

Dr. Michael Bliss

From Faith to Faithfulness

“Foundations For Spiritual Growth”

Dr. Michael Bliss

Second Edition

Dr. Michael Bliss

Copyright © 2013 Michael Bliss
All rights reserved.
ISBN: 1492377848
ISBN-13: 978-1492377849

Dr. Michael Bliss

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Fran Bliss, my wife and companion on our own journey from faith to faithfulness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I also want to thank my wife for her encouragement, insightful suggestions, and English teacher skills in wrestling with my grammar and punctuation.

My thanks also to my friend and pastor Norm Evans who provided encouragement and valuable feedback for the content of the book.

CONTENTS

1	THE BIBLE, THE WORD OF GOD	Page
	Lesson 1 – What Is The Bible?	1
	Lesson 2 – The Inspiration Of The Bible	7
	Lesson 3 – The Authority Of The Bible	13
	Lesson 4 – What About ‘Difficulties’ In The Bible?	19
	Lesson 5 – How Did We Get The Bible?	25
2	GOD THE FATHER AND THE TRINITY	Page
	Lesson 1 – Knowing God	31
	Lesson 2 – The Nature Of God	39
	Lesson 3 – The Attributes Of God	45
	Lesson 4 – The Works Of God	51
	Lesson 5 – The Trinity	57
3	MAN, THE CREATURE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD	Page
	Lesson 1 – The Creation Of Man	63
	Lesson 2 – The Nature Of Man	69
	Lesson 3 – The Original State Of Man	75
	Lesson 4 – The Fall Of Man	81
	Lesson 5 – The Present State Of Man	87
4	THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD	Page
	Lesson 1 – Who He Is	93
	Lesson 2 – His Birth	99
	Lesson 3 – What He Did	105
	Lesson 4 – What He Is Doing Now	111
	Lesson 5 – What He Will Do	117
5	MAN’S SIN AND GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION	Page
	Lesson 1 – What Is Sin?	123
	Lesson 2 – Man’s Need	129
	Lesson 3 – How A Person Is Saved	135
	Lesson 4 – Faith And Repentance	141
	Lesson 5 – Sanctification And Perseverance	147

6	THE HOLY SPIRIT, OUR INDWELLING TEACHER	Page
	Lesson 1 – Who He Is	153
	Lesson 2 – The Work Of The Holy Spirit	159
	Lesson 3 – The Fruit Of The Spirit	165
	Lesson 4 – The Gifts Of The Spirit	171
	Lesson 5 – Being Filled With The Spirit	177
7	THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST	Page
	Lesson 1 – What Is The Church?	183
	Lesson 2 – The Sacraments Of The Church	189
	Lesson 3 – Making The Most Of Church	195
	Lesson 4 – The Church As The Body Of Christ	201
	Lesson 5 – The Structure Of The Church	207
8	AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE	Page
	Lesson 1 – The Big Picture	213
	Lesson 2 – The Structure Of The Bible	219
	Lesson 3 – The Old Testament	225
	Lesson 4 – The New Testament	231
	Lesson 5 – Christ, The Central Focus	237
9	HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLY	Page
	Lesson 1 – Why Study The Bible?	243
	Lesson 2 – Biblical Examples Of Bible Interpretation	249
	Lesson 3 – Basic Principles Of Bible Interpretation	255
	Lesson 4 – Practical Hints For Bible Study	261
	Lesson 5 – Bible Study Aids	267
10	HOW TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE	Page
	Lesson 1 – What Is Prayer?	273
	Lesson 2 – Basic Principles Of Prayer	279
	Lesson 3 – How To Pray	285
	Lesson 4 – What To Pray	291
	Lesson 5 – Hindrances To Prayer	297

From Faith to Faithfulness

11	LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE	Page
	Lesson 1 – The Christian Lives By Faith	303
	Lesson 2 – Dealing With Temptations And Doubts	309
	Lesson 3 – Dealing With Sin And Failure	315
	Lesson 4 – Self-Denial Is Necessary	321
	Lesson 5 – Separation From The World Is Necessary	327
12	CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND SERVICE	Page
	Lesson 1 – Servanthood Is An Attitude	333
	Lesson 2 – Love And Thanksgiving, The Key To Service	339
	Lesson 3 – Christ, The Model For A Servant	345
	Lesson 4 – Be Sensitive To The Needs Around You	351
	Lesson 5 – How To Witness To Others About Christ	357

INTRODUCTION

This book had its beginning as a twelve-week audio discipleship program I developed while working on my Doctor of Ministry degree. It is designed for those who want to be serious about their faith and, thus, contains a clear call to obedience in Christ, to put off the old and to put on the new. It challenges the reader, as does the Scriptures, to die to self so that Christ can live in them, and because of these emphases, it may well seem radical to modern Christianity.

The program grew out of a burden that there was a desperate need for new believers, and some not so new believers, to be established in the faith and to have a foundation of spiritual truth that finds expression in faithful living. My observation, as both a ruling elder and a pastor, was that many church members were still babes in Christ, having never grown beyond the elemental things. My desire was to help new believers progress to a place where they would be strong in the Kingdom of God and experience the blessings of those devoted to Christ.

The theme for this course comes from Colossians 2:6-7, "As therefore you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving." There is a great need in the church today for everyone who has come to know the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ to be built up, established, and rooted in their faith.

It is a sad commentary on our modern culture that it has substituted feelings for truth, subjectivity for objectivity, and entertainment for worship. For the church to reclaim its power as the body of Christ, it has to reclaim its roots in the objective truths that the Bible teaches. And for the individual believer to live in the joy and power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, he too has to be rooted and built up in the faith so that his life reflects the reality of one who belongs, body and soul, to Jesus Christ. My earnest desire is that this book will be used to build up believers and in so doing help the church to grow in God's grace and be used for His glory.

Chapter 1

"THE BIBLE, THE WORD OF GOD"

Lesson 1 "What Is the Bible"

Much of the success of your Christian life will be determined by how well you become established and grounded in the truths of God's Word and in your relationship with God that is based on these truths. It is crucial, therefore, that your relationship and experiences stand solidly on the Word of God. My hope is that through this book you will find the material and encouragement you need to lay a strong foundation, that in the days and years ahead you will find yourself maturing and growing in the faith, to the end that you will be both fruitful in your own spiritual life and a faithful and useful servant of the Kingdom of God.

It should be emphasized that it is the Holy Spirit's work that brings about this change not our own effort. However, it is also true that those who "sow sparingly, reap sparingly and those who sow bountifully reap bountifully." (2 Cor. 9:6) There is an investment required in your walk with the Lord that will determine the amount of fruit that is borne.

As we begin our study together, we are going to devote this first chapter to examining the topic of the Bible, the Word of God. We're starting with the Bible, not because it is first in importance, but because the Bible is the source of our knowledge of all things Christian. In other words, everything that we understand about God, everything that we understand

about the Lord Jesus Christ, everything that we understand about what God wants us to do and be, everything that we understand about how we're to grow and how we're to mature, we learn through a study of the Scriptures. It's vital, therefore, as we begin, to understand exactly what it is that we have in this book that we call the Bible. Your understanding of what the Bible is will determine to a very large degree the kind of walk and the kind of relationship you will have with God. The prominence you give the Bible in your life, perhaps more than any other factor, will determine how strong your faith will be.

In this lesson we're going to look in particular at the question, What is the Bible? Why do we have the Bible? What's the purpose of the Bible? What are we to do with it? What is it for? In future chapters we'll deal with how to study the Bible and also get an overview of the contents of the Bible. But for now we're going to look at the more foundational issue of what the Bible is.

Let me say that first and foremost the Bible is a book in which God reveals Himself to us. What the Bible is, is a revelation of who God is, of what He is like, and of what His will is for us. The Bible is a revelation of the person and work of God.

Therefore, as you study the Bible, you will need to understand that you do not merely read it for information, but recognize it has a very personal content. It is as though God were revealing to you, in an intimate sort of a way, something about Himself, to the end that you would worship Him as God, that you would fellowship with Him, that you would honor Him, that He might bless you, and that He might be glorified.

The Bible not only has power to reveal truth about God and man, but it also has the power to transform the lives of those who receive its words in faith through the application of the Holy Spirit. We do not read the Bible just to add information to our storehouse of knowledge. Instead, as we open our heart to the Word, the Holy Spirit can actually do a work in our heart that changes us, that changes our character, that changes us from the inside out. It is important that we approach the Bible with this frame of mind. We need to clearly understand that its purpose is to be the seed that will change us into what God wants us to be.

The Bible is not meant to tell us what to do so that we would try to do what it says in our own strength. On the contrary, we're to receive the Word in such a way that the Holy Spirit can use it to mold and change our hearts. In that way we'll naturally become what God wants us to be,

which is more and more to fulfill the nature and the image of God in Christ Jesus. He is the center of all the teaching of the Bible. He is the Word of God made flesh. He's the picture of what God is seeking to do in our lives as we are made more and more like Him.

And so, the Bible is the means that God has chosen to show us, in a personal way, who He is, with the specific purpose that we'll honor, worship, obey, and serve Him. The Bible will also reveal to us the character that God wants us to have, that is the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will show us the work that God will do in and through us as we feed on His Word in faith. It often does this by revealing sin in our lives. It is by the process of acknowledging our sin and repenting of it that God moves us towards His purposes.

There are two basic ways for a person to learn and understand something new. He can either find it out for himself, or he can be told by somebody who knows. When it comes to knowing God, when it comes to knowing the ways and the will of God, we have no way of finding that out for ourselves. We can not reach up into heaven and grab hold of God to examine Him. We can't coax Him down to earth to take part in a scientific experiment. The only way we can know Him is if He reveals Himself to us. We need to be taught about Him by Him. We need to be shown by Him who He is. God's ways are above finding out. The knowledge of the person and nature of God is beyond our means. We've been separated by our sin from knowing and walking with Him. We need to be enlightened and transformed by the Word of God.

My hope is that every time you read the Bible, uppermost in your mind will be the understanding that the passage you are reading is seeking to reveal to you something about God, about His ways, about what pleases Him, and about what displeases Him. You need to be convinced that the Bible is God's revelation of something you need to know. It's personal. It's not merely a history, although it is that. It's not merely a testimony of how God dealt with His people in time's past, although it's that also. Rather, all things that are written in the Scriptures are written for your understanding, for your growth. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16) Again, I hope that as you read and study the Bible you keep this in mind so that you find yourself reading it as a personal revelation of God to you. God wants you to know and respond to Him.

However, having said that, I need to be careful not to create a false understanding. Just because the relationship you have with God is personal, and reading the Bible can and should be a personal revelation of God, it does not mean that this revelation will mean something different to different people. The truths that the Bible reveals are normative and the same for all people. There may be different applications of the truth depending on what is going on in your life, but the truths are universal. We must clearly distance ourselves from the modern relativism which likes to say that a truth can be “true for you but not true for me.” The truths of the Bible are true for all.

Not only does the Bible reveal God to us, but in the process it reveals to us who we are. One of the most basic questions that all men deal with in one way or another, some in a very sophisticated, philosophical manner and others in a way that perhaps they haven't even understood themselves, is the question, Who am I? and the accompanying question, Why am I here? What purpose do I have in life? What's the meaning of my existence? The Bible will answer these basic questions. It will show you who you are. You're a person made in the image of God. You were created by God for the purpose of living a life of fellowship and obedience to Him that would bring honor and glory to His name. It's only as a person understands and walks out on these truths that he can find true purpose in his life. Wherever else one may look for purpose, he will never find it outside of the relationship he was created to have with his Maker.

When we talk about the revelation of God in general, we sometimes find it convenient to break it down into two different forms of revelation. We can make a distinction between general revelation and special revelation. General revelation is that which is revealed to all men, whether or not they know God or have the Bible. General revelation comes through God's created order. We ought to be able to look about us, the Bible says, and know that there is a God by the things He has made. We ought to know that the things that we see were created by God. We ought to be able to look at God's creation and know that God is, and we ought to worship Him. (Rom. 1:20)

The limitation with general revelation is that it's not adequate to show us all we need to know about God. It can show us that there is a creator, but we need more than that. This is where the Bible comes in. It's God's special revelation. It reveals to us not only that there is a creator, but also the plan that God has made to redeem His people from their sin. The Bible reveals to us the nature and character of God, along with His will

From Faith to Faithfulness

for us. It contains within its pages, all that we need to know to walk faithfully with Him day by day. There's not a problem you will face, there's not a situation you will find yourself in, there's not a thing that you will need to know to be pleasing to God, that can't be revealed to you as the Holy Spirit takes God's Word and opens it to you and applies it to your situation.

This doesn't mean that the Bible is a reference book where one can turn to the index and find a reference for every imaginable situation or need. What it does mean is that while communing with God through His Word, the Holy Spirit, the author of the Word, can guide and direct you through the trials and tribulations of life. This guidance is often by simply believing a promise or obeying a command, not knowing the outcome, but faithfully trusting God and walking by faith.

In the next lesson, as we continue our study of the Bible, we'll look at the subject of inspiration. What does it mean when we say that the Bible is inspired? Who was its author? Why is it important for you to understand the issue of inspiration?

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Deuteronomy 30:11-14
2. Luke 24:27

Answer these questions:

1. Why has God given you the Bible?
2. Why is general revelation not enough for you to know God?
3. What can you expect to happen in your life as you study the Bible?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 1 "THE BIBLE, THE WORD OF GOD"

Lesson 2 "The Inspiration of the Bible"

In this lesson we're going to look at the topic of the inspiration of the Bible. In the previous lesson we talked about the Bible being the self-revelation of God. Having said that we have already said quite a bit about the inspiration of the Bible. When we talk about inspiration, the important question is, What is the source of the Bible? Where did it come from? The reason this is so important for us to understand is because our belief concerning how the Bible came into being and who we understand its author to be will determine a great deal about the amount of authority we place in it.

Therefore, we will devote this lesson to examining the question of inspiration and the resulting issue of accuracy. One of the passages of Scripture that we will turn to in order to understand the inspiration of the Bible is 2 Peter 1:21, "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." This passage tells us that holy men were moved by the Holy Spirit to write the words that we find in the Bible. The Scriptures were written by holy men who were moved not by their own will, thoughts, or ideas, but by the Holy Spirit. This tells us that there were two parties involved in the writing of the Bible. First, the words that were placed on paper were actually penned by men, but they are not simply the words of men. They are the words of the Holy Spirit. They are the words of God. God used holy men as instruments of His will to write His words.

Another verse that teaches us something about the authorship Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:16. This verse tells us, "All Scripture is inspired by God." It is especially helpful to our understanding of inspiration to get the full meaning of the word "inspired." In the original language, this word literally means "God-breathed." All Scripture is God-breathed. All Scripture has as its source the very breath of God. So what is being said is that the origin of the words that we have in the Bible is with God. Though He used men to write these words, we need to understand that these are not simply the words of men. We may not fully understand the process that was used in inspiring these men to write God's Word. What is important is that we understand that the Bible is the Word of God. It is the very Word of God.

In fact, one of the ways we can talk about this matter is to say that the Bible teaches verbal inspiration. The orthodox church has always affirmed that the Bible is verbally inspired by God. What we mean by verbal inspiration is that God so moved these holy men that the words which they wrote were the exact words that He wanted to be recorded and retained for the use of His people.

No doubt as you read through the Bible you will come to recognize that the writings of the different human authors reflect their own personalities, unique character, and even their own style. Nonetheless, the words that were written were not such that God merely gave His approval to the final results, that is to the concepts that emerged. It wasn't that these men wrote their own words and God read them over and was satisfied with what they had said. No! Every single word was recorded because it was the exact word that God wanted to be recorded. The Bible is the immediate work of God. He was not removed from the process in the least. Rather, He controlled the process through His Holy Spirit. That is why we can say boldly that the Bible is the very Word of God.

Again, let me say that the issue at stake is of critical importance. Whom we understand to have been the author of the words of the Bible will determine the authority with which we receive its teachings and the allegiance we give to it.

Some people have sought to teach that the Bible is merely the words of men. They count it authoritative only to the extent that it describes the religious struggles and beliefs of religious people of the past and thus gives some account of the history of God's dealing with His people. We need to be bold to say that this understanding is not only inadequate, but wrong. The Bible is the Word of God. It is valid for all time. It is as valid and important for us today as it ever has been for any people at any time in the past. It's not merely a religious history. It is not merely a journal of man's quest for God. It is an expression of the mind and heart of God in human words.

This brings us then to the question of accuracy. If God is the author of the Bible, and if our understanding of God is proper, then we must affirm that the Bible is without error. In so doing, we will look at two words that will be important for us to understand their meaning. The two words that we will use to guide our discussion of the accuracy of the Bible are "infallibility" and "inerrancy."

When we say that the Bible is infallible, one of the things that we mean is that it will not fail. It will always prove to be true. It will always prove to be accurate. It will not let us down. Whatever it says to be true, or whatever it promises to do, to those who meet the qualifications, it will always be true. The Bible is infallible. It can not fail.

When we talk about inerrancy, our focus is more directly on the issue of its accuracy. When we use the word "inerrant" we are saying that the Bible is without error. There are no errors or untruths in the Bible. When it was originally written, it was without the slightest error, not only in matters of religion but also in every area it touched, whether it be science, history, anthropology, or any other subject. If we truly believe it is God's Word, then we will recognize that it must be inerrant.

There are several reasons why we believe that the Bible is without error. First and foremost is that the Bible teaches that it is inerrant. Though we will get more into this particular matter in a later chapter, we do need to understand that the Bible teaches it is without error. Secondly, the Lord Jesus Christ affirms in His teaching the fact that the Bible is inerrant. In the third place, the orthodox church has always believed and held to the inerrancy of Scripture. Finally, God's character demands that the Bible be understood as inerrant.

The Bible teaches inerrancy, not so much in proof texts but in each part supporting the whole. New Testament authors, not to mention Jesus Himself, refer to Old Testament teachings as eternal truth. In Matthew 5:17-18, Christ exclaimed,

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”

The jot and tittle He refers to are tiny accent marks in the Hebrew alphabet, and in using these terms He is saying is that the Word of God is important and accurate down to the smallest detail.

Our concern in studying these matters is not only that we grasp the truths at hand, but also that we understand the underlying issues that hang in the balance. If we believe that the Bible contains errors, or that it, having been penned by men, is subject to human error, then we have no basis whatsoever to think that the Bible can be trusted in any way. If the Bible

contains human error and it follows that it is up to us to weed out what is true from what is false, then we have no basis for confidence in anything that it teaches, for it would all have to be suspect. We would have no basis for thinking it had any absolute authority. We would have no basis for trusting any of it because we could never know for sure if what it taught could be believed. We might want it to be true, but we would have no basis to be sure. Something might be discovered tomorrow that would contradict what we thought was true today. The very things that we would stake our spiritual life on, such as salvation by grace alone through faith alone, would have to be as much suspect as any other of the Bible's teachings. In other words, we could have no certain knowledge or assurance of anything in our relationship to God.

Anyone who does not believe the Bible to be the very Word of God, literally, fully, verbally, directly and inerrantly, has no true basis for believing any of its promises. The only reason that we have to trust and obey the Bible is because it is God's own Word. The reason that we can believe John 3:16, or any other verse in the Bible for that matter, is because we know its Author. We know that it was God-breathed. We know that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. We know that God can not lie. Therefore, we have proper reason to believe and commit ourselves to every word that it sets forth. It is not full of errors. It does not contain the least error. It is accurate in all that it touches. Many times the claims of the Bible have been challenged by unbelievers. Yet each time the Bible ultimately proves to be true, while those who make such claims pass on without notice.

As we have taken time to set forth the truth of the inspiration of the Bible, as we have talked about the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible, we need to have as one of our deepest convictions, that the Scriptures are completely trustworthy. They need to be received with the same honor and attention that we would give to God Himself, were He to come and stand before us and speak to us, for surely this is what takes place when we receive the Word of God aright.

We have a moral obligation to accept every one of the precepts of the Bible as holy truth. We have reason to believe and count on every one of its promises to come to pass. We have reason to take heed of every one of its warnings for they too shall surely come to pass. The Bible is God's inspired Word.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 2 Timothy 3:16
2. 1 Peter 1:21

Answer these questions:

1. Why does it make a difference what you believe about the authority of the Bible?
2. Why would it make a difference in your life whether or not the Bible is inerrant?
3. Can you have assurance that anything the Bible teaches is true if you deny its inerrancy? Explain.

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 1 "THE BIBLE, THE WORD OF GOD"

Lesson 3 "The Authority of the Bible"

If, as we have said, the Bible is the inspired Word of God, what does this say about the authority it should have in our lives? What does this say about how we ought to respond to the teaching of the Bible? This is a critical issue in the life of everyone who claims to be a believer.

The Bible is not given simply to make us wiser. It is not given simply to give us more knowledge. It is given so that we would respond in faith to the will of God. It is given to transform and move us from who and what we are as fallen creatures into who and what God wants us to be in Christ. This transformation will affect not only our conduct, but more importantly our character, or nature. The Bible is given to us by God to make us holy in heart and mind, that we might respond properly in our relationship with Him.

As we study the Bible, it ought to consciously be in our minds to understand how we should respond to God. What does God want me to do? How does God want me to change? What does God want me to become? How can I respond to this new insight? We need to keep these questions always in mind.

Another purpose of the Word of God will be to bring us to a place of conviction regarding our sin, so that the Holy Spirit can lead us to repentance. In this way God is able to deliver us from both the penalty and the power of our sin.

We need to be clear in understanding that the purpose of the Bible is to be an instrument used by the Holy Spirit to cause change in both our conduct and character. In other words, the Word of God will be a tool of sanctification in the hands of the Holy Spirit. God's purpose is to make us more like Christ. Since that is true, the purpose of the Bible must be to bring this sanctification to pass.

As we think on these matters, especially about the claim that the Bible has on our lives, we are brought face to face with the issue of authority. When we understand that God is the author of the Bible, we must conclude that the Bible is backed by the authority of God Himself. It has

the authority, as God's Word, to impose moral obligation upon us. If we look at the word "authority" we see that it contains the word "author." The author is the one who has the authority to impose obligation upon that which he authors. God is our Author. God is our Creator, and in that capacity He has the right to impose obligation upon us. It is within God's sovereign right to require us to submit to His holy will. The Bible is how He reveals to us both the blessings He makes available and the obligations His will imposes.

We are living in a day when the words we have been looking at, authority, morals, and obligation are not popular concepts. Authority is something that is spurned so that everyone can "do his own thing." We are told moral absolutes are "old fashioned." We are told to "first love ourselves" and do those things which bring our own happiness. Obligation has become obsolete as we are told to assert our own rights.

Yet, in this day in which there is so much rebellion against authority and moral absolutes, people are struggling like never before to find something, anything, which will hold them safe and secure. With the rejection of authority and its related values, many have been set free to do their own thing, only to find that their own thing was not worth doing. It doesn't bring the satisfaction and peace of heart and mind that they so desperately desire deep in their souls. Cutting themselves free from the authority of God and His Word, they find themselves drifting, lost and lonely, in a very large ocean with others who are drifting lost and lonely. God has designed and made us to be happy and at peace only when we yield ourselves fully and freely to Him and receive to ourselves the blessed privilege of walking with Him in His will for our lives.

While we are dealing with this matter, it is important that we make the point that the Bible has authority within itself. It does not have authority because we grant it authority. It doesn't get its authority from the recognition and acceptance of the church. It doesn't get its authority from what good it may bring. But it has authority in itself because it is the Word of God.

Because many people have interpreted portions of the Bible in different ways, there has grown up an attitude among some church people that the words of Scripture can mean different things to different people. In other words, whatever you get out of a passage is valid for you, and whatever I get out of it, even if it contradicts what you have said, is valid for me. This way of thinking is not only foolish but dangerous. If the Word can mean anything, then it really means nothing. If it can mean

one thing to one person and the opposite to another person, it is not hard to see that it can have no real meaning or authority for anyone. There must be a basis for authority. The Bible has as its basis of authority its origin in God. It is not like an abstract work of modern art that can be whatever you want it to be. The Bible is the absolute truth of God, revealed to us as the standard by which we are to know the truth about God and His creation, including ourselves.

Furthermore, we need to understand that the authority it has extends over all of our living, not just our "religious" life. Now the Word does direct our worship of God, so that when we come to worship, seeking to know how we are to worship Him in the manner He desires, the Bible is the authority that sets this forth. When it comes to our daily living, what is sometimes erroneously called our own "private living," i.e., what we do Monday through Saturday, the Bible has the same authority to direct us in God's will. It has something to say about how we are to spend our time, what our priorities are to be, and what we are to do to be pleasing in God's sight. The Bible, as God's Word, has authority to tell us what we ought to do with our money. The Bible, as God's Word, has authority to tell us how we are to spend our energy and resources, how we are to relate to our family, how we are to relate with other people on the job, how we are to relate to our government, to our community. All areas of life are under God's care and therefore under His Word. The Bible has authority over all of life.

It is important to realize the Bible doesn't present its claim of authority through a list of rules and regulations or through a guide that shows us what to do in every situation. Instead, the Bible is a living Word that comes alive as the Holy Spirit applies it to our own unique situation. Because the Bible is a living word, we need always be close to it, that it may direct our living more and more into the abundant life of faith.

God is interested in every single aspect of our lives. There is nothing that we do that falls outside of God's care and concern. There is nothing we do in life, however insignificant it may appear, that is too little to be of interest to God. He has made us to live in concert with Him and for Him, to be a part of our lives in every moment of the day. We are tempted to think that this would be restrictive and burdensome. Yet it is not at all a burden for a true believer. He has come to realize the truth of the Bible promise: "In His presence is the fullness of joy." (Psalm 16:11)

Because a believer has had his heart transformed by God and finds fulfillment in being obedient to God, the Bible, rather than being something that imposes burdensome restrictions upon his life, is seen as exactly the opposite. It is not a list of do's and don'ts, "you can't do this and you can't do that." To the believer whose been given a heart of love for the Lord, the Bible is a source of joy and delight, for it tells him the very things he is seeking to discover. As the psalmist wrote, "I delight to do thy will, O God." (Psalm 40:8)

We can get a better picture of this truth if we think of a young couple who are in love. For either of them, to love the other and to devote their attention to the other is not a burden. For them, to do those things that please the other is the very thing that they delight to do for it is an expression of their love. So it ought to be for a believer and his response to the Lord. Take hold of this picture and apply it to your walk with the Lord. It's to be a walk of gratitude. It's to be a walk of thanksgiving. It's to be a walk of love. It's something that you do, not to win God's favor, nor to earn His blessings, but because you already have these things. They have been given freely to you in Christ. And now that you have them, now that you have tasted the love of God, it will more and more be in your heart to want to walk in His will. The thing that will bring the most delight and joy to your own heart will be walking in His will as He reveals it to you in the Scriptures.

Having said this, I can't ignore the fact that we still have the old nature to deal with, which pulls at our heart and mind to do our own will and to resist God's will. It will be a constant struggle as long as we live. It is sometimes quite a strong pull and, for a season, can seem to thwart and overshadow our love for God's will. But in the end, God's grace will win out and the result will be that the Word of God will be the source of life itself, as God daily leads us by the Word of His mouth.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. James 1:19-25
2. Joshua 1:8

Answer these questions:

1. What changes ought to take place in your life as you realize the authority that the Bible has in speaking to you?
2. Why should an authoritative Bible not be a burden to you?
3. How can you demonstrate your submission to the Word of God?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 1 "THE BIBLE, THE WORD OF GOD"

Lesson 4 "What About 'Difficulties' In The Bible?"

Thus far, we have been talking about the Bible as the Word of God. We have been dealing with fundamental and foundational principles, some of which have been somewhat technical, but nonetheless important, building blocks for how we will learn from the Bible.

Now we are going to examine a question that is often raised by people who do not know the Bible. Yet, it can also be a question that believers should know how to deal with as they have opportunity to talk to others and perhaps even as they deal with this issue concerning their own faith. What is being referred to is the question of "difficulties" in the Bible. The way that an unbeliever might raise this question would be to ask, "How can you believe in the Bible when it contains so many errors?" We need to address this question, not because there are errors in the Bible, but because we need to understand the issues that are raised.

Particularly, what do we do with the few passages that might appear to contain error? How do we respond to those who dismiss the Bible as being the Word of God because they have always been told, but have never investigated for themselves, that the Bible is full of errors and contradictions?

It is impossible to come to the Bible being neutral. Trying to be neutral, thinking that you won't accept or reject anything until it passes your test of credibility, is setting yourself up as the final judge of truth. It is setting yourself above the Word of God as its judge, rather than letting it speak to you as God's word.

There is a very real sense in which this was the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They had, on one hand, a word from God, saying not to eat of a certain tree. On the other hand, they had a word from Satan, saying that it was all right to eat the fruit of the tree. As soon as they began to weigh the matter and decide for themselves who was right, they began to fall. They placed themselves in the position of judging God's word, rather than receiving it as true because God said it, as though God would lie.

We are to be under the authority of the Bible, not over it. We are to receive it as truth. We are to study it. We are to ask questions about it. We can even have questions in our mind about what it says and how it can be so. But never should there be any question in our mind as to whether or not the Word is in error. We shouldn't be surprised that when God reveals truth to us that some things go beyond our ability to grasp. After all, He is God Almighty, and we are but finite creatures.

Now, as we take up the subject of biblical error, we should first say that the orthodox church knows of no errors in the Bible. The Bible certainly is not full of errors and inaccuracies. But sometimes it does contain things that are difficult to understand and reconcile.

The first thing we need to do as we look into this matter is to make some distinctions. We need to define what error is before we can properly evaluate if the Bible contains errors. For example, imprecision is not an error. If somebody asked me how tall I am and I say that I am six feet tall, when I am actually only five feet eleven and a half inches, that is not an error, but merely imprecision. In response to the question, it was not my intention to give my height with scientific precision but only to give an accurate description of my height in terms that are suitable for the purpose of the question. To say it a different way, rounding off answers, when exact precision is not needed, is not error. Usually we do not want exact answers to our questions. It would be too cumbersome. All we want is that which will supply us with what we need to get the correct picture. We can talk about something being ten feet long without having to mean that it is exactly ten feet long. Now if we say that we are being precise and then are wrong, that is another matter. But imprecision in itself is not an error.

Therefore, when the Bible says in one place that something took place in a 430 year span and in another passage describes the same event as having taken place in 400 years, we can understand that there is not a contradiction. One of the writers was merely rounding off the more precise number which was quite suitable for his purpose.

Another distinction we need to make concerns the matter of brevity. Brevity or summary is not error. For example, if the Bible gives two accounts of the same incident, and one of the accounts is given in detail, listing every thing that took place, and the other account summarizes the incident, leaving out some of the detail, it is not error because the two

accounts are not exactly the same. The difference lies in the purpose of the writers and whether or not detail served their purpose or obscured it.

Yet another area that we need to be careful not to label as error is in the area of descriptions concerning how things appear to be. For example, some will say that the Bible teaches that the earth is the center of the universe and the sun revolves around the earth, which would be an obvious error. The basis for these allegations are passages in the Bible that talk about the sun rising and setting and seemingly revolving around the earth. Biblical critics are quick to say that the Scriptures teach an archaic view of the universe that is obviously in error, thus casting doubt upon the veracity of the Bible as a whole.

However, talking about the sun rising and setting and giving the appearance of revolving around the earth is simply an accurate description of the way it appears. Every modern weatherman on television or the most learned scientist talks about the sunrise or sunset. We don't mean, by these words, to imply a model of the universe but are only describing what we see with our eyes.

Even these simple distinctions can go a long way in clearing up some of the problems that are brought up when people seek to ascribe error to the Bible. Much of what they call error is not error at all. Yet, there still remain some passages that are hard to understand. There may even be a few that we may not know how to reconcile between what it says in one place and what it says in another. In this situation we must make a choice about what is going to be the final source of authority in our lives. What will ultimately determine what we believe to be true? Will it be my intellect or will it be the Word of God? Are we going to say that because we can't understand, because it doesn't fit with what admittedly limited knowledge we have, it can't be true and we will not accept it? If we are not careful we will end up saying, "I am the ultimate source of authority. Only those things that make sense to me can be true. The things that don't make sense to me I will not accept as true." If we take that position we place ourselves in a dangerous spot. If we end up making ourselves the ultimate determiner of what is true and what isn't, we replace God in His rightful place on the throne in our lives.

What we as believers ought to say in the situations which we can't fully grasp or understand is, "I don't understand how this all fits together, but I am so convinced in my heart by the Holy Spirit of the truth and authority of the Bible that I will believe what it says, even when I don't yet know how to fully grasp how it all fits together." In this manner of thinking

the Bible is given its proper place as the source of truth and authority for the believer.

Some people might fear that they would have to give up their intellect if they were asked to believe the Bible, whether or not they could understand it all. Actually, it is more rational to believe God's Word than something based merely on your own limited understanding of His creation. There are many things that we don't understand. There are many areas in which we would be wise to acknowledge we don't have all the answers. It is far wiser to go by the Word of God than by any lesser word. Believing the Bible is the most rational thing you can do.

Ultimately, being sure of God's Word, and having complete confidence in what it says, comes only by the assurance given by the Holy Spirit. All of the arguments in the world will not convince you of the truth of the Bible. The only way to know this assurance is to accept it by faith and allow the Spirit to do His work in your heart.

Finally, let me suggest that as you come across something in the Bible that you don't understand, that you study it, seek to understand but, if after all of your study, you still don't understand, set the matter aside. Be willing to admit that you may not be equipped to understand the matter at this time. Don't reject it. Don't say it can't be true. Just set it aside for the time being. Then, as you mature in the Lord and later come across the same matter, you will have a better framework in which to understand the truths involved. This would be a wise way to handle these matters.

God's Word is true. It will never let you down. The difficulties in the Bible are only difficulties to the understanding of a finite mind. They are not difficulties to the truth. "The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." (1 Peter 1:24-25)

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 2 Peter 3:15-16
2. Isaiah 40:8

Answer these questions:

1. How is it possible to not understand something the Bible teaches, but still believe it is true, without giving up your intellect?
2. Are you asked to believe the teachings of the Bible without any reason? Explain.
3. What is wrong with the idea of coming to the Bible with a “neutral” mind?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 1 "THE BIBLE, THE WORD OF GOD"

Lesson 5 "How Did We Get The Bible?"

The last issue we are going to deal with under this topic is the question of how we got the Bible. How did it come into being in the form that we now have it?

Let's begin this discussion by giving a few facts about the Bible. There are 66 books in the Bible which were written over a period of about 1600 years by 40 different human authors. Of the 66 books, 39 are contained in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, with a few sections in Aramaic. The New Testament books were all written in Greek.

The chapter divisions and the verse numbering system that we use today were not a part of the original text but were added much latter to aid in Bible study. Therefore, these chapter and verse divisions are not considered to be a part of the inspired Word, but are a useful reference system to aid us in locating passages of Scripture. The same is true about the titles of the books. They are not a part of the inspired text, but were also added later for reference sake.

The question before us is, "How did these 66 books of the Bible come together?" Why do we have these 66 books? Why are there not more or less? These questions are often brought to our attention when we learn that the Bible the Roman Catholic Church uses contains the same 66 books that we have plus an additional 13, which are called the Apocrypha. This raises the question as to which books are part of the inspired Word of God and which are not. We need to examine this question since it will have some bearing on our confidence in the Bible.

Nowhere in the Bible is there a list of which books are inspired. We are not given an inspired directory of Holy Writ. The study of the process of the formation of the Bible is called the process of canonization. The canon of the Bible is the list of books that the church recognizes as the inspired Word of God. The reason that this process is important is that if a group of books were gathered together which included some that truly were not God's Word, we certainly would not want them to be a part of an authoritative Bible. A Bible that contained books of

questionable origin would not be trustworthy. Or, on the other hand, if any of the truly inspired Scripture was left out of our Bible, it would not be complete.

This brings us back to the question of the authenticity of the 13 extra books contained in the Catholic Bible. We need to deal with this question because it might raise questions in the mind of a new believer that could lead to needless doubts. We will begin by examining briefly how the Protestant Bible came into being, then contrast that process with how the Catholic Bible came into being.

The Bible that we use now, the books that it contains, and the process of how they came together, can be summarized under the term "self-authenticating." In other words, if the Bible as we know it came into being because a group of men sat down at some point in time and made certain choices, we might have some doubt about whether or not they made the right decisions. If a church council had, let's say, 200 books before them, and they passed the books around the table and said "What do you think about this one, how about that one?" we might have some questions about the choices that were made. It would be very difficult for us to ever be able to say if the 66 books of the Protestant Bible or the 79 books of the Catholic Bible were the right choice. Such a process would always come down to a matter of judgment, and we could not know if the best judgment was made.

However, this kind of process was not the way the Protestant Bible was formed. There was not a time in which men sat down and voted on which books ought to be in the Bible. The 66 books we have in the Bible authenticated themselves to be the Word of God. In other words, the men who were instrumental in putting together the Bible as we have it, merely collected those books which were already recognized by their own merit to be the Word of God and put them together in one volume. It was not a process of selecting but of receiving. This might seem like a minor point but it is actually quite important to our understanding of the relationship between the Bible and the church.

The canonization process for the Roman Catholic Bible was different from what we have just outlined. At the Council of Trent, which met in the sixteenth century to deal with the issues raised by the Reformation, the Catholic Church claimed that it had an inherent right to judge the Bible. They said it was the duty of the church to say which books ought to be in the Bible and which ought not to be. The Protestant Church never took this position. It is true that there were times when councils of

the Protestant Church sat down and listed the books of the Bible, such as in the Westminster Confession of Faith, but the Protestant Church never said it had any authority over the content of the Bible.

The Protestant Church holds very solidly to the position that the Apocrypha are not to be considered as part of the inspired Word. And, if you would ever read them, you would find they are not the same as the Scriptures. Even their outward quality is quite inferior to the writings of the Bible. They do not appear to have the hand of God upon them. What we need to understand is that these books came about by a process in which men decided to do what they felt was best, which is always a process that is open to question.

Another way to approach this question is to ask if God would go to all of the trouble to inspire the biblical writers, moving them to write the very words that He wanted written, and then leave to chance the process of collecting these books over which He had so carefully watched and guided? No! God kept His hand on the entire process. As the Westminster Confession says, "By God's singular care and providence He kept the Bible pure in all ages." (WCF I:VIII) God not only ruled over the process of the inspiration of the Bible but He also overruled the canonization of the Bible, so that the books that He wanted in the Bible were brought together and are the books that we now have and acknowledge to be the self-authenticated Word of God.

It is important that you see the fundamentally different approach taken by these two bodies. The Catholic Church held, and still holds, that it is the right and duty of the Church to say what is to be a part of the canon of Scripture and what is not. That was why, at the Council of Trent, after the Bible had already been formed, they felt justified in adding the 13 books that are called the Apocrypha. In their judgment, they felt that these books were worthy to be added to the Scriptures. In other words, it was a matter determined by their judgment.

Another issue that we have to deal with when we talk about the canon of the Bible comes to light when we take the position that the canon is closed. This means that the written Word of God, the Bible, is complete. All of the books that God has for our guidance have been included and the canon is closed to the addition of any new books being included as part of inspired Scripture. The Bible is not open ended, subject to more books being added at a future date.

Even if an archeologist discovered tomorrow a book that could be proven to have been written by the Apostle Paul, and by the way the Bible does mention other letters Paul wrote that are not contained in the Bible, but even if one of these were found it would not be placed in the Bible or given the same authority as inspired Scripture. The canon is closed. God has given us in the Bible everything that we need to know. Since God was in control of the process He could have preserved any writing He wanted to. That would not have been a problem for Him. We are to understand that all we need, in the way of His inspired Word, has already been given to us.

Thus, if someone comes along claiming to have discovered or received new revelation from God, claiming it to be normative for all the church, we can be assured that it is not so. The canon is closed. The book of Revelation has a severe warning to any who would either add to or take away from the Word of God. (Rev. 22:18-19) The next revelation of God, as He has said, will be at the revelation of His Son at His second coming. That revelation won't be in written word, but in the power and glory of His personal presence.

God's Word is God's Word. He controlled the process from beginning to end. The inspiration, the assembly, and the preservation of the Bible were and are in God's hands. His care speaks volumes about the integrity and authority of His Word. It is our great privilege, and it ought to be our great joy, to pick up God's Word and open our hearts to it, that we might know, love and obey our Heavenly Father.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Matthew 5:18
2. 2 Peter 1:21

Answer these questions:

1. In view of the closed canon of Scripture, how would you deal with a person who claims to have further revelation from God?
2. What does God's care in the inspiration and preservation of the Bible tell you about His desire that you know His Word?
3. What have you learned from this week's study of the Bible that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 2

"GOD THE FATHER AND THE TRINITY"

Lesson 1 "Knowing God"

We are going to turn our attention to a new topic of study. We will be looking at the subject of God the Father and the Trinity. We need to say at the outset, the most important area of knowledge a man can have is to know the true and living God. The single most important quality about a person's life is whether or not he knows God. We could even go a step further and say that in a very real sense, ultimately all of man's problems are theological problems. In other words, man's troubles have at their root a wrong relationship with God. I'm not saying that every instance of trouble we face is the direct result of some sin on our part, nor am I saying that if a person has a right relationship with God that they won't have trouble in their life. The point is that all that we are and all that we do is inescapably related to God. No aspect of life falls outside of that relationship.

If this is true, it is of crucial importance that we have a proper knowledge of and relationship with God. The strength of your faith and Christian living is directly related to how well you know and respond to God, making this subject central to the Christian faith. If the truths and

foundations that we build here will remain with you all of your life in the Lord, they will be a source of great strength and faith as you walk with Him. You must have a big picture of God, or maybe we should say a proper picture of a big God.

In this lesson, we will focus our attention on how we can know God by asking these questions, "What can we know about God?" "Is it even possible to know God at all?" "What, if anything, can we know with absolute certainty about God?"

We need to make the point here that our knowledge of God is a knowledge based on faith in His Word. It is not a knowledge gathered by scientific experiment. It is true knowledge but it is always seen through the eyes of faith. It is only as the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and gives us insight into God's Word that the truths of that Word take root in our hearts.

Every time a poll is taken, asking people about their belief in God, there is always an overwhelming majority who claim they believe in God or in a supernatural being. And we might think that is a wonderful thing, but if you would begin to break down what people mean by "belief in God," you would find that there are radically different concepts of who this god is in whom they believe. These different concepts are often so contradictory one to another that it would be impossible for everyone who claims to believe in God to be referring to the true and living God. Just because a person says he believes in God, doesn't mean that what he believes about God is actually true of God or even that he believes in the same God revealed in the Bible.

We certainly see these different theologies illustrated in the various religions of the world, as well as the cults that have sprung from the Christian faith. For example, if you look at the god in whom the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses or Christian Scientists profess faith, you will see fundamental differences in who they say God is and what they say one is to do to please him. These concepts are mutually contradictory so that they can not all be true. It is obvious then that when a person says he believes in god it doesn't mean he believes in the same being, or even in the one true God. Even within the Christian faith we find that

when different people talk about the nature of God they do not all seem to be describing the same person.

All of this raises the question, "Can we truly know God?" "Can we know anything that is true about God so that it will always be true, and not subject to the opinions and ideas of man?" "Are there any absolute truths that we can know and on which we can build our lives?" Or, do we have to say, as some do, "No one can know anything for sure about God in this life. Everyone is entitled to his own opinions and beliefs so that no one can say that his beliefs are right and others are wrong. No one can know for sure." Is this the way it has to be?

We need to boldly say if that were true we are wasting our time in church. We are wasting our time seeking to know and walk with God. If we can't know the truth about God then we are fooling ourselves in our worship because we don't really know if what we do is pleasing to God or an abomination to Him. If we can't know anything about Him for sure, how do we know what to do or if He even exists?

Other people say that we can know for sure that God exists and that we should worship Him, but that is all we can actually be sure of. Yet, even if that were all we knew, it would still be true that we might as well not bother to seek to know and walk in God's will if it is impossible to know His will. If we can't know specific truths that are unchangeable, then we are trusting our lives and salvation to mere possibility, which would indeed be a foolish thing to do.

But again, we need to say as boldly as we can that we can know truths about God that will always be true, because He Himself reveals them to us. God is knowable because He has revealed to us truths about Himself. Our knowledge of God is not the result of examination or speculation about His nature. It rests upon His revelation. Our knowledge of God comes directly from Him, and since we know Him to be a God of truth we know that what He reveals is not speculation but truth. God is knowable. Whether or not people believe and honor His revelation is another matter, but God is knowable. We are not left to human opinion, but our knowledge rests upon divine revelation.

This naturally leads to the next question, "What exactly can we know about God?" If God is knowable what or how much can we know about Him? First of all, we need to be reminded that there is much we do not know about God. There is much that we can't know about Him. He is beyond the ability of our finite minds to fully comprehend. There is much about God that we will never know. We don't have the capacity to fully comprehend an infinite God. This is the first thing we need to realize, there is much about God we don't know.

The second thing we need to understand is that even those things which we do know about God, those truths that are revealed by God, we don't know them perfectly. For example, we know for sure that God is holy. Yet who of us can plunge the depths of God's holiness? Who of us fully appreciates and understands the fullness of God's holiness? The same is true about the other attributes of God, His mercy or His grace or His love. Although we know that these terms describe aspects of God's character that are true, we are not able to explore the fullness of their meaning.

Thus far we can say about our knowledge of God that first there is much we don't know. Second, even those things we know for sure we don't fully comprehend. However, and this is a crucial point, what we do know is true knowledge. It may not be in fullness. It may not be everything, but it is true knowledge, and it will always be true if it is rightly understood from God's Word. We will never come to a point in the future when, if we gain more knowledge, we will find out that the truths revealed in the Bible were wrong. The truths revealed in the Bible are eternal truths, whether believed by anyone or not.

If we think about it, we can see that a person is actually rejecting the revelation of God if he says we can't know God, or that anyone's opinion is as valid as another's. Our obligation is to find out what God has revealed about Himself and to structure our thoughts and living around these irrevocable truths.

One of the key scripture verses in this regard is Deuteronomy 29:29. It tells us that the secret things belong to God, but the revealed things belong to us. There are secret things that we don't know, and never will.

They belong to God. But the revealed things belong to us. We are responsible to know and honor the revealed things in our daily walk with the Lord.

Finally, let me say a few words about how we can know God. We know that the Bible says that "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork." (Psalm 19.1) We can look about us and see evidence that there is a God and that He is a mighty God. But nature will never tell us about His character, or about what He calls us to do, or how we can be saved. Nature can never tell us about Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross. For that we need the Bible. It is through the Bible that we come to know God. A person will not come to faith except through the truths contained in Scripture.

It is especially in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ that we see the clearest revelation of God. Christ is the Word of God in the flesh. He is the Word of God incarnate. He said about Himself that "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) If you want to see what God is like, look at the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want to see what the love of God looks like, look at the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want to see what the holiness or righteousness of God looks like, look at the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God in the flesh.

As we begin our study of God, it is helpful to begin with the knowability of God. We are often confronted by people who say that we can't know God for sure, or that their opinion is as good as anyone else's, even if it is entirely uninformed. We live in a time when it is viewed as unloving or even hateful to say that anyone else can be wrong. People want to hold on to their own beliefs and insist it is "right for them," no matter if there is any basis of truth or not.

When we get right down to it, a person's opinion doesn't really mean much. What matters is the truth that God has set before us in His Word and in His Son. We can be bold to say that God can truly be known by anyone who would open their heart to His Word.

This means we should read the Scriptures with an open heart. We should ask God to reveal Himself to us. We should ask Him to give us a

From Faith to Faithfulness

true and right knowledge of Himself. We should ask that any thoughts or ideas that we might have about God, not based on the truth of His Word, would be replaced by the teaching of Scripture.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Deuteronomy 29:29
2. Matthew 11:27

Answer these questions:

1. How would you respond to someone who said he believed in God but didn't believe everything the Bible said about God?

2. Can you ever, in this life, know anything for certain about God? Explain.

3. Where do you learn about God?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 2 "GOD THE FATHER AND THE TRINITY"

Lesson 2 "The Nature of God"

In the last lesson we began our study of God by looking at the possibility of knowing God and the extent to which He can be known. In this lesson we want to take the next step, which is to look at those things the Bible reveals about the nature of God, that is God as He is in His very being. In other words, we will look at those things which have to do with the person of God, those things that make God God.

One of the first things the Bible tells us about the nature of God is that God is a spirit. (John 4:24) When we say that God is a spirit we are not saying that God is a ghost, or some kind of vapor that floats around detached from reality. That is not what is meant by spirit in the biblical usage. Primarily what is in view in the use of this term is that a spirit is a person who is not confined to a body. A spirit is someone who is not limited to space and time the way that a person with a body is. We are made up of basically two parts: a soul, or a spirit, and a body. Who we are in our innermost person isn't as much tied to our body as it is to our spirit. Our body is that which our spirit inhabits in this world. It is not essential to our existence. It is essential to our existence in this world, but not to our eternal existence.

However, since we, as human beings, were created with a body, we are limited to being in one place at a time. We are subject to the effects of time and to the effects of space because our souls are contained in this earthly house.

God is different. One of the catechism questions our young people learn teaches, "God is a spirit and has not a body like men." God is not limited by space and time. God is not limited to being in one place at a time.

This is partially what Jesus meant when he said towards the end of His earthly ministry that it would be better for us if He went away, that is to

heaven, and sent His spirit to dwell in us. (John 16:7) For if the Lord would have remained in this world in His physical body He would have been limited in the number of people He could deal with because He could only be in one place at a time. But after He was resurrected with a new body and ascended into heaven, He sent His Spirit Who could minister to all men, and not be limited by space or time.

It is this matter that is in view when we say that God is a spirit. He doesn't have a body, even though, if He so chose, He could temporarily make use of a body to carry out His will. This leads me to say that when the Bible talks about the hand of God, or the face of God, or other such terms, it is speaking in human terms in order to relate to us some truth He wants us to understand about His character, rather than making a statement about a physical body that He possesses.

Even as we say this about God, we need to make sure that we don't lose sight of the fact that God is a person. That's the second thing we will look at. First, God is a spirit. Second, God is a person. God is a real person. In other words, because He does not have a body does not mean that He is not a real person. God is not just a supernatural power, or an impersonal force, like nuclear energy. Neither is God merely the name we give to the laws of nature that govern the running of the universe. Now some people use the name of God in that way. When they talk about God they are referring to the supernatural laws that govern the realm of nature. But that is not at all what the Bible reveals to us about God. He is a real person. He is someone who hears, sees, knows, feels, wills, and acts. He is a person. We, being created in the image of God, were created as people, as persons. While it may be difficult to isolate exactly what it is that makes a person a person, we need to know that God is a person in every sense of the word.

Another error we need to avoid is in making God's existence tied exclusively to His creation. It isn't the creation that gives God His existence. He exists separately from it. Before the world ever was, God was. And before the creation ever came into being, God existed in all of His fullness and majesty. God would be all that He is, whether or not this world existed.

