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all believers at Pentecost, he is available to all. His power and presence is available to us continually as we move out in faith and obedience to Jesus. We should not base our assurance of the Spirit's filling on experiences (speaking in tongues, falling down, etc.). Rather, we should base it on the sure promise of Jesus that the Father will give the Spirit to all who ask him (Luke 11:13). Then we should anticipate new and fresh fillings of the Holy Spirit to empower us to serve God.

Much could be said about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are three lists of gifts given in Scripture (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4). These lists are not intended to be exhaustive lists. They probably cover the various types of gifts which the Holy Spirit gives. We must always remember the purpose of the gifts. They are given to build up the body of Christ. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (1 Cor. 12:7) No spiritual gift is given as a "feather in our cap." We are to humbly serve our brothers and sisters with the gifts God has given us. We should also remember that each believer is given gifts. Scripture commands us to use our gifts (Romans 12:6-8). If you do not know what your spiritual gift is, why not ask an older and more mature believer what he or she believes your gift to be? Realize that you have a gift and use it to build up God's people around you.

There remains a question about supernatural experiences such as speaking in tongues, crying out under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, falling down and various other phenomena that believers have reported. God is not limited. He may or may not give such supernatural experiences to followers of Jesus. Notice that the apostle Paul rarely spoke about his visions (See 2 Cor. 12:1-5). He seems almost hesitant to mention them and declines to share the content of his vision saying that the things he heard were not permitted to mortal men to speak. He recounted his vision of the great light he saw at his conversion twice in the book of Acts (Acts 22:6ff; Acts 26:12ff), yet Paul declares that he will never boast except in the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14).

If God chooses to bless you with a supernatural experience through the Holy Spirit, then cherish that memory and hold to it. However, do not boast about it and do not assume that just because you have had an experience that you cannot fall or grieve the Spirit at some later stage of your life. However, do not seek a particular experience. Many have sought supernatural experiences and found them, only to discover that the experience was not from God, but either produced psychosomatically or by the presence of ungodly spirits. Therefore, don't make supernatural experiences your goal. Your goal is the fullness of the Holy Spirit in order to serve Christ fully.

Rather than look to experiences to verify that you have the Holy Spirit, look for obedience to Christ and a willingness to take the message of his truth to those who have not yet heard. Look also for the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) as the sure indication of

the presence of the Spirit. And don't forget, ask Him for the Spirit. He is more than willing to give.

Further Reading: Acts 1:6-10, Acts 2

Memorization: Galatians 5:22-25

The Unity of the Body

Lesson 20: John 17

One of the greatest challenges of parenting is being unified with your spouse in decisions related to your children and their upbringing. Often my children sense that my wife and I have differing opinions about how they should act and who they should go out with. Over the years we have learned that as parents we must present a unified front to our children. It would be disaster for my wife to refuse to let our daughter go out and then find that I had given my permission. Being unified in our parenting means that we must communicate, respect our differences, make conciliations and then determine what is best for our children together. Unity is not sameness of opinion. It is a commitment to operate as one. It requires that each of us give and take for our common good.

I have seen the principle of unity demonstrated many times in sports. Suppose a soccer team is skilled enough to win the national championship. They are strong both on defense and offense. However, one of the forwards decides that the defense is not doing his job well. He tries to play both positions. The defensive player is tired of letting the offense score all the goals. He moves out of his position to get his fair share of goals. The result would be a disaster. Every player must play his position to secure the victory for the entire team. A team that lacks unity, like a husband and wife that lack unity is a sure recipe for disaster.

Jesus' final prayer before his crucifixion gives us a window into the travail of his soul. He pours out his heart to God. In this prayer we see clearly the unity of the Father and the Son which he has spoken about in the previous chapters of John. We also see a new addition to this unity. He now asks that his followers be one. His final prayer was consumed with this reality—the unity of his followers.

We will need to give our best time and effort to pursuing this unity if we are to be disciples of Jesus. Pray now that God would show you new truth from his word. Then enter into the lesson with a desire to gain new understanding (with the mind), feel the depth of Jesus' desire for unity (with the emotions) and act in unity with your brothers and sisters in Christ (the will).

