



Growing Into Maturity by Finding Security in Christ

Compelling Love Bible Studies

By Clinton Meharry

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COMPELLING LOVE BIBLE STUDIES

“The love of Christ compels us...” 2 Corinthians 5:14.

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By Clinton Meharry

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With Suggested Answers For All Questions (see pages 253-274)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I grew up in a Christian home with two loving parents and three older brothers. Attending church each week was a part of life. We enjoyed the fellowship and friendships that developed. My parents willingly sacrificed for all of us to be able to attend Christian schools. The home, school and church experience provided a positive and Biblical foundation for me to build my life upon.

At age fifteen, my Christian life became more personal through positive influences of teachers and classmates. I began to fall in love with Jesus as I read the story of Jesus in the Bible along with a wonderful commentary called, “The Desire of Ages.”

The next year, a thought came into my mind. “I would like to be a minister and help others come to know Jesus as a personal Friend and Savior.” Then another thought came. “If I am going to be a minister, I better take this seriously.”

As I began to focus on how I was doing, I could always find fault with myself. Without a good understanding of the gospel, I began to live with a constant, nagging guilt. Eventually, that guilt led to much insecurity and a feeling of shame. That emotional pain led to seeking “pain relievers.” For me, that took the form of binging on food. It provided temporary pleasure, but it also led to more guilt. I found myself stuck in a cycle of addiction: guilt, shame, pain, pain reliever, guilt.... Since it was an “acceptable” addiction, and something I could hide, no one noticed but me.

The shame and insecurity kept me from seeking out the help that I needed. I almost gave up Christianity, for it wasn’t working for me. But I had seen others who had given up and noticed that they weren’t happy. I knew that Jesus was “the answer,” I just hadn’t figured out how to experience peace and victory for myself.

For 14 years I limped along in my struggling, Christian life. Looking back at those years, I recognize that God was removing any confidence in myself that might lead to pride or that might lead me away from trusting in His grace and righteousness alone.

God was also faithful to provide the help and encouragement that I needed to nurture me along. This came through family and friends, personal quiet time with Him, answers to prayer and His remarkable leading in my life.

Then in His wonderful providence and timing, He led me to understand the gospel foundation more clearly than ever before. I began to experience an inner peace and security that has led to a growing maturity in my relationship with God and others. I experienced freedom from the addictive cycle, victory in the Christian life and a new motivation for living for God.

In John 8:31,32, Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Having experienced freedom and joy through Jesus, it is my desire to share this good news with others.

It is my prayer that God will be able to use these Bible Studies to help many others understand and experience His unconditional love for the human race.

Knowing we can help each other learn and grow, I welcome and appreciate any suggestions, questions, or ideas you have as you study these lessons. May God bless each of us with the Holy Spirit that He may lead us step by step into all the truth He has for us. “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” John 16:13.

Your brother in Christ,

Clinton Meharry

APPRECIATION

The people who have influenced me in life are by far too many to list here. I would like to say thank you to my wife, Joan, for her love and faithfulness. Her friendship and prayer support has been a great encouragement and inspiration to me.

I would like to thank my son and daughter, Jonathan and Cherie, for their patience with me as I have grown, their forgiveness when I have failed, and the joy they have brought to me as we have lived together as a family.

I would like to thank my parents for their loving sacrifice in providing a Christian education and for their wonderful example of choosing to follow God. In each stage of their lives they have grown and have sought to live for Jesus and serve Him in their church, their family and their community.

Most of all, I would like to thank God for His amazing grace and wonderful love. He indeed is worthy to be worshipped and adored. He is the One who truly makes life worth living.

INTRODUCTION – BALANCED LIVING

WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

At the end of His “sermon on the mount,” Jesus made a bold statement that challenges every living person:

“Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.”

“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” Matthew 7:24-27.

Jesus left no room for misunderstanding His statement. It was either true or false. He was either the solid foundation to build one’s life upon or He was a great liar. He definitely got the attention of the people. Matthew reports their response:

“And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” Matthew 7:28,29.

Jesus compared our lives with building a house on a rock or on sand. When we build our lives on a firm foundation we will be able to withstand the storms life throws at us. When we build on a sandy foundation, our lives will crack, crumble and fall when the stress increases and the hurricane force winds blow.

JESUS IS THE FOUNDATION

In 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, Paul wrote, “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the

foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Jesus is the foundation for life and Christianity. Understanding what He has already accomplished for the human race provides inner peace and security. It changes our whole perspective in life and our motive for living. Jesus truly is a solid foundation to build our lives upon. He is able to give us something that the world never can:

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” John 14:27.

The world’s peace is based on everything going smoothly in life. Since there are always problems, the world’s peace is very shallow. The peace that Jesus gives is based on understanding His unconditional love and salvation, experiencing His forgiveness and trusting His promises.

Even in the midst of very difficult circumstances, Jesus had inner peace. Those who abide in Him will also experience the peace that He gives.

- “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” John 16:33.
- “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” Isaiah 26:3.
- “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” Philippians 4:6,7.

When we are filled with anxiety, we are invited to lay all our problems before God, trusting that He will listen and act according to His infinite wisdom, knowledge of the future, and love for everyone involved. Peace comes when we trust Him and thank Him for doing this.

WALLS: MAJOR TEACHINGS OF THE BIBLE

When we choose to build our lives on Jesus, we will have a solid foundation to build our “house” upon. We can then add the exterior walls and the roof that provide protection from bad weather and thieves. The roof and exterior walls could be compared to studying and understanding the major teachings of the Bible.

The truth in the Bible enables us to learn God’s perspective of life today, His knowledge of the past, and His promises for the future. These truths help us to recognize and resist Satan’s lies, temptations, and threats and also help us to grow up into maturity (John 8:32-36; Ephesians 4:11-16).

In the light of the gospel, the teachings of the Bible reveal a beautiful picture of who God is, what He is like, and how He is working to bring a complete end to the sin problem and all the pain and suffering it causes.

The truth gives us hope for the future as we look forward to the time when “the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” Revelation 21:3, 4.

ROOMS: A LIVING RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

When the foundation, outside walls and roof are in place, then we begin building and refining the inside of the house. This is where we spend our time and focus on our relationships.

This illustrates the living relationship we have with Jesus when we abide in Him and let Him abide in us (John 15:4, 5). “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” John 14:23.

Jesus will never force His way in. He says, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” Revelation 3:20.

As we fellowship with Jesus, our trust in Him grows stronger. We learn to recognize His voice and learn that life is truly worth living because He loves us and has a plan for our lives. We also discover there is no greater joy in life than working with Him to be a blessing to others.

ALL THREE PARTS ARE IMPORTANT

Without the foundation, the exterior walls and roof, or the inside rooms, a house would not be complete. In the same way, our Christian experience will not be complete if we neglect any one of the following:

- A. The gospel foundation
- B. The study of the Bible to understand what God says about life
- C. A living relationship with Jesus

DANGER FROM NEGLECTING THE GOSPEL

Since the foundation is not something we generally see, some might be tempted to think it isn't very important. When we fail to build a house on a solid foundation, major problems will arise. In the same way, when we fail to build our lives on Jesus, we will struggle. We will think our value and assurance of salvation comes from how good of a relationship we have with God, how mature we are, or what good things we have accomplished. This will lead to insecurity and a focus on ourselves:

Have I studied enough? Have I prayed enough? Have I witnessed enough? Have I truly repented? Do I have enough faith? Why am I not growing more than I am? Why is it taking so long? How can I know God loves and accepts me if I am always falling? Will I ever be good enough to find acceptance with God and make it to heaven?

Standing on the proper foundation frees us from serving God out of fear and selfish motives. It enables us to grow up into maturity and live for Him out of loving appreciation for His wonderful gift of salvation.

DANGER FROM NEGLECTING GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

A house without walls and a roof is not a house. In the same way, Christianity without the Bible is not Christianity. Some people say it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe in God. It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are a good person.

If we applied this way of thinking to ourselves, we would say, "It doesn't matter if a person believes I am honest or a liar, trustworthy or a thief, kind or abusive, loving or greedy. As long as they recognize that I exist, that is all that matters." Of course, we would object to that idea. We want to be represented correctly.

God also wants to be represented correctly. That is why He gave us the Bible. That is also one of the reasons why Jesus came to earth. He wanted to reveal what God is truly like. If we neglect to study the Bible, we will open ourselves up to Satan's clever deceptions and counterfeits. The trials and circumstances of life would then lead us to question God, doubt the gospel and trust in our own wisdom and strength.

Instead of understanding the truth from God's perspective, we will create our own ideas about God. We will then begin to worship a god who is made in our image, rather than letting God reveal the truth about Himself. Since God is so much greater than we are, it is impossible for us to come up with the truth about Him on our own.

God stated it very clearly. "'My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" Isaiah 55:8,9.

DANGER FROM NEGLECTING TO LIVE WITH JESUS

On the other hand, we can fall into another extreme. We can be tempted to relax and say, “My house is very sturdy. It has a strong foundation and the walls and roof are solid. It will always be there when I need it. I want to ‘enjoy’ some of what this world has to offer. I can pursue the ‘pleasures of sin’ for awhile, doing whatever I want to do. Then when I need Jesus, He will always be there in the house waiting for me. Whenever I am ready, I’ll come back and spend some time with Him.”

Unfortunately, many who fall into this trap become addicted to the “passing pleasures of sin” Hebrews 11:25. Their desire for a relationship with Jesus becomes less and less. Eventually many decide they don’t want any fellowship with Him at all, for they have come to love “darkness rather than light” John 3:19.

After believing lies about God, they reject the truth and would rather die than live with Jesus (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12; Revelation 6:14-16).

A Balanced Understanding Of The Bible Will Include:

1. Understanding the gospel foundation:
 - A. What Jesus has accomplished for the whole human race.
 - B. What He has saved us from, what He is saving us from, and what He will save us from.
2. Understanding God’s perspective of life today, His knowledge of the past, and His promises for the future.
3. Experiencing a living relationship with Jesus:
 - A. How do we respond to the gospel?
 - B. What does God promise to do for every believer?
 - C. How can we experience healing and live for the glory of God?

CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

Today, advertisers work hard at getting our attention, hoping we will buy the products they are promoting. We are used to exaggerated claims, attention grabbing pictures, and publicity stunts. Was Jesus using exaggerated claims in order to get our attention or was He communicating truth people could rely on?

These Bible Study guides are based on the conviction that Jesus truly is the “Savior of the world” John 4:42. There is much evidence to support this belief. This conviction is based upon careful evaluation of life, history, and the study of the Bible.

Intelligent Designer - Every product that we buy in a store has been designed and created by someone. We know it didn’t just accidentally evolve into a piece of furniture, a computer, or some other gadget. In the same way, human beings and the world we live in are too complex to simply have evolved accidentally. The evidence is strong that there is an Intelligent Designer who created life and the world.

“Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” Romans 1:20.

Fulfillment Of Prophecy - The Bible claims to be a book that reveals who this God is and what He is like. Can the Bible be trusted? God tells us how we can know.

“Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” Isaiah 46:9,10.

The Bible is full of evidence that God has accurately foretold events in the future. Daniel 2 is a simple prophecy that outlines 2500 years of history in advance. So far it has been accurately fulfilled. The rest of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation build on this simple outline and add more details in each succeeding prophecy.

Personal Testimonies - The life-changing testimonies of people give evidence that Jesus truly is a living Savior. Those who believe the truth and surrender their lives to Him discover the power of God to transform lives. The Bible promises amazing things:

1. “The truth will set you free” John 8:32.
2. The Holy Spirit will produce the qualities that everyone is wanting. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness. self-control” Galatians 5:22,23.
3. Forgiveness, hope, and eternal life with God. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” John 3:16.

When people experience God’s unconditional love, they will say with Paul, “The love of Christ compels me...” 2 Corinthians 5:14. “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” Romans 1:16.

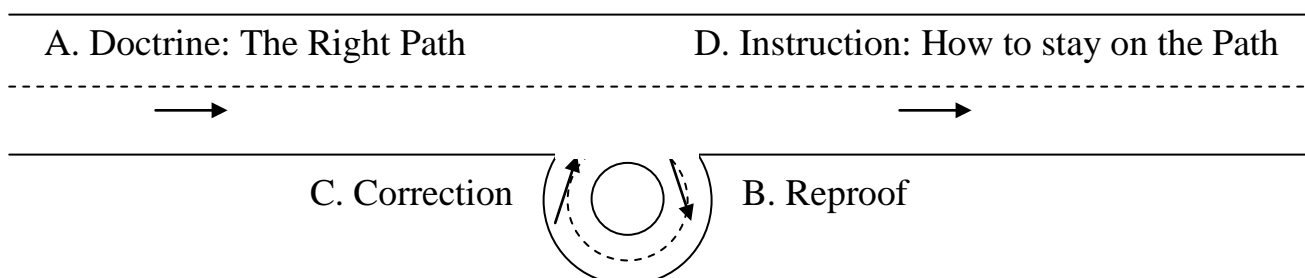
The transformation and testimonies of those who believe the truth will attract people to Jesus (Revelation 12:11). After Jesus healed a person who was demon possessed, people were afraid of Him. They asked Him to leave. Jesus then asked the one who had been healed to go back to his home and share his testimony with everyone. The man obeyed and shared “in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled” Mark 5:20. Several months later, Jesus came back to the region to find many people anxious to see Him. That is where He fed over 4000 people with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (Mark 7:31-8:9).

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE?

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

- A. Doctrine: The Bible teaches us what is true and right, describing Jesus as “The Way, the Truth, and the Life” John 14:6.
- B. Reproof: There are many detours along the way that distract us away from God. We are tempted to think these detours will bring us more happiness and love, but they always lead to more pain and brokenness. The Bible is faithful to reprove us when we stray from the right path so we can see where we have gone wrong.
- C. Correction: God’s grace and forgiveness enables us to experience healing and restoration. He leads us back onto the right path.
- D. Instruction in Righteousness: When we understand how painful and deceptive the detours are, we have a desire to avoid them. When we understand how amazing God’s grace is for everyone, it creates within us a desire to work for Him and glorify Him. The Bible provides instruction to help us stay on the right path.
- E. Thoroughly equipped: When people grow into maturity, God is able to use them more effectively in helping others.

Summary - The Bible Is Profitable For:



BORN TO BE SAVIOR

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Jesus was born to love and bring healing;
Born to be Savior, born to be King.
Filled with compassion, He knows what we're feeling.
Born our Redeemer, new life He'll bring.

Leaving aside His power and glory,
He became helpless and human by birth.
Learning from Mary the miracle story;
Jesus soon learned of His mission on earth.

Filled with the Spirit, wisdom, and kindness,
He came to free us from death and our sin.
Teaching the humble, removing our blindness,
He died to save us and live within.

(Words can be sung to the melody, "Morning Has Broken")

1 - IN THE BEGINNING:

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE BAD NEWS

LOVE AND FREEDOM GO TOGETHER

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day” Genesis 1:1, 31.

It is wonderful to visit manicured gardens that have been thoughtfully planned and properly cared for. The colorful flowers, the varieties of shrubs and trees, and the thick, green grass are a reminder of what the Garden of Eden must have looked like: beautiful, peaceful, paradise!

God created a world that we could thoroughly enjoy, planting the Garden of Eden as a gift to Adam and Eve. Love reigned in their hearts and all of the animals were friendly, living peacefully together. Indeed, everything God made was very good. There was no pain, sorrow or death. And God’s plan was that it would always be this way. He didn’t want us to learn what evil was like.

However, there was something He valued even more: freedom! He wanted love to be given freely, not manipulated or forced. In fact, it is impossible to have love without freedom. That is why He chose to place “The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” in the garden.

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” Genesis 2:15-17.

Adam and Eve already had the knowledge of good. If they wanted to learn about evil, they could communicate that choice by eating the fruit

from this tree. That is the only reason they would need to eat from this tree, for there was an abundance of food available on all the other trees. Unfortunately, rebellion in the universe had already occurred and Satan wanted Adam and Eve to join him in rebellion against God.

“War broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” Revelation 12:7-9.

Heaven! The place where we all want to be someday is where the war began! Amazing! That raises some questions:

- A. If war broke out in heaven in the first place, how can God prevent it from happening again?
- B. Does He turn everyone into robots, preventing them from rebelling? Does He take everyone's freedom of choice away?
- C. If God is going to take human beings to live with Him, how does He know which ones are trustworthy and which ones are not?
- D. What ultimately happens to Satan and his angels and the humans who are not taken to heaven?

In the Bible God reveals the truth about Himself and how He will bring a complete end to sin and the sin problem. He revealed the following scene to John. It shows us the kind of life God originally intended for the human race and the promise that it will be restored.

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.... God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there

shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.... There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie” Revelation 21:1,3,4,27.

All that is beautiful and valuable will be completely restored:

- A. Perfect joy, harmony, and love in all relationships.
- B. A place where there is both security and freedom.
- C. A place where we won’t get hurt and where everyone looks out for the needs of the other.
- D. The opportunity to explore the wonders and beauty of God’s creation throughout the universe without any fear.

SATAN’S LIES

In Revelation 12:9, the phrase, “that serpent of old,” is a reference to Genesis 3, where Satan uses a serpent to speak to Eve. He deceives her, persuading her to eat the “forbidden fruit.”

1. Why did Satan talk through a serpent? Genesis 3:1,13

By talking through a serpent, Satan aroused Eve’s curiosity. She might have wondered if eating the fruit from this tree would do something miraculous for her as it apparently did for the serpent.

Satan is very clever, deceptive, and persistent. Therefore we are counseled: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” 1 Peter 5:8. “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” Matthew 26:41.

2. Compare what God said in Genesis 2:16,17 with what Satan said in Genesis 3:1? What were the words that Satan chose to quote?

God said, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 2:16

Satan said, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” Genesis 3:1

Satan quoted a portion of what God said and changed the order of the phrases. His words encouraged her to focus on why God would say they couldn’t eat from this tree? The incomplete message also enticed Eve into a conversation with Satan. She tried to clarify what God had actually said. In his reply, Satan implied that God was a liar and selfish.

Satan tries to lead us away from God by sharing half-truths, mixing truth with error, or by leading people to emphasize one part of the Bible and ignore other parts. This will always lead to an unbalanced experience. Fortunately, we do not have to be led astray. When we maintain a humble and teachable spirit, the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth as we prayerfully study the Bible (John 5:40,41; 7:17; 16:13).

3. How did Satan contradict God? What did he imply? Genesis 3:4

Satan implied, “You don’t need to obey God. You will not die! The consequences that God said would happen, will not happen.”

He uses this same tactic today: “You can do it just this once. It’s not that big of deal. No one will know. What can possibly happen? It feels so good, what can possibly be wrong with it? God is a loving God, He’ll forgive! Go ahead. You’ll be ok.” In various ways, Satan tries to get us to believe, “You don’t need to obey God.”

4. What did Satan suggest that Eve should know about? Genesis 3:5

Satan implies that they should not obey God, for they would miss out on “being like God, knowing good and evil.” Adam and Eve had no knowledge of evil. Out of mercy and love, God did not want them to understand or experience it.

However, Satan implies that evil would be something positive and wonderful. He tries to convince us of the same thing today: “You will miss out on so much pleasure if you obey God. Following Him is boring. Times have changed. The Bible is out-dated. Following its laws may lead to pain. God would not want you to suffer. He wants you to enjoy life. You need to follow your heart. If you really want to be happy in life, you should not obey God.”

Eve believed Satan and ate the fruit. She then gave some to Adam, “and he ate” (Genesis 3:6). Their action communicated their choice to learn about evil and join in the rebellion against God.

As a result of Adam's choice, everyone has been born with a sinful nature. As a result, we can't help but sin (2 Peter 2:19; John 8:34; 15:4,5). Satan takes advantage of our condition and tries to make us believe, “You cannot obey God!” Without a Savior to save us from our sin, Satan is correct. Fortunately, we do have a Savior and we don't have to remain as slaves to sin and Satan.