That brings us to the third point we need to make. Not only is God a spirit, not only is God a person, but God is personal. God is a personal God. This means He has a personal interest and an active involvement in the affairs of man. It is not as some have said that God created this world, set it in motion, and having set up the laws by which it was to run, went off somewhere else so that He no longer is personally involved in the daily activities of this world. That's not true. God has a personal interest in every single thing that takes place. Everything that we do God is interested in. Nothing that we do or that occurs in this world is too small for God's attention and interest. No detail of our lives is insignificant to Him. He wants to be personally involved in, and more than that, He wants to lead and direct all that concerns the lives of His people. God is personal in His relationship with His creation.

If God took His hand off of this world for even a moment, it could no longer exist. If He took his hand off of us for a moment, we could no longer exist. God is self-existent, but that's not true of us. God doesn't depend upon anything outside of Himself for His existence, but unlike Him, we are entirely dependent on things outside of ourselves. We can not exist without the oxygen we need to breath or the narrow range of temperatures our bodies require to exist, or food to eat and water to drink. We are dependent creatures. God is the one on whom we are dependent. It is His world. It is His creation. He wants us to look to Him as our provider, as our God. He is intimately involved in all the affairs of our lives.

God created us that we might live in communion with Him, He being our God and we being His people. After man rebelled against Him, He sent His Son into the world to reconcile us to Himself. Then He sent His Holy Spirit to live in us to guide and lead us so that we could live in communion with Him. How could we ever get the idea that He would be impersonal? How could we ever get the idea that God is not interested in our daily living? God is a personal God.

What do all of these things mean about the nature of God? It means that God wants all that we do to be done unto Him. If He was not a person or if He was not a personal God, then what we did or didn't do wouldn't matter to Him. Either He would not be interested or He wouldn't be

capable of being interested. But since He is a person and since He is personal, He tells us that whatsoever we do, even down to the smallest, most common practices of eating and drinking, we are to do all to His glory. (1 Cor. 10:31) There is not a single situation that you will face in your life in which God's hand is not involved.

God is a personal God and one of the ways we see this personal aspect of His relationship with His people is in the names that He uses to reveal Himself to us. He is called our Father, and that says a lot about a personal relationship. He is our Father. It is true that He is Almighty God. It is true that He is our Lord. It is true that we are His servants. But He wants us to understand too that there is a relationship we can enter into, whereby He will be our Heavenly Father.

The second person of the trinity is called our Savior. That is a personal relationship. Jesus Christ is also called our friend. He is called our brother. God desires a personal relationship with us. It is not enough to say we believe in God. We must have a personal, daily involvement with God whereby there takes place an interaction between God and ourselves on a personal level. We can walk with Him. He can lead us. He can reveal things to us and we can share with Him the things that are on our hearts. And we can walk together in close, personal fellowship.

Lest you get discouraged, we need to add that this relationship is a growing one. You don't enter into it in full blossom. Like any other relationship between people, there must be time spent together for the closeness and fellowship to develop. The more time you spend in communion with the Lord, the more you will find that the relationship becomes a source of personal fellowship and blessing.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. John 4:23-24
2. Matthew 6:26-30

Answer these questions:

1. What difference does it make that God is a person, rather than merely a supernatural power?

2. If God is personally involved in every detail of His creation, what does that say about how you are to live?

3. How does John 4:24 affect your worship of God?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 2 "GOD THE FATHER AND THE TRINITY"

Lesson 3 "The Attributes of God"

As we continue on in our study of the person of God, we now come humbly to explore His attributes. His attributes are those qualities that can be attributed to His character. God's attributes are ways of describing those things that are true about His nature, those things He reveals to us in His Word that describe what He is like.

For example, when we talk about another person, we may describe them as being kind, grouchy, generous, quiet, compassionate, and so on. These qualities that describe the kind of character a person has are called his attributes. We can increase our understanding of who God is by looking at His attributes. As we do, we will separate them into two categories, the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God.

The incommunicable attributes of God are those things that are true about God alone. They are not true of any other person in all of heaven and earth. God has not communicated these attributes to any other created being. The communicable attributes of God, on the other hand, are those characteristics that God has communicated to the human race to one degree or another. However, even in those attributes we might have in common with God, we do not possess them to the perfection that He does.

For example, one thing we can say about God is that He is infinite. That is one of His incommunicable attributes. No one else is infinite. It is true only of God. But there are other things that are true about God that are also true about us, for example, God has power. He is omnipotent. We also have power, but obviously not to the extent, or to the perfection of God. This is one of the communicable attributes of God.

Let us turn our attention then to those things that are only true about God, His incommunicable attributes. In the last lesson we alluded to one

of them when we mentioned the self-existence of God. One thing that is true about God that has never been true about any other creature, nor will it ever be true of any other creature, is self-existence. God does not owe His origin to anything outside of Himself. He wasn't created. He wasn't born. He wasn't made. He wasn't brought into being. He had no origin. There was never a time that God wasn't. This is something that can be said about no other being. Every human being has a birthday. All created things have a time at which they were brought into existence. Whether it is an angel or devil, all had a time in which they were brought into existence.

The fact that God is self-existent also means that He has no need that He can not meet Himself. His existence is completely self-contained. Even the purpose of His existence is self-contained in that He exists for His own glory.

Earlier we mentioned that God is infinite. That means that He has no limitations. We understand that this attribute extends to all of His other attributes so that He holds each of His attributes in infinite perfection. If you want to think about the holiness of God, you are to understand that His holiness is infinite. It is perfect. If you want to think about the mercy of God, you are to understand that His mercy is infinite and therefore perfect. If you want to think about His righteousness, or His love, or His grace you are to understand that He holds these attributes in infinite perfection. There are no imposed limitations on who God is or what He can do.

A third incommunicable attribute of God is that He is eternal. This means that He has no beginning or no ending. He was never born, nor will He ever die. Neither is subject to time. We have to wait for many things to come to pass, not God. He does not have to wait for tomorrow. He is not bound by time. He is able to live in the past, the present, and the future all at once. For God there is no past, present, or future. Maybe I could say it this way. God lives apart from time. "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2 Peter 3:8) God is eternal. He lives above time and is not subject to the limitations of time.

Yet another incommunicable attribute of God is His immutability. That means He is unchanging. God never changes. When you come to God, you don't need to worry if He will be in a good mood on that day. God's character never changes. The truths about God never change. Whatever we read in the Bible that was true about God for the children of Israel will be true about God for us. The truths that the Bible sets forth about the person of God are unchanging. The ways of God are unchanging. The purposes of God are unchanging. This doesn't mean that God is static or that He is in a rut. What it does mean is that God doesn't change with the times. All that God does is done from plans that He made before time began. Since there are no unforeseen circumstances to God that can rise up and frustrate His plans, He never has to change them. Our plans are constantly being frustrated by our inability or by unforeseen circumstances, so that we must live amongst change. But God is immutable.

The immutability of God should be a tremendous source of strength and comfort to us as we realize that the promises of God will never fall to the ground empty. All that He says will surely come to pass. We never have to worry that somewhere down the line He will change His mind or change the rules. Because of His immutable nature, we have a sure basis to trust in His promises.

Though we have not exhausted God's incommunicable attributes, we need to move on to look at some of His communicable attributes. Remember, that the communicable attributes are those attributes of God that man also shares in, though not to His perfection. We could make a long list of them here, though it would not by any means be exhaustive. We will just name a few.

One of God's communicable attributes is that He is wise. We also have wisdom, but not like the perfect wisdom of God. He has all wisdom. He has all knowledge. God knows all things. Everything possible to know, God knows. Everything that ever happened or will happen or even everything that could have happened, God knows. God has all knowledge. God is wise.

God has power. He is omnipotent. He has the power to do anything

that He wills to do. Nothing is too hard for God.

God is holy. That means that there is no trace of evil in His character. He is entirely separated from sin. "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) Perhaps this attribute overshadows all the others. All that God does is wrapped up in holiness. It is at the essence of His very being. God is holy. He is untainted by the least bit of sin. His eyes are too pure even to behold sin. God is pure and undefiled.

God is just. Not only is He holy in who He is, but also in what He does. All that He does is just. He will never allow the least sin to be overlooked. His justice demands that every sin be dealt with.

Yet we know too that God is merciful. That means He has a character that doesn't want to treat us as we deserve to be treated. We deserve to be punished and separated from God for our sin, and yet God's character is such that He wants to be merciful. To be sure, our sins will not go unpunished, but in His mercy he places the punishment for the sins of His people on His own Son.

God is good. God's character is such that He wants to bless His creation. He desires our well-being. He is inclined to show us goodness and not evil. God's desire is for our good.

God is gracious. He gives to us freely out of His own gracious heart. He gives that which we do not deserve or merit. He gives that which we could never earn or acquire on our own. He treats us better than we deserve. God is gracious.

All of these truths about the character of God should lead us to worship Him. We really ought to worship Him for who He is. We ought to yield to Him. We ought to praise Him. We ought to thank Him. We ought to trust Him. The more we look at Him and His character, the more faith we will have. The Bible says, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." (Rom. 10:17) In other words, the more we see of God in His Word the more we will trust Him. We can't help but trust Him if we really see Him for who He is.

In fact, if you will take time to look at God, meditating on who He is, thinking on these attributes, you will come more and more to love and trust Him. You will come to open your heart to Him so that when He gives you an opportunity to serve, you won't serve out of duty or out of sense of responsibility but out of love. When you see who He is, you will long to give yourself to walk in His will, just to be in His presence moment by moment.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Isaiah 57:15
2. Psalm 139:1-12

Answer these questions:

1. What benefits could you expect to take place in your life if you sought to grow in your knowledge of God?

2. What do God's incommunicable attributes tell you about God in relation to you?

3. What do God's communicable attributes tell you about God in relation to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 2 "GOD THE FATHER AND THE TRINITY"

Lesson 4 "The Works of God"

Now we are going to move into a different area of our study of God, not so much His person but His works. First up is a look at God's work of creation. It is necessary for us to understand that God is our creator. We didn't come into being by chance or by evolution, but we were created by the hand of God. All that we know, everything we can see or taste or touch or smell, all that we come into contact with owes its existence ultimately to God. God is the creator.

When God created this world, it was merely the power of His word and His will that brought it into existence. God said, "Let there be light and there was light." (Gen. 1:3) When He called for stars, stars sprang forth. God created out of nothing. He didn't start with a little of this and add a little of that to come up with what He wanted to make. God's power is exhibited in that He can create merely by speaking the word.

We need to understand also that God's creation has a purpose. He didn't create this world just to see how it would turn out, or to let it go in whatever direction it would. He didn't create it and give it a free hand so that He could stand back and watch what would happen. God had a purpose in His creation. Ultimately His purpose was that His name be glorified. God overrules and oversees all the workings of this world so that in the end all things will give Him glory.

All of us, every living creature, owes his life and living to God. We owe our obedience to God. That is why there will be a day of judgment when everything will have to give account to God for how faithful it was in fulfilling what God created it to be. Every tree will be held accountable for how faithful it was as a tree. Most certainly we also will have to give account. How faithful were we to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, and strength? Were we faithful to all God wanted us to be

and do, moment by moment in all things? Just thinking about that should drive us to the Savior.

Another aspect of the work of God, that has to do with His relationship to this creation, is His providential rule and oversight over the world. God providentially watches over and overrules all that takes place in His creation. This world is in the hands of God. It doesn't mean that everything that takes place is what God would have liked to have taken place if all men walked in His will. But God has allowed everything that has taken place. Nothing takes place that God hasn't allowed. Even the evil of this world, though not the doing of God, will be used by God to bring about His purposes.

Not a single thing takes place, even to the extent of a hair falling from your head, that God is not aware of and has not allowed. (Mt. 10:30) Not a sparrow falls from the sky that God doesn't see and count. (Mt. 10:29) God personally oversees it all. He controls it all in His providential care. And the tremendous promise that is given in Romans 8:28 to all those who believe is, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." The next few verses go on to tell us that this purpose is to conform us to the image of Christ. In other words, God promises to all that love Him, to all that belong to Him, that He will not allow a single thing to happen in their lives that He will not use for good. That good doesn't mean that it will necessarily be pleasant, but if received by faith, it will cause them to become more like Christ. This is not a promise of a bed of roses for Christians, but it does promise that we do not need to worry about the outcome of all of our trials and tribulations. God works in creation and in providence for His glory and our eternal good.

We are reminded by these truths that a believer's eternity is in heaven. It is the true home of the believer. Our life on earth is temporary, but for a few years. We need to be faithful while here on earth but we need to never lose sight of the fact that heaven is our eternal home.

To this end, God works in re-creation also. God recreates those who are dead in trespasses and sin, and He gives them new life, a new life in Christ. We will deal with this aspect of God's work in much more detail

later. But this too is a part of the works of God.

We need to understand that God works from a plan. God works by what are called "decrees." In other words, God has established how He will work things out, and whatsoever takes place today has been foreordained before time began. Before this world was even created, God foreordained whatsoever would come to pass. This is what is meant by the decrees of God.

We need to be careful, however, that we do not conclude that we live in a fatalistic world where everything has been programmed so that we are merely actors in a drama in which the script has already been written. The decrees of God come to pass in such a way as to not deny the limited free will of man. Man still has a free will, at least within the limits of a fallen creature. Because God has foreordained everything that comes to pass does not in any way excuse us from what we do. We are people who bear responsibility. We are responsible for our actions and our choices because we do exercise our own will in what we do. What we choose and what we do will have consequences in our lives.

At the same time we need also to say that God's decrees extend to every creature and every event. Everything that touches your life has been foreordained by God. Everything that touches the events that take place in this world only does so with the permission of God. For example, the foreordination of God is not that you would have a happy life in general. But His decrees extend down to the specifics, the details of everyday living. We do not have to obsess about the things of this world. God has them in hand. We don't have to worry about tomorrow, God is in control. What we are called to do is to be faithful. We do have choices to make. We do have time and energy to spend and we have to be faithful in how we use them. We have to seek God's will and walk in His strength, but we don't have to worry. Nothing takes place by chance. Nothing takes place by accident, in the ultimate sense. God controls all that comes to pass.

As we continue to talk about the decrees of God, we can say several things about the decrees themselves. One thing is that they are eternal. God doesn't have to ever change His plans. He makes His plans and

they can not be frustrated, not in the final sense. Nothing ever pops up that moves God to say, "Oops, I didn't think of that." Nothing ever happens to cause God to have to rethink or reorganize His plans. Whatever God sets is set in eternity.

God's decrees are also wise. That means that He arranges those things that He foreordains so that they bring about the end that He desires. God is wise in His plans. What He wills to take place He brings about by wisely ordering and arranging His decrees so that His will is brought to pass in the most wise and glorious manner.

Another aspect of the decrees of God is that they are free. God is sovereign in what He does. He doesn't have to get anybody's permission for what He does. He doesn't have to wait for the cooperation of others before He can bring His will to pass. He need not await the outcome of any pending event before He is able to work. His decrees are sovereign. They arise entirely out of His own will. He can do anything He desires to do without having to answer to anyone else.

The decrees of God are also absolute. God's decrees cannot be appealed. There are no higher courts that sit in judgment of God. He is absolute by reason of His identity as God. He is almighty God.

We are thinking about these things because we need to understand that God is in control. He is working out His own sovereign plan. We live in an ordered world. We live in a world that is moving towards a sure end. To be sure, we live in a fallen, sin filled world, but not a world that has escaped the sovereign hand of God. This world, and all that ever lived in it, will be judged by the sovereign God, and in the end His glory will be seen and acknowledged by all. God will be glorified by all those who have been saved by Him and honor Him with their lives. And the amazing thing is that He will also be glorified, even by the punishment of those who have not honored Him.

A person can be ignorant of these matters, they can even deny them, but it doesn't change a thing. God is in control. He will be honored. And we need not be worried about the outcome of things in this world. God can move heaven and earth, if need be, to bring about the fulfillment of

His promises in our lives. As we think about the decrees of God, we should find that they are a tremendous source of blessing and strength in our lives. We can rest in the sure knowledge that God is in control of everything that comes to pass.

However, I do need to say that this truth does not mean that we can sit back and relax. No! We need to be sensitive to what God would do in and through us. God has in mind to use His people as He works out His will in this world. What a tremendous thing it is that God Almighty would work through us to bring His will to pass. We can be a part of God's work as we yield to His work in our lives.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Acts 15:18
2. Acts 2:22-23

Answer these questions:

1. What difference does it make that you were created by God, rather than being a product of evolution?

2. How can an understanding of God's providential care be a source of peace and comfort to you?

3. Since God works from decrees established before creation, does that mean that you are not accountable for what you do? Explain.

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 2 "GOD THE FATHER AND THE TRINITY"

Lesson 5 "The Trinity"

We're going to conclude this study of the person of God by looking at the very deep and difficult to understand subject of the Trinity. What does it mean when we say that God is a triune God, that there is one God who exists in three persons? We're going to look at this question to see what it means that God is three in one. We're also going to look at the relationship of those three persons to one another and their relationship to us as creatures of God.

What do we mean when we talk about the Trinity? First, we mean that there is only one living and true God. There are not three gods but one. There is only one God. But, in this one God there are three separate and distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are entirely separate. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three entirely separate persons, and yet they exist in such a way that they are one. It's not three gods; it's not that the three are three separate gods, but they are one. In dealing with the Trinity, we can get in over our heads very quickly. We can't fully understand how this can be. But that is the way the Bible reveals it to us. We have one God in three persons.

It would be valuable for us to look at these three persons and see how they relate to each other. There is a lot of confusion in this area, and though our study together may begin to sound rather theological, hopefully you will see how very practical it is in its application to our living and our relationship to God Himself.

As far as how these three persons relate to each other, we say that they are the same in substance. That means one is not different from the other. They're the same. They're equal in power and glory. They are all three equally and fully God. They are all three equally divine. They all have the same power. They all have the same glory. They all deserve the

same worship. None is higher than the other. None is boss over the other. None is in control of the other. There is no subordination in the Trinity in terms of their being.

But having said that, we also need to understand that as the triune God relates to us, His creation, they have taken on roles that do involve subordination. In other words, in dealing with the creation the Father is the one who plans. He's the one who plans how things will be. The Son is the one who accomplishes the will of the Father. He became incarnate and fully walked in the will of the Father here on earth. The Spirit is the one who applies the work of the Son and the will of the Father to His children. And so we see in dealing with us they have taken on subordinate roles. The Son says, "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me." (John 8:28) He says, "The Father is greater than I." (John 14:28) The Spirit says that He speaks not of Himself but only of the Lord Jesus Christ. (John 16:13-15)

What we need to guard against is thinking that because they have taken on subordinate roles as they deal with us, that there exists a true subordination of persons in the Godhead in a way that there is not an equality of persons. Though the Son says, "I do only those things that the Father tells me to do," in their relationship as they truly are, they are entirely equal and equally divine. But they do have different roles.

Perhaps one of the ways we can see a practical application of this division of roles in the three persons of the Trinity is in our prayer life. As we pray, we pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, and through the leading and power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes when people begin to read the Scriptures and look for a compact statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, they are troubled because they can't find such a statement. The reason is because there is no single passage in the Bible that spells out the doctrine of the Trinity. The revelation of the Trinity is much broader than that. It is more a matter of progressive revelation rather than being spelled out in any one place.

We need to understand that the truths the Bible teaches are revealed not

only in those things that are specifically set forth within the confines of one or two verses, but also include those things that we derive by good and necessary consequence. For example, here is the way the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity. It teaches that there is a person called the Father. The Bible teaches that there's a person called the Son. And the Bible teaches that there's a person called the Holy Spirit. Now it doesn't teach these truths all in the same place. Nonetheless, it does teach that there are persons called the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In addition, the Bible teaches that the person called the Father is God. The Bible teaches that the person called the Son is God. The Bible teaches that the person called the Holy Spirit is God. The Bible also teaches that there is only one God. Therefore when we add up the totality of the teaching of the Bible about God, we conclude that it teaches that there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and that they are one God. Or in other words, within the one God there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who share the same attributes, that is the attributes of God.

These truths are of more than just academic or theological importance. They are more than information that is only useful to put in a creed which we recite from time to time in church. These truths are the foundation of our faith. They are basic to how we relate to God.

There's a real sense in which most error, or most heresy, is a direct result of deviation from one of the basic tenets of the doctrine of the Trinity. The errors that the cults fall into, the errors that lead us away from the teachings of the Bible are, at root, errors of deviation from the orthodox understanding of the Trinity.

Let me give an example of such an error and show how it very practically relates to our living today. Who we understand the Son, the second person of the Trinity, to be will dictate, to a large degree, our doctrine of salvation. If we say that the Son is not God, that He is not altogether divine, that He is not very God of very God, then He is merely a human born under the law. If He is not God, then He is a fallen human being, and of necessity a sinful human being. Therefore, the most that He can be for us is an example. He would only be someone like us perhaps, who has tried to walk in the will of God. He would only be someone who has

sought to be faithful to God. Many people look upon the Son this way. They think He was a great example that we should try to follow. Others think He was a good teacher. But if we have this view of the second person of the Trinity, that He is merely another human being trying to do God's will, the result will be that we will seek to be saved by works. We will seek to find our salvation by trying to follow His example, or by following His teachings. Or in other words, we will seek to be saved by our works and our ability to follow in the steps of Jesus. We will be looking to find salvation by works, and we will never find it there.

But on the other hand, if we believe the doctrine of the Trinity, and we know that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, then we will know also that His death and His resurrection were not designed to be an example, but they were to be a full atonement for sin. Since Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh, His death was worthy of the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, if we believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, we know that salvation does not come from following His example, but it comes through grace, received by faith. If Christ was divine, we can have assurance of our salvation, if we truly belong to Him. If, however, He was not divine, we can have no basis for assurance. His death on the cross would only pay for his own sins and no others. We can only hope that our own efforts to walk under God's commandments will be good enough to please Him. And in that we will fail.

It does make a very real difference what we believe about the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. It will make a difference in how we live day by day. We have one God, but as we relate to this triune God we will know each of the three persons in a different way. We know the first person of the Trinity as our Heavenly Father. The second person of the Trinity we know as our Savior and Lord. We know the third person of the Trinity as our indwelling Teacher and Comforter. We have a great triune God who works in us to direct our path and to accomplish His will in and through us.

In our study about the nature and person of God, we have seen that it is not only the knowledge of facts about God that is important, but it is knowing Him personally that matters. As you read the Bible and study on your own, seek to translate all that you learn about God into a

personal knowledge of Him as you meditate upon the new insights you get. This will help you to open your heart to the one who reveals His majesty and glory to you.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 2 Corinthians 13:14
2. Matthew 28:19

Answer these questions:

1. If a person says he believes in God but not in the Lord Jesus Christ, does he really believe in the one true God? Explain.

2. Why do we believe that there is one God in three persons when we can't really fully understand it?

3. What have you learned from this week's study of God the Father that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 3

"MAN, THE CREATURE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD"

Lesson 1 "The Creation of Man"

Our topic for this chapter is man, the creature made in the image of God. First we want to look at the story of the creation of man. When we talk about the creation of man, the point at issue is to what does man owe his origin? Is he a created being of God? Or is his origin the result of some chance happening, so that through a process of evolution and self-improvement, man has progressed to what he is today? The root issue behind these questions is the matter of accountability, which we will spend some time looking at later in this lesson.

The Bible is very clear in teaching that God created man. Anyone who would come to the Scriptures, seeking to understand what is taught about the origin of man, would not come away with the understanding that man came into being through any kind of evolutionary process. No, the Bible is very clear in its teaching that God directly and personally created man.

We find the creation account in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. It should be pointed out that some have claimed there are two different creation stories in Genesis. They maintain that in Chapter 1 there is one story and

in chapter 2 there is a different story. They go on to say that these are contradictory, thus we can't really believe what is written. But there is only one creation story in Genesis. Chapter one gives an overview of the seven days of creation. Chapter two goes back to the sixth day and focuses on the primary work of creation, the creation of man, and then retells the story as it centers on man. These are not two conflicting stories.

Furthermore, the Bible teaches that man is not merely one among many of God's creatures, but man is unique. He is the highest of God's creation. He is fundamentally different from all the rest of God's creatures. There are many distinctive features that place man above all other forms of life, even though he does share many characteristics with animals. For example, he has skin, similar respiratory systems in many cases, similar internal organs, and many other similarities. Yet man, in his essence, is not merely another animal. There is something in man that places him above every other creature, something that places him in another realm of being, and that something is the image of God. However, before we examine what it means to be created in the image of God, let's first point out several of the unique features concerning the creation of man.

The first difference is that man was created as an act of divine council. When God set about to create man, the Bible records these words: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." (Gen. 1:26) Neither these words nor this process was used in regard to any of the rest of creation. When He created the animals, or the heavenly bodies, or the plant life, and so on, God just spoke the word, and they came forth. But when it came to the creation of man, the procedure was much different. The creation ordinance that brought man into being involved the invocation of a divine council. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were involved in the creation of man in a unique way. If you were reading through the story of creation, you would observe when you came to man's creation that quite a different process was at work. You would see that God did something unique when He made man.

Another difference is that the creation of man was immediately at the hand of God. Man's creation was not mediated through anything else.

For example, when God created the plant life He said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds..." (Gen. 1:24) When God created the sea life He said, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly moving creatures..." (Gen. 1:20) However, when God created man, He didn't do it by this process. Man's creation was altogether different. God's hand was immediately upon the creation of man. He did it Himself, not through another medium, such as the earth or the sea. God did not say "Let the earth bring forth man," even though God was going to form him from the dust of the earth. No! God did it by His own hand. "Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." (Gen. 2:7) So once again, as you read through the biblical account of the creation and see how the process consistently worked one way, and then come upon this different procedure with regard to man's creation, you would have to acknowledge that God had done something exceptional in his creation.

A further uniqueness in the creation of man is seen in the verse we looked at earlier, Genesis 1:26. God said, "Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness." Man is unique among all the creatures of God, primarily because He was made in the image and likeness of his Maker, in the image and likeness of God. Later in this chapter we are going to devote an entire lesson to the subject of the image of God. But let me say here that no other creature of God was given that honor. All of the rest of creation, even though created according to the design, purpose, and plans of God, was not made in the image of God. Man has the very image of God stamped upon his being, and because he is God's image bearer, he is capable of having a relationship with God that none of the rest of the creation could possibly have. Man is set apart from all the rest of God's creation because he alone bears the image of God and has the capacity to relate to God on a basis of personal communion.

We find yet another distinction in the fact that man was given lordship over all of the earth. God gave man the responsibility to tend and care for the creation. God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over ... every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:28) As man exercised his lordship, under the hand of God, the creation would be subject to his rule.

Along that same line, we notice also that man was created last in an ascending order of creation. In other words, in an order of ascending complexity and dignity of life, man was created last. This indicates he was the crown of all creation. Man's position is as chief of God's creatures.

Perhaps the greatest distinction or uniqueness in the creation of man is found when we look again at Genesis 2:7. We read there that, "God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." God formed man out of the dust of the ground. Then God took His own life and breathed it into man. He imparted His own breath, so to speak, into man as the source of his life. Man's life is a direct derivative of the life of God. Man's life is tied to God in an inseparable way.

As we continue to look at the special place of man in God's creation, we see his uniqueness is confirmed by several events in the opening chapters of Genesis. First, man had a special fellowship with God. No other creature had communion with God in the same personal, intimate manner. God walked with man. He communed with him. He had a special place of fellowship with him. God related to man on a personal basis, unlike the relationship He had with any other creature.

God also showed man special attention and care when He gave him a companion, a woman, a helpmeet, especially created for a relationship of intimate companionship.

We could also note that man's uniqueness was confirmed when God placed a certain sanctity on human life that He did not place on any other living thing. Genesis 9:6 says, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." God said that if anyone would take a human life, his life would be forfeited. The reason for the severe penalty was that man is made in the image of God. The sanctity of human life rests in the fact that man bears the image of God. Human life is precious because it bears the image and likeness of God.

If we would add up all that we have been talking about, we would have to acknowledge the uniqueness of man's creation and relationship to God. There is no room for man's theory of evolution in the biblical teaching of the origin of man. Since man was created by and for God, man is accountable to God. The reason why unregenerate man embraces the idea of evolution, and embraces it with such pugnacity, apart from any real evidence to support it, is that it does not make him accountable to God. If man is merely a product of chance and evolution, he is not accountable to anyone or anything. Neither does he have to give glory to anyone other than himself. But, if man is a creation of God, he is accountable to God for what he does and thinks, thus is responsible to give glory to God. To do this would require him to humble himself under the hand of God, which is unacceptable to fallen man.

Man is responsible to His maker. It is his duty and calling to live for the glory of God. Yet, let us remember this is not a burdensome thing to do, but it is a tremendous privilege to be able to have this intimate communion with God. Man is blessed above all creatures. The basis for man's glory and worth is not the result of who he is in himself, but it flows from who he is in relationship to God. He is God's image bearer, made to live in intimate fellowship with the Almighty.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Genesis 1:1-28
2. Genesis 2:7

Answer these questions:

1. What does the fact that you were created by God mean for your daily living?
2. List three things about the creation of man that set him apart from the rest of creation.
3. If you are accountable to God, how can you show it in the way you live your life?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 3 "MAN, THE CREATURE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD"

Lesson 2 "The Nature of Man"

As we continue our study of man, the creature made in the image of God, we need to consider the nature of man. We will begin by looking in more detail at Genesis 2:7, which says: "The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul."

We see again from this verse that man's creation was in two steps. First, he was given a body and then a soul or a spirit, and we will use these two words interchangeably. Man is composed of body and soul. His body is physical and owes its origin, as far as its composition is concerned, to the dust of the earth. Man's body is inseparably related to this earth. It was created from the dust of the earth, and it will return to the dust of the earth upon its death. This is the thought behind the words of committal we often hear at a graveside burial service when the minister says, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." What these words mean is that the body came from the dust of the ground and it returns to the dust of the ground.

But there is more to man than his physical body. There is more to him than that which is related to this earth. He is also spiritual. There is a constituent part of the nature and being of man that is directly related to God. As our body comes from the earth and returns to the earth, so too our soul comes from God and will return to God. God breathed His spirit into man and man became a living soul. Thus, man is accountable to God for his soul.

Even though we can make a distinction between these two parts of man's nature, we need to realize that there is a unity that exists in the composite of these two elements. We really can't make a sharp division between the two. In other words, the natural state of man is both body and soul. It is not natural for man's soul to be separated from his body. Though this

takes place when a person dies, it is not a natural, but an unnatural and temporary condition. The body and soul will be reunited at the time of resurrection, where they will remain united forever.

While we are thinking along these lines, we need to guard against a possible misunderstanding and say that man's body is not inherently evil. Some people teach that the spirit is inherently good and the body is inherently evil, resulting in an internal battle between a person's spirit, that wants to do right, and his body, which is evil and wants to do wrong.

It is very true that there is a battle that takes place within a believer, but not between body and spirit. The battle takes place between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh is a term the Bible uses to refer to the remnants of a sinful nature in the believer. The term "flesh" does not refer to the physical body. Though the body is an instrument the flesh may use to perform its sinful deeds, it is not inherently evil itself. It is the purpose to which the body is put that determines if it is being used for good or evil. Though the body is not inherently evil, it does need to be disciplined. But even when we say that, it is still not the body, as much as the will, that needs the discipline. The body needs to be kept under subjection to the new nature.

While we understand that man is composed of both body and spirit, it follows that if both are to be healthy, both must be nourished. If both are to grow, both must be fed. It is easy for us to understand that the physical body must be fed regularly if it is to be alive and healthy. Yet, many never come to understand that the same is equally true of the spirit. Without proper nourishment, it will not be healthy and able to live as it should. This is the idea behind the Lord's statement when He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of my Father." (Mt. 4:4) Man can't live by bread alone means that you can't live for the purpose God created you by only feeding your body with physical food. That will keep alive only one part of your being, your physical body. You still have a spirit that needs to be nurtured or it will have no life in its relationship to God. The spirit is nurtured only by the Word of God. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Anyone who feeds their body with physical food but neglects to feed their spirit by the Word of God is a

person who has a live body but a dead spirit. They are not capable of responding to God, neither can they be in fellowship with Him.

We see, therefore, how vitally important it is to feed not only the body, but the spirit. It is all the more vital when we realize the relative value of these two aspects of human life. Many places in the Bible teach us how foolish it is to care only for our body and neglect our soul. Matthew 16:26 asks: "What shall a man profit if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" In other words, if you owned the whole world so that you could give your body everything it desired but neglected your soul, what profit is there? The implication is, of course, that you have no profit but have actually been a fool.

The reason the soul is of so much greater importance than the body is because it is everlasting. It will exist forever, whereas the earthly body is temporal and soon passes away. To invest everything in something that will soon be gone while neglecting that which exists forever is indeed foolish. Yet, is that not the way it is with so many around us?

Let's move on now to pick up another aspect of the nature of man, one that we gave some attention to previously; that is the fact that man is created in the image of God. The one thing that makes man unique is the fact that God has endowed him with His own image. When we talk about man in the image of God, we are not saying anything about his physical appearance, that is, that man looks like God in some physical way. It is not that kind of image because we know that God is a spirit and does not have a body; therefore, man could not look like him in physical appearance.

The meaning of the image of God lies not in appearance but in the area of man's capacities. For example, man has a capacity, like God, to create. You might not think this is unique. Other creatures seem to be able to make things. We see birds creating nests, ants creating elaborate structures. But if we think about it, birds always build the same kinds of nests year after year. Ants are creating the same kind of structures today that they built centuries ago. There is no improvement in design, no climbing to higher levels of achievement or advancement. In other

words, though many creatures build things, only man has the capacity to improve his own lot by improving his surroundings. This is not evolution; man stays the same, but he is able to improve conditions for himself.

There are many other areas we could look at to see how man shares, in a limited way to be sure, the image of God in his capacities. However, the most important aspect of the image of God is centered in the moral capacity of man. Man was created to be morally responsible to God. Man has the capacity to relate to the holiness of God and is held responsible to live before God in personal righteousness. It is in man's capacity to be morally or righteously related to God that most fully explains the image of God in man.

In thinking about the image of God, we need to ask the question of whether or not fallen man still bears the image of God? The answer is both yes and no. Fallen man still retains the image of God in that he retains the capacity to be related to God in righteousness. Even though he is fallen, there still exists the capacity to be restored to a relationship of righteousness with God. To be sure, man doesn't have the capacity to make himself right with God by his own efforts, but bearing the image of God, tarnished as it is, still makes it possible for that relationship to be restored by the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

The sense in which fallen man has lost the image of God is in having lost the moral excellence he had prior to the fall. Before the fall, man was morally perfect. He was without sin or even the inclination to sin. He was related to God and fellowshiped with Him in righteousness. After the fall, he lost this moral standing, though he still retained the capacity for it to be restored. This capacity is unique to man. No other creature has the potential to be adopted into the family of God.

In this lesson we have looked at the nature of man from two perspectives. As far as his being is concerned, he has both physical and spiritual components. As far as his relationship to God is concerned, he is morally responsible to live before Him in personal righteousness.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Genesis 2:7
2. Matthew 4:4

Answer these questions:

1. In light of today's study, what does Matthew 4:4 mean to you?

2. If you are created in the image of God, what does that say about your moral obligations?

3. To what extent are you responsible to learn and walk in the will of God?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 3 "MAN, THE CREATURE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD"

Lesson 3 "The Original State of Man"

As we continue in our study of man, the creature made in the image of God, we are now ready to examine the original state of man. What was man like when he was first created? Was he different, in so far as his nature was concerned? Is fallen man somehow in a different condition than was Adam? The answer to that question, we will see, is "Yes." Man, as originally created by God, had a nature that was different than that with which all men since the fall were born.

The obvious question then is, "In what way were Adam and Eve different from all those who came after them?" "What is the basis for the distinction that we draw in the nature of mankind before and after the fall?" "How were these differences manifested?"

Let's begin to answer these questions by mentioning a few items that point out some of the basic differences. We can take note that when Adam was created, he was created as a mature man. He did not come into this world as an infant as we did. He entered the world as a mature adult. Though we do not know his apparent age, it is obvious that he had the physical and mental capacities of an adult.

However the major difference between Adam's original nature and our nature comes to light when we understand that, when Adam was created, he was perfect. By that I mean he was perfectly fitted to God's plan. He was perfect in meeting the qualities and characteristics that God had in mind when He created Adam. There was neither blemish on his character nor fault in his personality. He was altogether pleasing to God in every possible way. God had not the slightest complaint against Adam prior to the fall.

It is apparent in the Bible that Adam was not the barbarian cave man that is pictured for us by advocates of evolution. Actually, Adam must have

been quite intelligent. God gave him the job of ruling over and tending His creation. God brought all of the animals before Adam so that he would name each one. (Gen. 2:19) Adam was able to respond intelligently to God. He could think clearly. He could evaluate. He had the capacity to express himself. He was not the low form of life that many anthropologists have portrayed early man to be, basing their theories upon speculation and circumstantial evidence of questionable date and origin.

Man did not begin as a low form of life, slowly but surely raising himself into a more civilized form of existence. Yet, this is often the process we have been led to believe is true. That is, we have been told, that man, by his own determined will and great self-effort, is constantly improving his own being so that he gets better and better as time goes on. What the Scriptures teach is just the opposite. Man started off perfect and by his own efforts has managed to fall from his lofty state of perfect communion with his Maker, so that fallen man is actually in need of restoration. Rather than getting better and better, fallen man is in a critically inferior position to that with which he began.

Not only was man created mature and perfect, in the sense in which we have mentioned, but we also need to grasp the fact that man, in his original state, was without sin. Adam did not have a sinful nature or even a nature with inherent tendencies towards sin. This innocence and positive moral righteousness before God is what was lost in the fall. Since that time, all people born into the world have been born with a sinful, fallen nature. Each of us, the newest born baby, all people since Adam, were born with a nature that tends to sin, and in fact is already corrupted and dead in sin.

When we talk about a sinful nature, we are not talking solely about conduct. Sin is more deeply rooted than that. The root of sin lies in the heart and the motivations of the heart that determine what a person is and does. A newborn baby may not be guilty of a great deal of sinful conduct, but it does have a nature that is self-centered rather than God-centered. That is the essence of sin, to be self-centered rather than God-centered. Adam and Eve had, as part of their nature, a character that was God-centered. Their reason, their will, their desires, their conduct all had

the same single purpose, to give glory to God their Maker. They were holy. They had no tendency toward sin. They had no desire or inner temptation to sin. Their whole life and living was given over to pleasing God. After the fall, that was never again part of the fallen human nature.

One other thing we should say about the original state of man is that man was not subject to death. This may be hard for us to conceive, but Adam and Eve were not, prior to the fall, subject to death. "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23) Death is something that was not a part of the created order but came about as the result of sin. Death is the consequence of sin. It is the consequence of rebellion against God. God told Adam that in the day that he disobeyed Him, in other words, in the day that he sinned, he would surely die. (Gen. 2:17) Prior to that time, Adam was not subject to death. We might want to speculate on what would have happened if Adam had never sinned, but we do not know. What we do know is that death, suffering, sin, and misery entered this world through sin and disobedience to God.

We also need to say something about the purpose for which God created man. This purpose was simply to love and obey God. God created man to have personal, intimate, communion with Him. Man, on his part, was to love and honor God. He had the privilege of walking with and enjoying the fellowship of God. This is what Adam and Eve did. There was nothing that separated them from direct contact with God.

Yet, along with this purpose, God endowed man with free agency. Man was given the freedom of choice. He could love and obey God, or he could turn his back upon God and go his own way. God desired that man would respond to Him out of love, out of a personal desire to honor Him because God was worthy of such love and honor. God could have made Adam so that he had no real choice in the matter. He could have made him so that he would automatically always love and obey Him. But that wouldn't have been satisfying to God. It wouldn't have brought glory to His name. It wouldn't have been a relationship that was based on love. It would have been a relationship based on necessity and servitude, therefore lacking the self-giving of love. God wanted to be worshiped and loved for who He is, not because Adam was forced by nature to do so.

So the first man was given a free choice. He could honor and obey God, looking to Him for everything, or he had the potential to go off on his own way, ignoring God's will and replacing it with his own. This freedom of choice meant that man would be responsible for his conduct, for his thoughts, for his motives, for his priorities. It meant that God would hold man accountable for not only his conduct, but his heart. Man would be responsible to live before God in righteousness and love, every deed and every motive accountable to God.

We also need to recognize that Adam and Eve, prior to the fall, had a full experience of living in the personal presence of God, enjoying His presence and provision without measure. They had direct, unhindered access to God. When they talked to Him it was not through prayer but directly, face to face so to speak. They lived in His presence. Theirs was a life of blessing without compare.

As we are quite aware, such is not the case since the fall. In fact, man has been so separated from God by his sin that he is entirely cut off from all that his purpose in life entails. Fallen man is lost and adrift in his world of self-centeredness. So much so that men everywhere search for identity and purpose asking, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" Some may ask these questions on a technical, philosophical level. Others may not even understand or be able to express the deep longings of their heart that compel them to search for identity and purpose. But all men are seeking in their heart to know the answer to these questions. The book of Genesis gives, in the creation story, the answer, the only answer that can satisfy the human heart. We are creatures made in the image of God and we are here to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Nothing other than this understanding can ever truly satisfy man in his deepest need, his need to be restored to fellowship with his God. Nothing can ever make him truly happy until He is restored in his relationship with God.

However, because we've fallen from God's grace, because we have a corrupt nature, because we have never known a time when we have not been separated from God, because, whether or not we realize it, we are in rebellion against God, we find it impossible to hear the truth of God, let alone respond to it on our own. We must be saved. We cannot reach up

to God and make ourselves acceptable in His sight. But there is good news for the sinner. The Gospel tells us that God has reached down in Jesus Christ and will lift up and restore to Himself those who come unto Him through Christ Jesus. God gets all the glory. It's all of grace. His name is to be praised for evermore.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Genesis 1:28-30
2. Genesis 2:19-20

Answer these questions:

1. What was the one great privilege that Adam and Eve had that no one today has?
2. As far as man's relationship to God, are people born today closer to or further away from God?
3. What is your purpose in life, as seen in the purpose of Adam and Eve?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 3 "MAN, THE CREATURE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD"

Lesson 4 "The Fall of Man"

In this lesson we are going to examine a subject that has been referred to on several occasions already, that is, the fall of man. The story of the fall is found in the third chapter of Genesis. God had created a special place for man to dwell, the Garden of Eden. In the garden, God provided for man all he could ever need. He lacked for nothing under God's provision. But God also placed in the midst of the garden a certain tree. God told Adam that he could help himself to any of the fruit of any of the trees of the garden. Whatever he wanted he could take and use. But of the fruit of this special tree in the midst of the garden, God commanded Adam not eat.

God was testing Adam and Eve with this tree and the commandment concerning it. If he had only wanted them not to touch the tree, He could have not put it there. He could have put it in a remote place not easily reached. However, God did just the opposite. He placed the forbidden tree in the midst of the garden. He put Adam and Eve in a situation where it would be possible for them to do something they should not do, something that could harm them. Yet, God did not want them to do wrong or be harmed. He was testing them. He wanted them to obey and honor Him out of love for Who He is. In order for them to freely choose to love and obey God rather than follow their own desires, it was necessary to place them in a position where they would have the opportunity to choose whose will they would obey, theirs or God's. The tree was to be a test of their love for God. It was not just a forbidden object, it gave them an opportunity to demonstrate their love for Him by honoring what He told them to do.

God could have removed the temptation at any time. He could have made it so that they would not be faced with the possibility of sinning, but He didn't. God will test every one of us. God will allow there to be

things within our reach that we should not touch. He allows them to be there, not because He wants us to succumb to temptation, but because He wants us to have an opportunity to live out our profession of faith and obedience. God wants us to respond to Him out of love and from a desire to have His will done in our lives. There will be plenty of things within our reach that we should never touch. The main reason isn't because they might not be good for us, but that it honors God to leave them alone.

The story goes on to tell that one day Eve was near the tree looking at it. We could say she should not have been doing this, as it is often the prelude of falling into sin to begin to think and wonder about forbidden things. Nonetheless, the serpent, the devil, was there and he began to talk to her and draw her attention to the fruit of the tree and how attractive it was. Then he began to raise questions in her mind as to whether or not it really would be wrong to eat the fruit of that tree. Now God had clearly said that it was wrong. Furthermore, God had said that in the day they ate of the tree, they would surely die. Satan, however, raised doubt in Eve's mind about the word of God. Was what God said really true? Did she really understand Him properly? Did God really mean it the way she thought?

Satan also raised a question about God's character by suggesting that the only reason God did not want them to eat of the fruit was that, if they did, they would become like Him. What Satan was implying was that God was selfish and trivial, not wanting anyone to share what He had. What a fiendish lie this was. God is just the opposite, willing to make great sacrifice so that we might have all that He has for us.

Eve then looked more carefully at the fruit and saw how desirable it was. Having these doubts planted in her mind about what God had said, and thinking that she would be better off with it, she took and ate of the forbidden fruit. She then gave some to Adam, and he also ate. As a result of their disobedience, as a result of their decision to follow their own will instead of God's, they fell from the relationship of fellowship and intimacy they had with God. They became sinful, fallen creatures.

What really took place when they disobeyed God was that they actually

rejected God. They rejected God as God. God had created them. God had provided for them. God had every right to be loved and obeyed. But when they chose to go by their own desires rather than the will of God, they sinned. They took for themselves the role of God. They took upon themselves the prerogative to say what was right and wrong, what should be done and what should not be done.

Actually, a case could be made to say that the minute Adam and Eve began to weigh in their own minds the word of God and to judge whether or not God was right in what He had said, that was the point when they began to sin. On the one hand, Adam and Eve had the word of God. On the other hand, they had a competing word from Satan. As they began to weigh the merits of the two different words and make their own choice about which was right, they quit being submissive to God.

When Adam and Eve decided on their own to make the decision of what to do, they made themselves, rather than God, the final determiner of right and wrong. This is the very essence of sin. We are to be subject to the Word of God, not be a judge over it. We are to receive it, not evaluate it. We don't judge it; it judges us. That doesn't mean that we won't wrestle with the Word of God, but the wrestling should not be to determine if it is true or not. The wrestling takes place in how to understand it and apply it to our lives.

As a result of the fall, several things took place. The first thing that happened was that there came the knowledge of sin on the part of man. There was a feeling of guilt. You will remember that one of the things that took place after they had eaten the fruit was that they recognized they were naked and felt guilty about it, and tried to cover themselves. In other words, there arose a barrier between human relationships as a result of sin. More important, however, was the barrier that arose in the relationship between God and man. Adam and Eve's first response to God after they had sinned was to try to hide from His presence. Their sin caused a separation between them and God. From that time on, natural man would always seek to hide from God and be separated from His presence.

Another result of the separation was to cause a fear of God. This child

of sin, the dread of God, brings a fear of God's wrath and punishment. Instead of enjoying the presence of God as they previously had, they now hid from Him. Ever since the fall, natural man has not wanted to face the presence of God, because he knows that he is guilty and ought to be punished. This is not a false sense of guilt but is an inner understanding of the true guilt and culpability we have before God. Sin will always have this effect. It will always be a barrier between God and man.

As a result of their disobedience and their rejection of God, God banished them from the Garden of Eden, from the privilege of living in direct fellowship with Him. No longer were they allowed to live in the same relationship that they had enjoyed with God in the garden.

What we are talking about is spiritual death. Adam and Eve, and all of the posterity whom they represented, died spiritually as a result of the fall. The essence of spiritual death is being separated from God.

The fall also resulted in the seed of physical death being planted in their bodies. Man was created so that death was not part of his destiny. It was in the day that he ate of the forbidden fruit and chose his own will rather than being obedient to God that he died spiritually and began to die physically. From that point on, he began to grow old, and his body began to wear out, break down, and decay. Because all have sinned, all will die. "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23)

Not only were Adam and Eve affected by the fall, but all mankind fell with them. Adam and Eve acted as representatives of their race. They did not act solely on their own, but they stood or fell representing all mankind. It is somewhat like sending a senator to Washington to represent all the people of his state. Whatever he votes represents the whole state and applies to it. Adam and Eve were representatives of all mankind, and when they fell, it was as man's representative. So from that time onward, all that are born are born with a fallen nature, a sinful nature, a nature that puts its own wishes and desires above those of God. All are born dead spiritually and with the seed of physical death in their bodies. From the moment a person is born, they begin the process of dying. All of this is the result of the fall. All of these things are the result of rejecting God.

So we see that the world as it is now is not how God created it. Man is not as God created him. All of the evil and trouble we see in the world today is not God's doing. It is the outworking of the fall. It is the outworking of the rejection of God and His ways for the ways of man. At the same time this is still God's world. He is in control. He will not allow sin to triumph. God is working out His will in the lives of His people and will be glorified in all that takes place.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Genesis 3:1-21
2. Romans 5:12-21

Answer these questions:

1. Why did God put the forbidden tree in the midst of the Garden of Eden if He did not want Adam and Eve to touch it?
2. What was the underlying sin behind eating the forbidden fruit?
3. What were the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 3 "MAN, THE CREATURE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD"

Lesson 5 "The Present State of Man"

We will conclude this chapter's study of man, the creature made in the image of God, by thinking about the present state of man. You will remember from the previous lesson that we said men living today are not born with the same nature that God originally gave Adam. We call man's present condition, "the fallen state."

When we ask the question, "What is the state of man?" as far as his moral condition or his righteousness before God is concerned, we find that there are basically three viewpoints advanced in the world today. Some people say that man is basically good only needing to be patched up a little here and there. The proponents of this view hold that all men are essentially good, though all men do have some character flaws that need to be overcome. One man might have a temper, or another troubled with selfishness, but if they would work on these faults, they could overcome them and be pleasing to God. What is needed to help man become what he ought to be, they say, is to develop new programs that would enable him to overcome his flaws. This is one view of the present state of man, and there are many who hold this view.

Another prevalent view of the condition of man is that man is basically sick, some would even say very sick, perhaps even being on his death bed. Yet, they would say, there is a spark of good in all men. Though man's problems are much deeper than a few flaws, as the first viewpoint suggests, there still remains a seed of goodness resident in all men. What we need to do to help man, they say, is to take that spark of goodness and encourage it and fan it into a flame. If properly nourished and built up, it can lift up and make well the whole man. The work we need to do, they say, is to find that goodness, appeal to it, and feed it so that it will prevail.

These are the two basic views that the world affirms concerning the

condition of man. In differing and varying degrees, most people look at man in one of these two ways. Yet, the Bible would reject both views as error. The Bible gives us a third picture of the condition of man. It says that man is neither essentially well, nor essentially sick. The Bible says that man is essentially dead. Spiritually speaking, natural man is dead. There is no spark of life in him at all. "Man is born dead in trespasses and sin." (Eph. 2:1) We were born separated from God by a sinful nature. We were born in rebellion against God, not perhaps in a conscious outward manner, but certainly in so far as not being totally yielded to the will of God. The motive behind what natural man does is, at root, a desire to please himself. Though he may do things that appear to be unselfish, he does even these things out of a desire that arises in his own heart. Even acts of sacrifice are done because he wants to do them or because he feels better when he has done them. These are selfish motives. While the conduct itself may be commendable, the motive behind it is not to give glory to God. It is because of this fallen nature that the Bible teaches that natural man is dead in trespasses and sin, dead in his relationship to God.