Father, I approach your Word—the words of your beloved Son whom you said I should listen to. I realize that the presence of Your Spirit is in me, with me to make these truths live in my mind and heart. I ask you to clear away the debris of this world so that I can listen to you unhindered. Take away the clutter of my mind and heart. Let your word penetrate deep into my conscience and transform me deep within. I sincerely thank you that I can hold your word in my hands, read it with my eyes and understand it with my mind. Come and teach me, Holy Spirit through Jesus, Amen.

Examining the Scripture

Read John 17:1-26

1. What is Jesus' first request from his Father? Where is that request repeated? What relation do you observe between this request and John's prologue (John 1:1-14) and what is its significance?

2. To whom does Jesus give eternal life? Read John 6:37-39 and 45. What do these verses teach concerning those who come to Jesus. Where else is the same thought repeated in John 17?

3. How does Jesus define eternal life? Write your understanding of Jesus' definition.

4. In verse 9, Jesus says "I pray for them..." The prayer for these people continues through verse 18. Who is Jesus praying for exactly? What is his request?

5. When Jesus prays for their protection, exactly what is he asking that they be protected from? How has he exercised his own protection of them?

6. Contrast the emotions of the disciples and the emotions of the world in verses 13-14.

7. What is the means of the disciples' sanctification (sanctification means to make holy)? How does this word sanctify us? What does this mean for your own sanctification?

8. Summarize verse 18. What implications does this teaching have for us?

9. In verse 20, Jesus begins to pray for another group of people. Who are they? What is his prayer for them? What will be the final result?

10. Jesus' last statement in this prayer says that he makes the Father known to us that the love the Father has for Jesus would be in us. Take a few moments to describe God's love for Jesus. Do it in your own words. Then read your description and thank the Father that such a deep love can be in you.

Our Responses

1. That the Father would glorify him, that he might, in turn, glorify the Father. It is repeated in verse 5. Here Jesus prays that the Father would glorify him with the glory he had with the Father before the creation of the world. Jesus' prayer to his Father clearly echoes his unity with the Father before the creation of the world. This is one of the main ideas that John presents in John 1:14: "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." At the end of his life, Jesus is facing the gruesome prospect of death by crucifixion. Yet, he sees this as a return to glory—the glory he had with the Father since before creation.
2. Jesus gives eternal life to all those the Father has given him. The verses in John 6 confirm the same truth. It is repeated in John 17:6 and 9. Although we think of salvation in terms of our acceptance of Jesus, that is only one side of the coin. The fact is that we have been given to Jesus by the Father. The initiative is in his hands. He has confided us into the hands of Jesus and no one can take us away from him. This is the truth of our eternal security. It does not rest on our power to choose Christ. Rather, it rests on an eternal commitment between God the Father and God the Son in which the Father gave a people to the Son for his bride—the church.
3. He says that eternal life is "to know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Eternal life is knowing God and Christ. The important word in this definition is "to know." What does it mean? In modern languages "to know" something may simply mean to be able to recall it to memory. I know my address, for example. It may mean to have a relationship with such as "I know my neighbor." It can also mean to know something or someone intimately such as "I know my son." This last sentence means that I know my son's desires. I know what motivates him and how he reacts. I know what embarrasses him, what encourages him, what defeats him. I and my son share a deep relationship. This is the kind of knowledge Jesus is talking about when he declares that eternal life is to know God and himself. It is not merely knowing about God. It is an intimate relationship as he indicated in John 15 by the analogy of the branch and the vine. The two are organically related such that there is no life in the branch without the vine. Eternal life must be eternally growing and progressing. No matter how well we know God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) we cannot ever come to the end of that knowledge. It will grow through eternity. Knowing God is living in a right relationship with him.
4. Jesus is praying for his disciples and those who have followed him during his time on the earth. He prays for their protection.