THE CHOICE OF ADAM AND EVE

5. What did Adam and Eve do after they ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Genesis 3:6-8

Their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked. (Before this, they may have been clothed with light, as Moses was after he spent time with God. “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai ...the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him” Exodus 34:29-35. Moses needed to put a veil on his face so he could meet with the people.)

Adam and Eve attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves, but it was very inadequate. They were ashamed and hid from God when He came to talk with them. Sin always leads to shame, pain, and broken relationships. Shame leads people to hide from God and others and use “pain-relievers” to numb the emotional pain and spiritual emptiness.

A SERIOUS GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK

6. What did God ask Adam and Eve? If God knows everything, why did He ask them any questions? Genesis 3:9

God respects our freedom of choice. By asking a question, God gives Adam and Eve the opportunity to avoid Him or be honest with Him. When we acknowledge our failure, we are more open to receive the help and healing God can bring. We can think of God’s question as a serious game of “hide and seek.” Adam and Eve were hiding because of their guilt and shame. God was seeking them because He loved them and He had good news to share with them.

7. How did Adam and Eve respond to the questions God asked them? Genesis 3:12, 13

A. Adam: _____

B. Eve: _____

They were honest with God, but each of them added a hint of blame, as if to say, “I wouldn’t have done it if...” How easy it is to point the blame at others and justify ourselves. God is able to bring healing into our lives only when we are honest and acknowledge our need for help.

8. What limitation was placed upon the snake as a consequence for being used by Satan to tempt Eve? Genesis 3:14

9. What evidence is there that God is talking to Satan in Genesis 3:15? Revelation 12:7-9

In Revelation 12:9 Satan is referred to as “that serpent of old,” referring to when Satan talked through the serpent to deceive Eve.

CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

10. What did God say would happen to Satan? What would Satan be able to do to Jesus, the Seed of the woman? Genesis 3:15

Genesis 3:15 gives us a first glimpse of what the plan of salvation would accomplish. In the last half of the verse, God refers to the seed of the woman as He, referring to Jesus. “He shall bruise your head.” This is a promise that Jesus would bring an end to Satan (Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14). The verse also says, “You [Satan] shall bruise His heel.” While Satan would hurt Jesus, he could not destroy Him. He tried to keep Jesus in the grave, but Jesus was resurrected (Matt. 27:62-28:7).

11. What did God say He would put between Satan and the woman and between his seed and her Seed? Genesis 3:15

When Adam and Eve chose to learn about evil, they joined Satan in his rebellion against God. They became sinners with a sinful nature and passed that nature onto the whole human race. Paul wrote, we all are “by nature children of wrath” Ephesians 2:3. With this sinful nature, we are naturally at “enmity against God” Romans 8:7. In other words, without a Savior everyone would remain united with Satan in a war against God.

In Genesis 3:15 God promised a Savior would be born to free the human race from Satan’s dominion (Colossians 1:12-14).

Since God respects our freedom of choice, He will never force anyone to love Him. Instead, He draws us “with loving kindness” Jeremiah 31:3. Jesus said, “If I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all peoples to Myself” John 12:32. When He was lifted up on the cross, Jesus revealed His unconditional love for the human race. As a powerful magnet draws metal to itself, so Jesus’ love is drawing everyone to Himself.

Unfortunately, many will resist and reject Jesus’ love, for they love sin and hate the light (John 3:19-21). These are referred to as Satan’s seed in Genesis 3:15. Notice how Jesus referred to those who were fighting against Him. “You are of your father the devil, and the desire of your father you want to do” John 8:44. (See also John 15:18-20).

The seed of the woman is identified as Christ and His followers. He is the Head and they are the members of His body (1 Corinthians 12:12,13; Ephesians 4:15,16; 5:23). The woman’s seed or offspring are identified as those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. They cling to the blood of the Lamb, share their testimony, and are willing to die, rather than hurt God or others (Revelation 12:17,11).

12. What consequences were communicated to Eve? Genesis 3:16

A. _____

B. _____

Sorrow - The sorrow refers to the physical pain of giving birth. It also refers to the emotional pain of giving birth to children with selfish human natures. When Cain killed Abel, the emotional pain for Eve had to be much worse than the physical pain of childbirth. As a result of the sinful nature everyone is born with, much of the time, energy, and resources in society are spent trying to keep evil under control. While laws, punishments, and rewards attempt to prevent evil, only God can change the heart so that unselfish love flows from within.

Desire - This word hints there would be a longing for something that is desperately needed, but missing. God said it is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). We were created as social beings. In Eden, Adam and Eve were able to freely give and receive love. They experienced the emotional, spiritual, and physical oneness that brought joy to their hearts.

After they sinned, selfishness entered the human race, leading to insecurity and broken relationships. That is why God said Eve, along with other women, would desire and long for oneness with their husbands. This longing would create a vulnerability that could lead to manipulation.

Rule - Selfishness can lead husbands and wives to try to dominate and control each other in order to get what they want. Without love and security in the home, husbands and wives will not be able to experience oneness with each other. It will also be difficult for children to grow into maturity. When we've been hurt, it is appropriate to maintain healthy boundaries in order to protect ourselves. However, we can also be tempted to use unhealthy ways of coping. We use addictive substances, pleasure-seeking, busyness, entertainment, etc., to try to numb our emotional pain and protect ourselves from being hurt again. When this happens we begin to harden our hearts. We then have a difficult time giving and receiving *healthy* love, the very thing we all need and desire.

While selfishness and pride will lead people to try to manipulate and control others, Jesus said loving service is the healthy way to "rule."

"Rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28.

Husbands are invited to take the lead in receiving Jesus' love and forgiveness and in creating a safe, loving, and forgiving atmosphere in the home. Paul wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" Ephesians 5:25. Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you" John 15:12. When we experience Jesus' love and forgiveness, we can begin to love and forgive others in unselfish ways.

Wives are counseled, "submit to your own husbands, *as to the Lord*" Ephesians 5:22. When we submit our lives to God, we are opening ourselves up to receive His love and healing. This enables us to grow into maturity and begin to love others as He has loved us. John 15:12.

Great healing can come when husbands and wives "submit to one another" (Ephesians 5:21), that they may give and receive love freely, without manipulation or resentment. When this happens in the home, there will be security in the family and a little taste of heaven on earth.

What consequences are communicated to Adam? Genesis 3:17-19

When Adam and Eve sinned, they communicated their desire to be independent from God and to learn about evil. God honored their choice. Before sin, God enabled the plants and trees to produce food spontaneously (Genesis 1:29; 2:9). After sin, the ground would naturally produce "thorns and thistles" Genesis 3:18.

While God never wanted us to experience this “curse,” work is truly a blessing. Without it we would tend to pursue the sinful indulgence of appetite and passion. But even hard work would not keep people alive forever, for everyone would “return to the ground.” Sickness and death are part of the painful consequences of choosing to learn about evil.

OUR HUMAN CONDITION – THE BAD NEWS

13. What impact did Adam’s choice have on everyone?

- A. Romans 5:12 “Through _____ man sin entered the world.”
- B. Romans 5:18 “Through _____ man's _____ judgment came to all men, resulting in _____.”
- C. Romans 5:19 “By one man's _____ many were _____.”
- D. Romans 7:18-21 “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) _____ good dwells.... I find then a _____, that _____ is present with me, the one who wills to do good.”

When God created Adam, He was creating the human race. For the human race is the multiplication of Adam’s life (Acts 17:26). When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost something. The Holy Spirit no longer dwelt within them and they became selfish by nature. This was the only nature they could pass on to their children. As a result, we are all condemned and “by nature children of wrath” Ephesians 2:3. Being sinners by nature and performance, we are helpless without a Savior.

14. How were David and others born? Psalm 51:5; 58:3

The literal meaning of the word translated “iniquity” is “to crook,” to bend or make crooked (See Strong’s Concordance). We could describe it as love bent inwards: self-centered or selfish.

15. How does Isaiah illustrate our true condition? Isaiah 53:6

Because of our sinful condition, we are by nature self-centered. We go astray and follow our own way the moment we are born. The good news is we have a Savior who saves from all aspects of the sin problem.

16. How does Jeremiah describe our human condition? Jer. 17:9

17. What did Jesus say about those in Laodicea? What do they think about themselves? Who is right? Revelation 3:17

Those who think they are pretty good people do not feel their need for a Savior. Jesus describes the condition of our sinful human nature as “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.” It is hard for people to believe this. As humans, we like to think that we are basically good people who do some things wrong, but Jesus describes us differently.

18. How much fruit can we produce apart from Jesus? John 15:4,5

Understanding this truth is as important as understanding what Jesus has done for the human race. Without the conviction that we are helpless on our own, we will not see our need for a Savior.

19. What kind of fruit do bad trees produce? What kind of fruit do good trees produce? What kind of tree are we? Matthew 7:16-20

Jesus states a simple concept: a good tree cannot produce bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. The question is, “What kind of trees are we, good or bad?”

In other words, “Are we basically good people who do some bad things, or are we bad people who can do nothing good?”

Since we have sinful natures and are helpless without Jesus, we can only be described as bad trees in ourselves. But when we have the Holy Spirit living within our lives, He will produce the righteous fruit within us.

20. What kind of “fruit” is produced in our lives when the Holy Spirit is living within us? Galatians 5:22,23.

- | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ | 9. _____ |

God waits for us to ask before He will send the Holy Spirit to live within us (Luke 11:13). When He comes, He will transform us on the inside and produce these qualities within us. It is called the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is not fruit that we produce ourselves.

That is why Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” Matt. 5:16.

They will glorify God, for He is the source of all the good works.

21. What else does Jesus say that can help us see God’s perspective?

A. Matthew 19:16,17 _____

B. Luke 11:13 _____

Matthew 19:16,17 – Jesus was asked, “‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.’” In other words, no human can be described as “good.” Only God is good.

Luke 11:13 - In the context of an incredible promise, Jesus gave a general description of what we are like. “If you being evil...” Since we are sinful and selfish by nature, Jesus must describe us according to the truth. We are evil. However, since evil people are able to give “good gifts” to others, it appears that we are basically good.