It is of utmost importance that we have this biblical understanding of the present state of man. It will determine what we understand is necessary to take place in a person's life to make him right with God. If a doctor comes to a person and finds that the patient is basically well, only suffering from a common cold let's say, he will give appropriate treatment for that minor ailment. However, if the doctor comes to a person and finds him to be very sick and in need of a major operation, he will prescribe a much more serious form of treatment to deal with the more serious condition. However, if he comes to a person that is dead, he will handle that situation in an entirely different manner.

Similarly, the way we deal with those around us will be determined by the diagnosis we have of their condition. Unless we realize their condition is hopeless, in other words, they are dead in their ability to respond properly to God, we will never be able to help them. If we feel that they are either mostly well, or even mostly sick, we will try to heal them by patching them up as they are, rather than to try and bring them to new life. We will have the same effect as a doctor who would try to give medicine or perform surgery upon a person who is already dead. But if we realize

they are dead, then we will know that they must be born again.

The corruptness of sin has reached to the inner recesses of the heart of man. Since his heart is corrupt, all that he does out of that corrupt heart will be corrupt. It will not be enough to try to clean up his conduct. What is needed is a new heart, one that is not corrupted by sin. This is exactly what the Gospel offers in Christ, a new heart that desires to do the will of God.

Otherwise, if we tell natural man to try to do what God wants him to do, and convey in our challenge that they will be able to do it if they only try hard enough, we have created a situation that is doomed to failure. No matter how hard the sinful heart tries, it will always be sinful. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6) Fallen man does not need medicine. He does not need an operation. He needs a resurrection.

Another way we can talk about the condition of man is to use the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith when it describes the total depravity of man. Natural man is totally depraved in so far as being what God wants him to be. It is another way of saying he is dead. Total depravity doesn't mean that man is as bad as he can be. It doesn't mean that he can't be any worse or more sinful than he is. What it means is that he is totally separated from God. Every part of his being has been affected and contaminated by sin. He is totally deprived of the personal resources to make his life what it ought to be. He may be looked upon as completely acceptable to society, perhaps even highly praised by society, but utterly depraved in his relationship with God unless he has been brought to new life in Christ. We have to evaluate man, not by society's standards, but by God's. God's standard is total, unwavering holiness. God commands of all men, "Be ye holy, as I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16)

Another word that describes this situation is the word "lost." That is, those who are apart from Christ are separated from God. Man is also lost in the sense that, apart from having his sins forgiven in Christ, he is on the way to hell. This is not something that we hear talked about a lot in these days. It is something that people find uncomfortable, perhaps even unloving, therefore they do not talk about it. But it is true. A

person is born on the road to hell. He doesn't have to do anything horrible to get on that road. He doesn't have to murder, steal, cheat, or lie first. Because man is born with a nature that is self-centered, not God-centered and because he is interested first and last in pleasing himself, he is already separated from God. He is already lost. Now he can be saved. But unless something happens to get him off that road, he will end up in hell. Man is not born neutral, so that if he lives wrong he goes to hell and if he lives right he goes to heaven. No! He is born already dead in trespasses and sin. He is born in need of a savior. He is born lost.

We need to talk about one other word that deals with the present state of man. That word is "bondage." Natural man is in bondage to sin. He is a slave to sin. This doesn't mean that by his own willpower he can't overcome some bad habits. But even in doing that, his motive was self-pleasing. It had nothing to do with seeking to love and honor God. No matter how refined or commendable it may seem on the outside, it is still sin. In fact, natural man can do nothing but sin. All that he does is sin, because all that he does is done apart from God and does not have as its motive the love of God.

All natural men are also in bondage to self. They do not have the freedom of choice that they think they do. The fallen nature limits the freedom of choice only to choices made within the realm of self-centeredness. By way of illustration, if you set before a lion a bowl of salad and another bowl of raw meat, technically, the lion has freedom to choose to eat whichever bowl of food it wants. But his nature will always direct him to eat the raw meat. His choice is not really free. It is influenced by his nature. Natural man is like that as well. He has a freedom of choice in a technical sense, but it will always be limited by his fallen nature, so that his choice will always be to follow his own desires rather than God's.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh... For to set the mind on the flesh is death... For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom. 8:5-8)

Natural man never believes that he is in as bad a shape as the Bible declares him to be. After all, the way he is is the way he has always been. In addition, everyone else was born this way also. Certainly, his reasoning goes, if everyone is like this, it could not be all that bad, in fact it is normal. But when we realize that we must stand before a holy God who demands holiness, and who Himself is too holy even to behold sin, we ought to cry out like Isaiah, "Woe is me, I am undone." (Isaiah 6:5) As bad as the news is about fallen man's spiritual condition, the good news of the Gospel is that God Almighty has sent the Great Shepherd of the sheep to seek and to save the lost.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Romans 3:11-23
2. Romans 8:7-8

Answer these questions:

1. What is the spiritual state of every person who does not know Christ as Savior?
2. What does someone who does not know Christ need to have happen in their life before they can be right with God?
3. What have you learned from this week's study of man that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 4

"THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD"

Lesson 1 "Who He Is"

In this chapter we will direct our attention to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. If we are going to understand anything at all about God, if we are going to understand anything about the Gospel, if we are going to understand anything about the Bible, if we are going to understand anything about how a person is connected to this world and the world above, the only way we will ever come to an understanding of these things is through the Lord Jesus Christ. All of life and all of history is centered in Him and the outworking of God's purpose through Him. Therefore, we should come reverently and humbly to the Scriptures to be taught about this One who is the center of all things.

In this lesson, we are going to spend our time seeking to understand something of who He is. The first thing that we need to understand about the Lord Jesus Christ is that He is God. He is God in human flesh. He has always existed as the second person of the Trinity. He is eternal. He did not come into existence at His earthly birth. There was no such time that He came into being. He always was. He always existed as God. But it was at His birth that He became Jesus of Nazareth. It was at His earthly birth that He took on human form. Uppermost in our thinking

must be the fact that Jesus Christ is God in human form.

Another way we can talk about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is to say that He has a dual nature. He was always God. At a certain point in time He became man without giving up being God. Therefore, he was both God and man at the same time. He was fully God and He was fully man. As He walked in this world, He was both God and man at once. When He became man, when He was born in the stable in Bethlehem, He did not give up being God. He was still fully divine. What He set aside when he was born in this world was not His divinity but His glory. He set aside the status He had as God and humbled Himself to live as a man. Yet, all the while He was still God.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, (Mt. 17:1-9) for a brief moment, the veil, as it were, was pulled aside so that His glory could be seen. Yet, all the time He walked on earth, He walked without His glory being seen. It was hidden. Though He was God, He walked in the humility and weakness of a man.

In His human nature, the Lord experienced all of the weaknesses that you and I have, except that He was without sin. He could grow tired and weary. He could be hungry and weak. He had, in his human frame, all of the frailty of humanity. When He walked in this world, He walked in His human strength. He didn't take advantage of the fact that He was God to draw upon His supernatural powers to ease His road. He faced temptation and overcame them, not in His strength as God, but in the limitations of humanity, relying on God His Father for His strength and guidance. He used no resources other than what are available to believers today. Even when He performed miracles, it wasn't through His divinity as much as He performed them through being led and empowered by the will of His Father.

When He walked here on earth, He came as the second Adam. That is He came to retake the test that Adam failed, to be the second representative of mankind. To pass the test that Adam failed required that He live out His life using the same resources that were available to the first Adam. Though He had a dual nature so that He was fully God and man, the resources that He used to live out His Father's will on earth

were the same ones that Adam had available to him to live out God's will in his experience.

We can also recognize that, even now in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ retains this dual nature. He continues to be both God and man. To be sure, He is in His glory again. You could read the first chapter of the book of Revelation and see that He is no longer in a state of humility. In one sense He is very much different in His glory than He was when He was here in His humility. He is in His glory now and we need to think on Him as such.

Perhaps it would help us to better understand who the Lord Jesus Christ is if we would look at a few of the names that are assigned to Him in the Bible. Many different names are applied to the Lord throughout the Scriptures. In fact there are over 270 different names that are used to refer to Him. Each of the names brings out a different aspect of who He is and what He came to do. In other words, who He is and what He came to do is so full that it takes these, and many more, to describe for us who He is and what He did.

We will look at a few of the most common names, beginning with the name that we probably use most often to refer to Him, namely, "Jesus Christ." Jesus is His human name, His given name. Christ is not His last name; rather it is His title. Christ means the Anointed One of God. It is the same word as Messiah in the Old Testament. Translating the name Jesus Christ would give us "Jesus, the Messiah" or "Jesus, God's Sent One." In fact, the word Jesus itself is a meaningful name. It means "salvation is of God."

In the Scriptures, the name "Jesus" is most often used to refer to His human nature, or to His state of humility. After the resurrection, after He returned to His glory, seldom is the name Jesus used alone. He is called the Christ, Jesus the Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus the Lord, but only on a few occasions merely the name Jesus. He is no longer merely Jesus of Nazareth and all that is conveyed about His humbled state by this name. Now He is in His glory. Now we know Him, not simply as the humble Galilean but as the risen King of Glory.

Another name that we are familiar with is the "Son of God" and along with that the "Son of Man." Actually both of these names refer to His divinity and His humanity. But the term "Son of God," specifically the term "the only begotten Son of God," conveys to us that He is uniquely the Son of God. On several occasions God said of Him, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." (Mt. 3:17) God acknowledged Him as His only begotten Son. Jesus Christ was not the son of Adam. He was not the son of Joseph, in the sense that Joseph contributed to His conception. He was God's own Son. He was God's only begotten Son.

The name Jesus used most to refer to Himself was the "Son of Man." This term, like the name "Son of God," if studied in more depth, would show that it refers to His divine nature as well as His human nature. It does, however, identify Him with mankind. It does identify Him with our human nature. He is kin to both God and man. He identifies Himself with us and with our lot.

He is also called the Savior. This term describes the work He came to do. He came to "seek and to save the lost." (Lk. 19:10) He came to be the one who "would save His people from their sins." (Mt. 1:21) He came to redeem God's people and restore them to a position of righteousness before His Father.

He is also called Lord. This term describes His position or status. He is the King. He is sovereign over His kingdom. He is the One to whom "every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess ... that He is Lord." (Phil. 2:10-11) He is not only our Savior but He is also our Lord. He is the One to whom we pledge faithful allegiance.

In the Gospel of John we see yet another name ascribed to the Lord. John 1:14 tells us, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Christ is here called the Word. In a very real sense, Christ is an incarnation of the Word of God. If you could take God's Word and make it come alive and watch it live out God's will in human form, it would look like the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, if you wanted to see what obedience looked like lived out in this world, you could look at the Lord. If you wanted to see what the love of God looked like in action, you could look at the Lord. If you wanted to see what the law of God looked like lived

out fully, you could look at the Lord. Christ Jesus is the Word of God in the flesh. He is God's Word in human form.

In these few paragraphs we have barely scratched the surface of understanding who the Lord Jesus Christ is. As we continue on in this study we will add more to our understanding, so that we will come more and more to love and honor this one who is God in human form, the one whom God promised from the beginning. Even back in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve had sinned, God promised that there would come a seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent, (Gen. 3:15) signifying the ultimate victory that He would bring about over sin and Satan. All throughout Scripture, God promised His people that His Messiah would come and redeem them. That promised seed, the Messiah, is Jesus the Christ, our Savior and our Lord.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Matthew 16:13-17
2. Philippians 2:5-11

Answer these questions:

1. In what way was Jesus of Nazareth different from any other man who has ever lived?
2. When Jesus of Nazareth was born, was He still God or did He give up His divinity while He lived on earth?
3. What does the fact that God became man mean for you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 4 "THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD"

Lesson 2 "His Birth"

In this lesson we want to continue our study about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We will spend this lesson looking at the incarnation, that is, the account and significance of His birth into this world. The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ has always been a subject of great interest and importance to believers. Perhaps surprisingly, it has received its share of attention from unbelievers as well. The reason for this attention from unbelievers is because of what the Bible says about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It claims that Jesus of Nazareth was born of a virgin. An unbelieving world can not accept such a thing. Of all the miracles recorded in the Bible, perhaps none have been despised more by unbelievers than the virgin birth.

When we talk about the virgin birth, it was not actually the birth itself that was the supernatural event, but it was the conception that was supernatural. The delivery process, the birth itself, was entirely natural. The conception was what was miraculous. Jesus of Nazareth was not the product of a human relationship. He was not the product of the union of the seed of a man and a woman. He was not conceived through natural means. He was conceived without human intercourse. He was conceived by a supernatural work of the Holy Ghost without union or impregnation. We don't really understand how this worked in all of its detail. But we do know that in the first chapter of Luke the angel told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God." (Luke 1:35) Mary was told that she would find herself with child, and the child would be the Son of God. Yet, it was not the virgin birth that made Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is the Son of God because of His eternal pre-existent relationship with His Father.

Many people today dismiss the idea of the virgin birth. Perhaps the reason they do not believe it is because it is not natural. The natural

process has always been that conception takes place through sexual union. To say that someone was born of a virgin is to say that something unnatural has occurred. The fact is the virgin birth was unnatural. That is why it is so noteworthy. Yet it is this reason that many people use to reject the truth. We need to remember that Mary and Joseph also had their own doubts. They wondered how such a thing could be. That is why Mary asked the angel that had told her what would take place, "How will this be, seeing that I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34) She was never told how it could be, but she was led to understand that God would do it, and so she believed that it would come to pass.

We could suggest that people who deny the virgin birth have a very low view of God. If God can pick up a handful of the dust of the earth and create out of it a human body and breath life into it, He certainly would have no difficulty conceiving a child in the womb apart from sexual intercourse. That would not pose the slightest problem for an omnipotent God.

The Bible, without question, teaches that Jesus of Nazareth was born of a virgin. The Gospel of Matthew records that prior to Mary and Joseph having any relationship, Mary conceived. (Mt. 1:18) In the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesied that a virgin would conceive and give birth to this promised child. (Is. 7:14) There can be little doubt that the Bible teaches the doctrine of the virgin birth. Yet, the Bible does not present any arguments to support the doctrine, nor does it engage in an attempt to draw conclusions from it. It simply reports it as a fact of history.

We find in the Gospels two separate and different listings of the genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew's gospel traces His genealogy through Joseph. Yet, even though it is traced through Joseph, it is worded in such a way that it does not say that Jesus was born the son of Joseph. It says that Joseph was "the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born." (Mt. 1:16)

The other genealogy is found in Luke's Gospel. It traces the Lord's genealogy through Mary, who was from the tribe of Judah, and represents his birthright. Matthew's genealogy goes back through David to Abraham. It represents the Lord's legal claim to the throne of David and

His fulfillment as the promised seed of Abraham. Luke's genealogy goes all the way back to Adam, showing His link with Adam and foreshadowing His coming as the second Adam.

Perhaps the most important question we could ask about the virgin birth is, "Is it important for us to believe in the virgin birth?" "Does it make a difference?" We live in a day when more and more church people are denying the virgin birth. Is anything really important at stake in this doctrine? The answer is yes, it is of vital importance to the Christian faith.

In the first place, we ought to believe in the virgin birth because the Bible reveals it, which is reason enough. However, at stake is this important truth. If the Lord Jesus Christ was merely the product of a human relationship, that is, if Joseph and Mary were His parents by conception, He could not be the Savior. He would have been born with a fallen, sinful nature, as do all men born after the seed of Adam. If He were only human, His death could only be the wages for His own sin. His death could not atone for anyone else. His death would only pay for what He owed for His own sins, because, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23) and "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23) If the virgin birth were not true, He could not be the Savior. In order to atone for the sins of others, He needed to be a sinless sacrifice. He needed to be holy, without spot or blemish, the perfect, sacrificial Lamb of God. This would require that He not possess the fallen nature that all men born after the seed of Adam have. His birth would have to bypass natural means to do this.

Not only did He need to be sinless, but in order to be our Savior, He needed to be God if His death would be worthy to be imputed to men. If He was only a man, His death would not be all that worthy as a sacrifice. But because He was sinless, because He was God, His selfless sacrifice would be worthy to atone for the sin of men. Without the virgin birth we would not have a Savior. At most, we would have a man who was trying to live as God would want and in the end being unable to do so, finding himself under the wrath of God.

There is yet another reason that the virgin birth was necessary. One of

the purposes Jesus of Nazareth had was to come and totally fulfill the will of His Father as He walked on this earth. The Bible calls Jesus of Nazareth "the Second Adam." (1 Cor. 15) This title refers to the first Adam, who was a representative of mankind. As the representative of mankind, Adam was tested by being given the opportunity, of his own free will and love, to submit himself to the will of God and to walk in it perfectly. When he failed, he brought all mankind down with him. Jesus Christ came as the Second Adam. He came to take the same test over again. He walked out His life in this world, perfectly keeping the will of His Father, doing only what His Father told Him to do. Throughout His ministry, He made it clear that He came not to do His will but the will of His Father who sent Him. If Christ was to be the Second Adam, He needed to start with a clean slate, as did the first Adam. This would mean that He could not be born in the natural way with the fallen nature of man but would need to be born in a way that would circumvent being born with this fallen nature.

Therefore, the virgin birth was necessary so that Jesus of Nazareth would have both the nature of God, so His sacrifice would be an acceptable atonement, and the nature of man, so that He could walk in the will of God as the Second Adam and achieve a positive righteousness that could be imputed to His people.

All men are born after the seed of the first Adam, and with him, have failed the test. However, in the Lord Jesus Christ the way has been opened for men to be born again, after the seed of the Second Adam, and with Him have their fallen nature replaced by the righteousness of Christ. All with Adam for their father get Adam's reward, death. All with Christ as their Lord and Savior get His reward, life eternal.

We need to understand that the story of the birth of Christ is more than a sweet Christmas story of the Babe of Bethlehem. It represents more than a happy time of the year when we get warm feelings for one another. Jesus of Nazareth came into this world as God in the flesh. He humbled Himself and set aside the glory of heaven, subjecting Himself to the misery and trouble of this fallen world, even to allowing sinful men to nail Him to the cross where He would die for the sins of His people. He did this to be obedient where man was disobedient. He came to live out

the life of perfect obedience that fallen man could never achieve. He came that He might win for us life eternal. We who deserved the wrath of God have been called to come to the Lord Jesus Christ and be born again into the Kingdom of God that we might reap His inheritance of eternal life. The virgin birth was the necessary beginning to this atoning work of Christ.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Matthew 1:18-23
2. Isaiah 7:14

Answer these questions:

1. Why is it important that you believe in the virgin birth?
2. Why was it necessary that Jesus Christ be fully God?
3. Why was it necessary that Jesus Christ be fully man?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 4 "THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD"

Lesson 3 "What He Did"

It's time to turn our attention to what it was that the Lord Jesus Christ did while He was here on earth. The Bible says that if all the things that He did were written down, the earth could not contain all the books that it would take. (Jn. 21:25) For us to try to deal with this topic in a few paragraphs is rather an impossible task. Yet, we can use this time to get a brief overview of His work here on earth. To do this we will have to bite off a large chunk of material as we talk about His earthly ministry, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension.

The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world with a specific mission to accomplish. He came to perfectly live out the will of God and then to lay down His life for the sins of His people. He came with the purpose of laying down His life as an atonement for sin. Other people could, and have, done the other things that He did. Others have performed miracles. In fact, many people performed miracles both in the Old and New Testament. There were many that have faithfully proclaimed the Word of God. There were many that have set an example of a faithful life. But there was no one else who ever could have laid down his life as an atonement for sin. Actually, that was the only thing that He came to do that no one else could ever do. All the other things, important as they were, could have been done by a man or an angel. But to be the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world was something only God Himself could do.

We also need to realize that His death was not an accident. It was not an unexpected surprise to Himself, or His Father, when He was put on trial and sentenced to death. It was not by chance that His ministry was "cut short" at an early age. It was part of God's plan. It had been foreordained by God's predetermined counsel. That is not to say that the people who executed Christ were innocent, only that what they did was

part of what God had foreordained to use for His redemptive purposes.

Let's get started then in our examination of our Lord's earthly ministry. He began His public ministry at about the age of 30. There is very little recorded in the Bible about His life from the time of His birth until He began His public ministry. We could take note that it must not be necessary for us to understand this part of His life, or we would have been given the information we need. The focus of our attention on the life of Christ ought to be on the work that He came to do.

The Lord began His public ministry when He came to John the Baptist, asking to be baptized. He did not need to be baptized because He was sinless and had no need for the cleansing which is represented by baptism. Actually, John the Baptist told Him that He should be the one to baptize him, rather than the other way around. (Mt. 3:14) Yet, the Lord submitted to baptism because He desired to be identified with man, to live out His life as the Second Adam.

As He began to preach, He called people to repentance, saying that the Kingdom of God was at hand. He performed many, mighty miracles, demonstrating that the hand of God was upon Him and thus validated all of His teaching. The people of God had not seen a prophet in 400 years, so the amazing works that the Lord did were undeniable proof to them that God sanctioned His ministry. The miracles He performed brought together an audience to which He could preach and teach concerning the Kingdom of God.

As the Lord lived out His ministry here on earth, He sought to be fully obedient to the will of His Father, even to the point of going to the cross. We know that the religious leaders of His day were convicted by His words and were jealous of His popularity with the people. Therefore, they sought for opportunities to undermine His ministry and eventually to kill Him. The Lord understood what they were doing and knew that He would be put to death. He knew that was the work that He had come to do was to be the innocent sacrificial Lamb of God. In fact, He had warned and prepared His disciples for this event on several occasions, the last time at what we call the Last Supper. (Lk. 22:14ff)

Following the Last Supper, He went to the Garden of Gethsemane where, in a time of great agony, He voluntarily took upon Himself the sins of His people. You see, it was in the Garden that the agony really began. It was in the garden that the Lord struggled with the separation that would of necessity take place between Him and His Father when He became sin for us. Yet, He continued to be obedient to the will of His Father and said, if it be His Father's will, He would drink of the cup of the sins of His people to the dregs. (Mt. 26:36ff)

It was not the physical pain, as horrible as it must have been, that was the real agony of the cross. What was so repulsive about the cross was that it meant that the innocent, loving Son of God had to stand before His holy Father bearing upon Himself all of the ugly, coarse, most vile sins that you can imagine. The Lord Jesus Christ had to stand before God Almighty being personally guilty of every depraved thought and deed and in so doing incur His Father's wrath, facing the tormenting separation that would result. That was the real pain and ugliness of the cross. It was the reason why it was such a dreadful thing to the Lord. He had to come before His Father, with whom He had always had the most intimate and blessed relationship, and be rejected and hated by Him. We can't really understand the sheer agony and dread that must have been involved in that act. We can't feel how utterly devastating even the thought would be to the Lord. It was a price beyond our ability to appreciate that the Lord paid to win our redemption.

Sometimes you hear people say that the God of the Old Testament was a God of wrath and the God of the New Testament is a God of love. However, if you want to see wrath, if you really want to understand wrath, more than anywhere else, you will see it in the New Testament at the cross. If His own Son, whom He loved with the greatest love imaginable, did not escape His wrath, it must truly be an awesome thing. If God hates sin to the extent that even His innocent Son, who bore the sins of others, would not escape its punishment, we ought to tremble before such a holy God. We ought to eternally express our gratitude and love to the Lord Jesus Christ for what He has done for us.

We need to emphasize again, however, that it was for the sins of His people that Christ died, not for any sins of His own. He was innocent. It

was our sins that He took upon Himself at the cross. It was for our sins that He died, that we might never have to face the wrath of God. It was out of love, not necessity, that He went to Calvary and faced the wrath of His Father.

We need to remember also, that though He died bearing our sins, He did not remain dead, but on the third day He rose from the grave, victorious. It was our sins that He took to the grave, and it was our resurrection from the grave that He won when He rose again having put an end to sin, death, and the grave. Just as Adam was our representative in the fall, the Lord Jesus Christ was our representative in the resurrection and newness of life. When He rose from the grave it was evidence of His vindication and God's acceptance of His work on the cross as the atonement for the sins of His people. He took our sins, past, present, and future, to the cross where He paid the punishment that they were due, and, having settled the debt, rose to new life no longer subject to the penalty or power of sin. All this He did on our behalf and as our representative. His death was our death. His payment was our payment. His resurrection was our resurrection. His victory was our victory. That is why Jesus Christ is called the first fruits of those who are the children of God. (Col. 1:15) Those who are His are no longer in bondage to sin. They are no longer prisoners to death and the grave. In His name we have power and victory over sin, death and the grave. In His name we have new, abundant, and fruitful life. Christ in us is the hope of all of our glory. (Col. 1:27)

During the forty days following the resurrection, He continued to meet with His disciples to instruct and challenge them in the work that He had for them to do. Then at the end of the forty days He ascended into heaven. It was a public event. He could have done it privately, but He did it in plain sight. It was as though He set the stage, having all of His followers together on the Mt. of Olives, because He wanted them to see that there is more to life than what we see in this world. There is heaven. There is a place where we will dwell for all eternity with God. We need to know that heaven is real and just as Christ died, rose again, and ascended into heaven, that will be the destination for all that belong to Him. That is what He won for us. That is what we have, in a very real way, already participated in. Christ the forerunner has already entered

Dr. Michael Bliss

into the victory and the victory is ours. We will dwell forever in His presence, beholding His glory.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Romans 5:6-11
2. Romans 6:3-10

Answer these questions:

1. What did Jesus Christ do that no one else could do? Explain.

2. How was Christ's resurrection different from merely coming back to life again?

3. What does it mean to you that you were involved in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 4 "THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD"

Lesson 4 "What He Is Doing Now"

We have been studying about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We first looked at who He is. Then we took a look at how He came into this world and what He did while He was here. In this lesson we will look at what He is doing now. The Lord Jesus Christ is alive. He is alive right now. He is at the right hand of His Father in heaven. He is at work on behalf of His Church. In the previous lesson we left off talking about His ascension. We saw that the Bible said that He ascended into heaven where He sat down at the right hand of God. We can understand that the term "right hand of God" doesn't emphasize a location as much as it does a position of power and authority. The Lord Jesus Christ is in power and has all authority over heaven and earth. He is reigning now from the throne in heaven, using His power and authority on behalf of His people and for His own Glory.

When we think about the Lord, too often we only think about Him as someone who lived here some 2000 years ago. However, we should have uppermost in our minds that He is alive right now. He is in His glory. No longer is He living in humility as He did when He walked on earth. No longer is He "lowly Jesus meek and mild," but He is clothed with splendor and glory. He is still humble, merciful, and kind. Those are eternal attributes. But He is also the righteous Judge of all the earth. If you want to see what the Lord Jesus Christ looks like now, now that He is in His glory, you could look at the first chapter of Revelation.

We need to realize there is a difference between what He was like when He walked on earth as the suffering servant and what He is like now as the King of glory. The difference is not so much in His person as it is in His role. He is not only meek and mild, but He is also awesome in His power and in His holiness and in His majesty.

There are two main activities that the Lord Jesus Christ is currently involved in concerning His people. First, the Bible tells us that He is making intercession for us before the throne of God. (Heb. 7:25) He is our intercessor, our mediator, our advocate. He is constantly praying for us and pleading our case before His Father in heaven. Every Christian has a personal advocate, a personal representative before the throne of God who will intercede on his behalf. Every Christian has an Ambassador in heaven. Every Christian has a High Priest who stands before God. The amazing thing is that this High Priest is none other than the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the sacrifice is none other than Himself, offered up for us once and for all on the cross of Calvary.

You may have noticed that there are a lot of legal terms used in this description of the Lord's work in heaven. A very distinctive courtroom picture is painted for us by the use of these terms, and there is a very real sense in which what He does has a legal dimension. God is the just Judge of all the earth. God is the judge of the whole world. Jesus Christ is our defense attorney. He is defending us before the judgment seat of His Father. He is not trying to prove our innocence, (for we have none) but His defense is based on the fact that He died for us. He died for our sins. Our defense rests upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and His payment of the debt that we owe.

It is not that God the Father is the one who is angry against us, while the Lord Jesus Christ is the kind and loving one who is on our side. You must remember that it was God the Father who sent His Son into this world to die for our sins. The Father and the Son are one. They have the same character and nature. Both are holy and hate sin, and both are loving and merciful.

We need the constant intercession of the Lord on our behalf. We need Him to continually intercede for the needs that we have, for the sins that we stumble into, for the trouble we confront, for the times of testing we face. There is testing. There is trouble, and there is trial in this world. We are weak. We need help. The Lord Jesus Christ is one who helps us. He helps us from His position of power and authority at the right hand of God. Hebrews 7:25 tells us, "Wherefore He is able also to save them

to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them." The position of the saint of God, the position of the one who belongs to Christ, is secure, eternally secure. Christ is able to save them to the uttermost, to the end. He is able to see that they persevere through the troubles, through the trials, through the testing, and through the stumbling into sin, because He makes intercession for them. We are not so strong that we could make it on our own. When we make it, when we get to heaven, it will not only be to the glory of Christ's atoning work on the cross, but it will also be to the glory of His continual intercession for us at the throne of God. We need to understand this work. We need to appreciate it. We need to trust it. We need to give Him the glory for it.

One thing of real concern to every true believer is how inconsistent his response can be to the grace of God. There may be times in our lives when our faith seems to evaporate. There may be times when we stumble in a serious way. There may be times when our heart grows cold. If we are true believers, these times will grieve us. Yet, the Lord will help us even in times like these. 1 John 2:1 tells us that, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins." He will pray for us in times of need, even in times of our failure.

It is also important to note that when He makes His intercession for us it is not an impersonal chore but it is as one who is "touched by the feelings of our infirmities." (Heb. 4:15) "He knows our frame. He knows that we are but dust." (Psalm 103:13) The Lord Jesus Christ was made like unto us so that He would know from His own experience what it was like to be weak and totally dependant upon God. Because He knows us through and through, His intercession brings about the exact thing that we need. Sometimes, perhaps often, the work of His intercession may not bring the results that we think are needed, nor may they come in the time that we think they are needed. But we can trust ourselves into the hands of Him who knows our frame, who knows the feelings of our infirmities, and who works all things together for good. The Lord will help us. He will intercede for us. He will keep us to the end.

His work as intercessor was the first of the two works that we are looking

at concerning what the Lord is doing today. The second work is that He is the Head of the church. In several places, the Scriptures draw an analogy by saying the church is like a body and the Lord is the head of the body. In other words, He is the head of the church in the same way that the head is the head of a body. It is the head that rules over the body. It is in the head that the decisions are made and the direction the body will take is determined. The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church in the same way. He directs and guides it in the way it is to go. The church, all who are united to Him through faith, make up His body and are to be sensitive to the head as He would lead and guide His body. These truths emphasize the sense in which the Lord rules the church from heaven on high. Now He is here in our midst also, and His rule is internal, but there remains the truth that He is the exalted ruler sitting on the throne of heaven. Part of what the Lord is doing now is leading and guiding His church, according to plans established before the foundation of the world.

If we have a head, we need to be careful to follow His leading. We need to be yielded to His Holy Spirit who will convey to us the direction we are to take as we go about the work we have been given. Just as the Lord came not to do His own will but the will of His Father (Mt. 26:39), even unto death, so we must also remember the words of the Lord when He said, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." (Mt. 16:24) This is the way that He rules in His people. This is the way He rules in His church, as the church, the people of God, deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow the head as He leads them into His will. It is not up to us as individuals or as the church to chart our own course. We are not independent in our affairs. We have a head who will direct us into His perfect will.

In this lesson we have sought to see something of the work that the Lord is doing in heaven. He is alive and at work on behalf of His people, the church. He is our mediator, our intercessor who keeps us persevering. He is the head of His church. He leads and guides it in the path that He has set before it. He is the risen Lord of glory who is working out His will in the lives of His people.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Hebrews 7:24-28
2. Hebrews 2:14-18

Answer these questions:

1. What does Christ's intercession mean for your daily living?

2. In what ways is Christ your Lord?

3. Do you have a personal sense of walking with the living Lord? In what way?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 4 "THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD"

Lesson 5 "What He Will Do"

We now take up the last study in the series about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will be looking at His second coming. Probably no other subject generates more interest among many church people than the second coming of Christ and the events surrounding His return. Probably no other subject generates as much confusion or as many different ideas than the study of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps one of the reasons why there is so much confusion and so many different ideas surrounding this subject is because of the tendency to go beyond what the Scriptures teach, and enter into speculation. Many of the Biblical texts that deal with the second coming of Christ are difficult to understand. The passages are couched in a great deal of symbolic language, which practically assures there will be a wide variety of suggestions on how the symbolism is to be understood.

Because of this, we will deal only with those things that are clearly the teaching of Scripture concerning the Lord's second coming, along with what it will mean for us and what we are to do about it. We will leave to others the discussion about when, where, and how the details will work out.

First of all, we begin with the fact, the promise that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. There are at least 318 references in the New Testament to the fact that the Lord is coming again. Over and over again in the New Testament we are told that He will return. There are promises about it. There are parables about it. There are references to it. We can't help but get the idea that the Lord Jesus Christ is really going to come again. God wants us to understand that. He wants us to believe it. He wants us to be ready for it.

Let us turn now to some of the things that the Bible teaches about His return. One of the things that is clearly taught is that He will return in the same way that He left. (Acts 1:11) He will return personally. He will return bodily. He will return in such a way that He will be seen by all men. His return will not be hidden or in secret.

Some people have attempted to write off the Lord's physical return to earth by saying that the words in the Bible about His second coming are to be understood as describing what happens when a person comes to faith and receives the Lord as their Savior. While it is true that He comes to dwell in the hearts of His people when they are saved, that is not what is in view in the promises concerning His second coming. The promise is that He will personally, bodily, and visibly return to this earth.

We are told that His return will be in power and glory. When He came the first time, for the most part, it went unnoticed by the world. There were a few humble people who were told and came to worship Him, but for the most part the world was ignorant that God Himself had come into their midst. That is not the way it will be at His second coming. When He comes again He will come on clouds of glory. (Mt. 24:30) All people will see Him and all eyes will be focused upon Him. The whole world will know that God Himself has come. The whole world will bow before the returning Lord of glory.

We are also told in the Bible that when He comes He will come as a thief in the night. (1 Thes. 5:2) At first appearance, these words may seem to contradict what has just been said. But what is meant by coming as a thief in the night is not that He will sneak in unnoticed, rather that His coming will be at a time when He is not expected. He will come at such a time that there is no special watch set or any sign of clear and present danger. There won't be any special warning or any unique events that will announce His imminent return. He will come as a thief in the night, at such time and hour as you expect not.

That leads us to say that there is nothing yet to be done, there is nothing unfinished that must first take place, before He can make His return. He could come at any moment. Nothing special has to take place first. We are living in the last days now. The work of God, at least as far as what

was needed to be done to redeem man, was finished on the cross. Peter, in His Pentecost sermon, said these are the last days. These are the days that the prophet Joel referred to when he talked about the last days proceeding the return of the Lord. He can come at any time. This is what should be the motivation for us to be watching and working.

What will He do when He comes? The Bible says that He is coming to judge the world. He is coming to bring to an end this age. Matthew 25 describes His coming as a time in which He will separate the sheep from the goats. That is what is involved in judgment, to separate and to reward accordingly. When He judges, when He separates the sheep from the goats, He will put the sheep, that is, those who have been born again into the family of God, on His right hand and will call them to enter into His Kingdom. To the goats, to those who knew Him not, those who were not obedient to God, those who were not covered by the blood of Christ, He will cast into outer darkness. That means Hell. Whatever else will take place when He returns, we know that it will be a time of judgment.

We know also that when He comes, He will take His own to be with Him. They will dwell in the place He has prepared for them to live with Him forever in heaven. (Jn. 14:2) When He comes again He will receive His own unto Himself. It will be a day of great joy for the believer, but it will be an awesome and terrible day for those who have not found forgiveness under the blood of Christ.

What are we to do then about the certain fact that He is coming again? Over and over again, especially in His parables, the Lord taught that we are to prepare, we are to be ready, and we are to watch. In other words, we are to live today as though the Lord was going to return at the end of the day. We ought to live this very moment so if He were to return now, we would be found faithful and ready. If you expect someone important to come to your house, you take time to have your house in order. If you know someone important is going to come, you want the house to be in its best shape. You don't want them to come when you are not expecting them and find the house in disarray. Especially would this be true if it were his house you were living in. This idea was the basis for the Lord's words when He reminded His people that He would return. Keep your

house in order. Be about the Lord's business. Work for the night is coming when we can work no more. (Jn. 9:4) Don't put off until tomorrow what the Lord has for you to do today. You may not have tomorrow. Be about the Lord's business today.

We could also say concerning His delay, that it is a delay that has behind it mercy, not weakness or indecision. Though it has been almost 2000 years since the promise was made, we ought not view the delay as a reason to doubt or question whether or not the promise is true. We need to see that His return is delayed because of His compassion. Where would you be if the Lord had come before you were a believer? You ought to thank the Lord that He waited for you. You ought to thank the Lord for His amazing long-suffering. As eager as we may be for Him to come, for us to be united with Him in heaven, removed from the sin and corruption of this world, we ought to understand that His delay is for the purpose of bringing other sheep into the fold.

Finally, when we ponder the second coming of the Lord, we don't have to get all wrapped up in trying to understand all of the details that will surround the event. The when and the where and the how, if they were all that critical for us to know, would have been set forth for us in clear detail. God is more interested that we live faithfully today than that we understand the future in detail. We need to be busy about today, not tomorrow. God has work that He wants done today, and it is very easy to get so caught up in the future that we can miss out on being sensitive to the Lord's will for today. The future is important and can be a great motivation for what we do, but we have to live and be faithful today. This is the day that the Lord has made. (Ps. 118:24)

We need to be ready. We need to be burdened for those who are outside the flock, for we know that He is coming in judgment. The real burden that the knowledge of the return of the Lord ought to give us, the real place it ought to lead our eyes, would not be to look at world events, trying to fit them into a Biblical scheme, but rather to look to the fields that are white unto harvest. The second coming of the Lord is a mandate for the people of God to work and pray for the lost.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Mark 13:27-37
2. 2 Peter 3:3-15

Answer these questions:

1. What do you believe is the most important thing to understand about Christ's second coming?

2. Is it important for you to understand all of the details concerning the Lord's return? Explain.

3. What have you learned from this week's study of the person of Christ that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 5

"MAN'S SIN AND GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION"

Lesson 1 "What Is Sin?"

As we move forward in our study, we come to the topic of man's sin and God's plan of salvation. We might begin by asking the question, "What is sin?" "What does it mean when we talk about a person being a sinner?" "What constitutes sin?"

Sin is not a word we often hear in everyday conversation outside of the church. You can go a long time in the office or in the classroom or on the street or wherever you may be and not hear the word "sin" come into the conversation. Although it is a common word, it is not used a great deal outside the church. The reason is because we don't talk much about God outside the church. Sin is a word that only has meaning in the context of the things of God. I know we can use the word to describe one's misconduct in treating another, but sin, in its primary sense, has to do with a person's relationship to God, not man. Because of this, it is not surprising that we don't very often hear sin being talked about since we don't often hear people talk about their responsibilities before God.

I could add that the concept of sin is not generally well understood outside the church, or within the church as well for that matter. Yet, the Bible has a lot to say about sin. God is interested in our relationship to Him. He is interested in what we do. He is interested in what we think. He measures what we do and think. He measures the motives of our heart. He measures the priorities we have, the values we have, and after He measured the heart of every man, God concluded, "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) "None are righteous, no not one." (Rom. 3:10)

The concept of righteousness is an important key to our understanding of sin. To understand sin, we need to understand righteousness because sin, in its basic sense, is a negative judgment of a person's righteousness before God. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that sin is a description of a person's unrighteousness before God.

In its original meaning, the word righteousness conveys the idea of being straight. If something is righteous, it is straight, straight up and down. Therefore, sin, or unrighteousness, is a deviation from the straightness of God. Sin, in other words, is crookedness. We sometimes use the word "crooked" to convey the idea of sin in the English language. If someone is corrupt we may say that they are crooked or just refer to them as a crook.

When we talk about righteousness, we must have a standard by which we can measure what is righteous. There has to be a standard which says that this conduct is crooked and that conduct is straight. The measure that we are to use, the standard for determining what is righteous, is God's own personal righteousness. God does not measure us or our righteousness against one another. God doesn't grade us according to how well we stack up against our neighbor. God measures us against His own holy righteousness, by His own standard of perfect holiness. Any deviation from that standard is sin. If you get the idea that man is in trouble, you've got the right idea. God counts anything that is not absolutely according to His holy standard as sin, no matter what man thinks about it. If you want to understand sin, you must understand the righteousness of God. God is absolutely holy, and to the extent that we deviate from His holiness in the least degree, we have sinned.

Another way for us to understand sin is to break it down into two categories. One of the catechism questions that our young people learn asks, "What is sin?" The answer given by the Westminster Children's Catechism Q28 is, "Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God." We see in this answer that sin can either be by transgression or by want of conformity. A sin of transgression is a sin of breaking a commandment or going against what God has said. For example, if God said to not steal and we steal, we have transgressed the law of God. We have broken it. We have done that which we were not to do. This is the category that most of us think of when we think about sin, doing something wrong. God has given us commandments that we ought to obey. Every time we go against what He has said, we sin.

Yet, there is a whole other category of sin that is equally serious and grievous to God. We also sin when there is want of conformity to the law of God in our lives. What this means is that we sin not only by doing what is wrong but we also sin by not doing what is right. We are under obligation not only to keep ourselves from doing wrong but also positively to do what is right. For example, if a person sat quietly and peacefully in a chair and never got up and did anything wrong we might think he would never sin. However, he would be sinning by not doing what he is obligated to do. He needs positive righteousness to be right with God.

Another way to make this distinction is to talk about sins of commission and sins of omission. You can sin either by committing a wrong act or by omitting a right act. An illustration that we can turn to in the Bible to help us see this distinction is the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In this story there is a man who was robbed and left lying alongside the road, wounded and needing help. There came down the road, as the story goes, two religious men, one after the other, a Levite and a priest. Both of these men passed the suffering man without stopping. They didn't hurt him. They didn't steal from him. They didn't do anything to him, but they sinned against him because they didn't do what they ought to have done. They should have helped him. They should have come to his aid. Though they did not commit any outward sinful act, they sinned in omitting the help they should have rendered. If

we are ever going to appreciate the full extent of sin, we need to understand that want of conformity to God's will is also sin. Our view of sin can't be so narrow that it only incorporates wrongful conduct.

Much of our discussion of sin has been centered upon conduct. Yet, sin arises not only in a person's conduct, but it is also a part of a person's nature. In other words, not only can a person's conduct be sinful, but his nature can be sinful as well. As a matter of fact, the Bible teaches us that all since Adam are actually born dead in trespasses and sin. All are born with a fallen nature. All are born with a sinful nature, a nature that desires to do its own will rather than God's will. Sin, in its essence, is even more a matter of the heart than a matter of conduct. God is more interested in what is in our hearts, in our motivation, in our priorities, in our values, than merely the outward expression of those things in our conduct. Do we love Him with all of our heart, mind, and strength? Sin is primarily an expression of what is in the heart.

For this reason sin need not be something crude, vulgar, or ugly, as society would pass judgment. It could actually be something that society might praise. It might look like something that society would not find objectionable. But God would call it sin if it arose out of a heart that was not motivated to respond to Him in love. For example, two people could be praying. One could be doing it as an expression of his relationship with God and the other could be doing it out of a desire to receive the praise of men. The first would be doing a righteous deed, the second would be sinning. Both people, as far as their conduct was concerned, were doing the same thing. Another example would be that two people could give to the church. One person could be giving to the glory of God out of a heart of gratitude. The other person could be giving to get what he wanted or to ease his conscience, or one of a hundred self-centered motives, and his giving would actually be sin. Man looks on the outward and evaluates by what he sees in the conduct. God looks on the heart and evaluates the motives of the heart. (1 Sam. 16:7)

Because all sin, whatever its manifestation, is at root rebellion against God, all sin is essentially equal. Now there are certainly some sins that we would consider worse than others, but all sin is equal before God in that it is evidence of the person's rejection of God. All sin is a testimony

to the fact that we are doing what we want to do and not what God wants us to do. This rebellion against God's will makes all sin equal. It doesn't matter if it is a little sin or a large sin in man's eyes, it is all equal in the eyes of God.

Sin is more ugly and worse than we can begin to understand. We treat sin much too lightly. That's because we are so used to it. We live in it. It is all around us. It is in us. We get so used to it that we have a hard time understanding how God could be so upset about sin. If everyone sins, it is normal and how can God get upset about something that is normal? Many use this kind of internal argument to justify sin in their own eyes. "It is the way I was born." "It is the way I've always been." "I can't be responsible for something I can't control." We use such arguments to justify ourselves. But if we want to really see how ugly our sin is, we need to look again at the cross. You can tell something of the seriousness of a crime by looking at the punishment that it receives. You can see the seriousness of sin by looking at the punishment that was dealt out on Calvary's cross. To God, sin is a vile, utterly detestable thing. As we begin to see the vileness of sin from God's eyes, we will be driven to cling more and more to the Savior who can redeem us from all our sin.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 1 John 3:4-8
2. Romans 14:23

Answer these questions:

1. Why is sin bad?
2. Why is sin a matter of the heart, even more than a matter of conduct?
3. How should the last half of Romans 14:23 influence the choices you make in your daily living?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 5 "MAN'S SIN AND GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION"

Lesson 2 "Man's Need"

As we continue to look into man's sin and God's plan of salvation, we come now to examine the subject of man's need. In what condition has sin left man? With what needs has it left him? As we will see, sin has corrupted natural man and left him in a state of misery. Sin has left man's days full of suffering, trials, and tribulation. As we well know, the world is full of trouble, suffering, and grief. The Bible tells us that, "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." (Job 5:7) Trouble and misery are as natural to man in this world as it is for the sparks to fly upward from a fire. To be sure there can be good times, but ultimately man's experience is surrounded with trouble and inevitably ending in death.

Yet, we must remember that this is not the way God created the world to be. He created it to be a Garden of Eden. God created the world to be a place of blessing and joy. The world, as it was originally created, was without the least trace of sin, without any pain, without any suffering, without any misery, and without death. All of the sickness, grief, agony, fighting, and trouble of this world is a result of sin. Not that each specific instance of trouble is the result of a specific sin, but it is sin in general that brought trouble into the world that God created perfect. The troubles of this world have come about because man has sought to remove himself from under the hand of his Creator. As long as man walked in the will of God, he knew no misery or trouble. But once he rejected God's will and replaced it with his own, the ultimate outcome of all that he touched would be sin and misery. Whenever God's will is disregarded, the result will inevitably be trouble.

However, the greatest need that man has as a result of sin is not to repair the alienation that exists between himself and his fellow man. Neither is his greatest need to put an end to the fighting, killing, and inhumanity that exists between men, as desirable as that would be. Nor is the

alienation that exists between man and his environment of upper importance. Rather, it is the alienation that exists between sinful man and a holy God that is the single most important need to be addressed in the life of every person. Man is alienated from God and must be reconciled before life itself can have any real meaning, let alone life after death. It was sin that brought about the alienation, that broke the relationship of communion that existed between God and man as he was first created. It was the sin of Adam and Eve that caused God to eject them from the Garden of Eden where they had enjoyed intimate fellowship with God. It was sin that separated man from the only one in whom he could find his identity and reason for being.

As we try to focus then on this condition in which the fallen state leaves man, we need to pick up several words that the Bible uses to describe the needs of fallen man, and then look at the provisions for those needs that God has made available in Christ. There will be more needs than we can deal with in this lesson, but the few we look at will help us to appreciate and worship God all the more as we see what He has done to redeem us to Himself.

The first need that we will look at is the need that results from our guilt as sinners. We have not been holy in the sight of God. We have sinned and therefore are guilty of transgressing the law of God, and will face judgment. Actually the judgment has already been pronounced, for God has warned man from the beginning that the punishment for sin would be death. We are told many times in Scripture that the wages of sin is death. The judgment has been posted. We stand guilty and in need.

One of the wonders of the Gospel is that God has met this need by providing an atonement for our sin. Christ's atonement is able to deal with the guilt of our sin. His atonement fully satisfies the penalty for our sin so that we are able to stand innocent before God. The penalty could not be waived; it had to be paid. When Christ went to the cross, He did so for the express purpose of paying the price for our sin. Our guilt was imputed to Him so that we would be counted guiltless before God. When Christ stood before God, He stood as one guilty of our sins. When He suffered, He suffered paying the price that our sins incurred. In His atoning work, our guilt was expunged from the record so that God

could let us go free.

Another need of fallen man, in so far as being restored in his relationship with God is concerned, is the need for the wrath of God to be dealt with. Not only is fallen man guilty, but he stands before a holy God. Romans 1:18 tells us, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." God is a holy and righteous God, and He has a holy wrath and a holy anger that burns against both sin and the sinner. God is justified in His anger against people, whom He created for Himself, that would turn their backs upon Him and live for themselves. We don't hear much about the anger of God today, but it is true, and we need to understand it. We need not only our guilt to be erased but we also need God's holy anger against us as sinners to be quenched.

The word that the Bible uses to describe how the wrath of God is dealt with is called "propitiation." Again, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10) In other words, His death not only dealt with the legal aspect of guilt, but it also satisfied the holy indignation of God. God's wrath is not to be taken as an indication that He loses His temper or self-control, but that His holy nature demands that His wrath be poured out against all sin. The Lord's sacrifice serves as a propitiation for the wrath of God. Therefore, when we stand before God, having been washed and cleansed by the blood of Christ, we need not fear the wrath of God. It has been propitiated by the blood of Christ. The believer can walk before God without fear of judgment because of his Savior's atonement.

The next need that characterizes natural man is the need that arises because of his alienation from God. He is separated from God. He has no access to the presence of God. His alienation is both physical and spiritual. He is physically barred from entering into God's immediate presence, and he is separated by his corrupt nature from walking in faith and love with Him. This could lead us to ask, how is it then that man can be reunited to God if he is unable by his own desire to turn to God? How can man be restored to God if He can't even enter into His presence?

Again, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross has, included in its merit, all that is needed to bring about this reunion. The word that describes this provision is called "reconciliation." Christ's sacrifice is able to bring about the reconciliation of God and man. It does away with the alienation. It can bring us back into fellowship and communion with God. Those who are Christ's have been adopted into the family of God and are called the sons of God.

One further need that must be mentioned is that need which flows from the fact that sin has left man in bondage, bondage to sin, self, Satan, and the world. Being in bondage means that natural man is actually a prisoner to these forces and unable to escape their bonds. Even being declared not guilty for our sins before God is not enough to open the doors of this prison and set us free from their hold. The bonds need to be broken; the captives need to be set free of their bondage to sin, self, and the world, so that they can be free to serve God.