5. Verse 15 is very clear. Jesus is asking that they be protected from the evil one. This is also clear when Jesus says that “none has been lost except the one doomed to destruction” (this refers to Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus). Jesus is not talking about protection from disappointment, protection from physical harm or any other kind of protection. He asks God to protect the disciples’ souls. Jesus protected them “by that name you gave me.” (verse 12) The name is representative of the person. Many of Jesus’ names are used in John’s gospel. Perhaps the most expressive one is “I am” in John 8:58: “Before Abraham was, I am.” Jesus has exercised the power and authority of God to keep and preserve the souls of his disciples. Now as he prepares to depart from the world, he asks the Father that the disciples continue to be kept by the same power and authority—the very name of God.
6. The world will hate the disciples. Jesus warned them over and over that this would be the case. Most of the disciples died by martyrdom. Immediately after Pentecost they were questioned and imprisoned. The world hated them. However, the unexpected emotion which characterized the disciples was joy. One would expect fear or self-preservation in the face of such hatred. However, the word of Jesus produces the full measure of Jesus’ joy within them.
7. Jesus prays that the disciples would be sanctified through the truth—God’s word. In order to grow in holiness we must be exposed to God’s word. We read and understand with our mind, internalize the word through our emotions and react to the word through our will. Depriving yourself of God’s word for long periods of time is like depriving a plant of water or an animal of food. We cannot grow in sanctification without the word of God.
8. Jesus has sent his disciples into the world in the same way that God the Father sent Jesus into the world. As Jesus came to teach and do the works of God, he also sends his disciples. While we are not part of the original twelve disciples, we are sent into the world by Jesus. Our role in the world is not to be passive. Jesus sees his disciples as change agents in the world. We are to do the works of God.
9. Jesus prays for those who will believe in Him because of their (the disciples’) message. This is a prayer for all believers after the time of Jesus on earth, which includes, of course, you and me.

Jesus prays that we would be one. This must mean that unity is available to us. Jesus would not pray for us to be one if it were not possible. But what is unity? Does it mean we all have the same opinions? I think not. It does mean that we all have the same Lord—Jesus. Following him will impact the way we interact with other Christians. I just read a news article. In it, a national believer plainly stated that one of the foreign Christian workers in his country was his enemy and should leave his country. When this kind of disunity takes place, it is a clear affront to Jesus and flagrant disobedience to

his desires. On the other hand, when churches and believers of different denominations join hands to work for the glory of Jesus in a given location, unity is expressed. The result is a clear proclamation to the world that Jesus is sent from God.

10. God the Father's love for Jesus is eternal. It existed before the world was created and before I was born. It is perfect love with no blemishes or shortcomings because God himself is perfect. It is a love that is thorough in its knowledge and understanding. It is a love that is proud—a love that declares “this is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.” It is a love that is self-giving. The Father gave his only begotten Son. The love of the Father will never end. Even death could not separate the Son from the love of the Father. It was a love that allowed the Son to endure hardship but also gave him ultimate victory.

Foundations: Eternal Security

Can a believer lose his salvation? Can you be born again one day and the next day be lost? This is a question that plagues many believers. Consider these statements of Jesus:

John 6:39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

John 10:27-30 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”

John 17:6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

The starting point for a right understanding of this doctrine is a right understanding of salvation. If one sees salvation as primarily his personal decision, then it stands to reason that he could easily decide to abandon the faith. If, however, salvation is an eternal agreement or bond between God the Father and God the Son in which a people are secured for God's glory, then it would be hard to imagine how such a person could lose his salvation. Our view is that salvation is initiated by God. Of course, this does not mean that he forces us to repent and turn to him. Rather, he regenerates us to a new life such that we desire God and willingly embrace the faith. Because our salvation is God's work, we cannot lose it.

In Romans 8:30, Paul states “and those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” For Paul, there was no doubt that salvation was the work of God from beginning to end. Can you imagine Paul saying, “now some of those he predestined, he failed to call” or “some of those he called,

he did not actually justify.” That would be preposterous. Salvation is the work of God from beginning to end.

However, there are some qualifications. First, there may be those who look very much like they belong to Christ but they do not. They may come to gatherings of the church and have a sincere testimony and yet not be one of God’s people. Jesus will declare to some who have done miracles and cast out demons that he never knew them (Matthew 7:23). The only true judge of who is in Christ is Jesus Christ himself. We make judgments based on what we see. God looks on the heart.

Secondly, there are those who abandon the faith. They are drawn to the people of God and they seem to be believers. Yet, in time they turn their back on the faith. What do we say of these people? Though they had the outward signs of faith, these people were never in Christ. These people represent the bad soils in Jesus’ parable of Matthew 13. They seemed to be fruitful, but in the end, their heart (the soil in the parable) was not prepared to receive the seed of God’s word.