The truth is we are able to give good gifts out of selfish motives. We can give in order to get something in return. Or we may give so that others will think well of us. Paul says if I do these things, “but have not love, it profits me nothing” 1 Corinthians 13:3.

22. How does Paul describe us in Romans 5:6-10?

_____ (Verse 6) _____ (Verse 6)

_____ (Verse 8) _____ (Verse 10)

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE BAD NEWS

23. How does God respond to us when we are this way? Rom. 5:6-10

Instead of rejecting us, God takes the initiative to love and redeem us. The good news about the bad news is this: We don't have to try to be good in order to make God love us, for He already does. We don't have to pretend that we are good out of fear of rejection, for Jesus came to save us, not to condemn us (John 3:17).

God's love for us is not based on our performance. He loves us in spite of our condition. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less. We can relax and be honest with God. This good news allows us to experience security and peace with God. It enables us to grow up into maturity. Bill Gaither wrote a song that sums it up well:

“I am loved, I am loved, I can risk loving you,
For the One who knows me best, loves me most.
I am loved, I am loved, won't you please take my hand.
We are free to love each other, we are loved.”

“I said, ‘If you knew, you wouldn't want me;
My scars are hidden by the face I wear.’
He said, ‘My child, my scars go deeper;
It was love for you that put them there.’”

24. What kind of clothes did God make for Adam and Eve? What is the significance of this? Genesis 3:21

The fig leaf clothes Adam and Eve had made were very inadequate. God “made tunics of skin, and clothed them.” As God promised, death did occur that very day (Genesis 2:17). The garments of skin from animals were a constant reminder that the wages of sin was death. The animals that died represented their death and also pointed forward to Jesus dying on the cross to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29; Rev. 13:8). They knew they were alive because Jesus promised to be their Savior.

25. Thought questions:

A. Do you like being around people who have “the fruit of the Spirit” in their lives? ____ Yes ____ No

B. Explain your answer. Why did you mark the one you did?

C. Would you like to have “the fruit of the Spirit” in your life?
____ Yes ____ No

IT’S OK TO DISOBEY?

By Clinton Meharry, © 2008, 2011

“It’s OK to disobey,
It doesn’t matter what you do!
Go ahead” Satan said,
“The fruit is really good for you.”

“You won’t die! That’s a lie!
God just wants this for Himself!
Adam and Eve, you can believe
You’ll become like God yourself!”

“Come and see, look at me!
How could a serpent really talk?
Open your eyes; you’ll become wise!
Adventure waits you on this walk.”

“Knowing the good, you really should
Experience evil too.
Don’t hold back, take the snack.
Evil will be good for you!”

When they took, all heaven shook
With grief and tears that day.
Heaven knew what was true –
Sin would take their life away.

When God came the pair felt shame.
They ran away to hide.
Filled with fear with death so near,
They knew that Satan lied.

When God spoke the pair felt hope!
They heard amazing grace.
While sin brought pain,
God’s love would reign –
He’d redeem the human race!

2 - THE LOVE OF GOD

A SIMPLE MESSAGE – JESUS LOVES ME

The simple hymn, “Jesus Loves Me,” summarizes the basic message of Christianity. The song reminds us of five important truths that help us grow into maturity by finding our peace and security in Jesus.

Jesus loves me this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak, but He is strong!

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

1. When I know that I am loved by Jesus, I am drawn to Him.
2. When the conviction that He loves me is based on what the Bible says, rather than my feelings, I will be able to experience inner peace and security, no matter what circumstances I am in.
3. When I understand that I belong to Jesus because He created and redeemed me, I am free to serve Him out of love and appreciation, rather than out of fear of punishment or a desire to earn His favor.
4. When I remember that I am weak and helpless to do anything good on my own, I will remain humble and dependent upon Him.
5. When I remember that He is strong and has already conquered the enemy, I am free to live without fear, trusting in His power and providence every day.

If I forget or neglect any one of these truths, I will find it easier to trust in myself, rather than in Jesus for my life and salvation.

DIMENSIONS OF GOD'S LOVE

1. What did Paul pray that we might experience? Ephesians 3:17-19

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

Paul wants us to be so “rooted and grounded” in the love of Christ that we may want to “be filled with all the fullness of God.” His love is so:

- Wide - His love encircles the whole human race.
- Long - He is patient when reaching out to everyone.
- High - His love is not mixed with any selfishness.
- Deep - No one has sunk so low that God does not love them.

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, New Living Translation, Second Edition

GOD LOVES US BECAUSE . . .

2. How does the Bible describe the nature of God? 1 John 4:8

3. What was the motivation that led Jesus to be our Savior?

- A. John 3:16, 17 _____
- B. Ephesians 2:4,5 _____
- C. Titus 3:3-7 _____

If God's love for us were based on our goodness or performance, we would be very insecure. For every time we messed up, we would worry that He couldn't love us anymore. However, we experience great security when we learn that God took the initiative to love and redeem the human race before we did anything good.

Early in their marriage, a wife would sometimes ask her husband, "Why do you love me?" After much thought, the husband responded,

"If I say that I love you because you are beautiful, honest, hardworking, a great pianist, a good cook, clean and neat, a wonderful friend, all of the above would be true. But my love for you is not based on those things. If you were in a car wreck and became paralyzed and your face became burned and scarred, I would still love you. I love you because Jesus has loved me and I have committed my heart and my life to you."

Before marriage, the close relationship of a man and woman is based on mutual attraction, enjoying common interests, and sharing similar beliefs and goals. When two people get married, the relationship adds an additional element that provides a solid foundation to build upon: a commitment to each other until death, no matter what the circumstances.

God has chosen to love the human race and be committed to her until the final death separates them from Him. He has taken the initiative to love and redeem the world, but then He gives each person the freedom to choose to live with Him now and forever or to perish (John 3:16).

I DON'T CONDEMN YOU, YOU ARE FREE TO LOVE

4. How do you think the woman felt when she was publicly accused of adultery? How would you have felt if you were her? John 8:2-5.

5. How did Jesus respond to those who accused her? John 8:6-9

Jesus knew the hypocrisy of the accusers. They said they caught the woman in the very act. That means the man would have also been caught. The law they referred to said both the man and the woman should be stoned (Leviticus 20:10). Since the man was let go, Jesus knew they were trying to set a trap for Him. It was a clever trap.

If He said, “Stone her,” they could have said to the Romans, “Jesus is disregarding your authority.” If He said, “The woman should be let go,” they could have accused Him of disregarding the Law of Moses.

Jesus began to quietly write in the dust the sins of the accusers, from the eldest to the youngest. When they insisted on an answer, Jesus said, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”

As people began to read what Jesus wrote, all the accusers left, convicted by their own conscience. One commentary says,

“Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people.”

“He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes” Desire of Ages, page 353.

6. How do you think the woman felt when Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more?” John 8:10-12

Jesus gave her hope. She wasn't going to die. She was free to live! But how should she live? Jesus in essence said, "Don't hurt yourself anymore. Don't choose to go back to a life of sin and pain. Discover what God's real plan is for your life! You are free to truly experience God's love that you may learn how to truly love others."

Then Jesus spoke to her and to everyone listening, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" John 8:12. By inviting her to walk in the light He was giving, He was showing her the way to experience freedom from slavery to sin.

7. Does Jesus treat us the same way?

A. John 3:17 "God did not send His Son into the world to _____ the world, but that the _____ through Him might be _____."

B. 2 Corinthians 5:19 "God was in Christ reconciling the _____ to Himself, not imputing (or counting) their _____ to (or against) them."

If the accusers had stayed around and acknowledged their sin, they could have heard the same words Jesus spoke to the woman. The message that the woman heard is the message God is trying to communicate to everyone, "I don't condemn you! You are free to leave your life of sin. Experience my love that you may "love one another as I have loved you" John 15:12. This message could be summed up as:

- Freedom from condemnation precedes freedom from slavery to sin.
- Being treasured precedes being transformed.
- Being loved unselfishly precedes being able to love others unselfishly.
- Experiencing healing precedes being able to help others heal.

AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE; A STORY OF GRACE

8. Read Luke 7:36-50

A. How did the woman express her love for Jesus in a tangible way?

B. What question arose in Simon's mind as a result of her actions?

C. Summarize the parable Jesus shared with Simon.

D. What lesson did Jesus want Simon and the woman to understand?

Simon knew the woman had openly disregarded the law of God. He knew she was a “sinner” and “untouchable.” Jesus knew all were sinners and in need of God’s forgiveness. That is why he came. Simon hadn’t understood the depth of his own sin and the greatness of God’s love.

Those who recognize they have been forgiven much, will love much. Jesus is not encouraging people to commit lots of sinful acts so they can be forgiven much and love much. He is calling us to recognize how great our sin already is. The closer we come to Jesus, the more we will:

- See the contrast between His great love and our natural selfishness.
- Understand how much we need a Savior.
- Recognize how amazing God’s grace really is.

HUMAN LOVE VERSUS GOD'S KIND OF LOVE

9. How does Jesus describe God's kind of love in Luke 6:27-31?

“Love your _____, do good to those who _____ you, bless those who _____ you, and _____ for those who _____ you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. _____ to everyone who _____ of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you _____ men to _____ to you, you also _____ to them likewise.”

If we see this passage as simply a command from Jesus, we would be overwhelmed and say, “Impossible!” But when we see this as a description of how God loves us, we are amazed and drawn to Him. We can also understand this command as a promise. This is the kind of love God will create within us when we give Him permission.

A caution might be appropriate. Jesus says, “Give to everyone who asks of you.” He doesn’t say, “Give what they ask of you.” God doesn’t give us everything we ask. Out of love for us, He gives us what we need.

One three year old girl was anxious to have a sister to play with. When her mother told her she wouldn’t be having any more babies, the girl prayed, “Dear God, please help me to get pregnant.” Her parents were very thankful that God did not say yes to her prayer at that time.

When someone asks us for something, we can lovingly listen to understand the real need and prayerfully seek God’s guidance that we might know how He would have us help. Jesus then promises to provide for our needs when we do love others as He has loved us.

“Give, and it will be given to you: . . . For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” Luke 6:38.