The word that the Bible uses to describe how this is done is called "redemption." We who have been held in bondage by these forces have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. We were redeemed so that we no longer need to be in bondage to any of these forces. We have been set free and never again need to be under their control. In Christ, we are free to worship and serve God in love.

We need to understand these very real needs that every fallen man faces. These needs are universal. All men born into this world are born with these needs. Yet, since we are helpless to satisfy them in our own strength, God has provided for them in a wonderful way in the work of our Savior. He has provided an atonement that is able to wash away our guilt as sinners. Our Savior also stands in the gap before God and propitiates the holy wrath of God by His own sacrificial offering. He is able to bring about reconciliation between us and God that restores us to a place of privilege and honor as the children of God. And He also redeems us from the bondage under which sin has kept us. He has broken the chains and set the prisoner free.

Fallen man's needs have been wonderfully met in the sacrifice of our Savior. His salvation is full. It has already been won for us. All we need

to do is embrace each of these provisions in faith and respond by worshipping God for His wonderful mercy and grace. Though we will still live in a world that surrounds us with sin and misery, though we ourselves will still stumble into sin and experience trouble as long as we live, we have been given the resources that can lift us above this world.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Ephesians 2:12-22
2. Colossians 1:20-22

Answer these questions:

1. Is God responsible for the troubles of this world?
Explain.

2. What does Christ's work of reconciliation mean for you
and your relationship to God?

3. What does Christ's work of redemption mean for you
and your relationship to God?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 5 "MAN'S SIN AND GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION"

Lesson 3 "How a Person Is Saved"

Now we want to take up the subject of how a person is saved. What is the process and what is it that takes place when a person is called "out of darkness into His marvelous light?" (1 Peter 2:9) Sometimes it is helpful to make a few distinctions between different viewpoints to help us more clearly understand how something works. We will engage in that kind of a process as we look at how a person is saved.

There are some people who say that God saves all men. Therefore, they say, we don't really have to worry about salvation since everyone will be saved. This is called "universalism." People who hold this view will often talk about the Lord Jesus Christ and say that He is the Savior, but they will say that His death saved all men, regardless of their response or lack of response to what He did. They say that the job of the church is not to call men to salvation but to announce to all the world that they have already been saved. But of course, if we take the Bible at all seriously, we know this is not the case. The Bible very clearly shows that people are lost apart from Christ. God says that if we believe not we are already condemned. (John 3:18) The Lord said that there would be some who called Him Lord, but He would say to them that He never knew them, and they would be cast into outer darkness. (Mt. 7:23) There are many such examples in the Scriptures that teach, without question, that not everyone will be saved.

Another group of people will acknowledge that not everyone will be saved, but they will say that it is up to man to work out his own salvation. In other words, the work of salvation is something that man does. It is what we do that makes us acceptable in the sight of God they say. We can save ourselves. If we live a good enough life, if we follow the rules, if we do what God commands us to do we will be saved.

However, we must stand just as strongly against this doctrine as we did against the idea of universalism. We are unable to save ourselves. We are unable to make ourselves acceptable to God. We are unable to meet His standards. We forever fall short. We can't save ourselves as we outlined in an earlier lesson. We are lost and helpless unless God intervenes to save us.

There is an offspring of the above doctrine of salvation which acknowledges that it has to be God who saves. However, they would say that God votes for me, Satan votes against me, and it is up to me to cast the deciding vote by accepting the Gospel offer of salvation. God saves but it is up to me to make the decision for God to save me. God can do nothing unless I cast the deciding vote. However, even this doctrine which appears to give God the credit for salvation still makes what man does the deciding factor. Whether or not I am saved is based on what I do. Since this is such a prevailing misconception, we will devote more time to this discussion a little later.

There are still others who would agree that salvation is something that only God can do, but these people would say He doesn't do it directly in the lives of individual people. They would say that God imparts salvation through the church, more specifically through the sacraments of the church. This is the Roman Catholic view of salvation. They teach that a person is saved by rightly receiving the sacraments of the church. They would say that if a person was baptized by the proper authority, they would be saved by the receiving of the sacrament. In other words, the grace that comes from God that works salvation in the life of an individual comes not through the relationship whereby they are joined to Christ in faith, but through the decree of the church. God, they would say, deposits His grace with the church and the church dispenses it to its members through the sacraments.

We would want to hold that this too is error. While the sacraments do witness to the truths concerning salvation, they can not bring salvation. Salvation doesn't come through an action or pronouncement of the church. Salvation is not imparted through partaking of a sacrament or participation in church ritual. Saving grace is not invested in the church in the form of a deposit from which the church can dispense it through

the sacraments. Salvation is something that comes to a person directly from personal faith and trust in the Living God. After Peter's great confession, when he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," (Mt. 16:16) the Lord told him, "Blessed art thou Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father which is in heaven." (Mt. 16:17) This is the way a person receives the grace that is needed to receive Christ unto salvation, not through flesh and blood, but directly from God.

These kinds of distinctions that we have been dealing with are useful because they can help to keep us on the right track. It might be nice to think that God will save all men, or that I am able, by my own efforts, to be pleasing enough to God that He will save me. It could also be imagined that the church might have the means to impart supernatural grace into the lives of people. But if we study the Scriptures, we won't have to go far to find that none of these ideas are valid.

It will be helpful to our understanding of the salvation process if we set forth something of the order of salvation, that is, the steps that we recognize by the teaching of Scripture that God uses in leading a person from darkness to light. It is not the technical or the academic insight that we need to gain as much as it is the sense of movement and direction that God has planned for a believer in the overall process of salvation. We also need to make the point that these steps we are going to outline are in no way designed to put God in a box, but they are simply what we understand the Bible teaches about the way of salvation.

The first step is called "effectual calling." This takes place when the Gospel is preached and the Holy Spirit works through the Word to call a person who hears it, so that they will respond. A person has to hear the Word before they can respond to it. But as we know, many hear the Gospel message and never respond. Effectual calling is when the Holy Spirit works in the life of a person so that he is given spiritual ears to hear the Word as a call from God. This is the first step.

The second step is the point at which there are many different ideas of what takes place. But the Scriptures clearly teach that the second step is regeneration. In other words, the effectual call of God works in the heart

of a person a change that enables them to believe. A person has to have his heart opened by God before he can believe. This work of God is called regeneration. It is the beginning of a new life that God is bringing forth in that person.

The next step is when the individual responds to the call of God by the exercises of faith and repentance. God has done all of the work up to this point. But God is not the one who has faith or comes to repentance. That is the response of the person who has been made regenerate. God enables the person to believe, but the person must be the one to believe. Faith is turning to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance is turning away from sin to righteousness.

The next step is justification. It is the fruit of faith and repentance. God justifies a person. That is, He declares them to be legally not guilty because He imputes his sin to Christ and imputes Christ's righteousness to them. That is justification.

Next is adoption. God takes the person who is justified and adopts him into His own family. He calls him His own and makes him a joint heir with Christ, giving him all of the rights and privileges of being His own child.

As this takes place, God begins the next step which is the ongoing work of sanctification. God takes the person who belongs to Him and has been legally declared righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, and begins to lead the believer through the lifelong process of turning from sin to righteousness. This lifelong sanctification process enables the person more and more to die to sin and more and more to live unto righteousness. Sanctification is a process whereby the believer gets victory over the power of sin in his life.

The next step is perseverance. This means that God will work in the life of a person who truly belongs to Him so that he perseveres unto the end. God will see to it that he continues to be faithful to the last day. The believer is not only saved by the grace of God, but he is also preserved by His grace.

Finally, the last step is glorification. This takes place when a person is removed altogether from the presence of sin as he is taken to heaven where the work of God is consummated in his life. God's people will be glorified, and all traces of sin will be removed, even the presence and influence of sin is removed from their lives so that the believer is glorified in the presence of the holiness of God. That is the final position for God's people. It is the goal that He had for them all along, to be in His presence without spot or blemish of sin for all eternity.

There is a lot of food for thought here. If you would take some time to reflect on these matters, you would get a better picture of what God has done for you and understand more completely the goal towards which God is leading you.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Romans 8:29-30
2. Romans 10:9-14

Answer these questions:

1. What would be your response to someone who said he was saved because he had been baptized and joined the church, or that he had tried to live a good life?

2. What needs to happen in a person's heart before he can come to faith?

3. What do you see about God's purpose for you in the process of salvation, as it leads to glorification?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 5 "MAN'S SIN AND GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION"

Lesson 4 "Faith and Repentance"

In this lesson, we will look in more detail at two of the words we talked about in the previous lesson: that is, faith and repentance. We all know that faith is an important part of the Christian life. We often talk about the need for faith, and we know it is intimately involved, not only in coming to salvation, but also in daily living the Christian life. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to spend some time trying to get a better grasp of what is included in the concept of faith and also the less often used word "repentance." Actually, these words are closely related to each other. They come in the same package.

To help get at the meaning of faith, let's look at a portion of Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-9. In explaining the way of salvation, the Word of God says, "For by grace are you saved, through faith; and that is not of yourself, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." For by grace are you saved through faith. In understanding salvation, we need to realize that faith is not the basis for salvation. Faith isn't meritorious. There is no value in faith in and of itself. The verse we have just read says that we are saved by grace. The basis on which we are saved is God's grace. Faith is the channel through which we receive the grace of God. We receive it by believing and trusting ourselves to Him. However, because we have faith doesn't mean that we have earned salvation. We need to make sure we fully understand this point. Faith is not something that has any value of its own. Its value is only as good as the object or promise on which it is based. The faith that brings salvation is based upon the promise of God and therefore has the highest value. The focus of faith and the power of faith is not based on the person who exercises the faith but is based instead on the trustworthiness of the person in whom the faith is placed.

Too often, when we think about faith, we think that the important

component of faith lies in the one who exercises it. In other words, we might think that a person we know has a great faith (and I am not taking anything away from that). But the danger to our understanding lies in thinking his faith comes from something inside of himself, something that we may think we do not have. No! Faith is more the result of having our eyes opened to see God as He really is. If we would see more of God in His fullness, we would have no trouble believing His Word. Faith is based more on who God is than on the one who believes in God. When we talk about the faith that we are to have, it has more to do with the faithfulness of God than our ability to have faith. If we want more faith, we need to see more of God. As we set our eyes more fully on Him, through His Word, we will find that we will have more faith in Him. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." (Rom. 10:17)

To go back to Ephesians 2:8-9, we see that even the faith that a person manifests in God is itself a gift from God. God enables us to believe, yet we have to exercise the faith that He enables us to have.

Before we go any further, we need to get a better handle on exactly what faith is. In doing so, we will mention three different ingredients that make up faith. The first ingredient is knowledge. Faith needs for its foundation some knowledge of fact or promise. You can't have faith in a vacuum. Faith has to be in something, and you have to have a knowledge of that something before you can have faith in it. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." If you want to have faith in God, you have to know something about Him. As it says in Romans 10:14, "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" So if you want more faith, you need more knowledge. Faith is based on knowledge.

Yet, faith is more than just knowledge. A person can have a great deal of knowledge and not have any faith. There must be a second ingredient, and that is conviction. You must not only know some facts, but you must personally be convinced that those facts are true. You must have a personal conviction that this knowledge is true, and in particular that it is true for you.

But even these two ingredients are not enough. The third necessary ingredient is trust. Not only must you have information and be convinced that it is true, but you must put your trust in it and be committed to it body and soul. This is the aspect of faith that we most often deal with, the trust aspect. It is not enough to believe that something is true in general, but you must commit yourselves to it before it will do a work of grace in your heart.

To illustrate this process we could compare this commitment to that which a sky-diver exercises when he jumps out of an airplane. He totally commits himself to the jump. There is no turning back once he takes that first step. His commitment, his faith, is such that his whole life is behind it and hangs on what he is doing. The faith that we are to exercise must have this same kind of commitment that undergirds our walking out on the Word of God.

Now it's time to turn our attention to faith's companion word, repentance. We probably understand faith better than we understand repentance. Repentance is closely associated with faith. In fact, it is inseparably tied to faith. The main idea behind repentance is a change of heart. It is a change in a person's will, a change in his conduct, and a change in his attitude about himself. Repentance must have specific application. It is not a general effort to try to do better. Neither is it a general sense of being sorry for your sins. Rather, repentance is actually turning away from something specific with the design of walking in a different direction. Repentance is an abandonment of a course of direction displeasing to God and turning to walk in the way that is pleasing to Him.

Faith and repentance are actually two sides of the same coin. Faith is turning to Christ. Repentance is turning away from sin and self. You can't do one without the other. You can't turn to Christ unless you turn away from yourself. You can't embrace righteousness unless you first let go of sin. Faith and repentance cannot be separated. Neither can one be made prior to the other. You can't put faith before repentance, or repentance before faith. They come in the same package. That is why if a person claims to have faith, you should also expect to see evidence of repentance in his life.

This point raises another reason why repentance needs to be emphasized in our day and time. An emphasis on repentance will serve to guard against a shallow commitment or a cheap faith. We live in a day in which the Gospel is preached in such a way that the response that is called forth from those who are challenged to believe is often a very shallow response. In other words, the Gospel is often preached in a way that the people are told that all they have to do is say the right words, say the proper prayer, and that is all that is required of them. No! Faith without repentance is no faith at all. If a person does not have a faith that is enough to turn him from sin, it won't be enough to turn him to Christ. If a person doesn't exhibit actual sorrow because he has grieved the Lord and then manifest in his conduct the response of turning away from that sin, it would be proper to question if he has really come to faith. So we can see that an understanding of repentance and the knowledge that it will accompany faith will keep our faith honest and healthy.

We should also say that the prime motivation for repentance will be that we have hurt the One whom we love. We have let down and grieved the One who gave Himself for us, and we repent of ourselves for what we have done to Him. Repentance focuses more on who we are, that is, that we could have the kind of heart that would do such a thing, than it focuses on what we have done. Though we do need to repent of our sins, it is not only the sin that we repent of but ourselves and our direction.

If you repent of conduct only, it will always deal with the past. It has no power for the future. However, if you repent of your heart and ask God to work in you a new, Christ-like heart in a specific area, it deals with the future and has the power to transform.

As the Bible deals with the matter of repentance it speaks of "a broken and contrite heart." (Psalm 51:17) It is the broken and contrite heart that will turn to Christ. You won't look in faith to the Savior until you have looked in repentance at yourself. You won't feel like you need a Savior unless you feel like you are a sinner. We clearly see the truth of this at work in Paul's words at the end of Romans 7 when, after he acknowledges his inability to keep the law, he cries out, "Wretched man

that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of death?” (Rom. 7:24) And then the wonderful answer to his cry, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:25) Thus, repentance involves looking to God for a new heart that would live in concert with His will.

Finally, we need to say that faith and repentance not only describe what is needed for the initial entrance of a sinner into the Kingdom of God, but they also characterize something that takes place throughout a believer’s life. The believer needs to daily exercise faith and daily, as necessary, exercise repentance. They are ongoing activities in the life of a believer. It is not that we enter anew every day into a saving relationship with the Lord, but rather that we daily appropriate the blessings and the power that is available in the Lord that will turn us from sin and self to Him. The extent to which we do this will determine the extent of our victories in the Christian life.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Ephesians 2:8-9
2. Acts 3:19

Answer these questions:

1. Why is faith an “action” word?
2. Why is repentance an “action” word?
3. Why would you have reason to question someone who claimed to have faith, but showed no sign of repentance in his life?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 5 "MAN'S SIN AND GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION"

Lesson 5 "Sanctification and Perseverance"

In this last look at the topic of man's sin and God's plan of salvation, we will examine the topics of sanctification and perseverance. We ended the last lesson by saying that faith and repentance are characteristic of the Christian life. We saw that they were necessary both in coming to and living out a life of faith. However, God has yet another work that He does in the lives of His people. In this lesson, we will discuss the two additional ongoing works of sanctification and perseverance.

Sanctification has to do with our daily growth in grace. The Westminster Shorter Catechism Q35 tells us that sanctification is a work that God does in us that enables us to, "die more and more unto sin and live more and more unto righteousness." It is helpful to point out the emphasis on "more and more" because it conveys the idea of an ongoing or continuous growth. We are not to be static. We are not saved to live in the same state we were in when we first came to faith. There is to be a progression, a "more and more" aspect to our experience of growing in righteousness. None of us will ever be fully sanctified in this world. But it certainly ought to be the case that, after some years of being a Christian, we ought to be less sinful and more holy.

When we talked about justification, we understood that it was a one-time act of God. It took place in the moment that the person believed. Sanctification, however, is not a one-time act but an ongoing work. It takes place not in a moment's time but continues all of our days in this world. As long as we live, we ought to be growing in victory over sin. However, that growth will not always be a constant, measurable upward advance. There will be setbacks; there will be steps backward, but over time the growth should be real.

Having said this, we need to distinguish between what we can call

"definitive sanctification" and what we have been describing as ongoing sanctification. When we first believe, God counts us already righteous. God says that when He looks upon those who have been washed in the blood of Christ, He sees them as without spot or blemish. He doesn't see them any longer as just sinners; rather He sees and deals with them as already holy. There is then, this sense in which, when we believe, we are definitively sanctified at that time in so far as God chooses to deal with us as sanctified based on the finished work of Christ. In other words, God looks upon us more according to what we will be when He is done with us than what we actually are at this point in time. Thus, there exists a qualitative difference between what we actually are in Christ and what we manage to appropriate of that position in our daily living. Still, God is gracious to deal with us based on our standing in Christ rather than by the weakness of our flesh. There is both an "already" and a "not yet" aspect to our sanctification.

Perhaps we could understand how the process of sanctification fits into the scheme of things a little better if we could back up and get an overall view of salvation. God's salvation extends to every area of influence that sin has on our lives. God saves us from the penalty of sin, and we call that justification. God saves us from the power of sin, and we call that sanctification. God will save us from even the presence of sin, and we call that glorification. As we view salvation from this perspective, we see that it has a past aspect, a present aspect, and a future aspect. In the past aspect we have been saved from the penalty of sin so that we are no longer subject to judgment and punishment for our sins. There is also a present aspect of salvation, and that is what we are talking about in this lesson on sanctification. It is an ongoing work whereby we are more and more saved from the power of sin in our lives. The salvation of God is so complete that it means not only being saved from the penalty of our sins but it also includes being saved from the power of sin. That means we are saved from having to sin. A believer never has to sin. At any particular time he has the resources, in the resurrected life of Christ through the power of the indwelling Spirit, to gain victory over any sin.

There is also a future aspect to salvation, and that has to do with glorification. In glorification, God saves us from even the presence of sin. When we enter into heaven, all traces of sin will be removed from us

and our surroundings, and we will never again come into contact with it.

From this overview of salvation we see that the basis for the work of sanctification has been provided for in Christ's finished work on the cross. The victory is already ours. It has already been won. All that we need is already available. What we need to do is appropriate it in faith and live it out day by day.

Now we need to move on to perseverance. Thus far we have spent a good deal of time talking about salvation. The question that the issue of perseverance raises is, "Can salvation be lost?" "Can a person that has been saved be lost again?" "Can a person be unsaved?" The answer to these questions depends on the position of the person in Christ. If a person has truly been saved by the blood of Christ then the answer is no, salvation cannot be lost. The Lord has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. (Heb. 13:5) God promises that those who come unto Him He will in no wise cast out. (John 6:37) He will keep His own to the end and no one can pluck them from His hand. (John 10:28) Therefore, if we truly belong to the Lord we cannot lose our salvation.

However, there may be those who may have made a commitment to the Lord by which they feel they are saved, but their commitment was not in true faith. They may think they have a relationship with the Lord, but it is too shallow, it is not enough. From this point of view, what they have, what they feel is salvation, can be lost. We could try to illustrate this point by contrasting two different people who walk with the Lord. One gives the Lord his hand in yielding his life to Him. He walks with the Lord, and the Lord has him by his hand and can lead him wherever He will. The commitment is full. In this illustration, the Lord has hold of the person and whether or not the relationship is maintained is based upon the Lord's ability to hold on to the believer. In this experience His promise of keeping His own unto the end applies because He has control. The other man who walks with the Lord does so not by giving his hand to Him, but instead he walks with the Lord by putting his hand on the Lord's shoulder so to speak. He will walk with Him as long as the path is acceptable. In this relationship the commitment is shallow. This person seeks to maintain control himself and has not actually committed his life to the Lord. He feels that if the Lord would lead him in a

direction that he does not want to go that he has the freedom to remove his hand from His shoulder and follow a different path. That is not a true commitment of faith. That kind of relationship is not secure. This kind of relationship is dependent upon the person's hold on the Lord and that "salvation" can be lost.

Now both men actually walked with the Lord and followed His leading and believed they had a relationship with Him that brought them salvation. But only the first man's relationship was such that the salvation depended upon the Lord's faithfulness, in other words, was secure. What we are saying is that not all who profess faith will be saved. The Lord said, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven..." (Mt. 7:21ff) It is those who truly belong to the Lord that will be saved, and persevere to the end.

Salvation, in its final perspective, is not irrespective of perseverance. A believer needs to endure to the end to be saved. The point is, however, that the endurance isn't so much what we do, although we must certainly be the ones to endure, but that God will see to it that His people will persevere. God will cause us to persevere to the end if we belong to Him. You must endure, you must persevere, but it is God's strength that will keep you persevering.

It is true that there are those who fall by the wayside. There are those who seem to start off strong in faith only to fall away in midstream. But this only indicates that they were never really saved in the first place. We need to remember that "the bruised reed He will not break or the smoking flax He will not quench." (Mt. 12:20) This means that He will encourage any relationship, however weak or shallow it may be, but before it can persevere, it must become a true commitment of faith.

We should add that it is not only possible, but it is actually normal in the Christian life to have assurance of salvation. Christians are not those who say they hope they will go to heaven or even that they believe they will go to heaven, but if they truly belong to the Lord by His grace, assurance of faith is part of their birthright. This assurance is not just for those who are spiritual giants, but is normal to the Christian life. A person who belongs to the Lord ought to have assurance. It is a part of

his inheritance in the Lord. It is not presumption. It is not because he thinks he is good enough to go to heaven. It is not because he thinks he will be faithful to the end. But his assurance is based upon the sure Word of God and the certain atonement of Christ in behalf of His people. Assurance is a matter of faith that honors God and His Word.

However, we should mention that assurance can be an elusive thing at times. It is something that will flee when we look too much at ourselves. We see inconsistencies and failures in our lives, and it is easy to think that we are not what we ought to be and in fact may not even be saved. However, assurance will never come by looking at ourselves and our conduct. Assurance comes by looking at the cross and believing the promises of God that He is the one who saves and keeps those who belong to him by faith in Christ Jesus the Lord.

We started off this chapter talking about man's need, and we have concluded the chapter by seeing some of God's provisions that will meet our needs and carry each and every believer through to the end.

Dr. Michael Bliss

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Acts 26:17-18
2. John 6: 37-40; 10:28-29

Answer these questions:

1. What does God want to do in your life through the work of sanctification?
2. Can you have assurance of salvation? On what basis?
3. What have you learned from this week's study of man's sin and God's plan of salvation that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 6

"THE HOLY SPIRIT, OUR INDWELLING TEACHER"

Lesson 1 "Who He Is"

The theme for this chapter's study will be the Holy Spirit, our indwelling Teacher. In this first lesson we will be looking at the person of the Holy Spirit, seeking to understand who He is. In the upcoming lessons we will take up the subjects of the work of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and in conclusion, the filling of the Holy Spirit.

First, we want to open our understanding to, "Who is the Holy Spirit?" The term, the Holy Spirit, is more of a description of who He is than a given name. The Holy Spirit doesn't have a name, as does Jesus or as the Father in His name of Yahweh or Jehovah. The name "Holy Spirit" describes Him as the Spirit of God, the Holy One. He is the Spirit of God who is absolutely holy. He is the Holy Spirit. The definite article "the" indicates that He is unique in that role.

We could also say, in regard to His name, that the terms "Holy Spirit" and "Holy Ghost" are interchangeable. The Holy Ghost is used mostly in the King James Bible, which uses the more archaic term "Ghost" interchangeably with the term "Spirit." Spirit is probably a better translation for our day and time than Ghost, because the word "ghost"

carries with it connotations that are not helpful in our understanding of who He is. In our day, ghost is used to describe a spooky kind of being that floats around in the air, but this would obviously not be an accurate picture of the Holy Spirit.

As previously mentioned, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. That means He is God. He is equal in power and glory to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We will see when we look at the work of the Holy Spirit that, although He subordinates Himself to the Father and the Son in the work that He undertakes, He is equal with them as far as His person is concerned. He is fully God, on the same level as the Father and the Son.

Let me also reemphasize the point that He is a person. Because He is a spirit doesn't mean He is not a person. It is similar to what we discussed about God the Father being both a spirit and a person. It may be hard for us to think of someone being a person if they don't have a body. It has been our experience that all persons have bodies. Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit is a real person. He acts. He wills. He thinks. He feels. He calls people to specific works. He can be grieved. All of these characteristics are characteristics of a person.

We are emphasizing this point because we need to be sure that we don't think of Him merely as a force or power, such as a source of electrical energy, that we plug into so that His energy runs through our bodies and gives us the power to do the work of God. When we talk about the power of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's work in us, it is as a person living in us that He does His work. His leading is a personal leading. He personally leads us and enables us to do the will of God.

Because we will be talking about living the Christian life as we go forward, let me say that we are not talking about human life lived on a higher plane than the rest of humanity. Being a Christian is not taking a person and helping him to be a better person. Being a Christian is not taking a person and helping him overcome his faults and improve his life, so he lives out a better life in this world. This is not what the Christian life is all about. What is involved in being a Christian is receiving a new life, not getting a second chance at this life, not just human life raised to a

higher level, but a new life, the life of the Spirit indwelling the believer. A Christian is someone in whom the Spirit of God lives and empowers that person. That is why we say that a believer is born again. He is born first as a natural man, empowered by the flesh, but he can be born again by the Spirit of God and be empowered by the Spirit in the newness of life.

Another way that we could emphasize this point is to say that God doesn't save us, then give us the Bible, and instruct us to follow it the best we can. Now, that may well be the way a great many Christians try to live the Christian life, but it will always lead to heartache and failure. (Read Romans 7) God doesn't give us the Bible and encourage us to live it out in our own strength. It was never designed for that purpose. God first saves us. He gives us His Word. Then, He gives us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us that we could be led to understand and do God's will. He is our guide. He works in and through us to apply the benefits of redemption to our lives. If we are going to lead spiritual lives we will need spiritual power. We can't find that in the flesh. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6)

It would be impossible for the Bible to cover all of the possibilities that we could ever face in our life for which we would need direction. Whether you are in business, or in the home, or in school, situations arise in which you need to know God's will for you in that specific situation. You might think that you could look in the Bible and see what it would tell you to do. But you would find that the Bible may well not speak to your exact situation in a direct way. You should understand that God hasn't given you the Bible to be a set of rules and regulations in which you are to look up the appropriate rule to fit your situation and then implement it in your own strength? No! God has given you His Spirit to live in you, and He will direct you and He will guide you and He will lead you in the path He wants you to go. That is His job. Now He needs to have you store the Word of God in your heart so that He can use it to guide you. You need to know the Word so He can lead you. The two work hand in hand. The Spirit illuminates the Word and guides you with the Word that He will lay on your heart. It is impossible to walk in the will of God without the Spirit of God leading your steps.

Let us turn our attention now to another truth about the Spirit of God and the role that He plays. The Bible calls Him the "earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14), or another way to say it that would be more familiar to us would be to say He is the down payment of our inheritance. If the Holy Spirit lives in us, we can understand that the new life He brings is a down payment of what will be our inheritance in heaven. It is a down payment of what it will be like to be in the presence of God, to have intimate fellowship with God, to know God's heart, and to be one with Him.

We need to understand also, as John 14:17 tells us, that the Spirit of God lives only in believers. The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit only lives in and guides those who believe, those who have the down payment of eternal life. Now He can deal with unbelievers, and He does. And He can seek to move and influence them, and He will. But, while the influence may be internal, He Himself would be external and only comes to dwell in them at such time as they come to faith.

Perhaps it would help us to understand more of who He is if we reviewed some of the names that are given to the Holy Spirit and say a word or two about what those names convey.

One name that He is given is "the Comforter." (John 14:16) That means He is able to bring peace and comfort to the heart of a believer. He makes us to be at peace with God and brings us to understand that God's will and providential care over our lives is perfect and in so doing brings comfort to us in our trials and tribulations.

He is called in another place "the Advocate." (1 John 2:1) That conveys the idea that He represents us before the throne of God. He takes our needs and our prayers, even the groanings of our hearts, and translates them before God into prayer that is effectual.

He is our "Helper." (John 14:16) He gives us strength. He gets us over temptations. He gives us victory over sin. He helps us to live a godly life.

He is our "Teacher." (John 16:13) He instructs us in the truths and ways

of God. He teaches us to discern between that which is worldly and that which is godly. He is the One who causes us to increase in our knowledge and commitment to the Lord.

The Holy Spirit is our indwelling Teacher. It is a wonderful thing when we yield ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is the natural thing for the Christian to do. It is as natural for the Christian to be led by the Holy Spirit as it is for the sinner to be led by the flesh. Walking in the Spirit will bring a life pleasing to God.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. John 14:16-17
2. 1 Corinthians 2:4-14

Answer these questions:

1. What difference does it make that the Holy Spirit is a person, rather than merely a power or force?

2. What is the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you?

3. Why does God give you the Holy Spirit when He has already given you His Word?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 6 "THE HOLY SPIRIT, OUR INDWELLING TEACHER"

Lesson 2 "The Work of the Holy Spirit"

In this lesson we are going to examine the work of the Holy Spirit. What does He do? What is His role? How does He relate to you and me? I want to approach this topic by dividing it up in the way the Bible does in the Gospel of John, the 16th chapter, and talk about the work of the Holy Spirit as it relates, first to unbelievers and then as it relates to believers. Verses 8-11 describe the work of the Spirit in dealing with unbelievers. It begins by saying, "When He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." The primary work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of unbelievers is to convict them of sin. He is not interested in helping an unbeliever to live better. For example, He is not interested in helping an unbeliever who might be an alcoholic to become sober, or some young person to get off drugs, not if they are going to live apart from God in unbelief. He wants them to believe. He wants to convict them of their sin. He wants them to turn to Christ. That's His purpose. After they yield themselves to the Lord, then He will help them in their conduct.

It is important to understand this point because we can sometimes convey to unbelievers that God wants to help them just the way they are. We give the impression that God will help them get along better in their daily living. He won't. He doesn't want to help them live better the way they are, in sin and under His judgment. He wants them to turn to Him in faith. Then He will help them in terms of their daily living. He isn't going to help them overcome a problem so that they can continue to live happier in their sin and unbelief. He wants them to believe, and the first step towards faith is to be personally convicted of sin. The Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment and, in doing so, point the way to Christ.

Next, we can ask what work does the Holy Spirit do in the life of a believer? Certainly He convicts them of sin as well, but that is not the

only thrust of His work on their behalf. As we continue in the 16th chapter of John, we come to verse 13 which says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak and He will declare to you the things that are to come." This verse tells us that a major aspect of the Spirit's work in the life of a believer is to guide him into truth, to glorify Christ in his life, to take the things of Christ and show them to him. What He wants to do in our lives is to transform us and make us more like Christ. That is His primary work in the life of a believer.

Everything that we get from God, all of the promises, all of the blessings, all that He has for us, is going to come to us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who is the channel that brings the blessings and applies the promises in our lives.

As we mentioned before, God the Father is the One who plans our salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ is the One who accomplishes the work and wins our salvation, and the Holy Spirit is the One who applies that finished work to us. All that God has planned, all that Christ Jesus has accomplished, is applied to us and is made available to us through the Holy Spirit. He is the one who brings this work to fruition in our lives. Therefore, we can see how essential it is that we be sensitive to the work that the Spirit seeks to do in and through us.

As we continue to think about the work of the Spirit, we need to list several things that He will do in the life of a believer and briefly expand on each item. These are things that we could expect the Holy Spirit to do, things we could ask Him to do in our own lives.

First, He convicts us of sin. We spoke of this in connection with the unbeliever, but He also does this in the life of the believer, perhaps even more so after a person is saved. In other words, as the Spirit works to make us more Christ-like, He must first convict us of sin, not only in our initial turning to Christ, but day by day. Before we are saved we may be aware of some sins in our lives, but probably not that many. But after we come to faith, we will become more sensitive to sin than ever before. The Spirit will convict us of sin so that we will confess it and be cleansed

and have victory over it.

The Spirit is also the person who brings regeneration. He works in the lives of those He is calling to faith so that they can respond to the call of God. He is the One who enables us to have faith. We are the ones who must have faith, but the Holy Spirit is the One who will work in our hearts to enable us to believe. He gives us ears to hear and eyes to see.

The Holy Spirit also sanctifies. That means He works in us to become more and more holy. He works in us to live less and less in sin. He works in us to become more like our Savior Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit of God will work in us so that we can have victory over sin. There will never be a time in our life after we are saved when we have to sin. At any time we can lean on the Spirit and avoid temptation. We will never do that perfectly in this life and we will be fighting sinful tendencies as long as we live. However, at any given point we never have to sin.

The Holy Spirit will also bear witness in our hearts that we belong to God. In other words, He gives us assurance. It will be His work, not our own positive thinking that will convince us that we belong to God. This, in turn, will give us an assurance of being cleansed of our sins and the assurance that our destiny is to be in heaven forever with our God.

The Holy Spirit will also guide us into truth. He illuminates for us the Word of God and gives us insight into the will of God. Part of His work is to cause us to have faith in the Bible and to believe that it is truly the Word of God. He will also work in our hearts so that we will have faith in God and trust Him day by day.

The Holy Spirit will also take on the responsibility of bearing His fruit in our lives. As we open our heart to Him in faith and obedience, He will increasingly give us a heart characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, meekness and faith. (Gal. 5:22-23) This fruit is something that He does. He plants and nurtures it in our heart.

He is also the One who gives gifts to the people of God, gifts for service to the church. He gives some the gift of evangelism, others the gift of teaching, still others may receive the gift of helps, or any of the various

gifts that are needed for the body of Christ to prosper.

The Holy Spirit is also the One who will bring to remembrance the things of the Lord Jesus Christ. Part of His ministry to believers is to bring to our remembrance the very words we need to know at the times we need to know them. In other words, He guides us by bringing to our consciousness the Word of God that bears on our situation. He will remind us that we are children of God and hold before us the benefits of that relationship.

Another of His works is to reveal the deep things of God. A person can grow to become sensitive to the things of God and have deeper insights into God's heart and His purposes. A person can have a deep sense of fellowship and communion with God. He can be united with Him in heart and mind through the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit guides and empowers us in prayer. "We don't know what to pray for as we ought." (Rom. 8:26) But He can take our feeble words and use them mightily before God. He can put power into our prayers. He can cause us to persevere in prayer. He can cause us to pray in the will of God.

Yet another of His works is to call people to specific works that He has prepared for them. He calls one person to serve over here and another to serve over there. He is the One who will move the people of God into the positions in which He wants them to serve. We will be led by the Spirit to feel burdened and called to a specific area and place of service.

Daily the Holy Spirit will guide us in the will of God. God has something He wants us to do. The Holy Spirit can guide us into God's will. God does not have in mind that we walk in our own paths, but in the path He has set before us and that His Spirit will guide us along in all that we do.

He also inspires us to worship and praise God. He causes to well up in our hearts a sense of worship and a sense of praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord. He brings the joy of the Lord into our heart. He causes us to rejoice in what God has done for us. He causes us to count our blessings.

Hopefully you can see, even by this brief list, everything we need comes to us through the Holy Spirit. He seeks to work in us so that we will die to sin, self, and the world, and be alive to Christ. The Holy Spirit doesn't promote Himself, but He takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He causes us to see the hand of the Lord in our daily living and, above all, to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, so that the Lord receives all honor and glory.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. John 16:8-13
2. John 14:26

Answer these questions:

1. What is the primary work that the Holy Spirit does in the life of a believer?

2. What is the primary work that the Holy Spirit does in the life of an unbeliever?

3. Why is it important that you be sensitive to the work of the Spirit?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 6 "THE HOLY SPIRIT, OUR INDWELLING TEACHER"

Lesson 3 "The Fruit of the Spirit"

We now take up the subject of the "Fruit of the Spirit." This is wording that we find in Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control." The fruit of the Spirit is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of believers, transforming them so that they naturally bring forth these qualities in their lives. It is the Spirit's work. It is the fruit of His labor. It is not our work. Though we manifest the fruit in our lives, the Holy Spirit is the one that brings it to fruition. He is the one who causes it to grow. This supernatural transformation in the life of a believer does not come about by self-effort. The believer must open his heart in faith and obedience to receive the fruit of the Spirit.

The natural heart cannot produce this fruit. We could make an analogy and say that the natural heart is like an apple tree and it wants to produce oranges. No matter how hard it tries, it will not be able to grow oranges. Because it is an apple tree, it will always produce apples. What is needed, in this illustration, would be for the apple tree to be transformed into an orange tree. If that could happen, the tree would not have difficulty producing oranges, they would be grown automatically. They would be the natural fruit of the orange tree.

That is something like how God bears this fruit in our lives. We are not to try to make the natural heart bear spiritual fruit. But we are to yield ourselves to God so that He changes our heart, that we would naturally bear the fruit He wants in us, the fruit of the Spirit. We can be transformed. The work that the Spirit will do is to transform us. He will create a new heart and a new life in us that will naturally bring this fruit to pass. It will not be forced or out of character. It doesn't come by overpowering the old nature. It doesn't come by gritting our teeth and trying harder. It comes naturally as the Spirit works in our lives.

Let's illustrate this truth in a practical way. Let's say you realize that you need to have patience. This is one of the fruit of the Spirit. You are an impatient person. In your flesh perhaps you can't help being impatient; that's the way you are; it is a part of your character. Yet, you understand God wants you to be patient and you want to honor God. So you wake up in the morning and say to yourself, "Today is the day that I am going to be patient. I am really going to try hard to be patient today." So you fix it in your mind and concentrate on it and begin your day's activities, resolved to be patient. And, since you have some degree of willpower, you may succeed for a little while. But then you get busy and your mind is on something else, and you forget that you are going to be patient, and before you know it, you lose your patience. You didn't mean to, you didn't want to, but you did, and you failed.

Yet, because you have a strong will, you jump up with all the more resolve to do better next time. But once more, before long you forget to be patient and lose your patience once again. You should understand that you will never get patience this way, not by your own effort. If you have a lot of willpower you may be able to restrain your impatience somewhat, but you would still be an impatient person at heart who has only managed to cover it over in some measure. That is not what God has in mind. That is not what God offers when He calls you to bear the fruit of patience.

Neither will it be God's will that you get up in the morning and ask God to help you to be patient that day. If you start out to be patient, again in your own flesh, but this time seeking God's help, you will still fall flat on your face. You can't do it yourself, and you can't do it with God's help. I realize how strange this may sound because we hear so much of this kind of talk. Yet, it is not what God would have you do.

The way you become patient is to wake up in the morning and say to God, "I am not a patient person. I do not have a heart of patience. Lord, give me a patient heart. Do a work of grace in my heart so that patience will be the natural response of what is in my new heart. Let your Holy Spirit, who dwells in me by your grace, transform me into a patient person." Then you believe and expect that He will do it. And you get up and start walking and you just begin to live as though you are a patient

person, believing and expecting that God will work it in you. It will not occur all at once, but day by day, as you continue to believe and to trust God to work in you a heart of patience, you will slowly become more and more patient. This is the way that the fruit of the Spirit is produced in the heart of a believer - through faith. He will transform your heart into a patient heart. Then one day, when you come across a situation which would normally cause you to lose your patience, you will be surprised to find, as you look back, that you were patient. You will see that God has been at work in your heart. He is the One who does it. He does it by giving you His heart of patience.

Will this transformation be total and complete the first time you ask for it? No. Will you ever again be impatient? Yes. Will you always be patient going forward? No. You still carry around the old nature and continually fall into old ways, being moved by the old nature rather than the new nature. Nonetheless, if you continue to believe that God will do this work of grace and walk in the confidence that His Holy Spirit is working in your heart, more and more over the years ahead you will exhibit the fruit of His Spirit.

Let me go on to say that there is a certain sense in which, when we talk about the fruit of the Spirit, we are to understand that the word "fruit" is in the singular case. In other words, in the original language it does not talk about the fruit of the Spirit in the plural sense but in the singular. This is important because we do not get just some of these qualities, but the Spirit will work all of these characteristics in the lives of those who believe. It is not that one person will be made loving and somebody else will be made kind and another will be made patient. No! It is the fruit of the Spirit. It is what He will do for each one of His people. The fruit comes in a package. Since it pictures the heart of God, it comes in one package.

Let's expand on that theme for a moment. The fruit of the Spirit is not an arbitrary catalogue of qualities that God thought would be nice for us to have. Instead, it represents the very nature of God. It is a picture of what God is like. These are characteristics that describe who He is. This is part of His image. So when the fruit of the Spirit is made manifest in our lives, though it be over the course of some time, we will be

manifesting the image of God. This is part of the process of becoming more Christ-like. If God works in your heart so that your nature becomes naturally loving, kind, patient, full of gentleness, goodness, and meekness, you will be expressing the character of Christ to the world.

Maybe we could illustrate this process in a different way. Let's suppose something rather ridiculous. Let's suppose that God decrees that each believer is to be a master pianist. That would put many of us in a terrible bind because we don't know anything about playing the piano. We don't know the difference between the white and the black keys. We don't know what the pedals on the floor do. We can't read music. We don't know anything about playing the piano. Therefore, if we sat down at the piano and tried to play we couldn't do it. Recognizable music would not come forth. Rather, all of our earnest efforts would only produce a horrible, grating mixture of unpleasant sounds. In much the same way, when God decrees that we are to love, if we are honest with ourselves, we will soon find that we cannot bring forth the results He wants in that area either.

As long as we are supposing, let's suppose further that it were possible for a master pianist to live inside of you. So when you sat at the piano and put your hands on the keys, it would actually be his hands inside of yours that would be guiding your fingers. When you looked at the music through your eyes, it would be his eyes that would be reading it. And when you put your feet on the pedals, it would be his feet that would be moving them. You would sit there and you would play and out would come beautiful music. Everybody looking on would think that you were playing the beautiful music. But you would know differently. You would know that it was not you, but the master pianist inside of you, that was doing it.

Let's suppose that after a time of playing beautiful music, you began to think that you were the one who was making the music, that you could do it on your own. So the next time you played, you would not let the master pianist inside of you guide your fingers and your feet. If you resisted his movements and you tried to do it on my own, the music would once again become the horrible sound it previously was when you tried to play it on your own. If you continued to resist his movement, the

master pianist would not be able to use you anymore. If you would not yield yourself into his hands and let him move you, you could not be used to play beautiful music.

This illustrates something of how the Spirit works in you to manifest His fruit and to work out His "music" in you. All illustrations, if pressed too far, convey wrong ideas. The point of this illustration is not that we are to become empty shells inhabited by the Holy Spirit. We are not to become puppets controlled by someone else. God does transform us so that we actually become the master pianist. However, the point is that it is His work in us that transforms our hearts to naturally produce the fruit of His Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is manifested more fully in those who more fully yield themselves into His hands, praying for and believing that God will do what He has promised to do in the lives of His people.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Galatians 5:19-22
2. 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

Answer these questions:

1. How do you get the fruit of the Spirit in your life?
2. Why will trying on your own to obtain the fruit of the Spirit not be enough?
3. How many of the fruit of the Spirit do you expect God to bring to fruition in your life? Explain.

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 6 "THE HOLY SPIRIT, OUR INDWELLING TEACHER"

Lesson 4 "The Gifts of The Spirit"

We come now to examine the gifts of the Holy Spirit. To do so we will turn to a passage of scripture that lists for us some of the gifts of the Spirit. I Corinthians 12:8 and following provides a partial list of these gifts.

For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.

Then, if we skip down to verse 28, we find these additional gifts.

And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

It will be helpful if we start by focusing our attention on what is involved in something being a gift of the Spirit. First of all, let's take note that a gift is just what it says it is; a gift. It is not earned. A person who exercises a gift from God has not received it because he has earned it or deserved it. Neither is a gift related to the person's level of spiritual maturity. You can't equate someone who has a special gift from God as being someone who is necessarily more spiritual mature than someone else with a lesser gift. There is no direct relationship between gifts and maturity. The fruit of the Spirit is a more accurate measure of a person's maturity. The fruit that a person bears, more than his gifts, will tell you more about his spiritual maturity.

Actually, gifts are divine enablements for service. They are divine enablements for a person to effectively serve the Lord and His church. They are not natural talents. A person with a natural talent as a public speaker, let's say, does not have the same gift as the person with the gift of preaching. There is a divine or supernatural quality behind a spiritual gift that is needed to bring about spiritual results. There is a spiritual power in the gift, perhaps not seen, that can bring about spiritual results, as God wills.

Even though the person with the natural talent for public speaking might be able to move his audience in a tremendous way, even bringing people to tears and great emotional feeling, it doesn't mean that there are any spiritual results to what he does if it is not done in the power of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts are needed to produce spiritual results. We need to be convinced of this fact if we will ever make the right choices for leadership in the church. We are to choose men of spiritual ability, not just men of natural ability.

We also need to recognize that spiritual gifts are given to benefit the church, not for personal pleasure or use. Even though the work of the church is not done through natural talents and abilities, these natural abilities can still be used. For example, if the church has someone who has a natural gift for handling money and the ability to keep good financial records, the church may be wise to give him the job of treasurer, over someone without that ability. Even so, the work of the church cannot be done through natural talents and abilities alone. The church only accomplishes its spiritual work through spiritual gifts. If the work of the church is carried out only through human strength, then it would merely be a human organization with human powers and human results.

There are many different gifts of the Spirit, every one of which is important and needful to the church. Some gifts are more prominent than others. Some gifts will be in the limelight, and others will be in the background. One person may be given the gift of teaching and be in front of the whole class. Someone else who sits in the back row may have the gift of giving, and their work goes largely unnoticed by the people. But one is just as important as the other. All of the gifts are vital. They are all needed if the work of the church is to be accomplished. Paul

illustrates this in I Corinthians 12 by using the analogy of a body. He asks if the foot can say to the hand that it is not needed. Or, would it be proper for the ear to say that, because it is not an eye, it is not a part of the body? Now, it may be true that some parts of the body appear to be more important than others, but all are needed. None can live and work independently of the other. Likewise, with the gifts of the Spirit, all are necessary if the body is to be healthy and fully functional. Therefore, if you have a gift that does not place you in the limelight, it is not a reason to think it is less important to the Lord's work.

The gifts of the Spirit are not necessarily permanent. It is possible for them to come and go. A person may be given a gift for a period of time if that is all the time he needs to exercise the gift. When the need no longer exists, God may withdraw the gift. Gifts are not necessarily permanent because they are enablements for service, and the areas of service we are involved in may change from time to time. As long as you are called to do a work for the Lord, you will be given the enablement to do it. If He has placed you in a position to serve, He will give you what you need to serve. If you are called, for example, to be a Sunday school teacher, and you don't feel like you have the ability to handle the job, that's probably a good way to feel. The Lord doesn't want you to serve in your own wisdom and strength. But as you call upon His Spirit, He will give you all you need to provide the service the Lord has called you to. You may serve in fear and trembling. You may not be as polished as a professional, but your efforts will be more effective than a professional, in terms of spiritual results, as you serve in the power of the Spirit.

Now let's spend the remainder of this lesson talking about charismatic gifts. What is most often in the forefront in a discussion of charismatic gifts is the gift of speaking in tongues, speaking in unknown tongues. One of the thrusts of those who call themselves charismatic is that they often, though not always, say that everyone who has the Spirit will have the gift of speaking in tongues. They would say that a person who does not speak in tongues doesn't really have the Spirit.

One of the ways some have sought to respond to this charge has been to say that the charismatic gifts have ceased. That is, God no longer bestows these gifts upon people after the close of the apostolic age. This

is not necessarily true. However, more to the point, it is clearly wrong to say that all Christians ought to have the gift of speaking in unknown tongues. I Corinthians 12:30 says "Do all speak in tongues?", making it clear in the context, that not all are given this gift.

We should understand, however, that supernatural gifts are usually tied to periods when the Gospel is introduced for the first time into new cultures in order to give evidence of God's power at work. However, over time these supernatural gifts are withdrawn and the focus is placed on God's Word. This is seen in early church history.

At root, the modern charismatic movement is made up of a great many people who are tired of the deadness that exists in many of our churches. They often express, and rightly so, that a true Christian should be excited about his faith. If a person is really saved and belongs to God, there ought to be evidence of it in his daily life. This understanding causes them to place a premium upon experience. With this in mind, they earnestly seek supernatural gifts and experiences, feeling that such experiences would be evidence that they really belong to God. The danger is that this kind of thinking can take a person's eyes off the Lord and His Word, placing their focus too much on the gifts themselves. If they are not careful they will end up seeking assurance of salvation by measuring their experiences. That is a hard road to travel. One thing about experiences is that they change. They are up one day and down the next. If a person sought to base his assurance of salvation and acceptance by the Lord on experiences, he would be on a spiritual roller coaster, on a great spiritual high one day and a great spiritual low the next. Assurance must be based on Christ's work on the cross and the promises that flow from that work. These are sure and unbending promises which can hold our assurance firm. It is much better to have our eyes on the giver than on the gifts.

Finally, we can note that the Bible tells us the Holy Spirit does not speak of Himself, but draws attention to the Lord Jesus Christ. He stays hidden. He is like the floodlight that is sometimes used to light up a building. It is there and casts its light, but it is not the center of attention. It remains hidden in the bushes while it illuminates and calls attention to the building. Likewise, the Spirit wants us to see Christ, not Himself.

The Spirit has come to reveal and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. He is grieved if too much attention is placed on Him. He wants our eyes to be on Christ. Where the Spirit is honored, the attention is on Christ Jesus. If you want to be filled with the Spirit, let Him fix your attention upon the Lord.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 1 Corinthians 12:4-30
2. 1 Peter 4:10

Answer these questions:

1. What is the primary purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

2. What is the difference between a spiritual gift and a natural talent?

3. What would be a possible danger in seeking “charismatic” experiences?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 6 "THE HOLY SPIRIT, OUR INDWELLING TEACHER"

Lesson 5 "Being Filled With the Spirit"

Our last lesson on the Holy Spirit will be to take a look at what it means to “be filled with the Holy Spirit.” This lesson, like the previous lesson concerning the gifts of the Spirit, is also a controversial topic that has received a great deal of attention in the church.