If this doctrine is true, why does Hebrews warn against falling away? (Hebrews 3:7-19; 6:4-12) Essentially, the writer of Hebrews is writing to a group of converted Jews somewhere in the Roman empire. The fires of persecution are beginning to heat up and some are enticed to leave the community of believers and return to Judaism. Hebrews warns them that going back would be returning to something far inferior to Christ. Therefore, to leave Christ would be to fall away from the faith. However, the writer of Hebrews also says he is convinced of better things from the Hebrews. He believes they are truly in the faith and will not fall away. His warnings are a necessary call for them to examine their faith and re-commit themselves to follow Christ even at great personal cost. Times of persecution reveal who is born of God and who is not.

Does this doctrine imply that we should not be concerned about losing our salvation? Really, this question needs two answers for two different types of people. The first person is the one who arrogantly takes this doctrine as a cover-up for what is actually his lack of obedient faith. To this person, we reply that he is to examine himself to see if he is in the faith. The faith of Christ produces good works. True faith changes us from within. If that change is not present, then it is probable that the individual is not even in Christ. Rather than resting on this doctrine, this person should examine his heart, repent and plead for God to have mercy on him. A right understanding of this truth leads to humility as we realize that God has accomplished our salvation.

However, there is also a type of believer who is truly in Christ, but he or she struggles with doubts. There is evidence of true faith and a constant struggle to put away a life of sin and live in holiness, even though there may be many failures along the way. For such a person, God’s word is clear that he is securely in God’s hand. Even in the midst of his struggles, he can be assured that God is the author of his salvation and he will complete it to the end (Phil. 1:6).

The doctrine of eternal security is a double-edged sword. It can and should give us great assurance before God that we are his people and no enemy can snatch us out of his hand. However, we must also be warned that there are many who pose as God's people who are not truly in Christ. We must remember that the final judgment is in his hand and we should not be surprised when seeming believers abandon the faith and turn their back on Christ.

Further Reading: John 6:16-71; Ephesians 1:3-14

Personal Worship

In this lesson, we read a prayer of Jesus. Some have asked, since Jesus is God in the flesh, why did he need to pray? Was this an exercise of God talking to himself? Of course the answer is that Jesus as God the Son was in fellowship with God the Father. That fellowship was perfect, unbroken and complete. For Jesus, prayer was natural. It was the expression of his unity with his Father.

The fact that Jesus prayed should push us to consider our own prayer life. If the Son of God found it necessary to pray, how much more should we? Consider what the Bible tells us about Jesus' practice of private prayer.

Mark 1:35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Luke 4:42 At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place.

Luke 6:12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

Although we don't have a daily record of Jesus' activities in the gospels, it seems clear that he was accustomed to withdrawing from the commotion of ministry in order to commune with the Father. This often happened in the early morning while it was still dark. Jesus maintained this pattern even on days when the crowds were seeking him out.

Christians through the centuries have found that a daily time of communion with God has been one of their greatest sources of spiritual strength and growth. Personally, I remember specifically when I began to take a daily time of personal worship. It was at that point that my spiritual life began to develop. At first, the practice of a daily worship time may seem like a discipline—a rule that you need to keep. However, you will soon find it to be as necessary as the air you breath. Here are a few suggestions for planning a daily time for personal worship.

1. Consecrate a place. Jesus told his disciples to go into their room, shut their door and pray to their father in secret. Choose a place and consecrate it to God to meet with him each day.

2. Consecrate a time. Some people prefer evenings, others go for early mornings. Whatever time you choose, make an appointment and resolve not to break it. Don't try to reserve too long a time at first. Begin with a brief time period, say 20 minutes. Remember that God is with you the entire day. The personal worship time will allow you to focus your thoughts on him before you step into the day's commitments.
3. Have a plan. There is no law about how to conduct your time with God. Take the following suggestions and adapt them to what suits you best.
 - Read or recite a memorized Psalm or sing a hymn of worship.
 - Invite God to come and be with you, dwell in you.
 - Read and meditate on Scripture. If you read three chapters a day plus one Psalm or one chapter in Proverbs, you can complete the entire Bible in a year. That may be too much to start with. The important thing is that you read systematically through a book of the Bible. Don't skip around in your reading. Keep a journal and write down the things you learn about God. Commit passages of the Bible to memory so that you can recall them during the day.
 - Respond in prayer. Start by worshipping God for what you learn about him. End by asking God for the things you and others need from him. It is a good idea to record your prayers in a journal as well. It will help you remember what you have prayed for so that, when God answers, you can take note and give him praise and thanks.