10. How does Jesus describe our natural human love? Luke 6:32-34

Our natural human love is selfish and self-centered. We love as long as we receive love, we give in order to get, and we are kind to others, so that others will be kind to us. But if someone lets us down, mistreats us or takes advantage of us, we tend to withhold our love or seek revenge. Jesus says the Jews were being taught to love only those who loved them. Jesus taught us we should love our enemies also (Matthew 5:43).

11. Who does Jesus say the world loves? John 15:19

The world accepts and enjoys being with those who are like them. They feel comfortable being around those who love “darkness, rather than light, because their deeds were evil” John 3:19.

On the other hand, they feel uncomfortable being around Christians who love truth and righteousness. Even though a Christian may be very loving and say nothing, the person who clings to sin is reminded that what they are doing is wrong. The longer they resist the light, the more they will hate those who love the light (John 3:21).

12. What kinds of works can people do who are motivated by selfishness rather than by love? 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

A. Verse 1 _____

B. Verse 2 _____

C. Verse 3 _____

Some “good works” are very deceiving, for they appear very loving. However, it is possible to do many things motivated by selfishness rather than by love. We can speak eloquently in different languages in

order to seek the applause of the crowds. We can work miracles in order to deceive (Matthew 7:21-23; Rev. 13:13,14). We can give all we have to the poor to make people think we are wonderful. We can even become a martyr to try to earn favor with God, like the suicide bombers.

Many people try to imitate the fruit of righteousness out of a desire for praise, acceptance, or lasting significance. However, God is able to discern “the thoughts and intents of the heart” Hebrews 4:12.

13. How does Jesus illustrate God’s unconditional love? Matthew 5:45

14. How did Jesus say we are to love others? John 13:34,35: 15:12

We need to experience God’s love before we can truly love others with God’s kind of love. Jesus also implies that we will love others the same way we believe that He has loved us: conditionally or unconditionally.

NATURAL HUMAN LOVE IS:	GOD'S LOVE IS:
CONDITIONAL Depends on beauty or goodness and therefore needs arousing	UNCONDITIONAL Is spontaneous, uncaused, and independent of our goodness (see Romans 5:6-10; 2Corinthians 5:19)
CHANGEABLE Fluctuates and is unreliable, based upon emotions and circumstances	CHANGELESS Is everlasting (see Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:35-39 and John 13:1)
SELF-SEEKING Seeks acceptance and fulfillment through possessions, performance and power. Tries to be better than others to make themselves valuable	SELF-EMPTYING Is selfless, and therefore will step down for the benefit of others (see 1 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Corinthians 8:9; and Philipians 2:6-8)

UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL IS RELATED TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S LOVE

Satan has tried to distort the truth of God's love to keep us from being drawn by His amazing grace and experiencing the power of the gospel.

When our understanding of God's love is faulty, it will lead to a perversion of the gospel (Galatians 1:7) and a motivation to serve God out of fear and reward. While there is only one true gospel, the following chart describes different beliefs people have had about how God relates to the human race. It also summarizes why some people will be lost in the end and not experience eternal life with God.

Non-Christian or Atheism	Distorted Gospel	Everlasting Gospel	Distorted Gospel	Distorted Gospel Universalism
God's favor must be earned / There is no God.	God's love and grace must be partially earned.	God's love and grace are given freely to all.	God's love and grace are given freely to some.	God's love and grace are given freely to all.
The next life is based on our own works	Salvation is by grace + works	Salvation is by grace alone for all	Salvation is by grace alone for some	Salvation is by grace alone for all
<div> <div>God</div> <div>↑</div> <div>Mankind</div> </div>	<div> <div>God</div> <div>↕</div> <div>Mankind</div> </div>	<div> <div>God</div> <div>↓</div> <div>Mankind</div> </div>	<div> <div>God</div> <div>↓</div> <div>The Elect</div> </div>	<div> <div>God</div> <div>↓</div> <div>Mankind</div> </div>
People will suffer longer if they do not do what their "god" wants. All die. There is no life after death.	People are "lost" because they fail to believe or do enough of what God asks them to do.	People are "lost" and perish because they love sin and do not want a Savior from sin.	People are "lost" because God has chosen to save only some of the human race. Others have no choice.	No one will be lost, for God will eventually win the hearts of all now or in the next life.

NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS / ATHIESM

All non-Christian religions are based on a system of works to earn the favor of some god to avoid being cursed and to gain a better afterlife. There is no concept of a Savior from sin. Some choose to believe there is no God at all.

DISTORTION: SALVATION BY GRACE + WORKS

It is hard for us to fully understand God's unconditional love. We feel we need to do something to earn it. Paul described this problem when he wrote, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" Gal. 1:6,7.

"Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" Galatians 3:2,3.

Because of our natural tendency to believe that we must earn something, it is easy to fall into this trap. There are many variations of this idea. A clear understanding of the gospel will enable us to avoid this problem.

THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL

The gospel is not something that we could have reasoned out on our own. It had to be revealed to us. Paul emphasized the gospel came to him through a revelation from God, not from any other source.

"The gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" Galatians 1:11,12.

Paul wrote that "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" Ephesians 2:4,5.

As "the Savior of the world," Jesus took away "the sin of the world!" (John 4:42; 1:29). Having given Himself as "a ransom for all," Jesus was able to redeem the human race and free us from the fear of death and the power of Satan (1 Timothy 2:6; Colossians 1:12-14; Hebrews 2:14,15).

Through the plan of salvation, God revealed His unconditional love for the human race, while maintaining our freedom of choice. Paul summarizes the message we are to give to the world: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing (or counting) their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:19,20.

In other words, no matter who we are or what we have done, God is not counting anyone's sins against them. We are free to come to Him just as we are. However, since God is love, He will not force Himself on anyone or force anyone to come to Him. Everyone is free to embrace or reject God's love and salvation. We choose to be reconciled to God when we believe this good news and embrace Jesus as our Savior and Lord. Those who reject Jesus will cry for the rocks and mountains to fall on them when He returns. They would rather die than come into His presence. God will honor their choice and they will perish in the end. (John 3:16-19,36; Revelation 6:14-16).

DISTORTION: SALVATION BY GRACE FOR SOME

Some have said that God chose ahead of time to save only some people from the wages of sin. This may be good news if you are part of the group God chose to save. It is horrible news if you are not, for then you have no hope and no choice in the matter. This idea distorts the truth of what God is like. “God is love” 1 John 4:8. However, love without freedom ceases to be love.

DISTORTION: UNIVERSALISM

Since Jesus died for everyone, He is not counting anyone's sins against them (2 Corinthians 5:14,15,19). Some have distorted this truth by saying that God will eventually win the hearts of everyone and no one will be lost. Since God is love, they say that He could never leave anyone to burn forever in hell. Therefore, either there is no such thing as hell or some will go there for a short time until they repent. Then everyone will live forever with God.

This distortion misunderstands what God's love is like, for love always gives freedom. God always honors the choices of those who love darkness rather than light and refuse to repent and be reconciled to Him (John 3:19-21; 2 Corinthians 5:19,20; Revelation 6:14-16; 16:9,11; 20:11-14).

Jesus said many would pursue the path that leads to destruction. Instead of living forever, they will perish (John 3:16). At the end, there will be a fire that will cleanse the earth of everything associated with sin (2 Peter 3:10-13). Even death and the grave are pictured as being cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). In fact, “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” 1 Corinthians 15:26. Then God will create “a new heaven and a new earth” and “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, or crying.” Revelation 21:1,4.

LOVE THAT ENDURES OR GROWS COLD

15. Read Revelation 2:1-5

A. How did Jesus describe the activity of those in Ephesus? (2,3)

B. What problem did Jesus identify in the church? (4)

C. What would happen if they refused to repent? (5)

It did not take long for Satan to lead the church away from a clear understanding of the love of God. (Galatians 1:6,7.) People who are very zealous for God can be hurtful to others when they do not have the love of God in their hearts. Jesus pleaded with them to “repent and do the first works” motivated by the love of God (1Cor. 13:1-8; 2Cor. 5:14,15). If they did not repent, He said He would remove their lamp stand. There would be no need for their lamp to remain if their light had gone out.

16. Read Matthew 24:12-14

A. What did Jesus say would grow cold in the lives of many? (12)

B. Why would it grow cold? (12)

C. What truth does Jesus want everyone to know? (14)

Jesus wants everyone to hear the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Those who embrace the gospel will experience God's unconditional love and forgiveness. This enables them to love and forgive others, rather than hold onto selfishness and bitterness. Finding security in Christ will lead to the love that endures to the end.

Rejecting the gospel will always lead to the increase of lawlessness and love growing cold. Out of insecurity, people will take advantage of others to get what they want. Hurt people will always hurt others, who will in turn hurt more people. This pattern will continue to repeat itself unless someone experiences the unconditional love of God and chooses to forgive those who have hurt them.

BROKEN DREAMS

Author Unknown

As a child brings his broken toys
With tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God
Because He was my Friend.

But then instead of leaving Him
In peace to work alone.
I stayed around and tried to help
In ways that were my own.

At last I snatched them back and cried,
"How could You be so slow?"
"My child," He said, "What could I do?
You never did let go!"

3 - MOTIVATED BY FEAR OR LOVE

FEAR IS NORMAL WHEN THERE IS DANGER

While jogging together one late, dark, night in Texas, a group of guys decided to leave the road and jog across some fields. As we explored the unfamiliar territory, we came to an area that dropped down about five feet into another field. After jumping down, we continued jogging. Then one person yelled, “A bull?!”

Immediately, terror filled our hearts. We ran as fast as we could, scared as can be. We reached the edge of the field and tried to hide amid some bushes. My heart was pounding as I tried to listen for the bull. After awhile, we concluded there was no bull chasing us. Even though the bull was imaginary, the fear and adrenalin were real. We actually should have been just as afraid of snakes in the bushes we were hiding in.

Fear is a natural emotion that we experience when we believe our lives are in danger. The first mention of fear is when Adam and Eve hid from God after they had sinned (Genesis 3:8).

In this sinful world, we all face the fear of death, pain, rejection, loneliness, failure, and meaningless living. Understanding our natural fears, people use fear and reward in order to motivate others to behave a certain way or to perform better.