Let me begin by saying that being filled with the Holy Spirit is a New Testament term and concept. It is something that the Bible commands us to do. Ephesians 5:8 says “Be filled with the Holy Spirit.” We may be tempted to shy away from talking about being filled with the Holy Spirit because we do not want to be labeled as a fanatic or a charismatic. Yet, this is a term that we can and should use without apology. It is part of the blessing of the New Covenant to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is part of the inheritance we have as believers. We can be filled with the Holy Spirit. Or, the other term that is used in this context, to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, is also a Bible term and a part of the blessing of being in Christ. It is a work that the Spirit does in the lives of His people. The Gospels tell us that the Lord Jesus Christ will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we do not need to be afraid or shy away from these terms because they may be misused by some. We do need, however, to understand them and the truths that they convey. Yet, even beyond understanding the terms and what they mean, the bottom line is that we personally need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Some people would say that being filled with the Holy Spirit is a second experience, entirely separate from what takes place when a person first comes to faith. In other words, a person believes and is saved; then, at some later time, if he seeks it, he can have the experience of being filled with the Spirit, or baptized by the Spirit, at which time he is endued with special spiritual powers. In response to that kind of understanding, we could say there is a half-truth to what is being said. In order to expand on that comment, we need to establish some foundational truths

concerning this "second blessing."

The first such truth is that all true believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9 tells us, "If we have not the Spirit of Christ we are none of His." If you do not have the Holy Spirit living in you, you are not a Christian. You don't belong to the Lord. It is as simple as that. All who believe have the Holy Spirit. But, and this is really the question at issue, are all true believers actually filled with the Holy Spirit? Some would say that since the Holy Spirit is a person you can't have just a part of Him. If He dwells in you, you must have all of Him. Yet, there is a very real sense in which you can be a true believer, having the Spirit dwelling in you, and yet not be filled with Him.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a matter of leading. You can be filled and led by the flesh, or you can be filled and led by the Spirit. Romans 7 and 8 contrast these two conditions. Whether or not you are filled with the Spirit at any particular time is determined by whether or not you are being led by Him at that particular time. If you are walking in His will, being led by His wisdom, and exercising His power, then you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

We know from Acts 2 that the Apostles were filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. That was a special experience of the Spirit's initial coming. We also read later in the book, Acts 4:8, that Peter was again filled with the Spirit. And in Acts 4:31 we read of Peter yet again being filled with the Holy Spirit. Obviously, being filled with the Spirit is a continuing experience that cannot be fully described by talking about what takes place at the time when a person comes to faith and receives the Holy Spirit, or, for that matter, at any one subsequent time. Ephesians 5:18-21 commands us to be filled with the Spirit and the verb that is used in the passage is in the present imperative form. This means it is to be an ongoing event. We are commanded to be continuously filled and refilled with the Holy Spirit. We do not simply receive Him at our conversion, thus putting an end to all possible further expression of being filled by Him. Nor is it a "second blessing" that is a definitive, once in a lifetime experience.

Being filled with the Spirit actually means that you are emptying yourself

and being filled with Christ. You are emptying yourself of seeking your own desire, emptying yourself of following after your own will, emptying yourself of living to please yourself, and being filled with the Lord Jesus Christ, His desires, and His will. If a person is continually living in this relationship, then they are living a life that can be characterized as being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we could better understand the meaning of being filled with the Spirit by asking a question. What would be the evidence that someone has been filled by the Holy Spirit? What would you expect to see in this person's life as a testimony to this claim? We could start by saying that being filled by the Spirit is not an experience of spiritual intoxication. In other words, being filled with the Spirit is not primarily a state of spiritual fervor manifested by ecstatic experiences. A person who is filled with the Spirit is a person for whom Christ is the center of his life. This person's mind would be fixed on Christ. His eyes would be on the Lord. He would have the mind of Christ. We talked in the previous lesson about the work of the Spirit being to floodlight Christ Jesus. So if a person was filled with the Spirit, he would be filled with Christ.

Another mark of such a person would be that he would exercise self-denial. He would be continuously dying to self. The only way to be filled with Christ, to be filled with the Spirit, is to be emptied of self. Such a person would also be recognized as one who would be reaping the fruit of the Spirit. This is primarily what is involved in being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is to live a life centered upon the will of God through Christ the Lord, to live in and be moved by God's Spirit.

Yet, even having said all of this, we still need to deal with the subject of special experiences. What should we think about people who claim to have special, supernatural, even ecstatic experiences, in their walk with the Lord. There is no doubt that some people have had such experiences. Paul describes such an experience. However, there is also no doubt that not all who claim to have had such experiences have genuinely had a supernatural experience with God. People can work themselves up into having a "special experience." Satan can also bring counterfeit experiences in order to keep the attention of a person off the Lord, that is, to get him wrapped up in his own experiences rather than

the Lord.

For some reason or other, God may give certain people special experiences. Perhaps they need them. If so, they should be thankful for them. But these experiences are not normal, nor should they be for all Christians. It is not something that all Christians will have. In fact, they can actually be dangerous. If you had a special experience yesterday, today, if you are not careful, you will be thinking about yesterday's experience. Tomorrow you will be thinking about yesterday's experience. The next day you will be trying to recreate that experience. You will be looking to relive it. Your attention will be in the past and you won't be looking at the Lord, or what He might have for you today.

Most of us probably would not handle special experiences with the Lord very well. This may be why most of us don't have them. Even when the Apostle Paul had his special experience of being lifted up into heaven, (2 Corinthians 12:1-10), it was necessary that he be given a thorn in the flesh to keep him from getting proud because of the experience. If the Apostle Paul needed special protection, we too would need to be careful of seeking special spiritual experiences.

We should point out that these special experiences are not as needed as some might feel. We need to walk by faith. God has called us to walk by faith, by the unseen things, by the truth of His Word. We are called to believe, not because we see, but because God has spoken. If we want to seek something, we ought to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." (Mt. 6:3)

Now if someone has been blessed by a special experience with the Lord, they should be thankful for it. God has blessed them. Now forget it. That was yesterday. Go forward with your eyes on the Lord and on what He would have for you to do today. Walk by faith. Don't walk by experiences. Don't walk by feelings. Walk according to the promises of God. Walk according to the relationship you have with Him today.

Be filled with the Spirit. You can be filled by the Spirit of God as you continually deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ in the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. Your eyes will be on the Lord.

From Faith to Faithfulness

You will be reaping the fruit of the Spirit, and you will be filled with the joy of the Lord, a wonderful privilege reserved for the children of God.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Ephesians 5:18-21
2. Acts 2:38

Answer these questions:

1. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?
2. How are you filled with the Holy Spirit?
3. What have you learned from this week's study of the Holy Spirit, our indwelling teacher, that has been most hopeful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 7

"THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST"

Lesson 1 "What Is the Church?"

The theme for this chapter is the church, the body of Christ. The first thing we will do is seek to get a clearer picture of what the Church is. We need to understand that the Church is not the building in which we worship. We may call the building the church, but that is not the biblical meaning of the term. What is in view when the Bible talks about the meaning of the Church is the people of God, those who believe, those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. The Church is the people of God assembled for worship. In other words, when the people of God assemble together for worship, it is the assembly that is the church, wherever they may meet. The Church is not the house of God but the people of God.

1 Peter 2:9 conveys this idea when it says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." What it means to be the Church of God is to be a called out people, a people for His own possession, people that are to be different from the people of the world who do not honor God. God

desires a special people for whom He can be their God and they will be His people. The Church is to be that special body.

Another way for us to view the Church would be through the account of Peter's great confession in Matthew 16:16. In response to the Lord's question to Peter about whom he thought He was, Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." The Lord went on to say, "On this rock (that means upon this confession of Christ being the very Son of God, not upon the person of Peter) I will build my church." It is upon the profession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God that the Church is built. In other words, the Church is made up of those who have a like profession of faith in Jesus Christ, those people who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

We also need to realize that the Church does not belong to the people. It does not belong to the leaders. It does not belong to the community. It does not belong to the denomination. It belongs to Christ. It is His church. He bought it with His blood. This is why there exists the requirement of a valid profession of faith in Christ to join His church.

Not only is the Church composed of those who profess faith, but in its true sense, it is composed of those who have had a work of God done in their heart that has transformed them with a new nature and character. The true Church is a body of those who have been born again. This means that the Church is a people who have been called to a status. It is true that we have been called to serve, but we need to recognize also that we have been called to a status. That is, we are called to be the sons of God. We are called to be adopted into the family of God, to become joint heirs with Christ. If we are not careful, we will lose this important understanding of our status before God. It makes a difference that we are the children of God. We may feel that we are not worthy to be considered as a special people, and that would be true. But the fact remains that the people of God, by virtue of their calling, have a blessed position in the sight of God. We are not merely servants of God, though that is an important part of who we are, but first we need to realize that we have been called to a status, a privileged status of the adopted children of God.

This would be a good time to make a few distinctions in our discussion of the church. One of the distinctions we need to make is the distinction between the Church visible and the Church invisible. The Church visible is what we see. The Church invisible is what God sees. In other words, in our churches we have membership rolls that contain the names of those who are members of the church. These rolls contain the names of all those who have professed faith in Christ and have united with the Church by their profession. These who are members of the local church make up the Church visible. Yet, we can understand that not all those who claim to have faith may not actually be true believers. Not all that claim to have faith will actually have been born again. This is where the Church invisible comes in. The Church invisible is composed of those who are the true believers, whether or not their names are on a church roll. Only God knows who these are. The distinction is between those who say they are Christians and those who truly are Christians.

We could also make another distinction by talking about the Church militant and the Church triumphant. The Church militant is a way to describe the Church on earth. It is a Church that is seeking to bring all into subjection to Christ. It is a Church that is under siege. It is under siege by the forces of sin, Satan, and the world. It is a Church at war that still has fighting to do. It is a Church that has not yet done all that remains to be done. It is a Church that must still face opposition, suffering, and persecution. It is a Church that has not yet arrived. The Church triumphant is the Church in heaven, so to speak. It is a Church that has already won victory. It is a Church that has overcome all opposition, has withstood the gates of hell, and has emerged triumphant.

We are actually a part of both of these churches. We live in this world, still facing opposition, having yet to bring all things under subjection to Christ, especially in our own lives. Victory is not yet fully realized in our lives and in the life of the church. Therefore, we are still fighting the battle of faith and the battle for the Gospel. Yet, there is also a very real sense in which we are a part of the Church triumphant. The battle has already been won. The victory is ours. We need only fight till the war is over to win the victory. To the extent that we can enter into the victory already won for us in Christ, to that extent we can be a part of the Church triumphant.

We can also speak of the Church as the Church universal. When we talk about the people of God, there are more people in that group than those in any one assembly of believers or any one denomination or any one country. The Church is universal in that it encompasses all believers everywhere, not just Presbyterians or Baptists or Americans or Koreans. The Church is truly universal in its fullest expression. We acknowledge the fact of the oneness of all believers in the Apostle's Creed, when we say that we "believe in one holy, catholic church." This is not referring to the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic is another way to say universal. So when we say the Apostle's Creed, we are saying that we believe in the brotherhood of all true believers. We say that there is one Church that encompasses all believers, the holy, catholic, church. We have a common bond and responsibility to all who name the name of Christ.

Finally, let us turn our attention to two analogies that the Bible uses to illustrate something of the structure of the church. One is the analogy of the body. In 1 Corinthians 12:12 and following, Paul makes this analogy. He says the Church is like a body. Christ is the head, that is, He is the one in charge, the leader. He is the one who directs and leads what takes place in His church. The body of the Church is then comprised of the people of God. They function and work together to carry out the leading that comes from the Head, so that the work of God is accomplished. In other words, God wants to use us as His hands, feet, and mouth, that we might work together as one to accomplish His will.

The body is also dependent upon the Head for direction. It would not know what to do or where to go if it was not tied closely and inseparably to the Head. The analogy is a picture that shows dependence and unity of effort.

This analogy can also help us understand our relationship to Christ. Though the body is composed of many and varied parts, they are to work in unity, under the same Head, to carry out His will.

The second analogy is that of a building. Paul says that the Church is like a building where God is the one who has laid the foundation and Christ is the chief cornerstone. (Eph. 2:20) He is the point of reference by

which the entire building is aligned. The apostles make up the foundation of the building and take their mark from the cornerstone, Christ. We are the subsequent courses of brick that make up the walls of the building. We need to be set upon the preceding courses which are themselves set upon the foundation which is aligned to Christ.

This analogy illustrates much of the heritage that we have in the truths that our faith is built upon. It also reminds us of our responsibility to build faithfully upon the truths of the Bible, so that the next generation, the next layer of bricks, will have a solid foundation upon which to rest. To the extent that we deviate from the teaching of the Apostles and Christ, we are building on a false foundation, one that will not support the building.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Ephesians 5:23-32
2. Ephesians 2:19-22

Answer these questions:

1. How are members of the true church different in status from those who are outside of the church?
2. What does the analogy of the church being like a body tell you about how its work is to be carried out?
3. What does the analogy of the church being like a building tell you about your part in the church?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 7 "THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST"

Lesson 2 "The Sacraments of the Church"

The topic before us in this lesson is the sacraments of the church. We will begin by looking first at sacraments in general. Sacraments are observances, instituted by God, to represent the work of Christ and its benefits. They are to be an encouragement and a meaningful time of communion between the believer and the Lord and, when rightly observed, provide true spiritual nourishment for the believer.

The sacraments were instituted by Christ. The church did not think them up but received them from Christ with the command that they be faithfully observed. We recognize two sacraments in the church, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both were commanded by Christ. It is important to recognize the sacraments are not simply a nice ceremony the church thought would enhance its ritual. Rather, they are observed in obedience to the commandments of Christ.

For a sacrament to be a sacrament, it must represent the work of Christ and its benefits. Some denominations, most notably the Roman Catholic Church, recognize many more sacraments, but many of these other sacraments do not represent the work of Christ, neither are they commanded by Christ. Therefore, the Protestant church does not recognize them as true sacraments.

The Westminster Confession of Faith tells us that sacraments are "signs and seals of the covenant of grace." Those who believe are participants in a covenantal agreement with God. The sacraments are signs of that covenant. They are signposts that point to the truth. They point to the provisions and terms of the covenant. To illustrate this point, if you were traveling down the highway and saw a pair of golden arches, you would know that they were a sign that a McDonald's restaurant was nearby. The arches would be, in a sense, a sign of a greater reality. They would point to a place where you could exchange your money for their food. Yet the

sign would not be itself the reality of the food, it would merely point to the reality. In other words, you don't expect the sign to feed you. It can only point to the place where you can be fed. The same is true of the sacraments. There is no intrinsic value in the sacraments in and of themselves. Their value is only in the fact that they point to the Savior, the true bread of life. It would be foolish to embrace only the sacrament itself and ignore the thing to which it pointed. When we rightly partake of the sacraments we are embracing the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's use another example to help us better understand the relationship between the sign and the thing signified. A marriage relationship is also a covenantal agreement. The wedding ring is the sign of that covenant. Yet, as meaningful as the wedding ring may be, a person does not embrace the wedding ring but the marriage partner. The wedding ring is merely a sign of the relationship that exists between the husband and wife. The ring is of little value apart from the relationship. It would be foolish to embrace the wedding ring and ignore the spouse. We are emphasizing this because it is important to understand the relationship between the sign of the sacrament and the reality of the relationship it points to in Christ. The sign only has value when the relationship has value. There is no value in the sign apart from the relationship.

The Westminster Confession also mentioned that the sacraments are a seal of the covenant. They seal God's faithfulness. They are a seal of God's promise to faithfully keep His part of the covenant. There are stipulations to the covenant that are imposed upon us as believers that we must abide by in order to reap the benefits of the covenant. The thing that the sacrament seals is not a guarantee that all who physically partake of the sacrament will be recipients of the blessings of the covenant. Rather, it is God's faithfulness and promise that is sealed in His pledge to uphold His part of the covenant. God will never renege on His promises. They are sealed, and the sacraments are the seal of the promises. Again, we will have to meet the stipulations of the covenant to reap its blessings, but for those who do, the promise is sealed.

Another purpose of the sacraments is to make a difference between believers and unbelievers, between those within the covenant and those without. They set apart people unto the Lord to be His people and to

observe the signs and seals of that relationship.

It is important that we talk about how the sacraments confer their blessing. There is definite blessing involved in the faithful observance of the sacraments, but the question is how is the blessing conferred to the believer? This is a crucial point. We need to be sure that we understand that there is no power or grace in the sacrament itself. There is no blessing automatically conferred on a person just because he may partake of the sacrament. The blessing comes through the Holy Spirit as He works through the faith of the believer. For example, just because a person receives the sacrament of baptism does not mean that he is saved. There is no power in the mere act of the church sprinkling or immersing a person in water. The blessing of the sacrament is conferred as the person comes in faith, believing on the thing signified. The sacrament has no power to save, only to confirm what God has done in the lives of those who come in faith, looking not to the sacrament but to Christ. If a person comes without faith, he receives nothing from the sacrament, except condemnation for his unbelief.

Now let's turn our attention to the two sacraments themselves. First of all, baptism is primarily a picture of the washing away of sin. The water is used to picture cleansing, the cleansing of the believer from his sins.

Baptism also represents admission into the visible church. It is one of the requirements for church membership. When a person publically professes faith and receives the sacrament of baptism before the people of God, it marks his inclusion into the covenant.

As you no doubt already know, there is some difference of opinion over how the baptismal water is to be administered. Some churches administer it by sprinkling, others by pouring, and still others by total immersion. All we are going to say about the mode of baptism is that nowhere in the Scriptures does it place emphasis on one particular mode over another. In fact, nowhere is the mode even mentioned in direct relationship to water baptism. The emphasis in Scripture is uniformly upon what baptism represents.

Another area of debate is infant baptism. Not all true believers agree that the infant children of believers are to be baptized. As we look at this

issue, we should first try to clear up some common misunderstandings concerning infant baptism. Infant baptism is not saying that the child is saved. It is not presumptive regeneration. When a child is baptized, we are saying that the child has a proper place in the covenant of grace. Certainly there is no question that children of believers under the Old Covenant received the sign of the covenant, which was circumcision administered on the eighth day of their lives. Children of believers had a place in the covenant of God, not as full believers in their own right, but as covenant children. God would deal with the children of believers after the faith of their parents. There would come a day when the covenant child reached an age of accountability whereby they would have to deal with God according to their own faith or lack of it, rather than according to the faith of their parents.

A covenant child is not to be considered a heathen, but as one who has certain covenantal privileges. To name a few, they have the privilege of being raised in an environment where the Word of God is preached and they have the privilege of being nurtured by the faith of their parents. These are tremendous blessings. The covenant child has a place with the people of God, not as a believer in his own right until he make a profession of faith, but as one being trained in the faith. Both the parents and the church make vows to raise the child in the faith and, if they are faithful in this responsibility, the expectation is that God will bring that child to a saving faith.

When we turn our attention to the Lord's Supper, we see that it includes both a remembrance aspect and a communion aspect. Concerning the remembrance aspect, we are told to observe the Lord's Supper, to remember His death till He comes. (1 Cor. 11:26) We are to remember what He has done for us, the sacrifice He has made in our behalf, and the benefits He has procured for us.

Actually, a communion service is much like a wedding ceremony, or perhaps more accurately, a ceremony where wedding vows are renewed. The Lord's Supper is a renewal of the vows that make up the covenant of grace. The Lord renews His commitment to us in a very graphic manner by reminding us, in the elements of bread and wine, that He died for us. The Lord's Supper actually preaches the Gospel in a visible way and

reminds us of the benefits of Christ's work on the cross to all those who come in faith. We too renew our commitment to Him by coming in faith to feed upon Him and offer ourselves anew to Him and His Kingdom's work.

That brings us to the other aspect of the Lord's Supper, the communion aspect. We not only remember what He has done for us in the past, but we commune with Him in the present. We partake of the meal together. The Lord is spiritually present with His people at the Lord's Supper. We acknowledge this aspect when we call the Lord's Supper a communion observance. There is a spiritual communion that takes place between Christ and His people through the Holy Spirit.

The sacraments are designed for the blessing and encouragement of God's people. The blessing comes, not as we look upon the sacraments themselves, but as we look upon what they point to, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and what He has done to bring us to Himself.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Matthew 28:19
2. 1 Corinthians 11:23-30

Answer these questions:

1. For whom are the sacraments intended, and how do they confer their blessing?

2. What does baptism represent?

3. What does the Lord's Supper represent?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 7 "THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST"

Lesson 3 "Making the Most of Church"

How do you make the most of what your relationship to the church has to offer? How do you take advantage of the blessings of worship, fellowship, and service that are available in the life of the church? The church provides a great many opportunities for you both to contribute and receive, to partake and to serve. You will need to do both. There will be times to serve, and there will be times to receive. But if you are a new believer, your greatest need is to grow in the grace and strength of the Lord. You need, above all, to be nurtured in the Lord so that you can grow to be an effective member of Christ's body. If you don't spend time being fed and nourished, you will never grow to the point where your service and relationship to the Lord can be used as an effective witness for Him.

We could make an analogy here between a new believer and a newborn baby. When a newborn baby comes home from the hospital, we don't expect him to immediately begin upholding his share of responsibility in the family. We don't expect him to begin doing chores around the house. We know that the child will receive a disproportionate share of attention and care at first. There is a sense in which everyone in the house will serve the child and do for him. The baby will return nothing in the way of work to the family. Yet, no one is upset by this fact because it is what we expect under the circumstances. It is a natural part of the relationship that exists between a child and his parents.

The child, however, does have a role in the family. It is not to work but to grow and become strong physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. In other words, the child's early years are a time of development, during which much is invested in him, with the idea that the payoff will come later as the child matures and begins to live the life for which he is being prepared.

It is much the same in the Church concerning a newborn spiritual life. When a person comes to faith, he comes as a child, as an infant. He needs above all to be fed and cared for so that he can grow. No one expects that he will immediately be ready to serve in any major way. Actually, the new believer's first task, his first call to service, is a call to personal growth and maturity.

One of the reasons that God has called you to sit under the preaching of His Word is that you may grow thereby. God wants you to grow and mature. You should keep this in mind when you attend a worship service. You are called first of all to worship God and then to grow in His grace. You should therefore approach each church service expectantly, always believing that God has something for you that can help you to mature in the faith.

With this in mind, it should be motivation to attend all the services you are able to, not just Sunday morning. It would not be right to neglect something that God holds out to you for your own growth and blessing. None of us wants to remain weak because we have neglected the opportunities for growth and strength that God has provided. Yet, this is what many church people find themselves doing.

You will need to make an effort to listen attentively to hear what God has for you when His Word is preached. He has something that He wants you to understand. He has something that He wants you to know. He has something He wants you to do. One of the primary ways that He has chosen to reveal these things to you is through the preaching of His Word. You might wish He would open up heaven and speak directly to you, but if you wait for that to happen, you will miss what God has to say to you through His Word.

Sometimes, when people don't mature in the Lord and wonder why, it is because they never really receive the Word of God as it comes to them week by week from the pulpit. They listen to it, but it doesn't ever cross their minds that it is God speaking to them through His Word. It seldom comes to their attention that God wants to communicate personally with them. It never really crosses their mind that they need to respond to the Word. There is a sad verse in the fourth chapter of Hebrews that speaks to this point. It says in Hebrews 4:2, "For good news came to us just as

to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.” The writer of Hebrews is saying something that is all too common. The preaching of the Word will not benefit people, no matter how many years they sit under its teaching, unless it is received and walked out in faith. You need to respond to the Word when you hear it. You need to mix faith with it. You need to ask what is God saying to you? What does He want you to believe, or do, or change, or become? If you do this, you will not walk out the door and forget what you have heard, but you will mix faith with it and look expectantly for God to do a work of grace in your heart.

One very practical way to help you to give proper attention to the sermon would be to take notes. Bring a little notebook and try to understand the main points the preacher is making and write them down. Write down the illustrations that help you to understand the meaning of the text. Make a note of the Scripture passages that are referred to. Take notes. Review them later. You will remember the message far better if you do so. You will be able to respond better. You will have something to take with you and chew on after you have gone out the door.

You also need to bring your Bible to church each time. You need to follow along when the Scripture is being read and to look up passages that are referred to. It will help you to be more involved in the message. It will help you to be less of a spectator and more of a participant. These are just a few of the practical things that you can do to grow in the Word and to aid you in getting more out of the preaching of the Word of God. Your relationship with God is important enough to spend the effort to do so.

You would also find it a source of blessing if you made use of the pastor. Do you understand that the reason that you have a pastor is that God has called and sent him to the church to help you grow? He is one of God's appointed means of helping you in your life of faith. God would have you seek his guidance and insights. Many of the things that you need to understand, much of the help you need, God could provide if you availed yourself of the pastor's help. Not that he is in any way perfect himself, but he is one of the ways that God has ordained for His help to come. You would be blessed if you took advantage of the minister and went to

him for counsel. You would never need to fear that he would think little of you for any sin that you are struggling with, or because you didn't understand God's Word in a certain area. More than you could know, he wants to help you grow in the Lord and live a fruitful life of faith. Sadly, after having said this, we need to acknowledge that not all pastors are walking with the Lord as they should or, for that matter, even know the Lord. You need to find a church where the Word of God is preached faithfully and the preached word is Christ centered.

Finally, you need to take advantage of the opportunities for fellowship in the church. You will be stronger if you do. You can't live the Christian life on your own. You can't be strong enough on your own. You need to be around other believers. You need their fellowship, their encouragement, and their support. You need their challenge and perhaps even their occasional chastisement. Take advantage of the fellowship available in the church. Spend time with the people of God. Let them warm your heart and be an example to you.

To summarize, you would be blessed if you really believed that church worship services, fellowship, the preaching and teaching of the Word, opportunities for service, all of these things are gifts to you from God. Yet, even though they are gifts from God, you need to take advantage of them to benefit. You need to be in church to be blessed. You need to ask for help to receive it. You need to invest to reap. Take advantage of what is available in the life of the church. The more you take advantage, the more you will grow. If you want to be strong, if you want to be mature, you must invest in these opportunities from the Lord.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Ephesians 3:1-21
2. Hebrews 4:2

Answer these questions:

1. What is the primary work for a new believer to be engaged in within the church?

2. How can you best take advantage of the teaching of the Word of God?

3. How can you best take advantage of what the pastor has to offer?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 7 "THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST"

Lesson 4 "The Church as a Body of Servants"

In this lesson, we are going to take up the study of the church as a body of servants. Everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ is called to serve. There are no seats in church for spectators. None is excused from being a servant of the Lord. It isn't only the officers and leaders of the church who are called to do the work of the church. Every member is expected to be a servant. Keeping in mind what was said in the previous lesson about new believers, we have not been invited to attend church so that we can sit back and let others minister to us. We are called to serve God and others.

Now there will be different opportunities and emphases for our service from time to time. For a while we might serve in one area and then move to another. We can expect, as we continue to grow, that God will open up new avenues of service. Not all people will serve in the same way. Not all people will have the same burdens. One person may have a special burden for evangelism. Another person may have a special burden for missions. Another person may have a special burden for Christian education. Yet another person will carry a burden for the visitation of shut-ins. These different avenues of service do not mean that one work is better or more important than another. Too often the problem arises that a person who has a particular burden in one area, let's say evangelism, feels that anyone who doesn't have the same burden to the same extent that he has is not what they ought to be. God will lay on different people's hearts different burdens and different avenues for service. But no one is allowed the ease of only being a spectator.

As we try to understand the different directions that the ministry of the church can take, there are three main avenues, from which there can be many side roads. The church really only ministers in three major areas:

we are servants to God, we are servants to other believers, and we are servants to a lost world.

First, we are servants to God. Our ministry to God comes primarily under the banner of worship. We are called to serve God, and part of our ministry will be directed to Him personally as worship. God is a glorious and awesome God. He is to be worshipped and praised and it should be our joy to do so. While our love of God will cause us to serve others, a major focus of what we do should be focused directly on the Lord. As our hearts and minds are focused on Him alone, and that attention evokes from us a response of worship, then we are ministering in a special way unto the Lord. Our life is to be empowered by this kind of worship, praise, thanksgiving, obedience, and gratitude. As we do what we do with this focus, we are serving God. It doesn't matter so much what we do. It doesn't matter if we are washing dishes, or doing homework, or standing behind a pulpit. If you do what you do as unto the Lord, because He has given it to you to do, you are ministering to Him in worship.

We are also called to be servants to other believers. This is still a facet of our commitment to God, but it is different, in that it is directed to other believers. This ministry can include edification or fellowship. It can include godly chastisement. We are called to be servants to all of the household of faith. We need to be our brother's keeper. We need to love and edify each other. We need to challenge each other. We need to serve each other. The love of God shed abroad in our hearts will cause us to want to see our brothers and sisters prosper in the things of the Lord. When we serve one another, we will actively seek each other's welfare.

We are also called to be servants to a lost world, being servants to unbelievers. This ministry includes witnessing or evangelism and would also include acts of compassion and mercy. We are called to be ministers of reconciliation. We have a responsibility to share the Gospel. We have freely received the message of God's grace, and we need to freely pass it on. We are debtors to the Gospel. We are debtors to those in need, to point them in the way of salvation. This is one of the motivations behind evangelism and missions, the fact that we are called to love, and thereby

serve, a lost and dying world.

If you think about these three directions of the ministry of the church, you will see that they include everyone. We minister to God, fellow believers, and unbelievers. If any of these three ministries is neglected, no matter how strong the church may be in the other two areas, it will have a distorted and warped existence. It is true that there will be individual believers in the church that will be more involved in one area than another, but the church cannot neglect any of the areas without becoming lopsided in its identity and purpose.

Even within the individual believer's life, none of these three areas can be totally neglected without leading to distortions. We must all be involved in active worship of God. We must all be involved in fellowship and serving our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We must all be involved in freely giving our witness and help to those who know not our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If we ever begin to feel out of balance, one thing that we might do would be to examine our involvement in these three areas to see if we are neglecting any of them.

As we continue to understand more of what it means to be servants of God, the question that comes to mind is, "What can the individual believer do to serve God?" We might particularly want to understand what the new believer can do to be a servant of God? As a new believer, you are not ready or able to teach a Bible class. It may well be the case that you don't even know enough to encourage another believer going through a time of need. Perhaps you are not able to explain the plan of salvation clearly enough to do evangelistic work. What can you do, therefore, to be a servant of God? Where can you find a place of service?

Again, the most important thing you can do as a new believer is to prepare yourself by growing in the Lord, so that you will be able to be used by Him. Beyond that, you have a unique opportunity as a new believer that many other church people may not have. Most likely you have friends that are not believers, since that is the group of people that you associated with before you came to faith. Many church members have developed their friendships within church circles and do not have personal relationships with a large number of unbelievers. Therefore, you

have a great opportunity to influence these people through your new life in Christ. They know you and how you were before you came to faith. As they see what the Lord does in your life, there is a great opportunity for witness. You may not know exactly what to say to them, but they will get the message as you live out your new life before them. You can also help by inviting these friends to church or by asking other, more mature believers to visit them. You can walk out your faith before them and witness to them that you are trusting in Jesus Christ. God can use this witness in a tremendous way. There is a certain kind of contagiousness that is transmitted by the zeal of a new believer. God can use it to bring His witness to bear in the lives of your friends. It would be a tremendous opportunity for you to serve the Lord.

Another way you could serve would be by tithing. This is something that God would have you do. It is yet another way that you could be involved in His work. Tithing means that you give ten percent of your income to the Lord's work. Actually, all you have belongs to God, and you ought to be willing to let him guide you in how you use all of the resources that have come from His hand. Normally speaking, God expects that all believers would tithe. Actually, it is a real privilege to be able to be a part of the Lord's work. It ought to be something that we delight to do. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:7, our giving should "not be grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver."

God has promised that if you are faithful to provide for His work, He will provide for you. This moves the issue of tithing to a new realm. If God promises to provide for you if you trust in Him and take care of His house, it becomes no longer a matter of whether or not you can afford to tithe, but it becomes a matter of whether or not you believe God. He promised to provide for you. The question is do you believe enough to tithe and trust Him?

God will call all of His people to be servants in the specific tasks that He has planned for them. He will provide the opportunities to serve. It is up to you to take up these opportunities as they become available. Some church members will seek to be excused from service by claiming that they are not capable. This is true. None of us is capable of doing God's work. Yet, He does not ask us to serve Him in our strength and talent.

All God looks for us to do in the way of service is to be vessels for Him to use. We are not responsible to be talented as much as we are called to be yielded. As we yield ourselves to Him and take up the opportunities, the church will prosper, God will be glorified, and we will be blessed.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. John 13:3-17
2. Matthew 24:45-51

Answer these questions:

1. Should there be any “spectators” in the church?
Explain.

2. List the three directions in which your service is to extend.

3. What should be the motivation for you to be a servant of God?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 7 "THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST"

Week 5 "The Structure of the Church"

We're going to conclude our study of the church by talking about the structure of the church. The first point has been made earlier, the church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't belong to its members or to the denomination; it belongs to the Lord. We always need to remember this fact as we go about our work in the church. Whenever a decision needs to be made, the primary factor that ought to guide the decision is, does it honor the Lord? Does it cause the Lord to be glorified? Is it in conformity to His Word? Too often, we do what we do out of our own ideas and wisdom. It's not up to us to decide what we want done, but we are to seek God's will to find out what He wants done. When a decision needs to be made or direction is needed, we ought to seek God's will through prayer and study of His Word. The church would be stronger and more effective if we did more of this.

Yet, having said this, even though it's God's church, He calls men to lead it. He calls human beings to be the leaders in the church. There has to be a structure. There has to be authority in the church. God has designed it to function with human leadership. It's been that way from the beginning. God called Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. God called David to be the king over Israel. The prophets led the people of God. The judges led the people. The Apostles led the people. There has always been structure and human leadership in the church.

Basically, there are three different kinds of structure that church governments can follow. One form of government is what we call the Episcopal form of government. The primary characteristic of this structure is that leadership is in the form of a hierarchy of power. We see this type of government most clearly in the Roman Catholic Church. It has a very formal hierarchy of authority. At the top is the Pope, who has a very high degree of authority in the church. Perhaps he does not have as much now as in the past, but he still has a great deal of authority. His

authority is transmitted down through a formal structure of cardinals, bishops, and priests to the local parish. This is one form of church government. It has a rigid structure and emphasizes the various levels of authority in the church.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the Episcopal system would be what is called the congregational form of church government. This is the kind of government that is found in most Baptist churches. The congregational form of government has a very broad base of power. There is not a hierarchy of authority that binds the individual churches and leaders together. In fact, these churches are usually not grouped together in a formal way. The local church may or may not be a member of an association. Even if they are, the decisions of the association are not binding upon the individual churches. The association can't decree that something has to take place in the local church the way that the Pope or a cardinal could for those under his authority. The congregational system has a very loose and broad based power. The power doesn't lie in the system. The power lies in the individual churches. Even within the local church itself, the authority is so broadly based that there may need to be many congregational meetings because the congregation is where the power lies. The congregational form of government, therefore, emphasizes the individuality of the churches rather than the unity of the churches.

In between these two opposites lies the Presbyterian form of church government. It is a representative form of government. It incorporates aspects of both of the two other systems. The Presbyterian form of government is not based on a hierarchy of power, so it doesn't have the inherent problem of individuals having great power and influence. Likewise, there isn't the problem of having such looseness that there is no real unity either.

The Presbyterian form of government is a system that has as its base of authority the elected elders of the local church. The elders are responsible to direct the activities of the local church when they meet together as a Session. The path of authority then branches not so much upward as outward, as local churches are a part of a broader court called the Presbytery. The Presbytery is not made up of people of higher

authority; rather it is an assembly of local church elders. No one in the Presbyterian Church has any more authority than that of an elder. The elder is the highest office, as far as authority is concerned, in the Presbyterian Church. There is a distinction of function drawn between ruling elders and teaching elders. The ministers are teaching elders. The ruling elders are the laymen who have been called and elected to the office of elder. When the churches meet together in Presbytery, the decisions that are made are decisions made by peers, not by people of higher authority. After the presbytery, the next broader court is called the synod, which is an assembly of all of the Presbyteries in one given area, although not all Presbyterian denominations are large enough to have synods. Finally, on the national level of the denomination, is the General Assembly. Yet, even at this level it's still an assembly of elders. As the elders of the church make decisions and recommendations, they spread back out through the various levels of government and carry with them the authority of the collective wisdom of the elders of the church.

Let's take a minute now to look at denominations in general, because when we examine different kinds of church government, we find ourselves looking at different denominations. Some denominational differences are based on form of government. The three different kinds of governments that we've mentioned, Episcopal, Congregational, and Presbyterian account for some of the differences between denominations. Other differences are based on doctrine. Some groups of believers have felt that certain biblical doctrines have been either neglected or misinterpreted by others. Therefore, they meet together with others of like mind to take a stand on their particular doctrinal emphasis. For example, one of the reasons for the formation of the Baptist church was based upon a different understanding of how the sacrament of baptism was to be administered.

Having different denominations is not necessarily a bad thing. While we do have to bear a common witness of our unity in Christ, that doesn't mean that all denominational distinctions need to be done away with. There will always be differences in the way things are handled and differences in doctrinal emphases, and these differences are not bad as long as they seek to be faithful to the Word of God and make Christ the center of their focus.

We need to look at a different but related topic now, submission to church leadership. Since we're talking about church structure, authority, and leadership, we need to understand something about submission to brethren in the church. God has called certain people to be leaders, not because they're so good or special, but because He has called them to serve in that capacity. There can be a great deal of harm done in the church when people speak against its leaders. When a person speaks against the leaders the Lord has called to lead, he needs to be careful that he does not end up speaking against the Lord. When people run down the leadership of the church, they are likely to harm the church itself. We see it time and time again in quarreling churches. It's not that you can't speak against the leadership of the church, it's the manner in which it is done that is the issue. There are proper channels for complaints, and they ought to be followed, and those channels never involve gossip.

We need to honor church leaders, not because they will always be everything they ought to be, but because we honor God when we honor those He has set over us.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Ephesians 4:11-13
2. Hebrews 13:7-18

Answer these questions:

1. Whose church is it, and how does your answer affect your involvement in the church?

2. How should you view the leaders of the church? Explain.

3. What have you learned from this week's study of the church, the body of Christ, that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 8

"AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE"

Lesson 1 "The Big Picture"

In this chapter we want to get an overview of the entire Bible. It is important for your study of the Bible that you have this overview. When you read the Bible, you will be looking at individual passages of Scripture. That is naturally what happens when you read. Yet, from time to time, to keep your study in balance, you need to look at the bigger picture so that you will know how individual passage fits into the overall scheme of things. It is somewhat like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. When you put together a jigsaw puzzle you have to pay attention to the individual pieces. However, it is difficult to tell much about the overall picture by only looking at these small pieces. In order to properly relate the individual pieces to each other it is helpful to have the complete picture in front of you. Then you are able to see how the piece you are looking at fits into the whole picture.

Studying the Bible is a little like that. Certainly you are able to read individual passages with the Spirit's illumination, so that you can understand them even if you do not have the overall picture. On the other hand, it is easy to get off on the wrong track by taking passages out of context. It is easy to make mistakes in seeing how passages of Scripture fit together if you don't have the overall picture in view, into which you can fit the individual pieces. Many times the trouble we have

in understanding certain passages comes from the fact that we really don't have a good grasp of the overall teaching of Scripture, so that the smaller passages appear to be unrelated and hard to understand.

To begin to grasp something of the overall picture the Bible paints for us, we could understand that its primary purpose is to set before us the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This simple sentence contains a very crucial concept for our study of the Bible. The Bible is designed to set before us the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we don't keep this in mind we could get lost. We will be in danger of falling into one of several traps. One trap might be to read the Bible as merely a book of good moral teachings or lessons on how to live a good life. Another trap might be to reduce the Bible to a history lesson on how God dealt with His people in the past. What will keep the teaching of the Bible in perspective is to understand that its purpose is to bring us face to face with Christ Jesus, what He has done, what He will do, and what His death and resurrection make available for us.

To set the theme for this lesson, let's turn our attention to a verse in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24, verse 27. This verse comes from the story of the Lord on the road to Emmaus after His death and resurrection. As He walks in the company of two of His disciples who do not yet recognize Him after His resurrection, the discussion is centered on the death of Jesus of Nazareth. The disciples are unable to understand how it could have happened if He were truly the Son of God. To open their eyes to the fact that these events were exactly as God had foretold in His Word, the verse reads, "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." In other words, when He wanted to teach them about himself and the events of the cross, He turned their attention to the Scriptures, and of course the Scriptures of His day were the Old Testament. He took them back to the very beginning, to the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, and He went through all of the prophets, all of the Old Testament, and showed them the things concerning Himself. From beginning to end, the Bible is designed to show us the person and work of Christ Jesus. In the last lesson of this chapter, we will do the same kind of study, that is, to go through the Bible, beginning with Moses, showing how it speaks of the Lord.

In many other places, the Bible shows us how individual passages fit into a larger picture. For example, when the Lord talks about the Ten Commandments, He says that they can be summarized under the umbrella of love. If you truly love the Lord your God with all your heart

and your neighbor as yourself, you will keep the Ten Commandments. Love summarizes the overall intent of the Ten Commandments. It is the essential core of what they teach. Yet, even with this overview in hand, we also need to have the detailed picture. How do you love God with all your heart? The answer is that you put no other gods before Him. You don't take His name in vain. You honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy, etc., in other words, you honor the Ten Commandments. You need the detailed view to fill out the overview and the overview to keep from misinterpreting the details. Our Bible study needs this attention to both the overall emphasis and the individual detail.

People who focus almost exclusively on the detail tend to become legalistic. They reduce the relationship between God and the believer to following a set of rules and regulations. On the other hand, people who focus almost entirely on the overall picture, on one grand theme (often God is love), tend to become liberal. Their theology lacks specific truths, but instead is centered on fuzzy concepts of love, peace, etc. They might not feel that it is important to honor the specific details of the Word as long as they stick to the main emphasis.

Another truth we can keep in mind about the Bible is that it is a book of progressive revelation. It begins with Genesis, the book of beginnings, and ends with Revelation, the book of endings. We learn about the world's creation in Genesis and the renewed creation in Revelation. In other words, the Bible begins with the basic concept that God created man and this world, then builds block by block upon that truth so that the further we go in the Bible, the more complete is our understanding of God, man, and the provision for salvation God has made available in Christ Jesus. Though we see many of the main truths we need to know in nutshell form early on in the Bible, the truths are opened up and illuminated as God continues to reveal more and more through the pages of Scripture.

There are many different ways we can approach the Bible as we try to understand its teachings. There are many ways we can divide it into smaller sections for our study. No doubt the first division that comes to mind is that which divides the Bible into the Old and the New Testaments. While we will divide the Bible into even smaller sections during our study, it is important to emphasize its unity. The Old and New Testaments do mark differences in God's dealing with His people. Yet, we need to be careful that we don't draw the differences too sharply. It is true that in the Old Testament there is an emphasis on law and in the New Testament there is an emphasis on grace, but we would make a

great mistake if we drew too sharp a dividing line. The Bible is one story. It is the story of God's work to redeem His people. It is one, unified story from beginning to end. The Old Testament leads up to and points out what Christ would do when He came. The New Testament looks back to what He did and tells of its significance for us. If we took the position that the New Testament is for today and the Old Testament was for back then, and we were only going to pay attention to the New Testament, we would not have all we needed to live a fruitful Christian life. We need, all the Scriptures to know and walk in the will of God.

Finally, we need to take a moment to give a very brief overall look at the Scriptures from a perspective that may be new to you. There is a sense in which the Bible describes the life of a believer as he moves from the new birth to glorification. You begin in Genesis where the power of God brings life. You are redeemed in Exodus; in Leviticus you begin to learn about the law or the Word of God. Your experience of walking with and trusting God deepens in Numbers and Deuteronomy. In Joshua you learn how to conquer the various aspects of your life in the power of God. Samuel shows you how self is dethroned and a new God-appointed King takes the throne. You are taught about molding a godly character in the Wisdom Literature. The books of the prophets show you the consequences of the failure of the flesh to constantly draw on the Lord for His strength. They also provide the hope of promise of the coming One who will perfectly obey the will of God on your behalf. The New Testament shows you how the Spirit will empower your life so that you walk with and serve the Lord in His strength, and not your own. The book of Revelation shows the final result, in heaven, in the presence of God and His glory.

Hopefully this kind of personal application will be helpful for you to see how alive and personal the Bible can be as God seeks to use it to move you to a deeper and fuller relationship with Him.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Romans 15:4
2. Luke 24:27

Answer these questions:

1. Why do you need to be able to understand both an individual passage of Scripture, as well as the overall picture, to get a proper understanding of the text?

2. What is the one main subject that all of the Bible centers around? Explain.

3. Does the New Testament replace the Old Testament? Explain.

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 8 "AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE"

Lesson 2 "The Structure of the Bible"

Now we are going to look more closely at the structure of the Bible. We will begin by taking the Old and New Testaments and see how their various books can be divided and grouped into units of similar purpose. If we can better understand the structure of the Bible, we will be better able to see the overall picture and how the teaching of the Bible fits together in unity.

The Old Testament is composed of 39 separate books. These 39 books are often grouped into four different sections, relating to their structure and purpose. The first section or group of books is called the books of the law. These are the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Sometimes these books are called the Pentateuch or the books of Moses, indicating that Moses was their author. The books of the Law spell out God's claim on this world and its inhabitants. They reveal the requirements that God placed upon the people of Israel. They reflect the holy character of God, as well as outline what conduct his people should follow to be consistent with God's holy character. In addition, these books set forth the terms of the Mosaic covenant, as well describing its blessings and sanctions.

The second group of books is called the historical books. This section contains the twelve books that begin with Joshua and run through Esther. The historical books focus upon the history of the nation of Israel as the people of God enter into and live in the promised land. While the history they record is an accurate account of the events that are reported, their purpose is more than to teach a history lesson. Primarily, these books reveal the experience of a people who are learning to live under the hand of God by faith and obedience. They are recorded to illustrate for us spiritual truths concerning how we too are to relate to God and His will for us.

The third division of the Old Testament is called the poetical books. This section encompasses the five books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. These are also called the Wisdom Literature. They teach us something about the heart and mind of God. They provide real wisdom about living in this world from a

heavenly perspective. These books lay the foundation for godly character. In other words, the wisdom and truths they present can serve to plow up the fallow heart and prepare it to receive the seeds of God's grace. They will work to produce a godly character that is able to respond to the leading of God's Holy Spirit.

The last division of the Old Testament is called the prophetic books, or the writings of the prophets. This section is the largest of the Old Testament and contains the 17 books that run from Isaiah through Malachi. Often this section is further divided into the major prophets and the minor prophets. There are five major prophets, Isaiah through Daniel, and twelve minor prophets, Hosea through Malachi. The major prophets get their name, not because they are more important than the minor prophets, but because their books are considerably longer than the books of the minor prophets. The purpose of the prophetic books is similar to that of the New Testament epistles. When a problem arose among the children of Israel, God would send a prophet to deal with the problem. The prophets dealt with the kinds of problems that a believer would face as he tried to walk by faith. Though the setting and resources were different, the church today faces many of the same problems that the Old Testament prophets addressed.

Though, on occasion, the prophets would predict the future, that was not their main function. They were primarily messengers of God's word to His people. Often their messages were words of warning to those who were unfaithful to the Lord. They warned the people against the consequences of their unfaithfulness and disobedience to God. Though God was merciful and slow to anger, He would not allow sin to go unpunished. The prophets called the people to turn to God in repentance, and promised His blessing if they did.

When we look at the Old Testament as a whole, we can envision it as a foundation upon which the New Testament is built. The Old Testament provides the foundation upon which we must stand to rightly interpret New Testament truths. Both the foundation and the building itself are necessary if a structure is to be solid. Either one without the other would be incomplete. In other words, you can't fully understand the New Testament without having a solid grasp of the Old Testament. Much of what is written in the New refers to and builds upon what is written in the Old. If we ever want to appreciate the New Testament, we must first appreciate and understand the Old Testament.

With this in mind, let's turn our attention to the New Testament, and, in a similar fashion, see how it too can be divided into sections of similar content and purpose. The 27 books of the New Testament, like the 39 books of the Old Testament, are also grouped into four sections. The first section contains the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Their purpose is to introduce the Savior and His work. They tell us about His birth, His life and ministry here on earth, His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The Gospels are actually four different portraits of the one Savior, each one written from a slightly different perspective or with a different purpose. For example, Matthew was concerned to portray Jesus of Nazareth as the King, the promised Messiah. Mark portrays Him as the Servant of God. Luke pictures Him as the Son of man, and John presents Him as the Son of God. Even though the Gospels have much material in common, each one paints the Lord from a slightly different perspective. It takes each one of these different portraits to get the proper insight into who the Lord Jesus Christ is, and what He came to do.

The second group of New Testament books is called the historical books. Actually, it is not a group of books but a single book that makes up this section, namely the book of Acts. The book of Acts portrays the history of the early church, beginning at the time of Christ's ascension and His sending forth His Spirit to indwell and empower the church. The book of Acts then relates how the Spirit directed the church to take the Gospel into all the world. It pictures for us how the Holy Spirit will work in the lives of those who are yielded to Him. It also gives us an understanding of what the purpose and work of the church is to be.

The third section of New Testament books, the epistles, is by far the largest section. It contains the 21 books that run from Romans through Jude. The word "epistle" is the Greek word for "letter" and that term is used because these books are letters written, mostly by the Apostles, to specific churches and individual believers that they ministered to. Paul was the author of about two thirds of these epistles, and his letters are called the Pauline Epistles. The rest of the epistles are called the General Epistles and were written by others such as Peter and John. These books, like the prophetic books of the Old Testament, are designed to deal with problems that arise in the church. As the people of God seek to live out their faith, they encounter various difficulties along the way. God would then lead one of the apostles to write to them to encourage them, to instruct them in dealing with the troubles they faced, or to call them to repentance.

The last section in the New Testament, as was true of the Old Testament, is that of prophecy. In the New Testament this section contains only one book, the book of Revelation. If you have ever tried to read the book of Revelation, you will know that it is a difficult book to understand. It is a book that describes for us how all things concerning this world are wrapped up in the last days as God brings the creation into judgment. It also gives us the clearest picture of heaven we find in the Bible. The book of Revelation magnifies the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who overthrows the kingdom of Satan and reigns victoriously forever in heaven. It is a book of encouragement and hope for those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Hopefully you have seen that the Bible is not merely a collection of miscellaneous religious stories. Rather, it is a book whose structure has been organized under the hand of God to tell the story of God's plan and purpose of redemption. It is a book that tells the story of the Son of God, our Savior, as He and His work are revealed "line upon line and precept upon precept" (Isaiah 28:13) to the end that we would embrace Him as Savior and Lord to the praise of His glory. As we grow in our knowledge of the Bible, we will grow in knowledge of that story, but more importantly we will grow in knowledge and fellowship with the God of that story. As we do so, the Book will come alive, with His face, and His hand being seen on every page, and we will know Him as our God and Heavenly Father.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 1 Corinthians 10:11
2. Revelation 22:18-19

Answer these questions:

1. If many of the Old Testament customs and practices no longer apply, why do we still study them?
2. How can understanding something of the structure of the Bible help you in your study of God's Word?
3. How sharply should the distinction between the Old and New Testaments be drawn? Explain.