As you grow in your walk with God, you may want to expand your personal worship time to include serious Bible study or memorization of the Word. However, remember the important thing is that you connect with God and grow in your relationship to him. Allow his word to speak to the weak areas of your life. Write down your ideas about how you should change and grow. It is a time when you give to God and He also give to you.

One of my favorite descriptive phrases in the Bible is spoken of Noah. It was simply said that he “walked with God” (Genesis 6:9) What a beautiful expression of the life of faith—to “walk with God.” Let that be the goal of your personal worship. Develop a “walk with God” where you commune with him as your Lord and Creator, but also as your companion. Let every day be a meaningful encounter, a new opportunity to walk with him.

Scripture Memory: Psalm 1 (This is a great Psalm to recite at the beginning of your personal worship)

The Disciple's Restoration

Lesson 21: John 18-21

We have reached the final lesson in our course. Congratulations for persevering all the way to the end!

Failure. The very mention of the word discourages. No one admires a failure. Certainly no one wants to be a failure unless he is in an unhealthy state of mind. Yet, the persistent reality is that we all fail. We fail academically, relationally and morally. We disappoint those closest to us and those we love the most. Our lives contain failure.

The essence of being a disciple is that we learn to succeed in following Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we believe that following Jesus Christ is true “success.” So you could say that the path of discipleship is the path of true success. But there is a nagging question, “what if I fail?” What if I am unable to follow him fully? What if I mess up? What if I commit some horrible sin? What if I deny him in a moment of weakness? What if I fail?

It is a striking fact that Jesus, even when on his way to death on a cross, was aware that his disciples would have to face failure. What was about to transpire—the crucifixion—was so devastating that they would abandon him. One of the disciples would even deny that he knew Jesus. What is even more stunning is that this was the leader of the twelve—the spokesman.

How does Jesus deal with failures (like us?). You’ll see in this lesson.

Jesus’ death is the apex of the gospels. In the gospel of John it is told with great simplicity and clarity. There is the intrigue and corruption of the Jews, the cowardice and political self-preservation of Pilate, the fear of the disciples. You will notice that the study itself does not deal directly with Jesus’ death. As you read John’s account of the crucifixion, try to place yourself in front of the cross. Think of all that you have studied in these lessons and how all the Old and New Testaments come to a climax in this one all-important event. See him there, on the cross for you.

Prayer: Father, I have failed. But I believe that you are the author of success and that as I follow Jesus you can restore me and turn me into the fruitful and effective disciple you have promised that I will become. As I look into your Word, let my heart and my mind see. Let me understand, love and obey you. Please ignite my being with the love of which only you are worthy. Let me be your disciple, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Examining the Scripture:

Read Luke 22:31-34; John 18-21

1. Describe Peter’s emotions in Luke 22:31-34.

2. In John 18:15-27, we read of Peter's denials. Compare the answers Jesus gives with those that Peter gives. What were the results of both sets of answers?

3. In 18:28, we find that the Jews did not enter the Roman palace in order to avoid ceremonial uncleanness because they wanted to eat the Passover. You may recall that the Passover should have been eaten the night before. There are two possible explanations for this. One is that "eating the Passover" refers, not merely to the eating of the Passover lamb, but the whole festival which lasted eight days. Another possibility is that the Jews referred to here are not all the Jews. Rather they are the Jews who went with the Roman soldiers to arrest Jesus. John 18:3 says that they are "some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees" (probably members of the Sanhedrin). As these leaders were meeting to prepare for Jesus' execution, they had postponed the eating of the Passover lamb. In any case, these Jews were concerned about their ceremonial cleanness.

What was the significance of the Passover meal? How do these Jews demonstrate that they have totally missed the essence of the Passover celebration?