- When children are young, parents use various kinds of punishments and rewards to help their kids learn right behavior and to protect them from activities and ideas that would injure them.
- Peer pressure leads many people to conform to group practices in order to gain acceptance.
- Businesses evaluate the performance of their employees and reward those who do well.
- Criminals are sentenced to prison or death in order to protect society and prevent further crime.

Fear and reward are the basic motivations in all of these situations. In a world of selfishness, it has its proper place to keep evil in check and to help us avoid pain. However, fear motivation can also be used improperly.

- Parents have at times abused their children, hurting them rather than training them.
- Adults have used manipulation to try to get what they want from others, regardless of how it makes others feel.
- Governments and armies have tortured people to learn information.
- Some religious people have persecuted and killed those who disagree with them.

SECURITY PREPARES THE WAY FOR MATURITY

All of us begin life with the motivations of fear and reward. Every parent longs for their children to grow up into maturity and show kindness, respect, and appreciation that is motivated by love.

God understands our natural fears and insecurities. He meets us where we are. He then tries to help us experience the security that we need that we may grow into maturity and love one another as He has loved us.

1. Read 2 Timothy 1:7

A. What does Paul say that God does not give us? _____

B. What are the qualities that He wants to give us?

Note:

The Greek word that is translated fear is *deilia*. It has the meaning of fear, being timid, and cowardice. Those who hold onto this fear are also described as unbelieving and will be lost in the end (Revelation 21:8). Through faith in His salvation, promises, and power, God wants us to live with confidence, security and a healthy, balanced outlook on life.

Power - We can accomplish whatever God asks us to do when we rely upon His strength, no matter what circumstances we are faced with. (See Philippians 4:13,19; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.)

Love - We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. John 13 makes it clear that Jesus was able to be focused on serving others because of the security He had from knowing where He came from, where He was going and why He was here (John 13:1-3, 13-15, 34,35).

Sound mind - Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (deliao)” John 14:27. The fruit of the Spirit includes all the qualities that make up a balanced, healthy mind (Galatians 5:22,23).

WHEN GOD ACTS, SATAN REACTS

2. Read Mark 4:35-41

A. Why were the disciples afraid? (37,40)

B. What did their fear lead them to ask? (38)

C. What were they expecting Jesus to do? (Thought Question)

D. What did Jesus do? What did He ask? (39,40)

After a long day of teaching and helping people, Jesus and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee in a boat. Jesus was very tired and decided to rest in the back. But then a terrible storm came up that overwhelmed the disciples, even the ones who were experienced fishermen. They were terrified and cried out for help.

Satan would have been happy to destroy Jesus in this storm. When God is doing something positive, Satan tries to disrupt His work (Job 1:12,19).

When God acts, Satan reacts. Through the trials and temptations he brings, Satan hopes we will get discouraged, question God's love, get angry, and give up. The question the disciples asked reveals they were responding to his suggestions: "Don't You care that we are perishing?"

What were they expecting Jesus to do? Did they want Him to help bail water out of the boat? What Jesus did do was far beyond what they expected. They were totally shocked and amazed when He said, "Peace, be still!" and the wind and waves calmed down.

Paul reminds us that God is still "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" Ephesians 3:20. Trying to convince God to do what we want Him to do is like asking Him to help bail water, when He is able to calm the storm.

This story is incredible! The disciples thought they were dying and Jesus had the boldness to ask, "Why were you so afraid?" (The Greek word Jesus used was *deilos*, a form of the word Paul used in 2 Timothy 1:7.)

Fear is a natural reaction to danger. Fear motivates us to react quickly to protect ourselves. The disciples were trying to save themselves, but they were feeling hopeless in the midst of the storm. Their fear of dying led them to question Jesus' love and care for them.

Jesus, however, was at peace. He was secure in the knowledge that:

- Nothing can happen to those who trust God and place their lives in His hands, except what He allows (John 10:27-29; 1 Cor. 10:13).
- God will bring good out of the trials He does allow (Romans 8:28).
- Nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:31-38).
- God's grace will always be sufficient to provide the strength and help we need in every situation (2 Cor. 12:7-10; Phil. 4:11-13, 19).

3. Read Mark 5:1-20

A. What did Jesus encounter when He got out of the boat? (1-7)

B. What does Jesus command the “unclean spirit” to do? (8)

C. What happened when the demons asked to enter the swine? (12-13)

D. What was the man like after he was healed? (15)

E. What did the people ask Jesus to do after the swine drowned? (17)

F. After Jesus left, what did the man do who had been healed? (18-20)

After Jesus calmed the storm, Satan reacted by trying to scare or hurt Jesus and his disciples. When they got out of the boat they were met by a man possessed by demons. Matthew 8:28 says two came “out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.” Mark and Luke apparently focus on the worst one. Luke 8:27 says he “had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes.” (Each gospel writer provides details that give a fuller picture to the stories they told.)

While the demons controlled the words the man said, his inner desire for deliverance was manifested by an act of worship (Mark 5:6). Looking beyond the faults and seeing the need, Jesus commanded the demons to leave. They begged for permission to go into a herd of pigs. When Jesus said yes, they “entered the swine . . . and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.” Mark 5:13.

When the people saw what happened, they begged Jesus to leave. This was what Satan was hoping for. But God had a plan. Jesus told the healed man, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things

the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.” The testimony of the healed man prepared the way for people to listen to Jesus. Several months later, Jesus came back to the region of Decapolis and that is where He fed four thousand people (Mark 7:31-8:9).

When God acts, Satan reacts; but God always has a plan. When we remember this, we can see every difficulty as a call to prayer and every trial as an opportunity to see God work. This story illustrates that:

- Satan and his angels are subject to the authority of Jesus.
- They are limited in what they can do on earth.
- They can control only those people who give them permission.
- Even when humans fail, God can bring healing and restoration.
- God will bring good out of evil when people give Him permission.

SATISFYING THIRST WITH AN EMPTY CUP

4. How does God summarize all the evil Israel did? Jeremiah 2:13

God uses a word picture to describe the foolishness of anyone turning away from God to satisfy their inner thirst. God alone can bring healing and meet our basic need for security, acceptance, and significance.

Satan has a counterfeit plan to meet our needs. Through combining truth with error, he convinces many people that his plan is best. When our needs in life are threatened, Satan tries to get us to react out of fear. To overcome our fears, we will try to satisfy our needs in whatever way we think is best. Our needs are too great to ignore.

For example, when people are drowning, they have a desperate need to breathe. They can only hold their breath for so long. If they are still in the water when they finally gasp for air, their lungs fill up with water. Unless they get help right away, they will die.

Our physical, emotional and spiritual needs are also great. When we try to satisfy those needs in unhealthy ways, it is like trying to breathe when we are in water or trying to drink water from an empty cup.

The chart on the next page contrasts two basic ways we try to meet our needs and overcome our fears. Satan's plan seems right to us, for we can't get along in the world without money, good behavior, and status symbols. However, God's plan alone will truly satisfy.

GOD'S PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR

5. What is cast out of our lives when we experience God's perfect love? 1 John 4:17-19

Fear is related to judgment, torment, and negative consequences. When we experience the security that comes from God's perfect love, we no longer have to be afraid. We can rely upon His power, promises and salvation to provide for us and give us eternal life. We are truly able to move from being motivated by fear to being motivated by love.

- Fear of pain will diminish when we rest in the grace and strength God provides and trust in His ability to bring good out of our trials.
- Fear of death will be conquered when we know Jesus will never leave us or forsake us and remember He has given us eternal life.
- Fear of rejection is overcome when we know God loves and accepts us because we are His children, not because we deserve Him.
- Fear of loneliness will be lessened as we grow in a living relationship with God. He promised, "You shall seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13.
- Fear of failure will decrease when we remember that God is patient with us, always faithful to forgive, and promises to help us.
- We will experience meaning and purpose in life when we serve God and let Him use us to be a blessing to others.

LIVING BY FAITH IN GOD'S LOVE AND TRUTH

	PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	SPIRITUAL
HUMAN NEEDS	Protection; Security	Acceptance; Belonging	Value; Meaning in Life
NATURAL FEARS	Pain Death	Rejection Loneliness	Failure No Meaning in life
SATAN'S PLAN Focus on these things to satisfy our needs and overcome our fears.	Money to buy: 1. Food 2. Clothing 3. Shelter 4. Healthcare (long life) 5. Entertainment (pleasure)	Good behavior The better we behave, the more we feel God and others should accept us.	Value Based on Performance/Status 1. Important job 2. Higher salary 3. Education 4. Nice home & car 5. Designer clothes 6. Expensive jewelry 7. Accomplishments
PROBLEM Focusing on: ➤ Money, ➤ Behavior, ➤ Status symbols will leave us: ○ Empty, ○ Insecure, ○ Unloving.	1. Greed: never enough 2. Steal time, energy and resources to "get ahead" in life 3. Insecurity remains	1. Hypocrisy 2. Manipulation and abusive relationships 3. Loneliness and rejection remain	1. Condemning others to make ourselves look better 2. Pride if we have done good 3. Jealousy if we have little
GOD'S PLAN Faith in His: ○ Gift of life ○ Love ○ Mission	Gift of Life 1. Eternal Life 2. He provides for our needs 3. He is able to bring good out of evil.	Unconditional Love God takes the initiative to love us because we need it, not because we deserve it.	Mission We all are valuable to God. He has a plan for each of us. True joy comes from being used by Him to love and bless others.

6. What fears do I experience periodically?

7. How have I responded to my fears in unhealthy ways?

8. What truth and promises from God do I need to focus on?

WHY ARE WE TO FEAR THE LORD?

9. What does the Bible say the fear of the Lord is?

A. Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the Lord is the _____ of _____, but fools despise _____ and instruction.”

B. Proverbs 1:29 “They _____ and did not _____ the _____ of the Lord.”

C. Proverbs 8:13 “The fear of the Lord is to _____.”

D. Proverbs 9:10 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of _____.”

E. Proverbs 10:27 “The fear of the Lord _____, but the years of the wicked will be _____.”

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. When we understand that God is ultimately the One in control of life, we recognize our need to listen to Him above every other authority.