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 8 "AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE"

Lesson 3 "The Old Testament"

In the previous lesson we dealt with the structure of the Bible. In this lesson, we will seek to get an overview of its contents, narrowing our study to the Old Testament. Then in the next lesson we will do the same thing as we turn our attention to the New Testament.

Let's begin by making a few observations about the Old Testament in general. The Old Testament reveals something about God's dealing with the children of Israel. So we don't get too far off track, we could make this analogy about the nation of Israel. God dealt with Israel as an example to the world of how He would deal with those who would walk with Him by faith. It would be something similar to a teacher who wanted to demonstrate how something worked to his class, and so he chose one student to come to the front of the class and used him as a model for the whole class to see what he wanted them to see and do. God's dealing with the nation of Israel is something along that line. He chose them. He brought them to the front of the world and demonstrated through them how He would deal with all who walked with Him by faith.

Another point we need to make about the Old Testament is that it contains physical illustrations of spiritual truths. This is an extremely helpful key in understanding the Old Testament. The Old Testament contains physical illustrations of spiritual truths. For example, if you wanted to draw a picture of what it would look like to be saved and to be taken out of bondage to sin and set free, the story of the Exodus would be the picture you would come up with. Much of the Old Testament will speak to us as physical illustrations of spiritual truths. Our primary interest is not to learn about the history of the nation Israel, but to see in its history the seed of spiritual truth concerning God's leading and providing for His people. This focus will allow us to see what God has for us in the Old Testament and enable us to make application to our own lives. 1 Corinthians 10:11 illustrates this truth by telling us about the Old Testament's account of the life of the children of Israel that, "These things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction." Let us be instructed by their example.

So let's begin to focus on the Old Testament and gain an overview of what it contains. The story of creation is found in Genesis 1 & 2. Chapter 3 tells us something about the fall of man, where he lost his privileged communion with God and his perfect standing of holiness before Him. Because of his sin he was expelled from the Garden of Eden, though God immediately set about the process to redeem and restore fallen man. The world, however, continued in its evil and sinful ways, in mass proportions, so that by Genesis 6 we learn that God could find no righteous men on the face of the earth, except Noah. God poured His holy wrath out upon His fallen and corrupt creation in the form of the flood which destroyed every living thing except those that found safety in the ark.

After some time, as the world is repopulated, we have in Genesis 11 the account of the Tower of Babel where God confounded the plans of men who came together to build a Utopia apart from God. God confused their language so that their plans would not prevail, and from that time onward the people of the world have spoken different languages and have been unable to truly get along.

Starting in Genesis 12 we have a new beginning where God called Abraham to leave his home and follow Him to a land that He would show him. In the call of Abraham and his walk with God, we have the model of a life of faith. Abraham is the father of the faithful. He depicts how God can call a person out of heathen surroundings and background to walk with Him in a covenant of grace.

The covenant God made with Abraham passed down through his children through the child of promise, Isaac, who was himself a foreshadowing of Christ, the true child of promise. As the story continues, the offspring of Abraham multiplied and in a time of famine were led to Egypt where God had made provision for them. Though at first they prospered there, they later came under severe bondage and hard taskmasters who made them their slaves. As the bondage grew increasingly unbearable, they cried out to God. In the fullness of time, God sent Moses to deliver them from the bondage of Egypt.

The book of Exodus contains the story of their escape from Egypt and the beginning of their journey to the land of Canaan which God had promised to give them for their inheritance. They could not reap the blessings of God while they lived in Egypt. They had to first leave Egypt and separate themselves unto God before He would bring them eventually to enter into the land of promise.

As they followed Moses, they were supernaturally delivered from Pharaoh and came face to face with God on Mt. Sinai, where they received the law of God. In the law, God revealed something of the requirements of His holy nature. God also revealed His plans for the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices which were to direct their worship. The children of Israel continued their wilderness wanderings, prolonged for forty years because of their lack of faith in taking possession of the Promised Land.

The book of Joshua describes how they finally entered in and conquered the promised land. It is a picture of how a person enters into a relationship with God, whereby his life is lived in the strength of the promises of God. Joshua shows us how the various aspects of the old life are conquered and re-inhabited by the new life in Christ.

Yet, even after they had conquered and taken possession of the Promised Land, Israel went through the period described by the book of Judges, where there was the constant rise and fall of blessings and troubles. The pattern was repeated again and again where, in their own prosperity, they would forget to honor God and go their own way. Then God would send trouble, and they would cry out to Him for help. In response to their cries, God would send a deliverer and peace was restored. However, they would soon forget God again, and the pattern would be repeated. The book of Judges shows us what happens when we try to serve God in the power of the flesh.

As a result, the children of Israel came to realize that they needed a king to rule over them. The problem was that they did not accept God as their King. Instead, they wanted a human king like the neighboring countries. God granted their desire, even though it would be to their own hurt. God told Samuel to anoint Saul as their king. Saul represented the kind of king that the people wanted for their leader. But in the final analysis, Saul proved to be an unworthy and disastrous king, not honoring God, causing the people to be defeated by their enemies.

God then provided a leader of His own choosing, David. Under David and his son Solomon, who reigned after him, there came the golden age of Israel, the age in which the people won great victories over their enemies. They enjoyed a widespread reputation of glory and blessing at the hand of God. During this time the land was truly a land of blessing as God prospered His people.

However, after the death of Solomon the kingdom was divided into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms because of infighting over leadership. From that time on the decline of Israel began. The people of the Northern Kingdom fell completely away from worshipping God as He had commanded. They substituted false gods in His place. They neglected the laws of God. As a result, God sent the Assyrian army into the land to destroy it and scatter the people forever.

Not many years later, God sent the Babylonian army to capture and take captive the Southern Kingdom who too had turned from God, though there still remained a remnant of faithful believers among them that God would save. After being held captive for 70 years, God opened the door for the remnant to return to the Promised Land, as described in Ezra and Nehemiah. They restored that which had been destroyed, the temple and the city walls, providing for us a picture of revival and restoration after a time of decline.

This is obviously a very abbreviated overview of the Old Testament and the experiences of the Israelites as they tried to walk with God. If nothing else is learned, the Old Testament should convince us that the flesh and the law are weak, in that they are unable to keep a person in the will of God. No matter how much the people may have desired to please God and be obedient to Him, they were not able to do so. They needed help from outside of themselves to keep the law of God.

The Old Testament concludes with the promise of that help, the coming Messiah. When He and His Spirit came, they would write the law of God on the hearts of God's people, so that obedience to the law would become an inward desire of their new heart. There would come a new day, a new age in which God would actually dwell in His people and give them all the resources they would need to live faithfully with Him. The Messiah would come and bring new life to the people of God.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Deuteronomy 11:18
2. Deuteronomy 8:3

Answer these questions:

1. Why is it important for us today to learn about God's dealing with the nation of Israel?
2. What does it mean when we say that the Old Testament contains physical examples of spiritual truths?
3. What lesson does the Old Testament teach us concerning the ability of natural man to walk in the will of God?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 8 "AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE"

Lesson 4 "The New Testament"

In this lesson, we are going to look at the content of the New Testament, much as we did when we looked at the content of the Old Testament. We said then that the Old Testament is a picture of God's dealing with the nation of Israel. The New Testament is a picture of God's dealing with the Church. Some Bible teachers would want us to draw a very sharp distinction between the Old and New Testament and between God's dealing with Israel and His dealing with the Church. But again, we need to be careful that we do not draw too sharp a line here. While there are some important differences between the Old and New Testaments, the requirement for the blessing of God has always been the same. God has always based His blessings upon His people walking with Him by faith, whether in the Old or New Testament. Abraham was saved by faith just as much as we are in our day and time. The story of redemption is one story. While there may be a part one and a part two to the story, it is still one story.

There is a sense in which the Old Testament was a shadow of what was to come in the New Testament. When we move from the Old to New Testament, we move from shadow to substance. Or another way to say it would be to say that we move from illustration to reality. The New Testament ushers in the realities that the Old Testament pointed to and illustrated. The New Testament begins with the long awaited Savior that the Old Testament had promised and foreshadowed in countless ways. Even as far back as in the Garden of Eden, in Genesis 3:15, God made reference to the Savior Who would come and deliver His people. From the beginning to the end of the Bible, the story is united in purpose, intent, and direction.

So with this in mind, let's look at an overview of the New Testament. We will structure our overview a little differently than we did in the previous lesson. When we looked at the Old Testament, we structured the material chronologically. We looked at the events that took place from creation through the time of the return from captivity. In the New Testament we will structure our study by the themes or application of truths that it holds forth for our learning.

The New Testament begins in the Gospels with the appearance of the Savior. We are given a picture of this One who has come to save His people from their sin. We have in the Gospels a description of Jesus of Nazareth, the only begotten Son of God. We learn that His birth was supernatural. He was born of a virgin, so that He could be both fully God and fully man. We are shown how He came and lived out His Father's will perfectly in this world. He ministered in the power of God, performing miracles and revealing the person and work of God. The most important work He did, the most important revelation of the will of God was given to us as He laid down His life as the innocent Lamb of God to ransom His people from their sin. Then, because death and the grave could not hold Him, He rose from the dead, never again to be subject to sin or death. After 40 days He ascended into heaven, where He intercedes for His people before the throne of God.

One of the things that the Lord told His disciples before His death was that it would be better for them if He went away. The reason for that is shown clearly in the book of Acts, in the account of Pentecost. He had told His disciples that when He went to His Father, He would send His Spirit to dwell in them, and we see the fulfillment of that promise on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit came upon the disciples to empower them to know and do the will of God. From Pentecost onward, the New Testament is a picture of the Holy Spirit at work as He works through the Church to accomplish the will of God. Actually, there are two emphases or directions that are followed in the remainder of the New Testament, namely evangelism and growth in grace.

The book of Acts emphasizes the evangelistic outreach of the church and the working out of the Great Commission to go and preach the Gospel into every corner of the world. Evangelism is as central to the role of the church today as it was for the first century church in the book of Acts.

On the other hand, much of the New Testament is devoted to another role that the church has been given, and that is to help its members grow in the grace of God. Primarily it is the epistles that deal with this nurturing process. The epistles address themselves to correcting errors of doctrine, instruction in righteousness, encouragement in the face of trials and tribulation, opportunity to serve one another, and so on.

We have, in the New Testament, a picture of the same roles that we have in the church today, the worship of God, the evangelistic outreach to a lost world, and the nurture and edification of those who belong to the household of faith.

The New Testament ends with the book of Revelation, which gives us a picture of the church fully redeemed. In a more personal application, it shows us a picture of the life of a believer who has gone through the trials and tribulations of this world, having walked in faith and obedience with his Lord, and at last has come to rest in heaven, to live forever in the presence of his Lord and Savior.

Now, having said this, we need to go back over the same material and look at it from the perspective of an individual believer. As far as an individual and the process of his salvation is concerned, the Gospels depict for us both the way of salvation, as well as showing us what is involved in being saved from the penalty of sin. In other words, the Gospels deal with what it means to be justified. If you want to know what God has provided to save you from the penalty of your sins, Who your Savior is, the faith that you're to have, the Gospels will tell you about that. The Gospels are where you can meet the Savior and where you can learn what it means to trust in Him.

The epistles teach us what it means to be saved from the power of sin, in other words to be sanctified. The epistles deal with the struggles God's people have with the sin that remains in their lives after they come to faith. They show us how to put off the old and put on the new. Although all of the Bible speaks to each of these areas, perhaps the epistles, more so than anywhere else, deal with the matter of sanctification.

Finally, the book of Revelation shows us what it means to be saved in the final sense, that is from even the presence of sin. In other words, the book of Revelation shows us what is involved in being glorified. The final victory of salvation involves being delivered from our body of sin and death and being lifted out of this world of sin when we are taken to heaven, where there will be no more sin or suffering.

We can also go back to look at the New Testament from yet another perspective and view it from the eyes of the Church as a whole. If we did this when we looked at the Gospels, we would see that they picture for us our Head. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, and we are His body on earth. If we wanted to get a close up view of our Head, our Lord, we could look at the Gospels. They will reveal Him to us in detail.

Then, if we took the next two sections of the New Testament together, that is, the books of Acts through Jude, we would see a picture of the

Church militant. These books depict for us the Church in this world as it lives and moves and seeks to fulfill the Great Commission. It shows us the Church that still has fighting left to do, the church that is still facing persecution, that is still under opposition, the Church that is still incomplete. This section of the New Testament will show us something of what we can expect as the Church lives out the will of God.

Finally, the book of Revelation will show us the Church triumphant, the Church at rest, the Church victorious, the Church that has been lifted above all of the trials and tribulations of this world and has come to rest in the presence of God. The Church triumphant is the Church that no longer has to fight either outside opposition or internal conflicts. The Church triumphant is the final state of all those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

The purpose of looking at the New Testament from these various perspectives and seeing how its parts fit together, is to help us to understand more of what the Bible can teach us as we open our hearts to the Word of God. Then, when we read individual portions within these sections, we will have a better idea of how they relate to the whole of Scripture and be better able to understand their overall purpose and meaning, so that our knowledge of the things of God will be enriched.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Romans 16:26
2. Luke 1:1-4

Answer these questions:

1. What is the one great event that unites the Old and New Testaments together in one unified story?

2. How would you describe the relationship of the Old and New Testaments to each other?

3. How do you, as a believer, fit into the continuing history of the church as it is described, particularly in the book of Acts?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 8 "AN OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE"

Lesson 5 "Christ, the Central Focus"

We will wrap up this chapter's theme of an overview of the Bible by turning again to where we started in the first lesson, that is to say that the purpose of the Bible is to set before us the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible's purpose, to a large degree, is to show us who the Lord is, what He has done, and how we are to relate to Him. We can turn again to the passage from Luke 24:27 where the Lord revealed to His disciples on the road to Emmaus how the Old Testament spoke of Him from beginning to end. That will be something of the process we will go through as we look back at the Old Testament and examine some of the symbols and references to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will begin at the story of creation, and know that the eternal Christ had a part in the creation of the world. The Gospel of John tells us that, "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." (John 1:3)

The first real reference to the coming Lord, the coming Messiah, is found in Genesis 3:15. God, in dealing with Adam and Even after the fall, makes a promise by saying that there would come an offspring from the seed of the woman who would inflict upon the Serpent, that is Satan, a fatal blow, a blow that would bruise his head. The serpent would inflict upon the seed of the woman a nonfatal wound, a blow to the heel. This promise points to what took place at the cross where the Lord laid down His life as a ransom to redeem His people from the power of Satan, and to overthrow the works of Satan. What the Lord accomplished at the cross amounted to a fatal blow to Satan and the kingdom of darkness. Though the Lord was put to death on the cross, He was raised again from the grave. The wound that He received was nonfatal, while the blow that Satan suffered would prove to be fatal. Genesis 3:15 points to and promises this victory.

We also see something of a picture of the Lord in Genesis 7, and following, in the story of Noah and the ark. The ark was the provision that God made which would save from the flood, from His wrath, those who entered into it in faith. The ark would be the thing that would lift them up above the waters and carry them in safety. Jesus Christ is our

ark. He carries us above God's wrath against sin. Though Noah was himself a sinner like the rest of mankind, he was saved because he was in the ark. Though we too are sinners, we will be saved if we are in Christ. He will lift us up safely above the judgment of God.

We see another reference to Christ in the promised seed of Abraham. Isaac also represented a type of Christ who was born not by the power of the flesh but by the promise of God. We see yet another picture of the work of Christ in Isaac's being offered as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. Though Isaac was spared, Christ would not be spared, that we might be saved from our sins.

As we go on, we see in the story of the Exodus that Moses was also a type of Christ. He was one sent of God to redeem his people from bondage. The children of Israel were in bondage and cried to God to deliver them, and He sent Moses to take them from the land of bondage to a land where they would live in the promises of God. Their deliverance from Egypt required a supernatural parting of the Red Sea to let them flee the land of bondage, and certainly it is a supernatural deliverance that we need to escape from the bondage to sin. Christ is the One who parts the "Red Sea" in our experience, so that we might escape the land of darkness and enter into God's marvelous light. (1 Pet. 2:9)

Prior to their leaving Egypt, there was yet another illustration of the Lord and His work, in the story of the Passover found in Exodus 12. The Hebrews were told that if they were to escape the wrath of God that would be poured out upon the land of Egypt because of their refusal to heed God's word, they would need to slaughter an innocent lamb and put its blood on the doorposts of their home. As they remained in the home, under the blood, they would be saved from the angel of death. This too is a picture of how the blood of Christ, the true Passover Lamb of God, saves us and protects us from our just deserts.

As Israel wandered in the wilderness, after departing Egypt, God led them through several experiences where they would learn to trust Him to provide for them. One of their experiences was that they ran out of food. There was nothing to sustain them in the wilderness. God provided for them manna from heaven each day. And we know from John 6:31-35, that this was a picture of Christ who is the true bread of life, the true manna that came down from heaven. He is the food that feeds the spirit. "Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds forth from the mouth of God." (Mt. 4:4) Christ is that Word, the bread that sustains the people of God as they live in the world.

The Israelites also had the experience of running out of water, and God provided a rock for them. If they struck the rock, it would gush forth water. I Corinthians 10:4 tells us that the rock was Christ. The rock was a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the source of living water in a dry and thirsty land. We too can have this living, refreshing, life-giving water, as we also live in this dry and thirsty land.

As the children of Israel continued on, Moses led them to Mt. Sinai where they came face to face with God. Here they were given the Ten Commandments, and they began to learn something about God and His ways. Christ Jesus is the fulfillment of the law of God. If you wanted to see the law of God lived out in perfect action, you should look at Christ. He is the one who fulfills the law.

God also gave them instructions for building the tabernacle. The tabernacle was to be the place which symbolized God's dwelling in the midst of His people. The tabernacle is actually a picture of how a sinful man can come into the presence of a holy God, and the path that he needs to take to do so. This pathway began by the sinner bringing an innocent sacrifice which he would surrender to the priest who would sacrifice it upon the altar on the sinner's behalf. He would next go to the laver where he would be washed and cleansed. As the priest went on into the Holy Place, he would see the table of showbread and the golden candlesticks, which represent the light and life that comes from God's Word. He came next to the altar of incense, which represented the prayers and supplications of God's people. And finally, there was the veil, and on the other side, in the Holy of Holies, there was God.

This process, this journey that is pictured as how a sinner can come in repentance to God, is a picture of what Christ has done and what He has accomplished by His work on the cross. We know that the Gospels tell us that when Christ died on the cross the veil of the temple was torn in half from top to bottom (Mt. 27:51), thus representing that the way was opened for the sinner to come personally into the presence of God.

As we continue on in the Old Testament, we find in Leviticus the five major offerings or sacrifices that the people were called to offer to God. These too were a picture of what Christ did for us on the cross. The five offerings were needed to explain the different aspects of the one offering that Christ offered up on the cross.

We also have the establishment of the office of the high priest who would intercede for the people before God. Christ is the true high priest. He is our intercessor in heaven.

Numbers 21 contains the story of the brazen serpent that was lifted up on a pole at a time when the people had sinned against God, causing Him to send serpents to destroy them. But God also declared that anyone who was bitten by a serpent could look to the brazen serpent lifted up on the pole and be saved. John 3:14 tells us that this foreshadowed the cross upon which Christ was lifted up, so that anyone who looked to the cross in faith would be saved from the bite of sin and death.

We could also think of the cities of refuge in Deuteronomy 19, where a person who had accidentally killed another person could go and find safety and refuge from the avenger. Christ is our city of refuge, into which we can flee and find safety.

The wisdom literature pictures Christ as the mind of God, as the wisdom of God.

The prophets foretell Christ and His mission, especially Isaiah who reveals the suffering servant of God, as well as the triumphant King, both of which portray Christ.

Even with this brief, thumbnail sketch, we can get the idea that the Old Testament pictures for us, on almost every page, the person and work of Christ. We need this insight as we study the Old Testament. Don't just look at the history, or at what is on the surface, but look to see what the story has to say about Christ and His work. As you do this, the Old Testament will open up before your eyes as a wellspring of living water.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Matthew 5:17
2. John 5:39-46

Answer these questions:

1. If the Bible sets before you the person and work of Christ, what does that say about how you are to read the Bible?
2. Why is it important that we learn so much about Jesus Christ?
3. What have you learned from this week's study of an overview of the Bible that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 9

"HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE"

Lesson 1 "Why Study The Bible?"

Beginning with this chapter's topic, we will be moving into more practical themes on living out the Christian life. Not that what we have studied thus far has not been practical, but from here forward our lessons will have an emphasis of the "how to" kind. Up until now we have spent most of our time laying a solid foundation for our faith. Now it is time for us to build upon that foundation. It's time to move from faith to faithfulness.

In this lesson, we will begin the topic of how to study the Bible. Perhaps the most important thing you can do to grow in grace will be to study the Bible. We've spent quite a bit of time already talking about the importance of the Bible, what it is, and what it contains. Now it is time to look at how a person could go about studying the Bible. But before we do that, we need to look at the more basic question of why we should study the Bible.

At root, the main reason why you study the Bible ought to be because it is the desire of your heart. It isn't primarily because of duty or necessity but a privilege and blessing. It offers a way you can fellowship with the

Lord. It offers a way to receive the blessings of God. It offers a way to grow in grace and effectiveness in your service. So whatever reasons may be given to show how profitable it is to study the Bible, the primary reason should be to bring you face to face with the Lord. He will be the one, through His Spirit, to give you the desire and prompting to study His Word. You must be the one to do it.

Having said that, we can look at other reasons why we ought to study the Bible. The first reason is because we have been commanded to. One of the things that God commands you to do is to study the Bible. 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us, "Study to show yourself approved unto God." It then goes on to say that if we do, we will be "a workman that needs not to be ashamed." If God tells us to study His Word that ought to be reason enough. Yet, in this verse we are given a practical reason to study. Paul makes an analogy here, comparing a Bible student to a workman. A workman would be ashamed if what he built would not work or if it fell apart. We are workmen for the Lord. We are responsible for what we build in His service. For us not to be ashamed of the final product, when God puts it to the test, will require that we study to show ourselves approved. We need to prepare ourselves so that the Word of God can direct the paths that we follow. When we are finished building and stand before God, we will not need to be ashamed, for what has been built will stand triumphant to the glory of God.

Another reason to study the Bible is because it will increase your faith. If you study the Bible, your faith will grow. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." You might be tempted to think that faith increases as you go through different experiences, seeing God at work. And while that may be true, the Bible tells us that the primary way that faith increases is through hearing and receiving the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing, and I might add, by responding to, the Word of God. If you want more faith, you need more of the Word. It is as simple as that. If you want your faith to increase, spend more time in the Word. Spend more time in the presence of God, through His Word. You can't help but have more faith as you see more of God. He will draw it from you.

A third reason to study the Bible is that it will give you guidance. You

need to know how to discern God's will in various situations, and studying the Bible is what the Holy Spirit will use to direct you. The Bible will give you direction. Psalm 119:105 says, "The Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." In other words, the Bible will shed light on your way. It will illuminate the path you are to travel. It will point out the direction you are to go and the road to take. If you need God's guidance, and you do, you need to spend time in the Word. It will be a light unto your path.

Notice that this verse ties the lamp and light to your feet and path. Normally we would associate the light with our eyes, but here it is associated with your feet and path. The reason is that the light is not given merely for you to see the way but for you to walk in the way. God is not interested merely in you seeing which way to go but He wants you to actually walk out on the right path.

Another reason for studying the Bible is that it will be a means to your ongoing sanctification. John 17:17, a verse from the Lord's high priestly prayer says, "Sanctify them in the truth, your Word is truth." In His prayer request He reveals that the way we are sanctified is through the truth of God, through the Word of God. God is the One who sanctifies, but He will do it through the truth of His Word. You will never grow in sanctification unless you spend time in the Word. It will be the tool that the Lord will use to see that you become more and more sanctified.

Yet another reason to study the Bible can be found in 1 Peter, where it tells us that God's Word is the means by which a person is born again. 1 Peter 1:23 says, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God." Born again by the Word of God. The Word of God is the means whereby you can find the way of salvation. Eternal life comes through the Word, more specifically the Gospel, as it comes to life in you by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible also ought to be studied because it is the means that God can use to bring peace to your heart. Psalm 85:8 tells us that the Word of God will speak peace unto His people. The Word can actually bring peace to your heart in a time of turmoil and trouble. Peace is not the absence of trouble as much as it is the presence of the Lord. And what

the Word will do is bring you into the presence of the Lord. God will use

His word to bring peace in troubled times. You will need to study it. You will need to know it. You will need to have it stored up in your heart so that you can draw upon it in times of need, so it can produce the fruit of peace in your heart.

Likewise, the Word of God will also bring joy to the heart of the believer. John 15:11 says, "These words have I spoken to you that my joy might remain in you that your joy may be full." The Word of God, as it abides in you, can bring joy to your heart, independent of the circumstances you may find yourself in. The Word of God will bring joy to the heart that is stayed upon the Lord.

We find also that the Word of God, according to Romans 15:4, works patience, comfort, and hope in the life of a believer. This verse says that we, "through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." The Bible is alive. It is a living Word. As we feed upon it, as we open our hearts to it, God will use it to make us alive. He can use it to bring His joy, patience, comfort, hope, and even new life itself. It will increase our faith. It will give us guidance. It will sanctify us. The Word of God has the power to do all these things, and more.

It can also be an agent of cleansing to those who fall into sin. It will give assurance of eternal life to those who are covered by the blood of Christ. It can protect the believer from sin. It can make wise the simple. It can build up the downtrodden, make strong the weak. It can cause us to know the truth. All these things come through the Word. With this in mind, how can we not daily feed upon this Word and endeavor to hide it in our heart?

Why study the Bible? If you do, expectantly, humbly, and reverently, God will use it to change your life. It will do much more than give you new understanding and new insights into the ways of God. God will actually use it to transform you, to make you more like His Son. As you study God's Word, the old will pass away and all things will become new. You can expect to know Him and fellowship with Him in a wonderful way. The Word of God is the way that He has provided to lead us into

this knowledge and experience.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 2 Timothy 2:15
2. Acts 20:32

Answer these questions:

1. How can studying the Bible increase your faith?

2. How can studying the Bible bring peace and joy to your heart?

3. What is the difference between reading the Word to increase your knowledge, and reading it in faith?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 9 "HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE"

Lesson 2 "Biblical Examples of Bible Interpretation"

We begin this lesson by asking a question. “Where would be the best place for a person to learn how to interpret the Bible?” The answer to that question is that the best place to learn how to interpret the Bible is in the Bible itself.

We find in the New Testament examples of inspired interpretation of the Old Testament. In the New Testament we often find the inspired writers, Paul, for example, doing Bible study of the Old Testament. We can see how these biblical authors go about interpreting the Old Testament. We can look over Paul's shoulder, so to speak, and see how he interprets some of the Old Testament passages. Since the Scriptures are inspired, these interpretations of the Old Testament would also be inspired and thereby provide insight into how we can study the Bible. This lesson, therefore, will focus on biblical examples of Bible interpretation.

The first example for us to look at is in Galatians chapter 4, verses 21 through 31. In this section of Galatians Paul is referring to some passages from the book of Genesis, specifically from chapters 16 and 21. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is referring to these passages from Genesis and uses them to teach how Abraham walked by faith, and comparing that to walking under the law.

Paul uses the two offspring of Abraham that come from Hagar and Sarah to make an allegory about law and grace. As you may know, Abraham had a son, Ishmael, by Hagar. He also had a son, Isaac, by Sarah. The birth of Ishmael represented the works of the flesh, that which was the result of human effort. The birth of Isaac represented the works of faith, that which was the work of God's grace. Paul, in interpreting this portion of Genesis, said that these two children, and their mothers from

whom they came, were symbolic of the two covenants that God made with His people. Hagar represented the covenant of works, that is, the results of what man could do. Sarah represented the covenant of grace, that is, what God could do. Since this is somewhat involved, let's look at a portion of the passage from Galatians. Starting in verse 21, Paul says:

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia.

This is enough for us to see that, as Paul interprets the story of Hagar and Sarah from the book of Genesis, he sees spiritual truths that go beyond the surface of the story. He finds spiritual meaning to what is set forth in their experience. He sees that the physical events have spiritual significance and can be illustrative of spiritual truths.

What we can learn from this story is that one of the ways we are to interpret the Old Testament is to find spiritual meaning in the physical examples. Now you need to be careful. You don't want to create allegories where none exists. But there ought to be some spiritual significance to our interpretation of any passage of the Bible. None of the Bible is without spiritual significance.

In the New Testament we often find the Lord asking the Pharisees the question, "Have you not read ...?" He would go on to point out to them the spiritual significance of a verse that had completely escaped them. They knew the content of the Old Testament backward and forward, but they missed the spiritual significance of what was taught. As we grow in grace, we need to learn to interpret the Bible as Paul did, by recognizing the spiritual significance of what takes place.

Let's move on to another instance of inspired Bible interpretation. Galatians 3:16 says, "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to

his seed. It does not say, And to seeds, referring to many, but referring to one, And to your seed who is Christ.” What we need to see in this verse is that as Paul is interpreting the Old Testament, he does so even down to the fine points of language. Here he is pointing out that the word "seed" is in the singular form, not the plural. He points out to his readers that the passage refers to the seed of Abraham, not the seeds of Abraham. They had been interpreting this passage to apply to the children of Abraham and Paul wanted to point out that it primarily applied to the one seed of Abraham, the specific seed of Abraham, Jesus of Nazareth.

We too need to pay close attention to the details of the text, not just its overall meaning. To get the full meaning of a passage, you must pay attention to the fine points of the text. All of God's Word is important. It all has significance. None of it can be overlooked without tempting misunderstanding. That is why it is important actually to study the Bible, over and above merely reading it.

Let's look at another example of biblical interpretation that deals with a verse we looked at in the previous chapter. In Luke 24:27 where the Lord was on the road to Emmaus, He showed His disciples, beginning with Moses, what the Scriptures said of Him. We also looked at the verse from 1 Corinthians 10:4 which spoke of the rock in the wilderness from which the children of Israel got water. This verse tells us that the rock was Christ. Inspired interpretation shows us that the person who studies the Bible will find that all of the Bible speaks of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the center and focus of all that the Bible teaches. Our own Bible study, therefore, must also have Him and His work as its central focus.

Now let's turn to Revelation 1:20. In the preceding verses, we are given a picture or a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ as He is in heaven, in His glory. The description of the Lord contains imagery difficult to understand. The strange visions would certainly alert us to the possibility that what is being said about Him is written in symbolic language. Yet, we are not left in the dark or to our own resources to understand what is being taught. In verse 20 we have the Lord's own interpretation of these words and, of course, this would be the proper interpretation.

For example, in verse 20 the Lord tells us that the seven golden

lampstands represent the seven churches for which He has a message. His interpretation leads us to see that the Bible is not always to be interpreted exactly literally. Along this same line, we know too that the image of a sword coming out of the Lord's mouth is not to be taken literally, but it is symbolic of His words being the Word of God, able to pierce even to the heart.

While the Bible is always to be taken exactly as it is written, it doesn't mean it is always to be taken exactly literally. In some instances its words are symbolic. Sometimes it teaches the truth through symbolism. Certainly we find that to be the case in these examples, because we have been taught by the Lord Himself that this is true.

Therefore, when the Bible speaks in terms of symbols, we would be misled if we interpreted the symbolic passage literally. The Holy Spirit can show you when and how to interpret His Word. Again, don't misunderstand what I am saying. The Bible means exactly what it says. But we should be aware that sometimes the truths can be presented symbolically, as well as in straightforward literal fashion. This is especially true when dealing with great and glorious things such as heaven, which cannot be described in terms of the world because it is so foreign to the world.

The key is to interpret Bible passages in the genre in which they were written. Narratives are to be interpreted as narratives. Poetry is to be interpreted as poetry. Symbolism is to be interpreted as symbolism, etc.

We have been looking briefly at how the inspired writers were led by the Holy Spirit to interpret the Bible. If you want to be a good Bible interpreter yourself, pay attention to how the New Testament interprets the Old Testament. Pay attention to how biblical authors find meaning in the texts they interpret. Their example of Bible study will provide excellent insights for your Bible study as well.

It is the same Spirit that inspired these New Testament writers that lives in believers today. These writers were not such good Bible students because they were so smart. They could correctly understand the meaning of Scripture because the Spirit who inspired the words of the

Bible lived in them and illuminated its meaning to them. If you are in Christ, this same Spirit lives in you, and He can open your eyes and your mind to show you how to understand His Word. That's His purpose. Don't try to study God's Word solely in your own wisdom. Seek the Spirit's guidance, and you will be taught by one who knows the truth and is able to make it known to you.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 1 Thessalonians 2:13
2. 2 Timothy 3:17

Answer these questions:

1. How can paying attention to how New Testament writers interpreted the Old Testament help you learn how to study the Bible?

2. Are the Scriptures such that we are only to pay attention to the general points they make (like loving others), or should they be studied in detail? Explain.

3. Read Matthew 22:31-33 and comment on how the Lord interpreted the Old Testament passage, and how He applied it to the present.

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 9 "HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE"

Lesson 3 "Basic Principles of Bible Interpretation"

As we continue in our emphasis of how to study the Bible, we need to turn our attention to some basic principles of Bible interpretation. While it is only through the working of the Holy Spirit that one is able to correctly understand and apply God's Word, the believer still has the responsibility to study the Word and apply responsible principles of Bible study as he does so.

There are several basic guidelines that we can use as we go about studying the Bible. Perhaps the most fundamental reason to follow these principles is that they can help us avoid wrong interpretations of Scripture. They may not be able to give us the correct interpretation, but they are certainly an aid in keeping us from getting off track if we follow their guidance.

We will look at four of these basic principles in this lesson. The first principle is that the Bible, because it is the Word of God, possesses a unity in all of its parts so that there can be no internal contradictions. This can be a helpful principle to guide your Bible study. If you come up with an interpretation in one part of the Bible that seems to contradict what it says in another part, you've misunderstood something along the way. Now there are times that passages may appear to contradict each other when they really don't, so you will need to be careful. You will need to dig a little deeper to get the fuller meaning of the text. But what you need to see and make use of in this principle is that, if your interpretation of a certain passage directly contradicts a clear teaching in another passage, then you have violated a basic rule of Bible interpretation and will have to reexamine your understanding of the passages.

The second principle is similar to something we talked about in the

previous lesson. This principle states that the best interpreter, and, in fact, the final authority of any interpretation of a passage of Scripture, is Scripture itself. The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible. What will best illuminate in your heart and mind any one portion of the Bible will be the rest of the Bible. If you want to become a good Bible student, a good interpreter of the Bible, the best way to do so is to grow in knowledge of the whole Bible. The more you get to know the Word of God, the more you will be able to grasp the meaning of any individual portion. It is all tied together. The more you know of the Bible, the more you will find yourself seeing how it all ties together into one, unified story.

We also said, as a part of this principle, that the Bible is the final authority for testing any interpretation of Scripture. Since there is no authority higher than the Bible, nothing can be appealed to above Scripture to give authority to any interpretation of the Bible. If you want the last word on what the Bible teaches, the Bible is it. You must refer to Scripture to support or prove Scripture. The Scriptures are the final authority for any interpretation of the Bible.

The third principle of Bible interpretation is especially important for us to grasp in our day and time, as it will help avoid errors in explaining the Bible. The third principle is that the more obscure portions of Scripture must be interpreted in light of the clearer revelations of Scripture. Just think about that for a minute, and you will see how logical and proper this principle is. The more obscure portions have to be seen in light of the more clear portions.

Certainly there are some things in the Bible that are very clear. By virtue of the repetition of their teaching and the straight forwardness of the way the truths are stated, the meaning is very clear and understandable. But some of the things that the Bible says can be very obscure and difficult to understand. They may only be said one time and even then be said in wording that may be difficult to understand.

Therefore, when you try to understand an obscure portion of Scripture, you must interpret it in light of the clearer portions. In other words, don't interpret an obscure passage in such a way that it would challenge

or make it necessary to change the meaning of something that is clearly stated in another place in the Bible.

We can illustrate this truth by looking at 1 Corinthians 15:29. It mentions baptizing the dead. It is very obscure in its meaning. It is hard to know what it means to baptize the dead. Now, some groups, most notably the Mormons, have interpreted this verse in such a way that it contradicts clear teaching elsewhere in Scripture. The Bible is very clear in teaching that salvation comes by faith alone. Perhaps the clearest teaching in all of Scripture is that a person is saved by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, the Mormon faith has taken this obscure passage from 1 Corinthians and has built a major doctrine of their belief around it. They have interpreted this verse so that it negates the clear teaching of salvation by faith alone. They interpret this verse so that someone who has never had a saving relationship with God could be saved after his death by substituting another person to be baptized in his place after he had already died. That is clearly outside of what the Bible teaches. This is an example of using an obscure portion of the Bible in such a way that it actually denies that which is clear. It is not a wise thing to do. Always interpret the unclear in light of the clear. It will help to keep you from false and even harmful interpretations.

A lot of people do this same thing when they try to understand the book of Revelation. In interpreting the book, which is not easy to understand, they come up with ideas that contradict what is taught clearly in the rest of Scripture. They so want to be able to understand this book and to know the future, that they will hold onto a questionable interpretation to such a degree that they have to rearrange other truths to fit their understanding of the book of Revelation.

Finally, the last principle of Bible interpretation that we will take up today is that Scripture must be read and interpreted within its immediate context, as well as the broader context of all of Scripture. In other words, don't pull verses out of context. Perhaps you have heard people say that you can prove anything from the Bible. If you could take verses out of their context, without being responsible to examine them in their setting, that might be true. But when you want to understand the meaning of a verse, you can't isolate the verse from its surroundings. First of all, try to

get an idea of what the thrust of the passage is in which the verse is found. Then interpret the meaning of the verse in light of the thrust of the passage.

For example, Luke 14:26 would be a very strange verse indeed if you took it out of context. If you just read it in isolation from its context you would certainly think that it has to be wrong. In this verse the Lord is speaking and He says, "If any man comes to me and he does not hate his father and his mother and his wife and his children and his brothers and his sisters and even his own life he cannot be my disciple." If you isolated this verse from its context you would have to say that the requirement for being a disciple of the Lord is that you must hate your mother and father and just about everybody else for that matter. But you can see that this can not be what the verse means. You have to look at the context in which it is found. The context is talking about counting the costs of discipleship. It is seeking to show that discipleship demands such a commitment that our love for Christ has to be so singular, that in comparison, our relationship to others, even those we are closest to, takes second place. Certainly in the context of this verse, and in the overall context of the Bible, it is clearly taught that a follower of Christ is to love others, not only those they are closest to, but all men, even their enemies. This illustrates how easily one can fall into error if verses are taken out of context.

Finally, we need to say that Bible study is not something that is directed or conducted by rules and formulas. It is a matter of receiving inward instruction from an indwelling Teacher. Yet, there is also an aspect of Bible study that we are responsible for. We are responsible to deal honestly and properly with God's Word. The few principles outlined above cannot guarantee that you will always come up with the proper understanding of Scripture. But if you adhere to these few basic principles, they can keep you on the right track and help you become a good student of the Bible. God will bless you in your study as you use these common sense principles to guide your interpretation of His Word.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 1 Corinthians 2:9-14
2. John 10:35

Answer these questions:

1. Explain what it means when we say that the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture.
2. Why does a good grasp of the whole Bible help you understand any particular portion?
3. Why is it important to always interpret a passage within its context?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 9 "HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE"

Lesson 4 "Practical Hints for Bible Study"

In this lesson we will look at some practical steps and hints for you to follow to enhance your times of Bible study. If you had some time to sit down in the morning or evening to read the Bible, what would be a way you could approach this time to get the most out of it? Without trying to set up a formal structure or program, how would you go about studying the Bible?

The first thing you need to do is to approach the Word of God with reverence, humility, and expectation. In other words, don't just sit down and pick up the Bible in the same way that you would the evening newspaper. It is the Word of God that you are reading. You will be dealing with God Almighty. You will be handling the things of God. That will require that you come reverently, humbly, with a spirit ready to be taught. Don't come looking to find support for your own ideas, but open your heart to what God can teach you from His Word. Come expecting to hear a word from God.

Another important ingredient of personal Bible study would be the need to pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It is His Word. He guided the writing of it. He knows what it means. You want to know what it means. Now ask Him to show you. Of course you bring your own intellect to the process, but know that this is different than any other kind of study you have done before. You have an indwelling teacher. Let Him illuminate its meaning. That's His purpose, to take the things of Christ and show them to you.

A third thing you need to do is to commit yourself to walking out on any new understanding that you are shown. Before you even know what it is that the Bible may ask of you, commit yourself to walk out on it as soon as you are shown it to be God's will. Don't think you can wait and see what it is that God wants you to do and then decide if you will do it.

That is not letting the Lord be Lord. You are still being lord of your life. Commit yourself to walking out on any new insight you get before you even get it. Tell the Lord that whatever He lays on your heart to do you will do. All He needs to do is show you through His Word what He wants done. Now if you get the idea that you should do something drastic, share it with a more mature believer to make sure you have correctly understood God's leading.

If you don't have this kind of commitment, don't expect to be shown new things from the Word. You won't receive any new light until you make use of the light you already have. If you read the Bible yesterday and the Lord laid it on your heart that He wanted you to do something and you didn't do it, don't think that you can read the Bible today and expect that He would show you something new. You didn't do what He wanted you to do yesterday. Go and take care of that, and then you can expect that He would show you something new today. All this means is that God will call you to commit yourself to His Word. Make the commitment, and you can expect the Lord to shine new light on your path.

We have been talking thus far about things that you do before you begin to study in order to prepare your heart to receive God's Word. You don't need to do these things in a formal way, as much as they need to be descriptive of the attitude of your heart when you approach God's Word.

When you get down to actually reading a portion of the Bible, read the portion before you several times. How big the portion should be will be determined by several things: how much time you have, how hungry you are, the kind of study you are doing, etc. But whatever size portion you read, read it over a few times, making sure you have enough of the context to understand its setting. There certainly is a place for just reading through the Bible, but in this lesson we are talking now about studying the Bible. Sometimes you just read through and don't really stop to study, and there is nothing wrong with that. But you also need times when you study to get the deeper insights into the Word that are only unlocked to those who take the time to study. You need to let the Word sink into your heart and ponder what it means. You can't read it once or

twice and expect to get very much out of it. You need to stop and smell the roses.

Then the next thing that you need to do is to spend some time in prayerful meditation. Now that you have read the passage a few times and have begun to see what God is saying, meditate on the text. This is perhaps the most important step in the whole process because it is often in this time when new insights will come to light. It is in this time that the Lord will bring personal application to your heart. You are taught God's Word more than you learn it, and it is in this time of quietly meditating on the Word that the Holy Spirit will teach you. Don't read the Word and then just walk off and get involved in something else that takes your mind away from the Word.

As you are meditating on the Word you could ask yourself questions about the passage you have read. What truth is being taught? This is a question that will force you to think about the meaning of the text. What does the Word have to say to me and my situation? You could also ask, is there a command to obey? Is there an error I need to avoid? Is there a sin I need to forsake? Is there a promise I need to walk out on? These kinds of questions may be helpful to better understand the text. Then too, you could consult some Bible commentaries or other helpful Bible study aids. We will look at this aspect of Bible study in detail in the next lesson.

Don't fail to respond to the new insight that you receive. If you have found that there is a command to obey, obey it. If you have found that there is a sin to forsake, set about forsaking it. If there is a promise made, set about walking out on the promise. Don't fail to respond to your new insight.

One helpful way to keep up with these things is by keeping a notebook in which you record your new insights, the commitments you've made concerning them, and any item that you have come across that you want to come back to later for further study. Sometimes you can start going in a lot of different directions at once because what you read in one place will cause you to think about something else, and so you go over there and then that leads you somewhere else, and if you are not careful, you

will end up going a lot of places but not doing a very good job of studying the passage you originally wanted to understand. Having a notebook at hand and jotting down subjects to look into later can help keep you on track.

Something else that would be helpful is to share your new insights with someone else. If you have seen something new in God's Word, you would be blessed if you had someone with whom you could share this insight. For one thing, it would reinforce the truth in your own heart and mind. However, you would need to do this discerningly, especially if it was something that laid bare your heart. Sharing a new insight with a more mature believer would also make sure you have not misunderstood the meaning of the Scripture passage.

Finally, if you come across a passage that, after you have studied and meditated on it, you still do not understand its meaning, just set it aside without feeling like you have to understand it at this time. You don't have to understand everything, especially at first. You don't have to have a position on every issue. Certainly you do on the fundamental issues of the faith but not on all the other issues. If after your study you still are confused, just set it aside for now. If someone asks you what you believe or where you stand, tell them you don't know yet. God will bless you in this. Some of the things of the Lord require a maturity that will only come as you grow in the faith. Recognize that you may not be there yet, and reserve judgment on some issues until you are better prepared to receive them. Again you will be blessed to do so.

These are a few practical suggestions that you could use to help you study the Bible. Bible study doesn't have to follow a formal structure or procedure that you go through each time. But these are some practical steps that can help you on your way to get the most out of your times of study.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 1 Peter 2:2-3
2. James 1:21-25

Answer these questions:

1. How, and why, should you prepare your heart to do Bible study?

2. What commitment is necessary to the Word of God, and when should that commitment be made?

3. Why is meditation an important part of Bible study?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 9 "HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE"

Lesson 5 "Bible Study Aids"

We will conclude this chapter's study by talking about Bible study aids. Different aids are available to help you in your Bible study. There are a lot of helpful aids available, and there are many that are not so helpful. There are even some things that are outright dangerous, so you will need to exercise discernment as you use these aids

Let's begin by looking at the question of which Bible you should use. Perhaps you have gone to a bookstore and found that there are many different translations of the Bible available. Naturally the question arises, "Which Bible should I use?"

There are two basic ways that a modern Bible version can come into being. First, it can be a translation of the original language. This is what most versions are. They translate the words of the original language into equivalent words in our language. While the rules of language usage do not allow exact, word by word translations, for the most part translations translate as close as possible each word from one language to the other.

Another way a modern Bible version can come into being is called a paraphrase. It is not really a translation in the strict sense of the word but is more accurately described as a paraphrase. This means that the translator has taken the thought of each sentence and paragraph, as he understood it, and has rephrased the thought by putting it into modern language, without trying to have an equivalence between the words of the original language and his translation.

So, you can see that there is a difference between a translation and a paraphrase. Now the question is which is better? We might be tempted to say that translations are better, and for the most part they are. But not all translations are of equal quality, so all translations are not automatically better than any paraphrased version. The best advice about which

version of the Bible to use, is to use the one that you will read. No copy of the Bible, however faithful it is to the original languages, will do you a bit of good if you don't read it or if you can't understand it. On the other hand, most of the standard versions that are available can bless you if you read them and open your heart to what they say. While there are differences, the key thing is to get one that you can understand. Then as you grow and begin to do more Bible study, you might want to look at a couple of different versions. After gaining some experience with them you may prefer one over the others. But for now find one that you can understand and use it. If you want a recommendation, the English Standard Version should suit you well.

Translations rather than paraphrases would probably be better for any in depth Bible study. Paraphrases may be too loose in the translation from the original. But don't throw out your Living Bible or some other paraphrased version that you may have. Paraphrases can be good and may give you a new sense of what is being said or may give you some new insights as it words things a little differently.

Often the issue of which Bible to use revolves around the King James Version of the Bible. It has been in use for 350 years, and there are those who take a very strong stand in saying that it is the only faithful one to use. They would say that all modern translations are corruptions. That is not true.

One difficulty with the King James Version is that those who have not been raised in the church and are not familiar with King James English have difficulty with its more archaic language. Someone who is not accustomed to the King James would be better off using a modern translation, like the New American Standard or the English Standard Version.

Other than the Bible itself, there are many aids that can be helpful in your study. Perhaps the most useful aid is a concordance. A concordance is somewhat like an index or a word list of the Bible. A complete concordance takes every word in the Bible and lists them alphabetically and shows everywhere that word occurs. For example, if you wanted to study the word "heaven," you would look it up as you might when using a

dictionary. Under the word "heaven" the concordance would list every place that word is found in the Bible. It would give you the verse number and maybe four to six words of the context where the verse is found.

The real value of a concordance is in studying the meaning of the words of the Bible. Before we go any farther, you should understand that you don't have to be a Bible scholar to do what we are talking about. You don't have to have gone to a Bible college or seminary. Anyone could do this kind of study profitably if they would try. Let's say you are studying a passage and come across a word that you would like to better understand. Let's say you are reading in Ephesians chapter two and come across verse eight where it says, "By grace are you saved through faith," and you don't really know what the Bible means by "grace." One good way to get a better understanding of the meaning of grace is to look it up in the concordance and then go to the passages where the word is used, and, as you study them, you will get some excellent insights into its meaning.

There are two major complete concordances on the market today. One is Strong's Concordance, and the other is Young's Concordance, both named after their compiler. There are also many abridged versions for sale, and in fact, many Bibles have a very abridged concordance in the back, but these are quite incomplete. If you want to do serious Bible study, you should purchase one of the complete concordances. They are reasonably priced for all the good information they contain.

Another thing that will be helpful is a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia. These are just what the names imply. You can look up people, places, things, words, etc, and it will define them and give, perhaps, a little history of the word's usage in the Bible. This can be very informative. If you were studying about Joshua, for example, you could find a lot of good information about who he is and what he did in a Bible dictionary. One well known such dictionary is published by Zondervan's. They have either a one volume dictionary or a several volume encyclopedia. Either or both of these will be helpful.

Then there are also available commentaries on the books of the Bible. For example, if you were studying the Gospel of John you would find

that many, many commentaries have been written for this book. They are written by Bible scholars or teachers to interpret the meaning of the texts of the Bible and tell you what they understand them to mean. As you can see, these books would only be as good as the people who wrote them. There is a vast difference in the quality of commentaries. Some are excellent and give wonderful insights into the meaning of Scripture. Some are just terrible. They are not only wrong; they can be outlandish. You really need to use a lot of discernment when you consult commentaries. You can't believe everything you read.

I would recommend, especially if you are a new believer, that you not indiscriminately go to a bookstore and buy a commentary. Rather, go to someone you know to be a mature believer, one who is himself a student of the Bible, and ask him to recommend a good commentary. If you are looking for a commentary on the entire Bible (some of them come that way, others on only single books of the Bible), one that has stood the test of time is Matthew Henry's Commentary. It is available in a one volume condensed version or a five volume complete commentary. Although it is old, written a few hundred years ago, and some of the language is a little dated, there is really nothing else available as good as Matthew Henry in getting to the significance of the text for personal application.

While Bible study aids can be helpful as you study the Bible, as their names imply, you have to be the one to do the Bible study before they can aid you. The important thing with Bible study aids is that you do the study and let them aid you in that effort, rather than reading the aids in place of studying the Bible.

Finally, we need to take exception to what some church people think, and that is that the average person can't really do Bible study. That is just not true. You can do Bible study. You ought to do Bible study. The Spirit will open your eyes to new levels of understanding and deeper experiences of faith as you study and receive God's Word.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 2 Peter 1:5-11
2. Psalm 119:130

Answer these questions:

1. What is one important consideration in selecting which version of the Bible to use? Explain.

2. Why is discernment needed in consulting Bible commentaries?

3. What have you learned from this week's study of how to study the Bible that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 10

"HOW TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE"

Lesson 1 "What Is Prayer?"