Read all of John 19 and 20 quietly and prayerfully. There are no questions on this part of the text.

4. Read John 21:1-7 together with Luke 5:1-11? What similarities do you see between the two accounts. Why do you think Jesus chooses this location to confront Peter?

5. In John 21:15-29 Jesus carries on an interview with Peter. He repeats a question three times. The question is simply “do you love me?”¹⁴ This allows Peter to affirm his love for Jesus three times before the watching disciples. What effect do you think this had on Peter and the disciples’ understanding of Peter’s role?
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Jesus re-created a scene from Peter’s past. Three years prior to the denials, Jesus encountered Peter on the Sea of Galilee. He called him to come and fish for men. Peter’s heart must have leaped at the possibility that he, a normal fisherman, could actually become a disciple of Jesus—a fisher of men. He must have found it hard to believe that Jesus would call him—a sinful man. After three years of following Jesus, observing his miracles, hearing his teaching, seeing Jesus’ transfiguration and his powerful confrontation with the religious leaders, Peter has an experience which could either destroy his life or be a springboard to fulfill his longings and dreams. Peter fails. He fails miserably. The one thing he promised he would never do, he did. He denied his Lord. When Jesus’ eyes met Peter’s that night, he must have been shaken to the depths of his soul. Peter had vehemently denied the one who was true, who was pure and who was sent from God. Everything that was valuable in his life was thrown away in one moment of weakness and cowardice. Surely this was the end.

Peter has nowhere to go. We surmise that he is confused and unsure. He simply returns to the old and familiar thing that he knows how to do. “I’m going fishing” (John 21:3) he says to his friends. That’s where Jesus meets him. It must have reminded him that he is called to a new kind of fishing. The very fact that Jesus came and sought him out must have given him hope that restoration might be possible. His leap from the boat expresses more than a thousand words. Perhaps he was fearful that Jesus would disappear and there would be no more occasion to be with him or hear from him again. Peter leaped. The boat, the fish and even the other disciples paled in insignificance as he realized that now was his chance to go to Jesus. The words he heard were stern and yet they were effectual to re-establish Peter as a disciple of Jesus and a leader of the other disciples.

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32) For Jesus, even the useless person is useable. Even the weak can be strong. Even the one who has lost hope has great hope. Jesus makes

¹⁴ Jesus’ three questions use two different Greek words for “love.” The first two questions use *agapao* whereas the third uses *phileo*. Peter, on the other hand, uses *phileo* in all his responses. This is not terribly significant as John uses these two words interchangeably. I do not think, for instance, that Jesus is asking in the third question if Peter will at least love Jesus as a brother (*phileo* often refers to brotherly love). John normally does not make this distinction between the two words. In John 5:20 John says “the Father loves (*phileo*) the Son.” In John 16:27 Jesus says “the Father himself loves (*phileo*) you.”

things new, not just one time when we're born again. Following Jesus means to be born again with each new day. Jesus puts us on the path of growth and change.

He prays for you. When you return, strengthen the brothers and sisters! Let each setback become a springboard for growth and change. Amen.

Our Responses

1. I would describe his emotions as boldness, confidence and assurance. Peter was ready to follow Jesus to the death. We are not told what Peter's reaction was after Jesus predicted that he would deny him three times. Given his confidence previous to this, he must have been incredulous or confused to think that Jesus entertained such thoughts of him.
2. Jesus Answers were direct and honest. Peter's were dishonest. Jesus gets struck and insulted for his honest answers. Peter preserves himself from any suffering by dishonesty.
3. The Passover meal was eaten after the Passover lamb was slain. This lamb was slain as a redemptive sacrifice. The Israelite families were saved from the angel of death because the blood of a lamb was shed in the place of their firstborn. Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of the Passover lamb. His blood purchased the security of all God's children. The angel of death would no longer execute God's righteous judgment because the eternal lamb of God had taken their guilt. The Jews did not realize that they were leading the Passover Lamb (Jesus) to his slaughter. After Jesus was crucified they went to their homes satisfied and ate the lamb that had absolutely no value while the blood of the eternal lamb of God was smeared upon the wood of a rugged cross.
4. Luke 5:1-11 contains the story of Jesus' calling of Peter. In this scene as well as in John 21, Peter has worked hard all night and has caught no fish. In both scenes, Jesus tells them where to let down in the net. In both they bring in a great catch of fish. In both, Peter reacts emotionally to Jesus' presence. In Luke, he asks Jesus to depart from him because he is a sinful man. In John 21, Peter leaps from the boat out of eagerness to get to Jesus. In both situations, Jesus gives Peter a personalized call. The call in Luke is "from now on you will catch men." The call in John 21 is "feed my lambs."
5. Peter repeats his love for Jesus three times. The final time he confesses that Jesus knows all things and therefore he must know that Peter loves him. Put yourself in Peter's place. He has publicly denied his Lord after having been a leader of the disciples. It seems that he has disqualified himself as a disciple of Jesus. Peter realizes this as he goes out and weeps bitterly after having denied Jesus (Luke 22:62). Jesus replies by giving Peter a commission—feed my lambs. The affirmation of Peter's love is repeated three times as well as Jesus' commission. Perhaps this corresponds to Peter's three denials. The