Choosing to respect the Creator of life is a wise choice. He has established the physical and moral laws to live by. Evil is a rejection of the moral law of love and will lead to emotional and spiritual pain, just as disregarding physical laws will lead to physical pain. Choosing to disregard God's authority will truly shorten life. Only those who trust God will want to live forever with Him. Those who fear men rather than God are showing their lack of trust in God's love, power, and promises.

10. Who does Jesus say we are to fear? Matthew 10:28

If we are motivated by fear, Jesus says, "Fear God, rather than men." If someone threatens to kill us because we are following God, we can rest in the promise of the resurrection (John 5:24-29; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). If we ultimately reject God out of fear of what people will do to us, God will honor our choice and we will perish in the end (John 3:16,19).

11. What does Jesus say to encourage His followers to move beyond being motivated by fear? Matthew 10:29-31

Jesus assures us that we don't need to live in constant fear, for God really cares for us. Since He cares for the sparrow, we can be sure He will care for us. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, not the end of wisdom. It can get us started on our journey. Then as we grow in our relationship with God and understand more clearly what He is like, we will begin to be motivated by love, rather than by fear.

SERVING GOD WITH REVERENCE AND GODLY FEAR

12. What attitude should we have as we serve God? Hebrews 12:28

The word translated godly fear is *eulabeia*. We should never lose the reverential respect and awe of who God is:

- While He is an intimate God who offers to live within our lives, we must also recognize He is the all powerful Creator and the One who is Holy (Exodus 33:20; Isaiah 6:5; Daniel 10:6-8; Revelation 1:17).
- While He is merciful, gracious, and forgiving, He will honor our choice if we want to cling onto sin. Our guilt will remain (See Exodus 34:6,7).
- While we need not be afraid of God, we will always be afraid in the presence of God if we are clinging onto sin (Revelation 6:14-17; Matthew 10:28-31; Genesis 3).

13. What emotion did the disciples have during and after the storm? Mark 4:40,41

While they were in the midst of the storm, they were terrified. They thought for sure they were going to die. Jesus asked them, “Why are you so fearful (*deilos*)?” After Jesus calmed the storm, “they feared (*phobeo*) exceedingly.”

Their emotion of being afraid of dying changed to an emotion of fearful respect and awe from being in the presence of someone so powerful and amazing. “*Phobos* lies in between *delia*, cowardice, and *eulabeia*, religious reverence” (AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary-NT, commenting on the Greek word, *delia*, #1167).

The Greek word phobos is sometimes used in relationship to being afraid and motivated by fear. Other times it is used in the context of reverential awe. The context usually reveals the meaning that is trying to be conveyed.

14. What leads us to repent and to surrender our lives to God?

- A. Jeremiah 31:3 “I have loved you with an _____ love; therefore with loving-kindness I have _____ you.”
- B. Jeremiah 29:11 “‘I know the thoughts that I think toward you,’ says the Lord, ‘thoughts of _____ and not of _____, to give you a _____ and a _____.’”
- C. Romans 2:4 “Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the _____ of God _____ you to _____?”

The One who knows us best, loves us most!

The One who knows the future, has a plan for our lives!

The One who has all power, is able to fulfill His dream for our lives!

Being afraid of God leads people to feel like they *have to* follow God.

The goodness of God leads people to *want to* follow God.

The Spirit of God empowers people *to* follow God.

PETER’S STORY: MOVING FROM FEAR TO LOVE

15. How did Jesus respond to the question, “Lord, where are you going?” John 13:36

Jesus was going to the cross for the salvation of the world. They didn't need to follow Him to the cross, for their mission was different. God would use them to share the gospel with others after Jesus was resurrected. They also were not capable of following Him at that time, for they had not yet fully understood His mission.

When Jesus tried to tell them that He would die and be raised again, they didn't believe Him. Peter even rebuked Him, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" Matthew 16:22. (For other times Jesus tried to tell them, see Matthew 17:22, 23; 20:17-19; 26:2). As a result of their unbelief, the disciples were devastated when Jesus was crucified.

After He was resurrected, they learned that the mission of the Messiah was to save the world from sin, not to save the Jews from the Romans. Armed with the truth and the power of the Holy Spirit, the gospel spread everywhere. Many believed and were converted. Others rejected and fought against the truth and killed many who chose to follow Jesus. The disciples did follow Him later just as Jesus said they would.

16. What promise did Peter make to Jesus? John 13:37

17. What was Jesus' Response? John 13:38; Matthew 26:34,35

Peter loved Jesus. He had left all to follow Him (Matthew 19:27). He promised to follow Jesus to the very end, even laying down His life for Him. When Judas led a group to arrest Jesus, Peter used a sword to fight, cutting off the ear of Malchus. He must have received the courage to do so when the mob fell to the ground before Jesus (John 18:6,10,11).

But then Jesus did something that totally surprised Peter. He said, "No more of this!" (Luke 22:51 NIV). Then He healed the ear of Malchus

and let the mob arrest Him. Peter couldn't understand. He must have wondered, "If Jesus was truly the Messiah, why would He allow this?"

In just a few hours, Peter went from attacking with the sword to denying that he even knew Jesus. Out of fear, he was willing to lie about his best Friend. When the rooster crowed, Jesus looked at Peter. Reminded of his failure, Peter "went out and wept bitterly" Luke 22:57-62.

18. What was Peter told ahead of time that would help him not give up after he had denied Jesus? John 13:38–14:3; Luke 22:31-34

The chapter divisions make us think John 14 is a totally new section. However, if we continue reading after John 13:38, we realize the significance of what Jesus was saying to Peter and the other disciples. The message applies to all of us when we fail God.

"You will deny Me, but let not your heart be troubled. I haven't given up on you! I am going to prepare a place for you... that where I am, there you may be also!"

Jesus assured them of His unconditional love and forgiveness. He was also promising that He would be resurrected after He died. Jesus knew the spiritual war was fierce. He prayed for Peter that his faith would not totally fail (Luke 22:32).

19. Read John 21:15-17 in the paragraphs on the next page.

(The Greek words that are translated "love" are included to give additional insight into the conversation.)

- A. How many times does Jesus ask Peter, "Do you love me?" _____
- B. How many times did Jesus use agapao? _____
- C. How many times did Jesus use phileo? _____

“So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love [agapao] Me more than these?’

He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You.’

He said to him, ‘Tend My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love [agapao] Me?’

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You.”

He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love [phileo] Me?’

Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love [phileo] Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love [phileo] You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’”

Peter was grieved, not because Jesus had repeated the same question three times (as the English Bible implies), but because Jesus had switched from “agapao” to “phileo” the third time.

Peter thought he had a love for Jesus that was stronger than death when he promised, “I’ll die for You!” He had to admit, however, that he didn’t have that kind of love. He also learned that Jesus knew him better than he knew himself, so he responds, “Lord, You know all things. You know the kind of love that I had for You failed.”

20. What did Jesus say would happen to Peter? John 21:18,19

It would have been easy for Peter to wonder if he would fail again when under pressure. This prophecy assured him that he would not deny Jesus again when he was faced with the threat of death. Peter had learned that He could trust what Jesus said. This freed Peter from constantly worrying and wondering if he would deny Him again.

After Peter was humbled and had repented, Jesus was able to use him to “feed His sheep.” It is the same with all of us. When we are humble and teachable, Jesus is able to use us and create within us the kind of love that will not fail, even when put to the ultimate test.

The historian Eusebius records, “Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero. This account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day.” (Ecclesiastical History, by Eusebius, bk 2, Ch. 25:5. www.newadvent.org/fathers/250102.htm).

Definitions by Strong’s Concordance – From phileo, word #5368

Phileo – “To be a friend to; to be fond of (an individual or an object), i.e. have affection for, denoting personal attachment, as a matter of sentiment or feeling.”

Agape - In contrast to phileo, agape “is wider, embracing especially the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety.” (Agapao is the verb form of agape.)

In general, phileo could be described as a love “of the heart” and agape as a love “of the head.”

While these definitions are helpful, it is important to understand that agape can embrace all aspects of healthy love. “Love [agapao] the Lord your God with all your *heart*,... *soul*,... *strength*, and... *mind*’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” Luke 10:27

It is also inspirational to know that God’s love is described as phileo in John 16:27. He enjoys the relationship He has with those who love Jesus. “The Father Himself loves [phileo] you, because you have loved [phileo] Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.”

Our next lesson will focus on the truth that compelled Paul to serve God.

4 - THE GOSPEL FOUNDATION: FINDING SECURITY IN CHRIST

A few years after Jesus ascended into heaven, Saul began “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” Acts 9:1. When he was brought before King Agrippa later in his life, He shared this story:

“Many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities. While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests . . . I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me. . . . I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*’”

“So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’”

“And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ‘But rise and stand on your feet; I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me’” Acts 26:10-18.

The phrase, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads,” reveals the inner turmoil and struggle Paul was experiencing. A goad was a pointed stick used to prod an ox along. Kicking against the goad was a common Greek and Latin proverb referring to the pain that resulted from stubborn resistance (See Robertson’s Word Pictures of the NT; New English Translation Notes).

Saul was fighting against the conviction of the Holy Spirit. His teachers had told him Jesus was an imposter. He believed them when they said the story of the resurrection was a lie made up by the disciples of Jesus (Matt. 28:13).

Respect for his teachers, along with the desire to be accepted, led Saul to stifle his conscience and persecute the church. However, the Holy Spirit did not give up on him. It was hard to fight against the convictions He brought.

Now that Jesus stood before him, he realized he had placed his confidence in the wrong authority. When the truth became clear, Saul repented and was baptized (Acts 9:18). With his whole heart he chose to serve Jesus as His Savior and Lord. (He later changed his name to Paul to communicate that he was a different person. Acts 13:9 is the first time he is called Paul.)

Paul was handpicked by Jesus to explain the gospel in order to turn people “from darkness to light.” Under the inspiration of God he wrote over half of the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 he revealed the truth that was the foundation of his life, ministry and teaching. “The love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died.”