In this chapter we are going to take up the topic of how to have an effective prayer life. We said in the previous chapter that our studies were going to be of a more practical nature from here on out. That certainly is the intent of this week's study on learning how to pray.

Prayer is something that every believer recognizes is a source of strength and power. Yet, how many of us really know the power of prayer? Perhaps one of the reasons is that we really don't know how to pray. In this lesson we hope to share some insights into the meaning and practice of prayer that will help you get started on the road to effective prayer, so that you will find God's will being accomplished in your life and in the lives of those around you, as a result of prayer.

What is prayer? Before we begin to answer this question, we need to say that prayer assumes certain things to be true. One thing that prayer assumes is that there is a God in heaven who hears our prayers. We also must have reason to believe that He will answer our prayers. Prayer involves holding before God certain burdens and requests, with a

reasonable expectation, if they meet certain criteria, that God will answer them in the affirmative. So, first of all, prayer assumes that God hears and answers prayer. If there is no reasonable expectation of this, there is no reason to pray.

Prayer also assumes that God is omniscient, that He knows all things. This must be true if He is to hear our prayers and knows our hearts. Prayer also assumes that God is omnipotent, that He has the power to bring about any change that is according to His will. Furthermore, prayer assumes that God is merciful, that He won't just give us what we deserve. Prayer also assumes that God is gracious, that He wants to do for us and give us that which we do not deserve. By thinking along these lines you are reminded that when you pray you are dealing with God. Your prayers are not one sided. Your prayers are not just wishes sent off to some lucky star. They are directed to the living God. Therefore, your concept and understanding of God will determine a great deal of what your prayer life will be like. If you want to have an effective prayer life you need a full and proper view of God as the basis on which you approach Him in prayer. You cannot be strong in prayer if you do not have a knowledge of a strong God.

So then, what is prayer? Prayer is a natural expression of our relationship with God. Prayer is something that is natural to the redeemed life. Prayer ought to be as natural to the spiritual life as breathing is to the physical life. Prayer ought to be so natural that it takes place as naturally as breathing. While it is true that we have to learn to pray and that will involve some struggle, prayer itself, or at least the desire to pray, is a natural part of a believer's life in the Lord. Prayer is also like breathing in that it maintains our spiritual life just as breathing does our physical life. Prayer is essential to the health of the Christian life. Without prayer we have no real relationship with God. Without prayer we have no real communion with Him. Without prayer we have no real communication with Him. God speaks to us through His Word and Spirit, and we speak to Him in prayer, also through His Spirit.

We could also say that prayer establishes the proper relationship between God and man. In other words, when we come to pray, we acknowledge that we are dependent upon God. Prayer acknowledges that God is God

and that we are His creatures. Prayer puts us in the right relationship with God. It humbles us before Him. It puts us in the position of relying on Him to undertake for us. It acknowledges our weakness and acknowledges His honor, glory, and strength.

Another aspect of prayer is that it is the source of God's power in the life of a believer. Prayer is the appointed means of spiritual power in the life of God's children. Prayer is the way that God's power is brought to bear upon our lives. It is the way that things that we do not naturally have the power to affect through our own strength can be affected by God's power and strength. It is prayer that will change things. We don't have all that much power when it comes to influencing others, let alone ourselves. There are many things in our own lives that will be in need of change but, in ourselves, we are without the power to make it happen. However, prayer can bring about change through the power of God.

Prayer can also bring God's power to deal with our surroundings in a way that we never could. We could, for example, pray for another person, someone, perhaps, whom we have had no influence over or perhaps someone whom we have no access to at all. But prayer can bring the power of God to bear on that person's life, also.

Another way to say this is that prayer can release us from our own personal limitations. We can only be in one place at a time. We only have limited power. We only have limited wisdom. But prayer can transcend these limitations. We could be sitting in our homes and praying for a mission work in China. As we hold that work and the people who are involved in it before the Lord, He could honor our prayers and work His will in that mission field in China. Prayer transcends our human limitations. It transcends our human strengths. It transcends our human wisdom. There can be no barriers erected that can keep prayer out.

It is not according to our power that the work of God is done. It is not according to our wisdom that God's Kingdom is built. It is not according to our might that people are reached and changed by the Gospel. It is according to our faith that we receive answers to our prayers. Faith is exercised through prayer. It brings the power of God to

bear upon the situation for which prayer is being offered.

However, prayer is not to be viewed as a magical hocus-pocus that we can use to bring about our will. Prayer is God's appointed means to involve His people in His work and to show forth His power and glory. When we pray, we are not telling God what to do and how to do it. We are holding before Him our burdens and desires and asking Him to work out His will in the people and circumstances around us.

Finally, we need to remember that prayer is an exercise of faith. However, it is crucial for us to understand that the faith we are to have is a faith in God and His promises, not in the petitions that we make. That needs to be said again. Our faith is to be placed in God and His promises, not in our petitions. For example, if there is a financial need and we ask the Lord to supply that need, our faith ought to be in the Lord and in His gracious provisions, not that the financial need will be met in the way we might have had in mind. There is a difference. The Lord may supply our need in any number of ways, other than giving us the money we might have expected. He may not provide us the money. He may take the need away. He may want us to go through the experience of being without so that we would learn to more fully lean on Him. Our confidence and our faith must be in God, not in what we are asking for. God is all wise and all loving; therefore we want our petitions to be left to Him and His wisdom not be granted according to our own imperfect understanding.

Actually, what we ought to be doing in prayer is seeking God's will and then praying for that. How would we know what God is going to do or is willing to do? How would we know what we should pray for, and be confident that God would do it? Will He do anything that we ask Him to do? Is He going to give us anything that we think we would like to have? No! Well then, what will He do? He is going to do His will. The one thing that we can be certain that God is going to do is His will. Prayer is very much a matter of seeking the Lord's will and then asking Him to do it. Those prayers will not go unanswered. It is as simple as that. Now how do we know what the Lord's will is? For one thing we know that His promises are certainly a part of His will. If you know a promise from God you know something that He wants to do for you.

You could ask Him to fulfill that promise in your life. You could then have a certainty that God would give you what He has promised if you are asking and understanding it aright.

The point is that our prayer life ought to be more oriented to seeking God's will than our own. We ought to seek God's face when we come to pray. We are seeking His will to come to pass, more than we are any particular desire of our own heart. Now no doubt we are to hold our desires before the Lord, and He is often gracious to grant them, but our faith must be in Him, not in getting the desires of our heart. What we really want when we approach God is to have Him work out His perfect will in every area that we, or others for whom we pray, are involved in. Therefore, our prayers, while making our desires known, should focus mostly on seeing His will done. His perfect will is perfect blessing indeed. There is nothing in our own will that we could request that would be as good as God working His will in and through us.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. John 9:31
2. James 5:16

Answer these questions:

1. How is your prayer life tied to your understanding of the nature of God?
2. How does prayer overcome your personal limitations?
3. In what do you place your faith when you pray? Explain.

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 10 "HOW TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE"

Lesson 2 "Basic Principles of Prayer"

Our second lesson on the topic of “How to have an effective prayer life” will involve looking at a few basic principles of prayer. There are certain guidelines, certain basic principles that we can understand and use so that our prayer life will be more effective.

The first one is very basic. One of the reasons we don't have answered prayer is that we don't pray. That sounds so simple that we might dismiss it. But the truth is, as stated in James 4:2, "You have not because you ask not." One of the reasons we may not have power in prayer is because we may not really ask God to do anything. We might not stand on a promise. We might not hold our desires before God because we think they are selfish. We might not trust God to do something. God wants to give. He is gracious. But we need to ask. It's in the asking that our faith is increased. It is in the asking that we are built up and our trust in God is increased.

Another way to say this is that prayer gives God a basis on which He can act. Now, He doesn't need us or our prayers before He can do anything. He is a sovereign God. Nonetheless, prayer does give God a basis on which He can undertake to do something that we have asked. God does not normally force His way into a person's life and begin to rearrange and reorder it. As much as God wants to do, you need to call upon Him. You need to exercise faith through prayer in order to have the blessings of God come to bear upon your life.

It has been said that nothing is done apart from prayer. There is a lot of truth in that statement. When a person is saved, there probably has been someone praying for him. When a person stands strong in the midst of trial and tribulation, someone probably has been praying for him. When a person's heart has been moved and has been changed, someone probably has been praying for him. We know that God is sovereign. We

know that God predestines whatsoever comes to pass. But we also know that God has decreed to work through prayer. God has ordained that it is through prayer that His power is manifested in the lives of His people.

To say this another way, if the church won't pray, God won't act. There is a direct correlation between prayer and results. The church that is serious about prayer, the church that takes hold of God in prayer, will see more of God's grace in its midst than a church that doesn't pray. It doesn't matter how much a church might stand strong in the doctrines of the faith, if the church won't pray, God won't act. The church that will be strong, the church that will be effective in its ministry, the church that will see people won to the Lord, will be the church that prays. You can count on it. God acts in response to prayer. God undertakes in response to faith. If you want answered prayer, you must pray.

The second principle is that prayer must be based upon the promises of God. Let me say that again. Prayer must be based upon the promises of God. You can't just come up with your own ideas and expect God to grant them like your own personal genie. Now, there is a place to hold your personal desires before God, and if we do, God is often gracious to grant them. However, we need to make a distinction between requests and prayers. Those things that are based on our desires, those things that arise in our own hearts and minds, are requests. God wants to hear them. He has told us to make our requests known to Him. (Phil. 4:6) But God hasn't promised to grant every one of our requests or desires. God is gracious and will grant many of the things we ask Him to do. It is still true that "You have not because you ask not." But if you don't have a promise from God, you have no basis for assurance that God will grant your request.

You can, however, have an assurance of answered prayer if it is based upon a promise of God. Let's try to illustrate the difference between a request based on a personal desire and a prayer based on a promise from God's Word. For example, let's say that a believer is sick and wants to be healed and he holds that desire before the Lord. Even though it is a valid need, the truth is that he really doesn't have any basis for assurance that God will grant him healing. He has reason to hope because he knows God is gracious and kind, but he can't have assurance of his prayer being

answered based only upon it being his desire.

Now there are certain promises that God has made that we can take hold of and have unwavering assurance that He will grant the promise in His time. For example, one of the promises God has made is that He will not allow His Word to return to Him void. (Is. 55:11) Based upon that promise, a believer can have the assurance that every time he holds forth God's Word, with faith that God will not let it fall to the ground empty, it will accomplish what God has purposed for it. It may not be in the way that he was expecting. It might be to the end of condemnation rather than blessing, but it will accomplish God's purposes.

To the extent that we know the promises and ask for them, believing that we have what we ask, they will be ours. In this sense, all prayers are granted if they are based on what God has already promised to do. Yet, without asking, even though He has promised, we won't receive the blessing.

There are hundreds of promises in the Scriptures. Those are the things that God will do. We know they are His will and we can be assured that they will be granted to those who come asking in faith, without wavering. Base your prayers upon the promises. Most of our prayers are probably based on our desires rather than God's promises. Most of the prayers we pray seem to arise more out of personal desire than they do from what God has promised to do. There is nothing wrong with those kinds of prayers. However, we ought to hold up those things that He has promised and see if we won't find more answered prayers.

For one thing, God has told us to pray to the Lord of the harvest that He might send forth laborers into the harvest. This is something that He has promised to do if we ask. We could take hold of that promise and pray and it would be answered. We know that God will answer that prayer. It may not be answered in the time or the way that we expect, but it will be answered.

Maybe the best example of the difference between these two kinds of prayer is in the Lord's own prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane where He was praying before going to the cross. He said, "If it be possible, let

this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." (Matt. 26:39) His request was "Let this cup pass from me." If it was possible, His desire was not to have to experience the awful separation from His Father that would take place as He bore our sins on the cross. That was His desire. That was His request. However, His prayer was that God's will, not His, be done. The request to avoid the cross was not answered, the prayer for God's will to be done was answered. In like manner, we ought to hold our requests before God, but always wanting God's will to be done.

The third basic principle of prayer for us to look at is that prayer has a cost to it. It will cost you something to pray. We not talking here about the cost in time and energy it takes to pray, that is obvious, but the cost we are referring to is the willingness that is necessary on our part to see the prayer answered. If you pray for something to take place, you need to have a willingness on your part to invest as the Lord might ask of you, to see that prayer answered. Let's say that you are praying for a family member with financial needs. How much are you willing to see your prayer answered? Do you really want to see them blessed? Do you really want their need to be met? What are you willing to invest to see it answered? Are you willing to be used of the Lord to give them what He might lay on your heart? If you are not, don't think that your prayer will be very effective. Now don't misunderstand, you should only do if the Lord leads you to do. The point is that you have to be willing to be used of the Lord, to see your prayer answered. You must be willing to invest in your prayers if God so leads.

Let's illustrate this principle with another example. Let's say you are praying for someone to be saved. Are you willing to go share the Gospel with them? If you are praying for the lost in your community, are you willing to let the Lord lead you in being used to see people won to the Lord? Without this kind of heart behind your prayers, we can't expect to see many answers. If you are praying for someone who is lonely, are you willing to spend time with them? If you are praying for someone who is sick, are you willing stand with them during their sickness? It is the heart that is willing to invest that will see answers to prayer. The reason we are making this point is that we are called to become Christ-like, and this is the kind of heart that Christ has. He was willing to take our sins upon

Himself so that we could go free. He would pay the price for us to be blessed. We need to be motivated by that same heart as well. We need to be willing to pay the price to see others blessed. The Lord may well test you from time to time to see how earnest you are in your prayers, for it is the "earnest prayers of a righteous man that avails much." (James 5:16)

Make yourself and your resources available to the Lord to see His work done. Be willing to be used of the Lord in your prayers being answered. While God can intervene miraculously and supply every need from heaven, He will normally supply through others. Are you willing to be one He could use?

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Matthew 7:7-11
2. John 16:23

Answer these questions:

1. Why do you have to ask, and trust, God to do what He has already promised?

2. What is the difference between prayer based on desire and prayer based on a promise, and is there any difference in the likelihood of their being granted?

3. How can prayer be costly?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 10 "HOW TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE"

Lesson 3 "How to Pray"

In this lesson we are going to look specifically at how to pray, how to go about having a time of prayer. If you had some time this morning or this evening to pray, what would be a faithful process that you could go through to have an effective time of prayer?

As we begin to think about this, we need to understand that prayer is something that is learned. Prayer is something that you are taught. It must be learned. Perhaps you have been around others who seem to be able to pray very eloquently, always knowing just the right words to say, and you seem hardly able to get out the simplest request. It might be tempting to think that the other person has something that you will never have. But you need to understand that effective prayer can be learned. The disciples' one request of the Lord was to teach them how to pray. (Luke 11:1) You will grow in your ability to express your heart and mind in prayer as you grow in your relationship with God and as you continue to learn how to pray.

In thinking about starting a time of prayer, we need to answer the question of who it is that we are to pray to. You hear some people pray to God, others to Jesus, and others pray to the Holy Spirit. Is there a certain way you are supposed to pray? Without wanting to set up any hard and fast rules, we would normally make our prayers to the Father. That is part of His role. He is our Heavenly Father. He is the One who provides for our needs. We are to call upon Him to supply our needs. We normally pray to the Father. But, we pray in the name of the Son, in the name of Jesus. That doesn't simply mean to tack on to the end of your prayer, "in Christ's name we pray." What it means to pray in Christ's name is that our prayers are to be made through the person and work of Christ. The reason God is going to answer your prayers is because you belong to His Son.

Therefore, make your prayer to the Father in the name of the Son, but make your prayer through the Holy Spirit, through His wisdom, through His power, and through His guidance. He will lead you. The Bible tells us that we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit will guide us in our prayers and lift them up before the Father, translating our feeble requests into acceptable prayers. (Rom. 8:26)

We need not get overly technical about this matter. You can count yourself just praying to God. However, normally you would want to pray to the Father. You would want it to be a part of your witness that it is through your relationship with Christ that you approach the throne of God. And it is the Holy Spirit who is empowering and guiding your prayer.

This does not mean we can't make our prayers to the Son or to the Holy Spirit. It would not be wrong. They are God. However, in the way God has established things our prayers are normally made to our Heavenly Father.

That brings us to the question of what to pray. We could spend a long time here, but we need to briefly look at this subject now and then come back and pick it up in more detail in the next lesson. Basically, you should hold before God, at least as a starting point, whatever is on your heart. If you have a burden, hold it before the Lord. If you have a desire, hold it before the Lord. If you see a need in your life or in the life of someone around you, hold it before the Lord. Anything, everything ought to be a matter of prayer. There is nothing too small to pray about. You are going about it wrong if you think something is too small to concern God. If it is sufficient to concern you, it concerns your Father in heaven. He doesn't want to hear only about the crises in your life. He wants to be a part of your everyday living. He is God of both the great and the small. If He numbers the hairs of your head, He is concerned about everything that affects you.

Even knowing that God is interested in every part of our lives, we still need to get some idea of how to pray. One very good way to learn how to pray is found in the Bible, especially in the book of Psalms. The

Psalms can help you learn how to pray. They can show you how to take the feelings and needs that you have in your heart and express them in prayer. We are not suggesting that you make it a prayer book, but it is a good place to learn how to express your heart before God. The Psalms will teach you how, when your heart is full of joy and gladness, to express that to the Lord. When your heart is burdened and heavy with grief, they will show you how to express that to the Lord. When you need to pray for forgiveness and confess a sin, the book of Psalms has in it what you need to see how to do that as well. If you want to learn how to pray, you should spend some time in the Psalms and let them show you how to express your heart to God.

As you think about what to pray, recognize that you have some living to do today. You have some living to do tomorrow. You have certain things that you will face; some you don't know what they will be, and that's certainly reason to pray; some you do know what they will be, and that's also good reason to pray. When you begin a new day, you need to hold it before the Lord. You need to review what you will be doing and turn it over to the Lord. That will be a good start on what to pray right there.

Now we need to say a word or two about actually getting started in prayer. We are talking about times of quiet prayer now. We are not talking about the prayer in which we are engaged throughout the day as we walk with the Lord. These suggestions are more appropriate for times of quiet prayer when you shut out everything else from your life and deal only with God. Let's say you have a half hour you want to use to pray. How do you go about using your time effectively? First of all, find such a quiet time. You may have to work at it and even set some other things aside or be willing to let some other things go undone. Prayer has to have a high priority in your life.

It is also helpful to find a quiet place to pray, somewhere that will become associated with you for prayer. As you start, it is helpful to spend a minute or two in reading the Bible or some other devotional material to get your heart set on the things of the Lord. Again, the Psalms would be a good place to turn. Then it would be a good thing to spend a few minutes just being still before the Lord. The Bible tells us to

"be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) This is actually a time of worship, acknowledging the glory and majesty of the God into whose presence you are humbly entering.

Sometimes we rush into prayer too quickly. We only have a few minutes, so we are in a hurry and rush into prayer without really opening up that channel between God and ourselves. Now, we know that He hears even those prayers, but we may not find in them the encouragement that we could have because we have not really secured God's presence. When you begin your prayer time, get your heart and mind centered on God so that you have the assurance that He is hearing your prayer. Set your heart on the graciousness of God and His desire to see His people blessed. Know that you are in God's presence, and that He is hearing what you are saying. Be still and seek the Lord's face, and your prayers will have more unction and power. You will also find that you have more confidence in God and His answers to your prayers.

Your desire should also be to worship God. He is a great and holy God that you are addressing. Take time to think of and praise Him for His glory and grace. Nothing can put you in a better mindset for prayer than to praise God for who He is and what He does.

Then, as far as the actual praying goes, make it specific. If you have a specific desire, make your petition specific. Don't just say, "God bless me and my family and the church." Be specific. How do you want Him to bless you? Do you need something? Then ask for it specifically. Has He blessed you with something? Then thank Him specifically. Do you see a specific need? Then ask Him specifically to meet that need.

General prayers are not as good as specific prayers. For one thing, you can never know if God has answered your prayers if they are too general. If you didn't ask for anything specific, you would not be able to thank Him or even acknowledge that He did anything at all. Be specific.

It may also be helpful for you to keep a prayer list. It can help you in keeping your mind from wandering. It will also give you an opportunity to be specific in prayer and also give you a place to record the answers when they come. It will be a great encouragement to see how the Lord has answered your prayers. If you don't keep track, you will forget. A prayer list will also remind you to continue to pray for those needs which

have not been answered after the first few requests.

Don't worry about having the correct form or the right words to say when you pray. Just express what is on your heart the best way that you can. Don't be concerned about everything being in proper form. God is much more interested in your heart than in your form.

Finally, when you have finished your prayers, take time again to be still before the Lord. It may be that He would have something to lay on your heart. Don't rush off and miss hearing a word from the Lord.

These are a few simple things that you could do to establish a time of prayer. As you take up the challenge of prayer, honoring God and His Word, you can expect God to hear and answer your prayers. You can expect to find new power in your life as you lay hold of God's mercy and grace.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Hebrews 4:16
2. Romans 8:26

Answer these questions:

1. How do you learn how to pray?
2. What should be the subjects of your prayer requests?
3. How can you prepare your heart to pray?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 10 "HOW TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE"

Lesson 4 "What to Pray"

As we continue in our study of how to have an effective prayer life, we will devote this lesson to thinking further about what it is for which we are to pray. What kind of prayers are we to offer to the Lord? If we are not careful, we can get stuck on just certain kinds of prayer. For example, the only kind of prayer that we might offer is a prayer petition. God wants to hear your petitions, but there is more to prayer than just laying your petitions before God. In this lesson we will review several different kinds of prayers that ought to regularly be a part of our prayer life. Every time you pray, you don't have to include each one of these items, but you shouldn't go too long without having each of them as a part of your prayer life. If you neglect any of these areas of prayer, you will not have an effective prayer life.

The first kind of prayer we need to mention is a prayer of adoration and praise. These ought to be a part of your prayer life. Praise and adoration are an acknowledgement of who God is, not so much for what He does. Praise is a normal response to recognizing who God is, to acknowledge His greatness and goodness. It ought to be on your heart to praise God for who He is, even apart from what He does, even apart from His blessings. He is God. He is awesome. He is almighty. He is holy. You should open your heart and mind to these things and praise God. That's what the angels of heaven do, and that is what we should do as well. Be careful to include praise in your dealing with the Lord.

The second kind of prayer are prayers of thanksgiving. Part of your prayer life should express thanksgiving to the Lord. Thank Him for what He does, for His blessings and all that He has done for you. If you can't be thankful for what He does for you today, you should not expect to get very much tomorrow. An example of this dynamic is the story of the Lord healing the ten lepers found in Luke 17:11-19. Nine of the ten went on their way without returning to thank Him. From all we know, that

was the only blessing they ever received from the Lord. But the tenth leper returned to thank Him, and in the returning and thanksgiving he opened his heart to more blessing.

Be sensitive to what the Lord is doing in your life, and thank Him for it. There is so much that you have to be thankful for. Recognize that it has come from the hand of God, and be thankful. It doesn't matter if you have worked for it and have earned it; the Lord is the one who has let you have it, and you should be thankful. He is the One who has given you the health to work and the opportunity to work. Be thankful. Develop a spirit of thanksgiving, and you will be blessed, not only in the attitude of your heart but also in seeing how your heart is open to receive so much more from the Lord.

Thirdly, part of your prayer life ought to involve confession of sin. We say that we confess our sins, and it is true. We acknowledge that we have sinned. We are specific about what it is we have done. But as we have said before, what you really need to confess and repent of is more yourself than what you have done. In other words, your confession will mostly involve who you are more than what you have done. Let's say that you have spoken unkindly against someone and have hurt them. You need to confess that specific act, but what you really need to confess is that you have a heart that caused you to be unkind. Your heart wasn't right, or you wouldn't have done it. Your heart needs to be changed and that is what you confess.

The reason it is important to confess what you are, not just what you did, is that confessing your actions only deals with the past, with something that is done and over with and cannot be changed. But when you confess that you have a heart that could be unkind, or that you have a heart that could cheat, or that you have a heart that could lie, or that you have a heart that could steal, or that you have a heart that could be unloving, this kind of confession deals with today and with something that can be changed. It gives God a chance to deal with your heart which is the real source of the sin in the first place.

A good example of this kind of prayer is found in Psalm 51. This records for us David's prayer of confession after his sin in the matter of

Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite. He doesn't dwell very much on what he has done; rather he wants God to change his heart. He repents of the evilness of his heart and prays that God would give him a clean heart. That is an effective prayer.

The fourth kind of prayer we need to mention is the kind we are most familiar with and it is the category that probably most of our prayers fall under, prayers of petition. Petition is asking God to do something, to grant us our needs and desires. God wants to hear these prayers. If you believe you need something from God, or even if you desire something, God would like you to share it with Him. God wants to help you. He really does. You need to ask.

It is important to realize that you shouldn't try to sort out your desires into what might be godly and what might not be, and then to hold before the Lord only those things that you think are acceptable. Doing that is not dealing as openly with God as you should. Let's say you have a desire on your heart to have a new house, and yet you don't think God would approve of such a desire, so you never express that desire to the Lord. Do you understand that you are not being open with Him? You are holding a part of your life back from Him. You are not giving Him a chance to deal with your desire. If it is a true desire of your heart, hold it before the Lord; it doesn't matter what it is. Tell Him what is on your heart. That gives Him a chance to deal with the matter. If He wants you to have it, He can give it to you. If He thinks you are covetous, then He can point that out to you. He can show you that you have a covetous heart. You don't need a new house; you need a changed heart. That kind of openness will be very healthy for your relationship with God. Be honest with the Lord. If you have a desire, share it with Him. He knows about it anyway. Opening your heart and telling Him about it gives Him a chance to deal with you on the matter. You may be surprised by what God might do for you out of His graciousness.

A fifth kind of prayer is intercession. Intercession is prayer for the needs of others. When you pray for the needs of others, you are interceding for them. You are asking God to undertake and do for them.

A good example of intercessory prayer is found in John 17. This has

been called the Lord's high priestly prayer, where, shortly before He was crucified, He prayed for the church. He interceded for the needs of His people as He held before His Father His requests for their needs. There ought to be a part of your prayer life that is devoted to praying for others. There are other people in your life, and you need to pray for them. You have family, don't you? Pray for them. You have neighbors, don't you? Pray for them. There are people you know in the church that have needs. Pray for them. There are leaders in the church. Pray for them. There are people trying to grow and be faithful in the Lord. Pray for them. There are many needs all around you, and you could pray for them. God wants you to be concerned for the needs of others and to lift them before Him in prayer.

Finally, we need to mention a sixth kind of prayer, which are prayers of submission. These may be the most neglected of all the prayers we have listed. There must be prayers of submission in our lives if we ever expect to grow in the Lord. In these prayers we abandon our own desires and surrender our will to the Lord. You are going to have times of temptation in your walk with the Lord. You are also going to be asked by the Lord to do things you would rather not do. You will need to pray to have a submissive spirit. You will need to pray to have the strength to set aside your own desires, and do the Lord's will.

This is best illustrated by the Lord's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36-46) where He prayed three separate times to have a submissive spirit. He knew that He was facing a terrible trial, so He prepared His heart for that time by surrendering His own will and yielding to the will of His Father. When He went to the cross He went in peace. The struggle and victory were won in the garden. Our lives will involve times when we need to pray for a submissive spirit and the grace to set aside our will, and yield ourselves to the will of our Heavenly Father.

As we said at the beginning of this lesson, you don't necessarily have to include each of these kinds of prayers every time you pray. But it doesn't seem possible that you could go for too long without praising the Lord or without having something to be thankful for or without having any sins to confess. Neither can it be possible that you could go for too long without having any needs to hold before the Lord or without seeing any

needs in the lives of others to pray for or without needing to submit your will to the Lord. Review these matters from time to time and let them be a part of your prayer life. You will be well on the way to having power with God and with man.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Philippians 4:6
2. 1 Corinthians 14:15

Answer these questions:

1. What is the difference between praise and thanksgiving?

2. What is it that should be confessed in prayers of confession?

3. Should you hold every desire of your heart before the Lord, even if you are not sure if it is in His will? Explain.

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 10 "HOW TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE"

Lesson 5 "Hindrances to Prayer"

The last lesson in this chapter deals with hindrances to prayer. Are there certain things that can keep you from having your prayers answered? The answer to that question is a definite "yes." We will look at several of them in this lesson, and it may be that for those who might feel like their prayers are not being answered they could find in this list of hindrances, one or more reasons why they are impotent in prayer. Yet, all of these items can be dealt with and overturned so that they no longer hinder one who wants to honor God in prayer.

Let's start at the very beginning with the most basic hindrance to prayer, ignorance. If you don't know what to pray for, if you are ignorant of what the promises of Scripture are, you won't be effective in prayer. If God has promised to do certain things for you, but you don't know what they are, you can't ask for them. It's that simple. Yet, it may be the single biggest reason for lack of power in prayer amongst the people of God. Many people simply do not know what God's Word says and what has promised to do. How many promises can you name right now? How many have you called on God for this week? The effectiveness of your prayer life will be related to how many promises you know and believe.

The hindrance of ignorance can be removed easily, though not effortlessly. You need to study the Word. You need to discover the promises. You need to call upon them.

The next thing that can hinder prayer is laziness. You may know what the Bible says, but you just don't pray. Prayer can be hard work. If you never thought it was, there may be more to it than you realize. It takes time. It takes attention. You have to overcome a lot of obstacles. You have to exert yourself. You have to deny yourself. If you only pray when you feel like it, you won't pray very often. We are not saying that it is tedious work, but it will demand an investment of your time and energy

and will require self-denial on your part. You have to overcome laziness if you are going to have an effective prayer life.

The third thing we could mention as a hindrance to prayer is indifference. Indifference is when you don't pray for something because you don't really feel like it is your problem, or you are not really burdened to see blessing in that area. It's somebody else's problem. For example, you might not pray for the Sunday school program in your church because you are not a teacher or an officer in the church, and it is not your responsibility. You don't pray for the lost because you are not an evangelist or a minister. What it really boils down to is indifference. If you are not burdened to see blessing in a certain area, you will not pray. Indifference hinders prayer.

However, in saying this we need to also understand that not everyone has the same burdens. It's not that you will be burdened for every single activity of the church or for every person you ever meet. God lays burdens on one's heart and we need to honor those burdens with prayer. It would be most unlikely, however, if a believer had no burdens. That might be a sign of indifference.

Prayer also has to involve some fervency, some earnestness. James 5:16 tells us that "the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." In order for prayer to be availing, it must have some earnestness behind it. It does not mean that you have to work yourself into a frenzy in order to feel like God will take note of your prayer. But you can't be indifferent about the matter either. You ought to have a sense of urgency in your prayers. If you really don't care that much about whether or not God will answer your prayer, it won't be effective. Lack of earnestness will hinder your prayer life.

On the other side of the coin, impatience will also hinder your prayers. If you are going to be effective in prayer you need to learn to be patient, to wait on God. God is not often in as big a hurry as you are to do something that you feel has to be done right now. He may be in more of a hurry to do some other things that you aren't in that big of a hurry to do. But as far as waiting on God to answer prayer, you need patience. You need to learn importunity along with patience. This means that your

patience causes you not to give up on the answer, yet it does not mean that you just sit back and be inactive until it comes to pass. Importunity means that you are persistent in asking while you are waiting.

Don't get so impatient that, if the answer doesn't come quickly, you give up on the prayer. Impatience leads to giving up. Patience leads to persistence and results. Some prayers may be answered the first time you bring them before God. Others may require that you ask over and over again. It is not that God doesn't hear you the first time. It's not that you have not asked properly. But in the providence of God He has arranged it so that we must wait on Him. Waiting builds our confidence in Him. It keeps us close to Him. As long as it is a burden, don't give up. Don't think, as some will say, that you just pray once, knowing that God has heard, and then just sit back and wait. That may sound good, but that is not the biblical example. Be patient. Be persistent.

The fifth reason that our prayers may be hindered is because of unbelief. By that we mean lack of faith, not that you simply do not believe God will do it. It is not that God has said that He will do something, and you say that you don't believe He will. We are talking about when you believe a promise of God is true, but you don't really have the faith to hold on to believe that you are going to get it. You believe that God can do what He has promised, but you don't have a real expectancy that He is actually going to do it for you. He might do it for others but you have no faith that He will do it for you. That is unbelief. Without faith that God will answer your prayer, that He will fulfill His promise, you will not see many answered prayers. There must be an expectancy surrounding your prayers.

For example, God promises you peace in the midst of trouble and crises. You have to expect that He will give it to you. You must hold on to the promise in the midst of tribulation, believing that peace comes not from the absence of trouble but from the presence of God. Now how do you get this expectancy? Look at God. Does He lie? Does He promise, then renege on His promise? Look at His Word. Are they empty promises? Reflecting on God and His Word will produce faith as it leads you to see Him in His fullness. Unbelief, or lack of faith, will hinder your prayers.

The next hindrance to prayer is worldliness in your life. If you live a worldly life, you are not going to have power with God. You need to choose who you are going to serve. You need to choose where you are going to look for your encouragement, where you are going to look for your strength, where you are going to look for your pleasure. If you choose the things of this world, it doesn't matter how valid your profession of faith is, you are not going to see much answered prayer. Worldliness will hinder prayer. You have to look to the Lord for those things. You have to look to the Lord as the One who is going to meet your needs. You can't be a friend to the world and have power with God. The world is an enemy against God. Now we are to be in the world. We are to be cordial with the world. But we are not to be of the world. Getting wrapped up in worldly things, no matter how innocent they may seem, will take your heart and mind off the Lord and hinder your prayer life.

The final hindrance we are going to mention is indwelling sin. Hidden sin or disobedience will put a stop to answered prayer. We are not talking about when you stumble into sin as much as when you hide sin in your heart, when you know you are being disobedient and will not let go of the sin. The Bible says that, if we hide iniquity in our heart, God will not hear us. (Ps. 66:18) It is the righteous man that has answered prayer. We are not saying that you have to reach sinless perfection before you can expect to have your prayers answered, but that you can't hide sin in your heart. God won't hear your prayers. He won't give ear to them. It's that simple. He is not going to undertake for you while you are rebelling against Him. Deal with the sin. Then He will undertake for you.

Do you know of a sin you are hiding? Do you know something that God wants you to do, and you are not doing it? Do you know something that you are doing that God does not want you to do? Don't expect to have God answer your prayers, not until you deal with those matters. You may have to struggle with them. You may not get as much victory over them as you would like, but that is not the same as hiding them in your heart. Hiding sin and being slow to let go will hinder, or, more accurately, stop answered prayer.

These are some of the things that can hinder a prayer life, but to end on a

more positive note, God wants to answer your prayers. Over and over again in the Bible God says that we are to ask of Him, to try Him, and see if He won't send blessing our way. (Mal. 3:10) There are invitations to pray with the promise attached, that if we call upon Him, we will be blessed. God is gracious. God wants to do for us. He really does. If we but learn to look to Him, to trust in Him and His grace, we will find a prayer life that brings God's blessings from above.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Mark 11:24
2. Psalm 66:18

Answer these questions:

1. In light of our look at hindrances to prayer, do you have to have it all together before God will answer your prayers? Explain.
2. What do you feel is the greatest hindrance to prayer in your own life, and how can you overcome it?
3. What have you learned from this week's study of prayer that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 11

"LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"

Lesson 1 "The Christian Lives By Faith"

In this chapter we are going to deal with the subject of living the Christian life. We will begin by talking about how to live by faith. The other topics we will look at will be how to deal with temptations and doubt, dealing with sin and failure, the necessity of self-denial, and the necessity of separation from the world. We need to examine living the Christian life because it is different from normal living in the world. The Christian is called to live in response to God, and that will set him apart from the normal way of living in this world.

A good starting point for this discussion would be to ask exactly what does it mean to be a Christian? What is a Christian? Let's begin by looking at a few things that it is not. The things we will look at are things that a Christian would do, but they are not what makes him a Christian, nor are they even the essence of what it means to be a Christian.

For example, a Christian is not someone who just lives a good, moral life. Hopefully that would be true of all Christians, but that is not what a Christian is. Neither is a Christian a Christian because of who his parents are. In other words a person is not a Christian because he was born and raised in a Christian home. We could also add that a person is not a Christian because he is raised in a "Christian country." That does not make a person a Christian. You are not automatically a Christian because you are not a Buddhist or a Muslim. Nor are you a Christian because you attend church. Joining the church does not make a person a Christian. Someone has said that sitting in a pew doesn't make you a Christian, any more than sitting in a tree makes you a monkey!

Neither is a person a Christian because of his good deeds and service to others. Now all of these things are things that we would expect a Christian to do, but they are not what make him a Christian. The single element that determines if a person is a Christian, is if he has a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. A Christian is a person who is related to God through personal faith and response to the risen Lord. He is a child of God, adopted through Christ, born again by God's Spirit.

We also need to understand that the Christian life is not the natural human life lived on a higher plain. It is a new life, a life that has been born again from above. It is not a remodeled life. It is not a patched up life. It is a life indwelt by God's Holy Spirit.

If this is true, then it is obvious that not everyone is a Christian. Not even everyone who claims to be a Christian is one. Only those who have been united to Christ by faith and who are born again by His Spirit are Christians. "But as many who received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." That is the way the Bible says it in John 1:12.

If that is what a Christian is, what does it mean that he is to live by faith? Certainly one of the things that we would closely associate with living the Christian life would be the matter of faith. "The just shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:17) That is what the Bible tells us. If you are going to live the Christian life, you live it by faith. You are not only saved by faith, but you live by faith day by day. Not only does it require faith to come to Christ in the initial act of surrender, but you have to live each day by

faith. It takes just as much faith to live today unto the Lord as it did to come to Him in the first place. "The just shall live by faith."

Faith is nothing more than believing what God says is true, and acting accordingly. Thereby faith becomes the channel through which we receive what God wants to do in and through us. We will spend this lesson looking at some of the practical problems and experiences a believer encounters in endeavoring to live by faith.

One of the things that we need to grasp is that living by faith is very much a matter of the will. When you get right down to it, faith is mostly a matter of the will. Now it is not the natural will, but the regenerate will that we are referring to. In other words, to have faith you need to have a new heart that has been created by God's Holy Spirit. Yet we must understand that faith is not some nebulous substance that you either have or don't have. It is really nothing more than taking what God has said as true, and acting accordingly. The trouble is that, too often, we get away from this simple idea and, as a result, get confused and disoriented in trying to walk by faith.

The way to walk by faith is to first look at what God says, that is, the facts that are presented in God's Word. That comes first. Then faith acts on that Word. That is second. Then any personal feelings we may have about these matters come last. They follow everything else. Faith has to be in something and that something is the truth contained in God's Word. These truths should generate faith in a believer that what God said is true, not only in general terms but personally true for them.

Trouble can arise in the believer trying to live by faith if he gets this order reversed. For example, God promises joy. At a certain time we may not feel very joyful, and, if we don't feel it, we don't believe it. In other words, we don't have faith. Consequently, we don't have the joy as a fact. Making faith dependent on whether or not we feel like we have what God has promised will end up making feelings the basis of our faith, rather than the certainty of God's Word.

Using this same example of having joy, we could have it by faith. Faith would begin with the fact, the promise of joy. It would say, "I believe

God's Word. I am going to act accordingly. God said He will give me His joy. I believe it. I am going to act according to His Word, and not my feelings." If you walk by faith in this manner, you will see the promises of God being fulfilled in your life, and you will also see that the feelings will follow, maybe at a little distance, but they will follow. Don't let your faith be influenced by your personal feelings. Base your faith upon the truth of God's Word.

Let's further illustrate this point by thinking about a mother trying to deal with a crying child. Let's say that the child wants a piece of candy right before dinner, and the mother knows it is best for him not to have it. Therefore, the mother has told the child that he cannot have the candy. That bit of bad news has caused the child to put up a terrible fuss. Now how is the mother to deal with the child? A wise mother would decide with her will what is best for the child and then proceed on that path, not letting the crying persuade her to change her course. She knows what is best, and she is going to go by that. The crying is not going to change her mind. We also know by experience that, after the child has cried for a while and hasn't gotten his way, he will give up the crying.

Our feelings are a lot like crying children. They know what they want and try to get us to follow them. All too often we let the clamor of our feelings overrule our will and move us into a path that is not good. We let the clamor of our feelings talk us out of doing what we know we ought to do. Walking by faith will require that you take what God says and go by that. Act according to God's will and let your feelings clamor all they want. They will come along in the end.

We need to say one other thing about walking by faith. Colossians 3:15 says that we are to let the peace of God rule in our hearts. When we walk by faith, there will be many things for which we will need guidance, but we won't have a clear word about what to do. Now how can you walk by faith when you don't have a word to go by? This verse gives us a good answer to that question. Let the peace of God rule in your heart. The peace of God is something He can use to direct us in our walk of faith when we do not have a direct word to follow. We ask God to lead us, yielding our will to His, and then we just walk in the path that He gives us peace to walk in. Continue to walk on that path as long as God gives you

the peace to do so. If He lifts the peace, stop.

God can lead you by His peace. Remember we are talking about times when God's Word may not address your specific situation. Do you need to know which path to take? Ask God to lead you in His will and commit yourself to walk down either road He would indicate. Ask God to give you peace in the direction He wants you to go and to withhold it if you get out of His will. He can do that. The peace of God will act as a traffic cop in your life directing your movement along the paths God opens before you. Learn to be sensitive to God's leading and you will learn to walk by faith.

To keep us from falling into a ditch by what we just said, we need to reemphasize that it is primarily God's Word that is used to guide us. Hide the Word in your heart, and God's Holy Spirit will use it to direct your path.

Living the Christian life will mean that you will walk by faith day by day. Faith is nothing more than taking God's Word as true, and acting accordingly. If you would do that, you will find yourself walking in a blessed relationship with the Lord, even though some of the paths you will walk on may be difficult.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Hebrews 11:1-6
2. Romans 4:13-25

Answer these questions:

1. What do you mean when you say that you are a Christian?

2. Why is faith more a matter of the will than a matter of feeling?

3. How does God's peace rule in your heart?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 11 "LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"

Lesson 2 "Dealing with Temptations and Doubts"

In this lesson we are going to look at how we can deal with temptations and doubts. Two of the things that we will have to deal with as we live the Christian life are how to handle times of temptation and how to cope with times of doubt. You might think that temptations should cease when you enter the Christian life. But that's far from true. You will continue to be tempted, but as the old hymn says, "Temptations lose their power..." In other words, you won't be exempt from temptations, but they need not have power over you. You don't have to give in. You have new strength. You have new life. As you continue to mature in the Lord, there should be less in your life that temptations can appeal to, but they don't go away. However, you need not succumb to temptation.

Another mistake that can be made in thinking about temptation is thinking that temptation itself is sin; that is, to be tempted is to have fallen into sin. Again, this is not true. Now giving in to temptation is sin, but being tempted is not. Everyone is tempted. It doesn't matter who you want to talk about, they can be tempted. The Lord Himself, who we know was sinless, was tempted. We are told in Matthew 4 how Satan led Him into the wilderness to tempt Him. Now He might not have been tempted by many of the things that we are tempted by, but He was really tempted by the things that Satan set before Him. The Bible tells us that, "He was tempted in all ways like we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15) He never gave in to temptation. He overcame each one. He knew how to escape temptation. Temptation is not sin. If it were, the Lord would have sinned when He was tempted. In fact, the Bible tells us in the book of James that we should count it all joy when we fall into temptations, for it works patience. Certainly, the Bible would not tell us to count it all joy if it were sin.

The Christian life involves warfare, a warfare between the powers of God

and the powers of darkness. As long as you live, there will be fighting to do. There will be temptations. The point is that you don't have to fall. You have to do battle, but you don't have to lose. At any given time, at any given temptation, God can provide everything you need to escape temptation; He has already provided everything you need to get victory over any particular temptation. No temptation is going to overcome you that you can't get victory over in the power of God. It doesn't matter what it is. You don't have to fall. It is true that in our weakness we will stumble and fall, but at any given time we could stand strong in the power of God.

One of the problems with temptation is that it is fought in the mind, and so it is easy to be tricked. It is in the matters of the mind that the enemy does his work. He comes to us and whispers evil thoughts in our ears, and then condemns us for thinking such thoughts. We are inclined to accept his accusation and, in so doing, often fall into great discouragement, which is what he wanted all along.

Many Christians are quite troubled by the thoughts that come to their minds. They feel like these thoughts are terrible things, and it must mean that they aren't really believers. If you have suffered with this problem, you need to understand that you are not responsible for what comes into your mind, but you are responsible for what you do with it once it gets there. You are not responsible for the things that flutter in and out of your mind. There is a sense in which they are beyond your control. But you are responsible for what you do with these thoughts once they get there. Some of the thoughts that come to mind will be ungodly, but you can deny them. You don't have to accept them. You certainly don't have to entertain them. Sin doesn't come into the picture until you begin to entertain the thoughts. It is when you roll them over in your mind and allow them to take control of your thoughts that sin begins. But just having the thought come into your mind is not sin. You can deny these thoughts when they come, and, when you refuse to entertain them, they will depart.

Sometimes we can get discouraged simply because we can be tempted. We may understand that it isn't sin simply to be tempted, however we become discouraged because we could be tempted in a certain area. We

may feel that we should be above temptation in certain areas dealing with immorality. However, it should not come as a surprise that we can be tempted. We ought to know that in our flesh dwells no good thing. (Rom. 7:18) Don't ever get to the point where you feel like you could not be tempted. You can. Don't get to the point where you feel you are above temptation. You aren't. Now don't use that as an excuse to yield to temptation, but never think you are so strong you can't be tempted.

God allows temptation because he will use it to mold your character. "Count it all joy when you fall into temptation, knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience." (James 1:2-3) This is said to keep us from despair as we wrestle with temptation. Working patience takes time so the struggles may last longer than we would like, but God will use them for good.

Having said that, we still need to resist temptation and continue to fight the good fight. We need to put on the whole armor of God to withstand. We may lose a few battles along the way but the outcome of the war is sure. If we continue to resist, temptations will eventually lose their power, not because we are strong, but because God is faithful.

We also need to understand that we can be tempted in good areas, as well as evil. We can be tempted to do good things for the wrong reason. We can be tempted to do good things for self and for our own glory. The things that the Lord were tempted with were not evil things. For example, changing the stones into bread would not have been an evil thing to do. However, the temptations were designed by Satan to promote Him doing His own will rather than His Father's, promoting His own glory rather than His Father's. Don't just think of temptation as associated with evil things. You are just as likely to be tempted to do "good" things for the wrong reason than you are to do really evil or vulgar things.

Now we need to turn our attention to thinking about doubts. The first point we need to make is that there is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Unbelief is a willing refusal to believe God's word. It is sin and needs to be repented of. Doubt, on the other hand is not sinful and can often be the catalyst to spiritual growth.

Doubts may arise because the Word of God makes claims and statements that are foreign to a believer's experience. Doubts can arise when one tries to grasp spiritual truths with the reasoning of the natural mind. Whatever the reason, doubts can hinder a believers faith, and unfortunately, can rob him of the peace and joy that is his inheritance in Christ.

Having said this, we also need to acknowledge that doubt is not uncommon amongst Christians, especially those new to the faith. A believer's doubts may be directed more toward himself than toward God. While a believer may not be tempted to think that what God says is untrue, he may be tempted to doubt his own relationship to God. He may doubt whether God's Word applies to him in his situation. He may doubt his own salvation. He may doubt his own forgiveness. He may doubt whether or not the promises will be true for him.

There is another kind of doubt that can arise when the pain of living in a fallen world meets the claims of the Bible. This kind of doubt is seen when the question is asked, "If God loves me, why does he allow....?" It can be the death of a loved one, an unfulfilled heartfelt desire, such as for a spouse, or lingering financial or health problems. This kind of question reveals that there is a disconnect between the believer's understanding of what a loving God would do and what actually happens in his life. It can cause a believer to doubt the love of God and, if not dealt with, lead to him pushing back from God.

When struggling with any kind of doubt, it is important to study what God's Word has to say about the area in which you have doubts. Knowing that God's Word is true, act on your faith, not on your doubts. When doubts arise, keep going back to what you know to be true. In order to forsake your doubts, you may have to hold on to a promise by faith alone in the face of all sorts of contrary feelings. You have to follow the example of Abraham:

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or

when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, full convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. (Rom. 4:18-21)

Abraham held onto the Word of God, despite unfavorable circumstances. He believed that God was able to do what He had promised.

We too can look to the Apostle Paul, who was “convinced that nothing could separate him from the love of Christ” (Rom. 8:35) because he kept his focus on the cross. Despite all of the trials and hardships Paul faced while serving the Lord, he comforted himself with the knowledge that “He who did not spare His own Son but gave him us for us all, how will He not also with him graciously give us all things.” (Rom. 8:32)

If you are one who struggles with doubts, know that the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Like temptations, God allows us to struggle with doubts so that our faith can be strengthened and we can grow in grace.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 1 Corinthians 10:13
2. John 14:8-11

Answer these questions:

1. Is it a sin to be tempted? When does it become a sin?
2. Are all temptations in the area of conduct? Explain.
3. What are doubts, and how should you handle them?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 11 "LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"

Lesson 3 "Dealing with Sin and Failure"

In the last lesson we talked about dealing with temptation and doubts. In this lesson we will talk about dealing with sin and failure. Let me start by saying that, when we are saved, we are set free from the bondage to sin. We might well ask the question then, "Why do we still sin?" If we have been set free from sin, why do we still sin? The answer is that we sin because of our weakness, because of our unbelief, because of our ignorance. We no longer have to sin. That we will still sin, yes, we know that. But we don't have to sin. A believer never has to sin. Before you were a believer, sin tainted everything you did. But a believer never has to sin.

Too often we use our weakness and ignorance as an excuse, as a crutch, to let us sin when we don't have to. Even so, our sin still grieves the Lord. Though we so easily excuse it, it grieves the one we love. Because we don't want to hurt the one we love, we should hate sin.

Yet, even though we never have to sin, God has made a provision for dealing with sin in the life of a believer. Even though He delivered us from it, He made a way to deal with sin when we do. If God had expected we would never sin again, He would not have made this provision.

Many places in the Scripture tell us how to deal with sin. Perhaps the most basic text is found in 1 John 1:9 where it tells us that, "If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Confession, with repentance, is the provision that God has made for dealing with sin in the life of a believer. When you sin, confess it. Open your heart to the Lord, and admit it was sin. Don't try to hide anything. Admit it. No excuses. No promises to try to do better. No alibis. You own up to it. You confess it. You acknowledge it. Call a sin a sin. Don't try to come out smelling like a rose. Don't try to appear

better than you are. Just tell it like it is.

Notice that it doesn't say in this verse that we are to ask for forgiveness. You will find very few places in the Bible where it says you are to ask the Lord for forgiveness. But what you will find, time and time again, is that the Bible tells you to confess your sin. That is really all God wants you to do. Just acknowledge it. He wants to forgive you. You don't need to beg for His forgiveness. But you do need to confess your sin. You do need to keep the record straight.