effect is that Peter and the disciples who are listening realize that Peter is forgiven and restored to his former role of leadership among the disciples.

Foundations: Suffering and the Disciple of Jesus

We now come to one of the most important topics for the disciple of Jesus Christ. Reactions to suffering vary from person to person and from one religious faith to another. It is common in the Middle East to hear a fatalistic response to suffering or evil. Onlookers attribute the suffering to the “will of God” as if to say there is no way around it as God has willed it. Many in the West question if God is all good and all powerful, why would he allow suffering to take place? Others suggest that suffering indicates God’s displeasure or that it is actually a punishment from God for some sin. But how did Jesus respond to suffering and how does he teach us to respond? How did his disciples understand and react to suffering?

Consider the following passages:

'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (John 15:20)

At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." (Mark 6:25)

"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. (Acts 14:22)

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12)

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him. (Phil 1:29)

Why suffering? Can it not be avoided? Is there no way around it?

No one enjoys conflict. We dislike disagreements with our friends. That is conflict on a small scale. How much worse when the conflict is between nations and massive weapons are threatening the peace and stability of entire countries! Conflict is difficult. Yet, we readily acknowledge that conflict is often necessary. In fact, the greatest achievements of humanity are usually brought about at great cost. Tyrants and dictators have been defeated through warfare. New societies have been established as citizens of a country rise up to cast off the chains of a brutal dictator. Great discoveries which have bettered the condition of humanity have come at great cost to scientists and researchers. Some have even paid with their lives.

But what does this have to do with our Christian life? Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means that we are stepping into a conflict of cosmic proportions. From the early lessons of this course, we saw how Satan attempted to disrupt the relationship that God established with man. He succeeded by appealing to man's pride and his desire to be like God. God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head while the serpent (representing Satan) would bruise the heel of the man. The conflict is ongoing till this very day. This is why the Bible warns us in very explicit language that we are to expect suffering and persecution as followers of Christ. We are involved in a conflict between the forces of evil and a holy God. The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ assures us that the all-powerful God has won this war, yet the reality of the conflict is still present.

This suffering and persecution is not merely the unfortunate consequence of being a Christian. In the life of the disciple, suffering and persecution accomplish purposes uniquely designed by God his people. "And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Romans 5:2-4 As we follow Christ, suffering takes on a new meaning. We can begin to understand it in a new light. Of course, you will spend the rest of your life growing in your understanding of God's purposes for you in suffering. As a beginning, let me point out three purposes which God brings about in our lives as a result of suffering.

If an athlete wants to increase the strength of a particular muscle, he exercises that muscle intensely, working it to the point of exhaustion. As the muscle heals, it returns to a greater level of strength. Then the wise athlete will carefully work out the muscle again. The increased exercise of the muscle does not destroy it, rather it builds it up to become stronger.

Suffering in the life of a disciple plays a similar role. **Our suffering strengthens and deepens our faith in God.** One of my good friends spent nearly a year in prison in a country of the Middle East. He had committed no crime except confessing his faith in Christ. Yet, he was held in solitary confinement and even tortured. When he came out of the prison he was in a weakened and sickly state. Many people pitied him. Yet as he reflected on his prison experience, he realized that God was the friend that was closer to him than a brother. His experience in the prison gave him greater boldness and assurance that Jesus would never leave him or forsake him. He became a fearless follower of Christ after he had passed through the veil of suffering and persecution.