We also should understand that repentance needs to accompany any confession of sin. The confession of sin should include the desire and the will to turn away from it. Not that you are promising so much to try harder next time, but, when you recognize that something is a sin, you must commit yourself to turn your back to it. That is what repentance means, to turn away, to go in the opposite direction.

When you confess your sins, you are to take them to the cross. Don't try to deal with your sins yourself. You have a Savior. Now take them to Him, and let Him deal with them. You know that Christ's atonement was sufficient to forgive all of your sins, past, present, and future, but you still need to confess them. You still need to take them to the cross. You still need to trust in the payment for them that was made at the cross. Then, ask for the power you need to forsake them. Don't try to deal with them in your own strength. Don't try to win victory over them in your own power. Take them to the cross, and let them be put to death there. Then stand fast in the forgiveness that you have. Don't take your sin back after you have confessed it. The Bible tells us that God has cast it behind His back, out of His sight. Once He has forgiven it, He forgets it. He is not going to remind you of it. He is not going to bring it up later. He is not going to hold it over your head as a threat. It will never come before you again. It is gone. Now don't you drag it back out again. Once sin has been dealt with, move on. Put your eyes on today and its opportunities, not yesterday and its failures.

Don't succumb to what all too often is the temptation to feel like you need to do penance for your sins. Don't feel like they cannot be forgiven unless you suffer and agonize over them for a while. There may be times

that God will have you do that, too, but be quick to confess your sin. Then be quick to believe God's Word of forgiveness. And be very slow to ever resurrect a sin that God has forgiven. Just don't let that happen. That's how to deal with sin. You have to receive forgiveness for sin by faith in the same way in which you received salvation by faith. That you will stumble, yes, it is a given. But you don't need to stay down. Deal with it quickly, and get back up, and get moving again. "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (Is. 1:18)

That leads us to the next thing we need to look at today, and that is failure, failure in the Christian life. We are talking about sin and how it can bring us to the point of failure. You need not ever fail. However, there will be times when you will. The important thing in times of failure is to turn immediately to return to the Lord. The most important thing to do in times of failure is not to let it keep you away from the Lord. Immediately, without delay, turn to the Lord. Sin and failure will separate you from the Lord, in a fellowshiping sense, and that is why you need to get back quickly. The longer you let it separate you, the harder it will be to return. Sadly, there are people who, because of a failure in their lives, because of sin in their lives that estranged them from the Lord, because they have not dealt properly with their failure, have remained estranged from the Lord. They have been estranged for years. They could have dealt with it when it happened. They could have put the failure behind them.

There is a sense in which you have to humble yourself to receive God's forgiveness. Pride can get in the way and cause you to hold onto the failure and not let go of it. You have to humble yourself to put the matter in God's hands and let Him deal with it, and move on. I don't care what the failure was. I don't care how serious it was. I don't care how hard you fell. That was yesterday. It can be set aside today. Whatever it was you did, it was yesterday. Today is a new day. Set it aside. There is no value to reliving it over and over and over. There is no value in suffering and agonizing through the experience again and again and again. Let it go. Give it up. Don't let your feelings govern what you do. Walk by faith. Put it behind you.

To be sure, there can be times when our failures have earthly consequences and these consequences can be long lasting. We may have to deal with the consequences of our sin for some time, maybe even the rest our lives, but the point is, as far as our relationship with God is concerned, repair that breach as soon as possible by coming before Him with a broken and contrite heart, which He will not ignore. (PS. 51:17)

We should also say the same thing about success. That was yesterday. You have living to do today. Don't relive your past successes over and over either. Put them behind you, and walk out on today's opportunities. We have to follow Paul's words from Philippians 3:13 where he says, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Forget your failures. Press on. Forget your successes. Press on. Yesterday was yesterday. Let every failure drive you immediately to the cross. Don't try to handle it all by yourself. Don't let your embarrassment and sense of guilt keep you from turning to the Lord, the one who can forgive sin. Get it behind you.

A good example of this principle in Scripture is the battle the children of Israel had under the leadership of Joshua at the little town of Ai. (Joshua 7) After they had won a spectacular battle at Jericho by faith and obedience, they came to Ai where they suffered defeat. They failed. They fell down. But they turned to God, and He showed them the reason for the failure. They found out that the source of the failure was a hidden sin in their midst. They dealt with the sin. They went back to Ai, and they got a victory. We could do that as well, in every area of our lives. We fail. We can ask God to show us the reason, the source of the failure. We can deal with it, and then we can return and get victory.

How blessed we would be if we handled our sin and failures that faithfully. If we did, we wouldn't allow sin and failure to keep us down. The Lord is ready and willing to restore you, more than you know. Sin and failure will stop you, but God's grace is greater than all of your sin. That is the key to handling sin. Know that God's grace is greater than all of your sin. God's grace will give you victory if you deal with the source

of your sin and failure. As the Lord renews you, you will be on your way, stronger than ever and with a heart filled with more love and gratitude to the Lord than ever before.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 1 John 1:8-10
2. Philippians 3:13-14

Answer these questions:

1. What should you do when you realize you have sinned?

2. How long should sin and failure be grieved over before you can find full forgiveness?

3. Why must all sin and failure be brought to the cross?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 11 "LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"

Lesson 4 "Self-Denial is Necessary"

In this lesson we are going to deal with self-denial, and why it is necessary to the Christian life. If we had to name the single most lacking quality in the lives of Christians today, it might well be this matter of self-denial. We need to deny ourselves if we want to walk with the Lord. His own words tell us, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." (Luke 9:23) We can't follow the Lord without first denying ourselves.

Self, the old nature, is never going to get any better. The flesh doesn't improve. It doesn't matter how long it is exposed to the things of the Lord, it is never going to improve. It is never going to get one bit better than it was before you believed. "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot." (Rom. 8:7) The only way to get rid of self is to deny it. The only way to be out from under its power and influence is to let it die. Just like you could deny a plant what it needs to grow so that it withers and dies, so can you deny self to the point where it can wither and lose power. The point is that it is not enough just to feed your new nature. You also have to deny the old nature. It is not enough to just feed your spirit. You have to deny the flesh if you ever want to grow to maturity in the Lord.

What you nourish the most, your flesh or your spirit, will be the stronger and will dominate in your life. If you want your new nature to dominate, if you want to have power in your life, you have to feed your new nature and practice self-denial. You can't be set free from the power of sin until you are set free from the power of self. Self is the source of much sin. It is at the root of so many of our troubles. It must go. All that self knows is self-will, self-confidence, and self-exaltation. You will not be able to walk with God while these attributes are alive and well. Self-will has to be surrendered. Self-confidence has to be replaced. Self-exaltation has to go. They are all detrimental to the Christian life. That is why self

needs to be denied.

When we think about self-denial, we need to recognize that we are not just talking about ugly or coarse things. Self can do "good" things, but when it does, they will be sin. You can pray in the power of and to the glory of self. You can preach in the power of self. You can serve in the power of self. But it is still self, and it needs to die if God is going to be lifted up. If we look around, we will see that much of what is being done in the church today is being done in the power of the flesh. That has to change if the Lord's work is going to be done in the power of God.

We are thinking about why it is necessary for self to die. It can be said boldly that until you exercise self-denial, you are never going to be strong in the faith. It is as simple as that.

Yet, to keep our understanding straight, we need to say that self denial is never an end in itself. It is merely a means to an end. It is the means to the end of God's will being done in your life. It is how Christ takes control of your life. You deny yourself in order that Christ can rule. You can't serve two masters: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." (Mt. 16:24) Self-denial is not the end. There is no value in self-denial unless it is for the purpose of following the Lord. You deny your will so that you can walk in the Lord's will. You deny your priorities so that you can adopt the Lord's priorities. You deny your values so that you reflect the Lord's values. Self-denial is a necessary means to walking with the Lord.

We need to move on now to talk about what exactly it means to deny yourself. We will begin once again by thinking about what self denial isn't. Self-denial is not a morbid deprivation of every pleasant or comfortable thing in life. Self-denial in the Lord is a joyful surrender. It is not self-inflicted hardship. Self-denial is not living an ascetic life in which you deny yourself every hint of pleasure. There is no merit in that. People have done that for centuries, thinking that there was some special blessing awaiting those who lived in self-inflicted pain and hardship of various orders.

Self-denial is a joyful surrender to the Lord's will. That doesn't mean it is

easy or pleasant or that it will be without hardship. Because of your commitment to the Lord, your desires, your will, your focus, your direction, your purpose is all taken from Him. You are glad to give up anything that you have because you get to be with Him. It is like a bride surrendering to her marriage relationship. It is not a grievous thing. It is a joyful thing. She wants to do it because of the relationship she has with the bridegroom. She is not concerned with any of the freedom that she is losing, but with what she is gaining. Her thoughts are happy ones because of her love for the bridegroom. The believer should view self-denial in the same manner, with his eyes on the Lord.

We could ask the question next, "When is it that you are to deny yourself, and what is it that you are to deny yourself of?" The best way to answer that is, "Always deny yourself, and in everything." In other words, there never ought to be a time when self-will takes over or self confidence or self-determination or self-exaltation or self direction or any of the works of self. There is never a time that any of these would be proper for a believer. In all things and in all circumstances you are to deny yourself. You set aside your own desires, your own ways, your own thoughts, your own understanding, your own will, your own interests, your own reputation, your own desires, whatever it is. Paul's words in Philippians 3 should be true of all believers.

"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." (Phil 3:8-9)

Self-denial is more a matter of denying self than it is giving up any particular thing. Self-denial does not mean to deprive yourself of every kind of pleasure and to subject yourself to a life of stern hardship. Self-denial is to deny self its own head. Deny that which would encourage and direct you in your own ways. Deny that which arises from self and would cause you to move away from the Lord.

We could also ask the question, "How is it that you can deny yourself?" If self can't be changed, if it always seeks to promote and serve itself, how can it deny itself? This is the dilemma Paul was facing in Romans 7. If I am governed in my life by self, and all self wants is self-will, then how can I ever do anything other than that? How can I ever do anything that denies self when I am controlled by self? The answer, as shown in Romans 8, is that the power of the life of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, as applied by His Spirit, is what gives me the victory. Self can't put self to death. But through the power of God's Spirit, self can be denied and reckoned dead. It is in the power of the resurrected Lord as He lives in us that we can walk in His will.

Let me say that self-denial is also a matter of the will. The Lord said that, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself." If anyone would. It is a choice. It is a matter of the will. If anyone would come after me, then here is what he must do. He must deny himself. Self-denial is a matter of the will. You must choose to do it. It is not something that can be done just because you choose to do it, but it won't get done until you choose to do it. It is based upon what God has already done in Christ. It is based upon being crucified with Christ. It is based upon something that has already transpired. But you must choose to walk in it and appropriate it. You must reckon yourself to be dead. You have got to hold fast to the truth that you have been crucified with Christ. Your acceptance and living in that truth will bring it to pass in your own experience.

I need to add that self-denial is something that needs to be done daily. You can't do it when you first believe and then never have need of it again. You have to reckon yourself to be dead every day of your life. There is never a day that you will wake up and find that it is proper for you to walk in your own will that day. Self-denial is something like the whole burnt offering in the Old Testament. It was to be laid on the altar the first thing every day. The first thing we should do every day is to surrender ourselves to the Lord, to do His will and not our own. We are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice unto the Lord. (Rom. 12:1)

When all is said and done, it is not an easy thing to deny self. And it is true that self will always be there, but it doesn't have to rule. Self will

always be there, but it doesn't have to be in control. It doesn't have to determine what you do. It doesn't have to direct your path. It will always try to raise its ugly head, but you don't have to heed it. You don't have to obey it. You can deny it. And when it does raise its head and suggests this or that, you could just deny it and say, as our Lord did, that I have come to do my Father's will.

Self-denial will be the source of tremendous power and blessing in the lives of those people who care enough about following the Lord to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. It will be the channel through which God's will can be done in our lives, and a channel which God can use to bring His blessing to the lives of those around us. As we walk down this path we will say, as Paul did, that anything that was denied was nothing compared to the glory and blessing of knowing Christ.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Matthew 16:24-25
2. Romans 8:12-13

Answer these questions:

1. Why is it necessary for you to deny yourself in order to follow the Lord?

2. What is it that you deny when you exercise self-denial?

3. How do you reckon yourself to be dead?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 11 "LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"

Lesson 5 "Separation from the World Is Necessary"

In the last lesson we talked about how to deal with self, one of our greatest enemies. We learned that we had to deny self. Today we are going to talk about how to deal with the world, probably our second great enemy. We will see that the way to deal with the world is to be separated from it. The way you deal with self is to deny it. Reckon yourself to be dead to it. The way to deal with the world is similar. You are to be separated from it.

If self-denial is one of the most lacking characteristics of believers today, separation from the world would not be very far behind. Why would it be necessary for a Christian to be separated from the world? The answer is that the world and the Lord are opposed to each other. They are two opposite poles of influence. They are mutually exclusive. The Lord said that anyone who is a friend of the world is an enemy of God. (James 4:4) We know the Lord is sovereign. But this world, as it lives and moves, belongs to the evil one. He is the prince of this world. (John 12:31) Anyone who is caught up in this world is not going to have power with God. He isn't going to be able to live and walk with God. God and the world are on two opposite sides. The world is all about self-pleasing, and our Lord and the life He has called us to live is about the welfare of others. The world is self-exalting, and we are called to live a life that gives glory to God. The world is self-willed, while the Lord and the life He has called us to live is to be yielded to God's will. We can see that, at every point, the values, the structure, the purpose of the world is exactly opposite to God's ways.

The world exalts man in his fallen condition. The world believes that man's chief end is to glorify man. The world teaches us to live to please ourselves. The world tells us the purpose of life is to satisfy ourselves. It says to accumulate for yourself, to give pleasure to yourself, to grab all

that you can for yourself. The central focus of man's existence is man. That is what the world tells us. Please yourself. You only go around once, so get all you can. You will never get anywhere with the Lord, with those worldly values. The world denies God to please itself while we are called to deny ourselves to please God. When the Lord Jesus Christ came to this world and brought the message of the Gospel He was put to death. The world has no place for a God who requires anything of them. That is why you have to be separated from the world and its ways if you are going to be pleasing to God.

"All that is in the world," the Bible tells us, "is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." (1 John 2:16) All the world has to offer is lust and pride. These are incompatible with the ways of God. This fallen world is the result of the influence that man and his sin has had upon it. That is why separation from the world is necessary.

Now we need to better understand exactly what it means to be separated from the world. There is much misunderstanding of what is involved in this matter of separation. Once again, we first need to look at what it does not mean to be separated from the world. It does not mean to escape from the world. It does not mean to withdraw from it and live in isolation as a hermit in a cave. You are not to run off from all of the problems of the world and try to start your own ideal society.

What you separate yourself from is not being in the world but from being a part of its ways, being a part of its values, being a part of its methods, being a part of its interests and desires and purposes. You can't separate yourself from being in the world. You are supposed to be a witness to the world. You can't do that if you are withdrawn from it. You are to be a source of leaven, a source of influence in the world. To do that you must be in it. It is in the world that our light is to shine forth. So we are to be in the world but not of it. We are to live here. We are not to try to escape it. We are not to try to be excused from its hardships.

The difference between a Christian living in the world and an unbeliever living in the world is that the unbeliever lives in it to further his own ends while the believer lives in it as an ambassador for the Lord. Part of the believer's witness will involve going through the very same troubles that

unbelievers go through but doing so, resting and drawing upon his relationship with the Lord. We shouldn't be surprised when believers have to go through the same experiences that unbelievers do. We have the same troubles and trials. We are not excused from them. We are to go through them in the strength the Lord will provide, so that we can be a witness for Him.

Separation is but one side of a coin. It is the negative side of the coin. There is no value in separation for separation's sake. In other words, we are to be separated from the world so that we can be separated unto the Lord. The reason why separation is necessary is so we can belong to the Lord. By way of example, God separated the children of Israel from Egypt, not just to get them out of Egypt but to get them to Canaan. Canaan was the Promised Land. They could be separated from Egypt and live in the wilderness, but that wasn't what God had in mind for them. His will was to get them to Canaan. The only way to do that was to get them first out of Egypt.

For us, God's goal is not just to get us separated from the world but to have us separated unto Him. That is the key. The former is merely the necessary means to get the process started. There is no particular holiness in separation from the world unless it leads to separation unto God. There can't be any holiness without separation, but separation itself will not produce holiness.

That leads us to ask the question about how it is that a person can be separated from the world. Romans 12:1-2 gives us some good insight into that process. It tells us that we are to present our bodies unto God as living sacrifices. Then it goes on to tell us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. These verses make two points about how to be separated from the world. First of all, we must present our bodies unto the Lord, as it says elsewhere, as members of righteousness. We present our lives to the Lord to be used however He would want to use them. We don't present them to the world for our own pleasure. We present our bodies to the Lord. We offer our members to be used for the Lord's work, not for the world's work. That's the first thing. The second thing is that we must have our minds transformed and renewed. The Word of God can do that.

Separation from the world will involve your mind being renewed and that will lead to yielding your bodies to be members of Christ. Again, this is a matter of the will. The desire will arise in the heart. It will stem from the desire to love and obey, but it will be implemented as a matter of the will.

Now someone might raise the question of Christian freedom. Doesn't God want us to enjoy the things of the world? And we can say yes. We know the Lord has given us freedom, but again the freedom is to serve Him, not to serve ourselves. We know that "the Lord gives us richly all things to enjoy." (1 Tim. 6:17) But when we receive blessings, we are to understand that they are from Him. They are not from the world. They are from the Lord. Our response should be to love Him all the more, and not the world.

It should be obvious that there is too much interest and attention on the things of the world in the lives of many believers. There ought to be a whole lot more attention on the things of the Lord. Often we hear the question, is so and so a sin? Can I do this or that without sinning? That is a not a very good question to ask. That question conveys the idea that we are looking to do as much as we can in the world without stepping over the fine line of sin. What is the most I can do without sinning? The desire on our hearts ought to be not how much we can do without sinning, but what is the most we can do to give glory to the Lord? What more can we do to please God? What can we do that is not merely avoiding sin but is positive in righteousness? What can we deny ourselves of to be more yielded to the Lord? We only have so much time. We only have so much talent. We only have so many resources. We only have so much love. What we ought to have on our hearts is how can we best invest these items in the work of the Lord, not how can we best invest these on ourselves without sinning.

Believe it or not, there is joy in separation unto the Lord. When we do so we are fulfilling the purpose for which we were created, and the peace of God will fill our hearts.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. 1 John 2:15-17
2. John 17:14-16

Answer these questions:

1. What is the purpose of being separated from the world?

2. Explain how you can be in the world, but not of it?

3. What have you learned from this week's study of living the Christian life that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 12

"CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND SERVICE"

Lesson 1 "Servanthood Is an Attitude"

We now come to the last chapter in our study of *From Faith to Faithfulness*. It seems appropriate to devote this last chapter to talking about Christian witness and service, a very important part of our calling as Christians. Not only has God called us to a rich relationship with Him, but He has also called us to become instruments of His Spirit to bear witness and to serve Him and His kingdom.

In this lesson we will look at the fact the being a servant of God is based primarily upon an attitude of the heart. Being a servant of the Lord does not mean simply going out and doing some good things for others now and again. Being a servant must begin with an attitude of the heart. It must be a way of life. It must be a direction or orientation of one's living. What we ought to cultivate when we think of becoming a servant is a servant's heart.

It might sound too simple even to say, but a servant is one whose purpose is to serve. The purpose of a servant is to be at the disposal of

those whom he has been given the opportunity to serve. As we talk about serving the Lord, what we need to keep in mind is the need to cultivate and nurture this servant's attitude in our own hearts and minds and to understand that being a servant is more than a matter of conduct.

It is possible to serve but not have the heart of a servant. In other words, it is possible to do those things that are required of a servant but to do them with an attitude of bitterness, hostility, or resentment. Yet, if service is performed with that kind of attitude, it would not really be service, not in the sense that the Lord requires. What is required to be a true servant of God is a servant's heart. A servant's heart is an inward desire and leading to promote the welfare of others and to be used of God to that end.

One place we could turn to when we think about being a servant is the second chapter of Philippians. It tells us in verse four, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." This reminds us again that we are not to be self-centered. We are to be concerned about the needs of others. Then in verse five, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." The passage goes on to describe how He came and took on the form of a servant because He looked not on to His own things but on the needs of others. But the important thing to notice is that it is a matter of the orientation of one's mind that determines whether or not he will be a servant. We are told to let the mind of Christ be in us, that we too might be servants of God and His people.

So when we say that being a servant is first and foremost an attitude of the heart, a heart that leads to the conduct of service, one of the things we are saying is that this heart comes from having the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ is a mind that looks on the welfare of others. He was willing to sacrifice His welfare to see our welfare met. The mind of Christ brings with it a willingness to serve. The one who has this mind looks for openings to serve. He wants to serve. He is glad to have the opportunity to serve. He is sorry when he can't find anyone he can serve. This will be the heart that is imparted to those who have the mind of Christ.

The Bible says elsewhere that our service for the Lord is “not to be done grudgingly or of necessity, because God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 9:7) This describes the servant's attitude towards serving others. What he does is not done grudgingly or of necessity. He is a cheerful giver. A servant's heart is a heart that expresses itself as a cheerful giver. That doesn't mean that there won't be hardships. It doesn't mean that there may not be costly sacrifices. It doesn't mean that there won't be some difficulty, and even sadness involved in the service. All of these things may well be a part of serving the Lord. But it is still undertaken willingly with a heart that is at peace.

The reason this kind of heart is necessary is that the natural man is more interested in being served than he is in being a servant. The person operating out of a natural heart will never be a good servant. He is too interested in his own life. He is too interested in his own needs being met, to minister to others. The natural man is self-centered, and therefore can't be a good servant. The only way to overcome this condition is to get a new heart. Let the mind of Christ be in you. You can't serve two masters. You can't serve self and God. So if you are going to be a servant of God, if you are going to have this mind be in you, it means that self will have to be set aside. Your own rights and privileges will have to be set aside. A servant doesn't hold onto his rights. It is not that your rights have been taken away. A servant voluntarily gives them up. That is a key point. A servant of the Lord serves from a position of strength, not from weakness. He voluntarily gives up his rights. He voluntarily sets aside his privileges because he has been given a servant's heart. The true servant of God serves out of strength, love, and conviction.

We could go on to say that if a servant did not exercise his own rights it would mean that he would not have the right to his own time. It would be in the hands of others. If you feel like you need to be in control of your own time, if you feel like your time is your own, you can't really be a servant. Being a servant will always be inconvenient. You will end up resenting the opportunities and demands for service. They will interfere with your own plans. One thing about a servant is that his time is never his own, it belongs to Christ and the ones he serves. Others have a claim to his time.

Being a servant also means that we have no claim to our own comfort. A servant can't be concerned about his own comfort, and be ready to serve whenever and wherever God may call. He has to be concerned about the comfort of the ones he serves. He will give up his comfort so that the ones he serves can be cared for.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle to becoming a servant is having true humility. Pride can get in the way of so much of our service. We can't be a servant of God and allow pride to move us. The two don't mix. There has to be humility in the life of a servant. There has to be a willingness to be nothing, to take the lowest job, to go without any recognition for what we do. The Lord set this example when he washed His disciple's feet as an example of how they were to do for each other. (John 13:3-17) You can't be a servant without humility. You can't be looking at your own position, your own honor, your own recognition, and be a servant. They have to be set aside.

Let's shift gears now and look at another aspect of being a servant of the Lord. When we serve the Lord, we are not strictly serving for service's sake. We are not serving for the sole reason of providing service, like a charitable agency, for example. While we will have a real desire to see others blessed, we are serving to the end that our witness and testimony will bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a servant unto Him. We are serving to demonstrate His love and compassion. We are serving to bear witness to the fact that we belong to Him. We are serving in order to testify to the new heart we have been given. We are serving so that others would look to Him and give Him glory. We need to keep this in mind. It is easy to get our eyes off of this fact and serve for service's sake. If that happens, the church then becomes simply another charitable organization, instead of the body of Christ.

It is not so much that we have an ulterior motive in all that we do. It is not that we don't want to serve. We do. Regardless of the results, regardless of the consequences, we want to serve. It is a part of the character God has given us in our new life. But we also have a motive behind our service. We have a design behind it. We have a purpose for it. And that purpose is to glorify God.

God has called us to be His servants, to be His witnesses. Yet, if we attempt to fulfill this role out of the resources of the natural heart, it will most certainly become a burdensome thing. It is necessary to have the heart of a servant, the mind of Christ living in you, in order to have the freedom and desire to be the servant God wants you to be. Let this mind be in you also that was in Christ Jesus, and you will be a fruitful servant of the Lord, and He will get the glory for what is done.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Philippians 2:4-8
2. Colossians 3:22-25

Answer these questions:

1. Why is it necessary to have a servant's heart, rather than merely doing good for others?
2. Should being a servant of the Lord be a burdensome thing? Explain.
3. How is pride a great hurdle to being a servant?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 12 "CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND SERVICE"

Lesson 2 "Love and Thanksgiving, the Key to Service"

In this chapter, we are looking at being a servant of the Lord. As we think along this line, there are several questions we should ask. Why would a person want to be someone's servant? Why would a person want to humble himself under another? Why would a person want to put others first? Why would a person want to set aside his own rights and privileges? We can begin to answer these questions by looking at two items, love and thanksgiving. They are important keys to being a servant of the Lord. If we examine these two items, we could say that love is the motivation for being a servant of the Lord, and thanksgiving is the power to live the life of a servant. However, there is a lot of overlap in their outworking. Yet, it will help us to understand better the motivation and resources that are available to a servant of God if we look at the fruit of these two Christian graces.

Love is a large part of the motivation for Christian service. You may remember that at the end of the Gospel of John there is a story about the Apostle Peter when the Lord took him aside and asked him three times, "Do you love Me?" (John 21:15-17) Each time after Peter affirmed his love, the Lord said to him, "Feed my sheep." The Lord wanted Peter to know, and He wants us to know, if we love Him, He wants us to feed His sheep, to serve His people. Love for the Lord finds expression in feeding the sheep of the Lord. If we love the Lord, He would have us express that by caring for His people. We can't commit ourselves to the Lord without committing ourselves to those He came to serve. We are called to be servants of the Lord. That service will be rendered to His people. Love for Him will move us to feed His sheep.

When you get right down to it, there is not a lot you can do for the Lord personally. He doesn't need anything you have. There is nothing you have that He wants. He is God. Everything is already His. However, He

wants you to do for Him by doing for His people. Matthew 25:31 is another example of this dynamic. In this chapter the Lord tells us that what we do, even for the least of our brethren, He counts as having been done for Him, and what we neglect to do, even for the least of our brethren, He counts as us having neglected Him. Love for the Lord will lead us to serve His people.

There is another familiar passage of Scripture that makes this point in another way. Again in Matthew's Gospel, 22:36-40, there is recorded the incident when a Pharisee came to the Lord asking Him what is the greatest commandment of the law. The Lord answered Him by saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." He said that was the first and the great commandment. He went on to say, "The second is like unto it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He said that on these two commandments hung all of the law. In other words, the essence of doing God's will is contained in first, loving God, and second, loving your neighbor. If you want to be obedient to God, if you want to serve God, the very center of what you will be doing is loving God and loving your neighbor. That will be the expression of the heart that has been born again. In these great commandments love for God comes first and love for others comes second. Not only is love for your neighbor second in priority, but it is also second in chronology. That is, the love of God must first be shed abroad in your heart before you will be able to love your neighbor as yourself. It is because we love God and know His love that we love our neighbors and will be God's servants to them. Love for God and love for His people are inseparable.

When we think about the matter of love, we need to emphasize that love is primarily expressed in action, not feeling. The very essence of love for another is not measured by how good or warm you feel about them, but by how much you are willing to do for them. The essence of love is self-sacrifice for another's welfare. Love esteems another's welfare above its own. Love is an action, an action that takes what it has and uses it to meet the needs of the object of its love.

Therefore, when we say that love is the motivation for Christian service, we are not talking about feeling warm and tingly towards the ones we are to serve. We do not serve only the people we like and feel good about.

We do not wait until we feel good about someone before we are willing to serve them. Love and service are independent of personal feeling.

Actually, the love is the service. You can't separate the one from the other. When you love, you will serve. It is as simple as that. Love must find expression in service if it is to be love at all. Love will be that which inclines your heart to do for others, not based upon how good you feel about them, or how much they deserve your attention, but because of the need and the leading of the Lord for you to meet that need. The result will be a faithful witness for the Lord. He was the One, while we were yet sinners, who loved us and gave His life for us. (Rom. 5:8) That can be the example of how our love can be expressed in doing for one another.

John 13:34 contains these words of the Lord, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you, that you shall also love one another. By this all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one for another." How would all men know that these disciples had love one for another? They couldn't look into their hearts. They couldn't see their feelings. Their love was seen in their conduct and in their actions towards each other. The things that they did for each other, the self-sacrifice, and the seeking of their brother's welfare would be the evidence of their love. This kind of self-sacrifice for another's welfare is so unusual, it is so rare, that the witness to those who observed this conduct would be that God must be among them. By this all men would know that these are Christ's disciples. Love would be the very thing that would be the evidence that they knew and served the Lord. The same is certainly true for our day and time also. Man is naturally self-centered. Therefore, anytime that Christian love is exercised it will serve to witness to the presence of God.

Now on to thanksgiving, which we said earlier may well be the sustaining power for Christian service. There is a sense in which thanksgiving can be the power behind the expression of love. It can be the power that will move you to respond to God in gratitude. Thanksgiving is the power that can open your hearts to do what God would have you do for others. Thanksgiving is the response that elicits the love and keeps it alive and warm. Thanksgiving will keep your service for the Lord strong.

Thanksgiving keeps our eyes on the Lord and what He has done for us. Thanksgiving keeps our eyes on the love of God, on His providing, on His providential care, on all that He does for us. Thanksgiving will keep our hearts and minds filled with the love of God, and as our hearts are continually filled with gratitude for all the Lord has done, it will cause us to respond to Him in love and service. You need to have a thankful heart if you want to be a servant of the Lord. You need to have a heart that is constantly in touch with the goodness of God if you want to be an instrument of His goodness. You need to feed upon God's goodness to empower your own service on His behalf.

Thanksgiving will be the power behind what you do. If you want to feed God's sheep, one of the necessary elements you will need in your life is a heart of thanksgiving. You need to be sensitive to all that God has done for you and, as you are, you will find yourself automatically being moved to respond by serving others. Your heart will be changed to want to do for others, not to try to pay God back for His goodness, not to keep Him doing more for you in the future, but because of what He has already done for you. Thanksgiving will keep these things fresh in your mind and will keep your response to God strong, growing, and alive.

We started this lesson by asking why a person would want to be a servant. Why would a person want to set aside his own privileges and seek the welfare of another? Hopefully we have seen that it would be because of our love for God, which leads to love for our neighbors, and thanksgiving, which can be the sustaining power behind all that is done in the name of the Lord. Be thankful and recognize all that God does for you day by day. It will keep your heart warm and your service strong on behalf of the Lord.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. John 21:15-17
2. John 13:34-35

Answer these questions:

1. How should love motivate you for Christian witness and service?
2. How should thanksgiving empower you for Christian witness and service?
3. What is the difference between service as done by a Christian and that done by a charitable agency?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Week 12 "CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND SERVICE"

Lesson 3 "Christ, the Model for a Servant"

This chapter's theme is Christian witness and service. We have been looking at what it means to be a servant of the Lord. We have seen that it is necessary to have a servant's heart and to have love for and thanksgiving to the Lord. Yet, it is not always enough to know the right thing to do. We also need to see an example. We need to see a model. We need to see what it looks like lived out in life. In the Bible we have the perfect model in the Lord Jesus Christ. He Himself, very God of very God, was not a servant. He was God. Yet, He took on the role of a servant. He took on the form of a servant. In Luke 22 He says to His disciples, "I am among you as He that serves." He was not Himself a servant though He came to serve, and, in doing so, He showed us what a servant of God looks like, lived out in this world.

In this lesson we will look at the Lord Jesus Christ and a few of the Scripture passages that deal with Him as a model for a servant. In each of these instances He makes clear that we are to follow His example, not in our own power, but in His power, presenting ourselves as servants for God's sake.

The first passage we will look at is one we mentioned previously, Philippians 2. Verses 4 and 5 read, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." So we have in these two verses something of the motive behind the Lord's coming to serve. He was concerned with the welfare of others. He looked not on His own things. In other words, He was not self-centered. His love caused Him to be concerned for the needs of others. This is a picture of His heart. You have to start here. Before you even look at what He did, before you even mention the service He rendered, you need to look at the heart. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." What mind was that? It is a mind that looked on the things of others, on their welfare. That is a description of the heart and mind of Christ.

Then the text goes on to say in verse 6, "Who though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." This is the second necessary part of being a servant. You have to humble yourself. You have to set aside your own rights and position. The Lord set aside His privileges. Though He was God, He did not hang onto that, insisting on His rights and privileges as God. He was willing to set aside the privileges of His rank. He never set aside being God. He was always God. But He didn't let His position determine the service He would provide. For us it should be the same. You don't become a servant because you are the low man on the totem pole and that's all you can do. I don't care where you are on the totem pole, your heart must be willing to set aside your own personal position or rank and be willing to serve those whom the Lord would lead you to serve. This is the freedom that the Gospel gives you. The natural man would rebel against this. The Gospel frees us from the bondage to self, position, and pride, so we can serve God and others.

The passage goes on in verse 7 to say, "He made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of a man." He emptied Himself of all He had, even His reputation. He just didn't count that as important in comparison to what He had taken on to do.

Next it says that He took on the likeness of man. That is, He identified Himself with those whom He was serving. He didn't serve from the position of superiority, though He certainly was superior. He didn't serve with the idea that He was doing something benevolent, though He certainly was being benevolent. He served as one who knew the frailty and suffering of those He served. We too are to follow that example. It is not real service if we sit in our ivory tower and merely hand out blessings. To serve, you need to identify with those you have been called to serve. You need to identify with their frailty and suffering.

Verse 8 tells us, "Being found in the fashion of a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." This verse shows us the extent of His commitment to those He served. It shows the extent He was willing to go to bring about the purpose of

God, even unto death, an unbelievably ignoble death at that. In other words, there were no limits to His service. It wasn't that He would go so far and no further. Whatever was necessary, according to His Father's will, He was willing to give. That ought to be part of our commitment also. We are not fully servants of God if we set limits to how much we will give in our service. This doesn't mean we necessarily give all we have in each act of service, but it does mean we should be willing to serve as the Lord would lead us.

Then verses 9 and 10 go on to explain how God exalted Jesus and gave Him a name that was above every other name. True service will lead to exaltation in the Kingdom of God. How much different that is from the world's ways. In the world's ways the servant is the lowly one. He is the despised one. The ones that are exalted in the world are the masters, the served, the ones that pamper themselves. The Kingdom of God is just the opposite. The Lord told His disciples as they were talking about these things that he who would be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven is the servant of all. (Mt. 20:26) If you want to be great in God's Kingdom, you must empty yourself and be a servant. That is how God measures greatness.

Now let us turn to another passage in the Bible where we have the Lord giving us an example of service, and that is in the Gospel of John, chapter 13. Here we have the story of the Lord washing His disciples' feet. We won't quote the whole passage, but we will cite an introductory verse, and then summarize the passage and draw some conclusions from it. This passage describes a time following the last supper where the Lord gathers His disciples together and washes their feet. It says as a prelude to this action in verse 3, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, that He had come from God and that He went to God, He rose from His supper and laid aside His garments and took a towel and girded Himself."

What we need to see here is that the prelude to this lowly act of service was that Jesus knew that all things were given into His hands. He knew that He had come from God and that He went to God. It was because of who He was, because of His position, that He had the freedom to be a servant. You can take on the role of a servant because of your position

with God, because of who you are; you're a child of God. You belong to the King. You have come from God; you are going to go to God. You are going to be forever in His glory. You don't have to fight and scrap for a little glory here in this world. You already have it in Christ. You belong to the Lord. You can humble yourself. This is important for us to have in mind when we serve. Though we empty ourselves, though we serve with humility, we serve from a position of strength, because of who we are, heirs to the Kingdom of God.

With this as the backdrop, the Lord washed His disciples' feet, as would a lowly servant of that day. Peter objected to Him doing so for him; he felt that the task was too lowly for His Lord. Yet, when the Lord finished He said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you?" He said, "You call me Master and Lord and you say well for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." He wanted to impress upon them the necessity for them to humble themselves to serve one another. He set the example they were to follow. He made the point that they were to respond to Him, not by washing His feet, but by washing one another's feet. We respond to the Lord's care for us by serving one another. That is what He wants us to do.

Take on the form of a servant. Humble yourself. You can do that because you know who you belong to, because you know you already have glory, all the glory in the world. You could serve others if you really believed this. You would never need to worry about your own personal position or glory. You could devote your heart and mind to serving God. Let the Lord dwell in your heart, and He will live out His life of service and humility in you. The result will be others are blessed, God is glorified, and you will be blessed in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Luke 22:27
2. John 13:3-17

Answer these questions:

1. What does Philippians 2 teach is required prior to being a servant?
2. What does it mean when we say you are to serve from strength, and not from weakness?
3. How could you “wash one another’s feet” today?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 12 "CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND SERVICE"

Lesson 4 "Be Sensitive to the Needs Around You"

In this chapter we've seen something of the attitude that is needed to be a servant of the Lord. We've seen something of the motivation and the power that lies behind being a servant, and we've looked at Christ as a model for being a servant of God. Now we will focus our attention on how and where we are to serve the Lord. One of the dangers we face in our day is that, when we think about serving the Lord, we automatically tend to think about large areas of service. We almost automatically think that if you are going to serve the Lord you will have to be a missionary, an evangelist, or a preacher. We tend to think of service in these areas of full time service. While we need to be sensitive to such a calling, we also need to think smaller when it comes to serving the Lord. Don't automatically think of ministering to large groups of people, but think smaller in terms of your own situation, your own location.

In other words, when it comes to where you are to serve, remember that God has put you where you are. He had a reason in doing that. He wants you to serve where you are. Be faithful there. Serve there. Witness there. You are where you are because, in the providence of God, that is where He has placed you. That is most likely where He wants your witness to be. I don't care where you are. If you are at home, if you are in school, if you are in the office or on the job, the Lord has you there because that is where He has prepared for you to bear your witness. If He wants your witness in some other setting, He will let you know. Otherwise, He wants you to hold up His name where you are. There is an old hymn that tells you to "Brighten the corner where you are", because that is most likely where He wants your service to be. Be sensitive to the needs right where you are. Think about the relationships you have. Witness and serve in your family, on the job, at school, wherever He has you. It is just as important that you be faithful in your witness and setting, even if it is only to one person, as it is for an

international evangelist to be faithful as he ministers to tens of thousands of people.

Again, let me say, in terms of where you are to serve, think small. Begin in the home. You have those there that need your testimony and service. You have parents or brothers and sisters or children of your own. Each one of these, in the providence of God, has been exposed to you as a servant and a witness for the Lord. It may be the only one they have. Be faithful. If you have made a profession of faith and have unbelievers in your family, there is one thing for sure: they will be keeping an eye on you. They will be watching to see if you are different. Now they may not say it, but they will be watching. And you have a witness to them. You have an opportunity that no one else has with regard to them. Be faithful. Even if your family are already Christians, they need to see the witness of a faithful, mature believer.

The same holds true if you are in school or if you are on the job or wherever the Lord has you. People will notice if you are a Christian. When you think about being a servant for the Lord and bearing witness to the relationship you have with Him, don't put it off into the future. Look at where you are today and the opportunities that today presents.

Then, also in terms of not only where you serve but also in what you do as far as service, think small. It would be wonderful if some of you would become missionaries or evangelists or preachers. However, the Lord doesn't call everyone to those tasks. So what about those He doesn't? Think small. It is the little things that are important in your witness and service. It is the little things that the Lord can use to open the other person's heart. It is the little kindness shown to those who have been neglected by others. It is the care that is demonstrated when others have forgotten them. It is the concern shown in times of need. It is the friendship offered in troubled times. It is the little things that are important in Christian witness and service.

The Lord acknowledged that. He said that not even a cup of cold water that would be offered in His name would go unnoticed. (Mt. 10:42) Therefore, be sensitive to the needs around you. You are not called to bear the burdens of the world. You are not called to change the world.

But you are called to deal with the needs around you. Now, be sensitive to them. Do you know anyone who has a need? It might be easier to ask if you don't know anyone who has a need. Be sensitive to these needs. Ask the Lord to make you sensitive to them. Look at your neighbors, and ask the Lord how you can be a witness to them in word and deed. Look at your family, and ask the same question. Look upon God's people, and ask that question. Think small. What kindness can you show that will touch the heart of another? What would God have you do for them? These will be the things that will be effective.

When we serve in areas where service is expected, it might not bear the results it should. It is the unexpected kindness that can open a person's heart. For example, we might ask ourselves, and this is not meant in any way to be critical, that when the church goes around at Thanksgiving and Christmas and takes food and presents to the needy, has it almost become the expected thing to do? Maybe we should ask ourselves if it might be more effective if that kindness and expression of concern were shown at times when they were not expected. If we would show this kindness at some other time of the year, then we would have an opportunity to say that there was no special occasion for our action. We were doing it because we have the love of God in our hearts. We were doing it because we love the Lord, and He is concerned about you. He would have us do this for you. We might see if that kind of witness could be more effective than when it was customary for such things to be done. Again, be sensitive to the everyday needs around you, and see if the Lord might use you to minister to them.

As we continue to think along this line we could turn to the Bible verse that tells us, "Freely as you have received, freely give." (Mt. 10:8) If you are a believer, you have received an abundance of blessing from the Lord, all of it freely given. You didn't earn the blessing. You didn't deserve the blessing. Yet, they were given freely. Just as freely as you have been blessed, freely be a blessing to others.

We could ask the question, why, in the providence of God, do you have relationships with other people? What is the purpose behind those relationships? One reason is for encouragement. It is a blessing to have friends to share with. It is wonderful to have fellowship with others. We

need it. But there is a higher purpose for being involved in relationships with others. And that is, God gives us relationships so that we can serve one another. God gives us relationships so that we can do for the other person. The purpose in every relationship you have, whether it is with a brother or sister, a husband or wife, a parent or child, or friend to friend, whatever it is, the main purpose in having that relationship under God is so that you can be a servant and witness to them. It may be that sometimes they will also be a blessing to you, but as you go about building relationships with others, keep in mind that God would have you be a blessing to them for His sake.

We will end this lesson with something that is sad to say, but since it will be something that you will experience, you should be prepared for it. And that is, when you seek to serve the Lord, you are going to be misunderstood from time to time. Your motives will be misunderstood. People will assign motives to your actions that are not true. It happens to everyone that serves the Lord. It certainly happened to the Lord Himself. His motives were twisted and misjudged. It happened to Paul. It happened to all of the servants of the Lord, and it will happen to you. Don't let it stop or discourage you. Just recognize that it will be a part of being a servant of the Lord, and press on.

Like Esther, you have been called for such a time as this. (Esther 4:14) Look around and see the opportunities God has made available to you, and let your heart be open to His guidance concerning the individual acts of service that He would have you undertake right where you are.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Mark 9:41
2. Matthew 25:31-46

Answer these questions:

1. What is meant by “thinking small” in terms of Christian service?
2. What is the purpose of being a servant?
3. Why should you be aware that you may be misunderstood as you seek to serve the Lord?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

Chapter 12 "CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND SERVICE"

Lesson 5 "How to Witness to Others About Christ"

As we come to the last lesson, not only of this chapter but of the book itself, we are going to look at how to witness to others about the Lord Jesus Christ. For many new believers, as well as for many not so new in the faith, the idea of witnessing to others about the Lord can be a very frightening prospect. The reason is not because they are ashamed of Him or of their relationship with Him, but many people simply find it difficult to speak to others about matters as close to the heart as this. Many others feel unprepared, not knowing what to say. Others are concerned about what kind of response they will receive, being frightened that someone would make fun of them or attack them. But one thing you should understand is that nothing can bring more joy to the heart than speaking a word for the Lord. The joy that comes to a believer as he speaks a word for the Lord, far outweighs any natural fear that they might have of doing so.

Perhaps some of the fright one might have comes from a picture that they have in their mind of what it means to witness for the Lord. They might think it means walking down the street and buttonholing a stranger and asking him if he is saved. The Lord can use any method of witnessing, but that will probably not be the way that you are led to bear witness.

What will make a person's witness effective is if it is natural. It ought to be something that is just a natural part of your life. You will find yourself naturally speaking about the Lord as you go about your daily living because He is so much a part of it. It is natural because it is done in your everyday setting. It is natural because it is putting into words what is already in your heart. It is putting God centered words to your daily living, because your life is God centered. Your lifestyle will reflect your relationship with the Lord, and your spoken witness merely testifies to

that way of life. Your witness will be natural because it will involve your love and care for others. Your witness will be natural because it will be seen in the peace that you have in your life. Your witness will be natural because it will be seen in the values you exhibit as you live out your life.

Yet, even with all these things, there still must be a witness in words. People will have to know why you are like you are. They will have to know why you do the things that you do. They will have to hear from your lips that you do what you do because you belong to the Lord. You have peace in your heart because the Lord dwells there. You care for others because the Lord has shed abroad His love in your heart. People won't know why you are like you are unless you let them know. They may think you are just different. You need to tell them.

Some people may be concerned that they don't know what to say when they witness. There are many, many formulas around that will tell you how to lead another to the Lord. Yet, the most effective witness you can give is to tell of your own personal experience. There is a story in the Bible about the blind man who was given sight by the Lord. When he was asked to explain how he was changed, he simply said all I know is that once I was blind but now I see. (John 9:25) You can't argue with that. You can't deny the proof if it is standing right in front of you. That is a wonderful witness for the Lord. You don't have to be a believer for a long time in order to say that. It is the kind of witness any of God's people could give.

Having said that, hopefully you will also grow to where you can understand and explain the ins and outs of the Gospel to others, but don't despise the power of a simple testimony. You could say I don't know how it all works, but I do know that once I was lost, and now I am found. Once I was sunk in despair, and now the Lord has lifted me up and set me on high. Once I was in bondage to sin, and now I have been set free. Once I was on the road to hell, and now I have the assurance of heaven. That is a powerful witness.

In a courtroom, all a witness can do is tell what he has personally seen, what he personally knows to be true. He can't tell about something that has not been a part of his personal experience. The same holds true for a

witness of the Lord. The most effective thing you can say is that the Lord saved you and He can save them too. You could say that you know the Gospel is true because it worked for you. You experienced it. They may be able to argue about many things you say, but they can't deny your experience.

Another thing we need to say about witnessing for the Lord is that it ought to be open and honest. When you give your witness, don't try to hide it or sneak it in the back door. Don't do what is sometimes done with children, when parents try to hide medicine in their food. Be open and honest about it. Don't try to be deceptive. It will hurt your message. What you have to say is important enough that it can be dealt with above board. Let people know that you are concerned about their relationship with the Lord. Be open and honest about your desire that they believe. If you don't treat what you have to say as important enough to deal with openly and honestly, they will not get the idea that it is important either.

You should also be open and honest about what is involved in being a Christian. Don't make out as if everything will be a bed of roses if they only believe. It won't be, and it won't take them long to find that out. They may well discard the whole package when they discard this false idea you have planted in their minds. Let them know that becoming a Christian does not mean a life free of trouble. In many cases it may be the beginning of trouble for them. But they will have someone who walks with them side by side that makes it all worthwhile.

Be open and honest also about the cost of belonging to the Lord. We should all be concerned about many of the Gospel invitations that we hear. Some are very shallow. Some preach a Gospel of easy acceptance rather than one of costly commitment. Some ask people to accept Christ in a way that really doesn't call for any commitment on their part. They are led to believe that they can add Him to their life, just as they would take out a life insurance policy. The result will be church members that are very shallow in their relationship with the Lord. They feel like they belong to Him when they really may not. It is like they have received a spiritual inoculation. They have been given enough of the disease to ensure they will not get the real thing.

The grace of God is free. It must be received as a gift, but at the same time it will cost you everything you have. If you want Christ as your Savior, you must also have Him as the Lord of your daily living. You have to be a yielded vessel for Him to deal with. This needs to be a part of the witness you bear for the Lord.

In the desire to see people respond to the Gospel, some can make it sound as if it won't cost anything. Perhaps they are afraid, if they said that it will cost something, others may not respond. They end up implying that all one has to do to be saved is come forward at a revival meeting. All he has to do is say the sinner's prayer. All he has to do is ask Jesus to come into his heart. All these things are true if they are done with a heart that makes a real commitment. But they are not true, independent of that kind of commitment. We need to be open and honest about these matters as we witness for the Lord. There may not be as many people respond, but the integrity of the Gospel will be served.

It is only the Holy Spirit that can open a person's heart to the Gospel. You can't, by anything you say, save another person. The Holy Spirit will have to open his heart. He will have to give him ears to hear and eyes to see. Therefore, your witness must be bathed in prayer for the person to whom you want to witness. Ask God to open his heart. Ask God to give him ears to hear and eyes to see. God must do a work of grace in his heart. And that leads us to understand that the results of our labors for the Lord must be left in His hands. Your job is to be faithful in your witness and service, but the results are in God's hands.

In conclusion, if you spend time with the Lord, if you have daily fellowship with Him in your devotions, your witness will be a natural part of your life. But if you neglect your devotional times, your witness for the Lord will become a burden and something you will try to avoid. When you are in fellowship with Him, you will look for opportunities to witness, and appreciate them when they come.

So with this we come to the end of our series together. I trust it has been a profitable time for you. God's richest blessings on you as you seek to grow in His grace.

Read, and meditate on the following Scripture passages:

1. Matthew 5:14-16
2. Matthew 10:32-33

Answer these questions:

1. How can you deal with the fear of witnessing?
2. Explain what it means for your witness to be natural?
3. What have you learned from this week's study of Christian witness and service that has been most helpful to you?

Record here any question or comments you have about this lesson.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I came to faith at the age of 24 through the witness of a young airman while in the Air Force. I was given an immediate hunger for God's Word and a strong desire for personal growth in Him. My wife of forty-four years has been a faithful partner on this journey from faith to faithfulness. We have three adult, married, children, who by God's grace, are all walking with the Lord and active in their churches.

My own spiritual journey has led me to being a ruling elder and an ordained minister, pastoring three churches. I hold a Master of Divinity degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. My journey has also led to being the president of a multi-million dollar business with over 300 employees, making me familiar with the challenges of living the Christian life in the business world. I am now "retired," traveling full time while writing and having opportunities for preaching and conducting Bible conferences.

I can honestly say that walking with Lord is more exciting now than it has ever been. It certainly has not always been easy but it has always been a source of comfort and joy walking with the Lord.

Should you wish to contact the author, you can email him at:
Mike@FromFaithToFaithfulness.com.