We must also remember that suffering does break the faith of some. I have heard stories of those who denied Christ when threatened by torture or other forms of persecution. If this is your case, realize that you are not alone. Seek out other brothers and sisters in Christ. Let God return you to the place of victory and assurance. Remember that a muscle, after being broken down, heals even stronger. Perhaps the breaking of your faith is for the purpose that you return to an even stronger faith.

Remember that Jesus did not abandon Peter in his moment of weakness. Rather, he sought Peter out and intentionally restored him to ministry.

I have noticed that the people who are most helpful to me during periods of discouragement or weakness are those who have passed through suffering and persecution. I recently read a book about Christian manhood and how the disciple of Jesus should treat his wife. I found the author's comments poignant, so much so that I sensed he was speaking to me directly. I later learned that this particular author had been through a very difficult time in his own marriage. His wife had battled a severe depression and he had to learn to battle for her. He carried out his battle in prayer as well as emotionally. His suffering gave his words a dimension of reality that other teachers could never had. The second reason we endure suffering and persecution is to **strengthen and encourage others who suffer.**

Paul spoke of this truth in 2 Corinthians 1: 3-6: (God) "who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer."

We are placed here to glorify God. One way that is done is by building up his people and encouraging them in their distress and suffering. The Arabs have a famous proverb which says "ask one who is experienced rather than asking a doctor." The best advice is given by those who have walked ahead of us. The suffering you are experiencing now may be the building block of God's people at some point in the future.

A third purpose of suffering is that **it magnifies the Lord whom we follow and draws others to him.** When the world sees that people are willing to give their lives for what they believe, they take note. This was true of the early apostles. They were willing to die for the Jesus they preached. One of the early church fathers in North Africa named Tertullian uttered the famous statement that the "blood of the martyrs is seed." He observed that the killing of the Christians, rather than stamping out the church, actually contributed to its growth. No martyr has died in vain.

When I was a student at university, I read the story of a group of missionaries who worked among the Auca Indians of South America. I was amazed and impressed by the knowledge and passion of these young missionaries who made it their ambition to take the gospel to the cannibal tribes of South America. No challenge was too great for them. In the 1960's they waited for the approach of an Auca Indian on the river bank where they had landed their small plane. Although the missionaries thought they had won the friendship of this tribe, they were deceived. All seven of their group were slain by Auca spears and left to die a horrific death. News of their martyrdom spread round the world. Many of them left wives and small children behind. The prominent question in the media was why would a good God allow these brave men to come to such a horrific end?

I am not sure how it happened, but as I read of those courageous men, my own heart was bolstered and impassioned to follow God with courage and abandon. I determined that I, as well, would follow Jesus, serving him among people who had never heard of him before. In fact, an entire generation of missionaries consciously picked up the baton of these seven martyrs. Their martyrdom served to thrust out many hundreds of workers to the ends of the world.

When we encounter suffering, we will feel overwhelmed with the pain. In those moments, we must have one thing settled before God. The saints in the book of Revelation cry out “worthy is the Lamb.” The disciple of Jesus must count the cost of following Christ. Is he worth more than fame, than wealth, than security? Is Jesus worth the cost we will be called to pay? For the disciple of Jesus, there is only one answer: “To whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.” Jesus Christ is the end of our pursuit. He himself is the prize which we seek. Like the apostle, the disciple of Jesus cries out, “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” (Phil 3:8)

The path that God has traced for us is intended to bring us to Christ likeness. He warned us that we must carry the cross. He told us that just as he himself was called Beelzebub, so his disciples would be mistreated. The promise is not that he will take us out of the world, but that he will always be with us in this world. That unique promise is made to the disciple of Jesus, “Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”

Prayer

Father, I ask not that you remove me from the sufferings of this world. Rather I ask for your presence as I walk through them. Strengthen and sustain me and let me fulfill the purpose for which you created me—to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, your only Son and my Lord! Amen.

Further Reading: 1 Peter 4; 2 Corinthians 4; Mark 6:16-30

Memorization: Philippians 3:7-14