This truth motivated him to share the gospel everywhere, even when faced with threats and persecution (2 Corinthians 11:22-28). If we want to be motivated by the love of Christ as Paul was, we also need to understand what he meant when he wrote, “If one died for all, then all died.”

HOW CAN GOD BE JUST WHEN SAVING SINNERS?

1. Every government has a law to keep order in society. How did Jesus sum up the law of God’s government? Matthew 22:36-40

A. “_____ the Lord... with all your heart,... soul, and.... mind.”

B. “_____ your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the _____ and the Prophets.”

2. If we are going to have eternal life based upon our own keeping of the law, what is required? Galatians 3:10-12

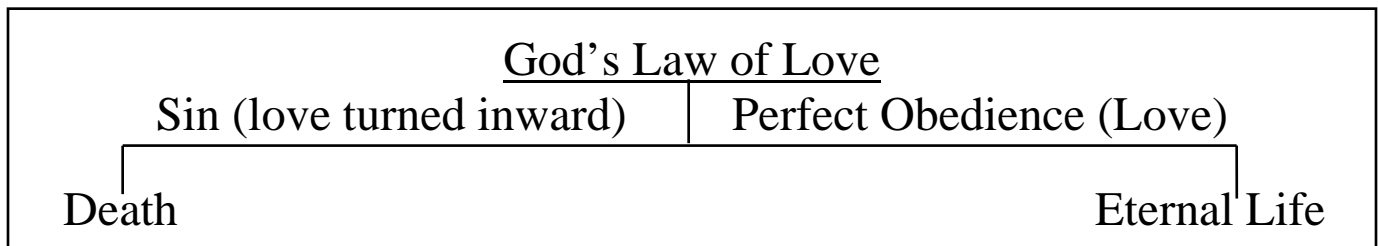
“The _____ is not of _____, but ‘the man who _____ them shall _____ by them’” Galatians 3:12

The law is not based on faith. It states the standard of right and wrong and the result of each. If we keep the law perfectly we earn eternal life.

On the other hand, all who do not “continue in all things which are written in the book of the law” are under a curse (Galatians 3:10).

3. What do we earn by our sin? Romans 6:23

Wages are what we are paid for the work we do. The wages of sin is death. Since all have sinned, all have earned death. This creates a dilemma. How can God uphold his law and give anyone eternal life?



4. Is upholding the law an important issue to God? Or to put it another way, is God concerned about justice?

- A. 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and _____ to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- B. Revelation 15:3 The redeemed will sing, “Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty! _____ and true are Your ways.”
- C. Romans 3:31 “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we _____ the _____.”

It is clear that justice is very important to God. While He loves us with an everlasting love, He is committed to upholding His law. Before we look at the gospel answer, we need to realize how big the dilemma is.

5. What is to happen to the one who sins? Ezekiel 18:20

Imagine a young man gets addicted to drugs and alcohol. He needs a lot of money to satisfy his addictive cravings, so he decides to rob a bank. The police are called and begin to chase him as he runs away. When they get close, he takes out a gun and shoots and kills one of them.

Eventually he is arrested, taken to trial, and found guilty. When the judge sentences the man to death, the father asks the judge, “My son is not ready to die; would you allow me to die in his place?”

What would the judge say in the United States? “No!”

God’s law is no different. The one who sins is the one who must die. No one else can die instead of me. I must die the death that the law demands. How can God uphold His law and give anyone eternal life? It seems like an impossible dilemma. The good news is God found a way.

SEEING THE WORLD FROM GOD’S PERSPECTIVE

The key to understanding the plan of salvation is learning how God sees the human race. When God created Adam, He was creating the human race. He “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” Genesis 2:7. He then took a rib from Adam’s side and created Eve (Genesis 2:21,22). Together they produced the human race (Acts 17:26). Since the seed was in Adam, God saw the whole human race as in Adam.

6. Since all of us were in Adam when he sinned, what impact did his sin have on everyone?

A. Romans 5:18 “Through one man’s offense, *judgment* came to all men, resulting in _____.”

B. 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22 “...in Adam all _____.”

This is the bad news. As a result of Adam’s sin, we all are born condemned. If the story ended here, there would be no good news. But fortunately, God created a plan to free us from the condemnation.

7. What impact did Jesus’ righteousness have on the human race?

A. Romans 5:18 “Through one man’s righteous act, the free gift came to all men resulting in _____ of _____.”

B. 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22 “In Christ all shall be made _____.”

In the New Testament we learn that Jesus was One who created the world and the human race (John 1:1-3,14; Colossians 1:16). Since Jesus created Adam, He was the head of Adam. This means He could legally become another head of the human race. This is what He chose to do.

8. What name does Paul use for Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47?

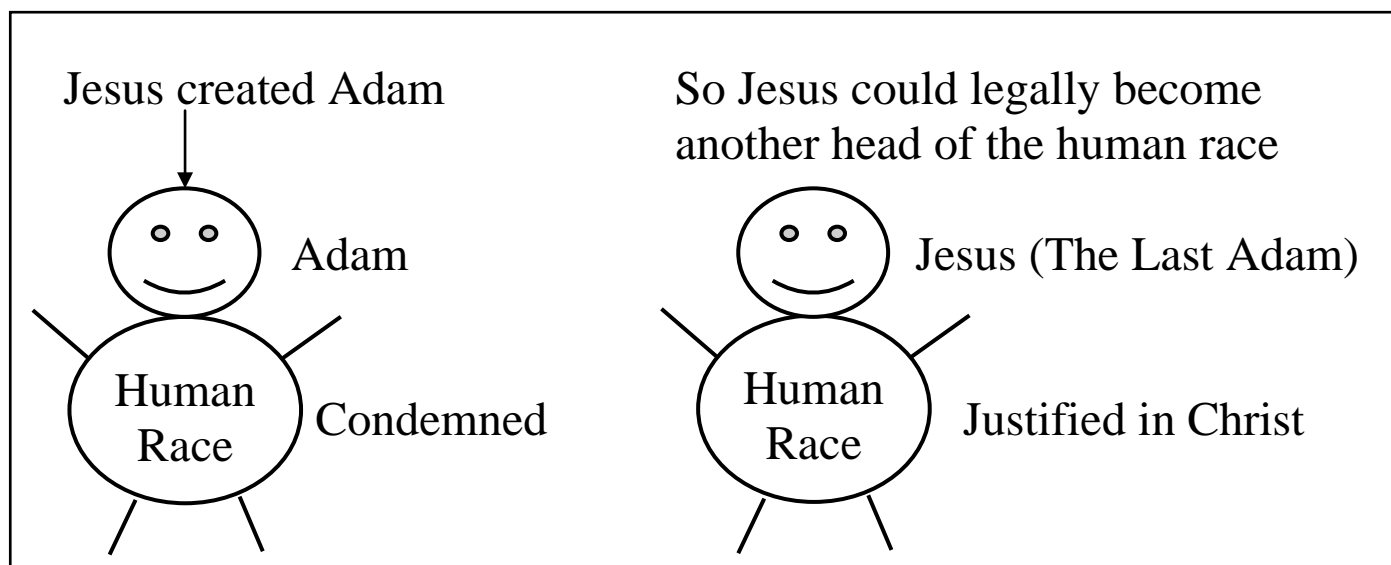
When a person's name is changed in the Bible, there is a significant reason (for example, see Genesis 32:28). By understanding the meaning of the name Adam, we can discover what Paul is trying to say.

9. What is the meaning of the name Adam? Genesis 5:1,2

Compare verse 2 in the King James and New King James Versions:

- “Male and female created He them; and blessed them, and *called their name Adam*, in the day when they were created.” KJV
- “He created them male and female, and blessed them and *called them Mankind* in the day they were created.” NKJV

The underlined word is from the Hebrew word, Adam. The name means man or mankind. So when Paul calls Jesus the last Adam, he is referring to Him as the last head or representative of the whole human race.



Two illustrations from the Bible can help us understand that this is indeed the way God thinks: one person can represent a whole group.

- A. “Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If all is well, why am I like this?’ So she went to inquire of the LORD.”

“And the LORD said to her: ‘Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.’ So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb” Genesis 25:21-24.

Rebekah gave birth to Jacob and Esau. However, God said she had two nations in her womb. He saw the whole nation of Israel in Jacob and the whole nation of Edom in Esau. From God’s perspective, each of them represented a whole group of people.

- B. The second illustration comes from Hebrews 6 and 7 where the author describes Jesus as our High Priest. The Jews had a problem with this, for Jesus was from the tribe of Judah and the priests came from the tribe of Levi. The problem is resolved when we learn that Jesus was a priest like Melchizedek. He also didn’t come from the tribe of Levi. He blessed Abraham and received tithes from him.

Then Hebrews 7:9,10 takes it a step further: “Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.”

In other words, Levi was seen to have paid tithes to Melchizedek in Abraham. What Abraham did, the Levites were seen to have done. This is different than we normally think. However, the gospel is based upon this concept from God’s perspective:

- What Abraham did, the Levites were seen to have done.
- What Adam did, the human race was seen to have done.
- What Jesus did, the human race was seen to have done.

WHAT JESUS ACCOMPLISHED FOR EVERYONE

10. What was the truth that motivated Paul? 2 Corinthians 5:14

“The love of Christ compels us, because we _____ thus: that if _____ died for _____, then _____.”

This truth helped Paul understand God’s unconditional love. It motivated him to share the gospel, even when he was faced with threats and persecution. It provided the security that enabled him to grow into maturity. This truth was the foundation for all he taught.

The concept we learned from Hebrews 7:9,10 helps us understand what Paul is saying. What Abraham did, the Levites were seen to have done, for they were “in Abraham.”

In the same way, what Jesus did, we were seen to have done, for we were all in Him. It was God who took the initiative to place us all into Christ, the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 1:30; 15:45). From God’s perspective, in Christ, everyone has legally died the death that the law demanded. The implication of this truth is tremendous.

11. How does God now view the human race? 2 Corinthians 5:19

God took the initiative to reconcile the world to Himself by removing the sin barrier that separated us from Him. As a result, He is not counting any of our sins against us, no matter who we are or what we have done. This truth is amazing! This is the good news of the gospel. Unfortunately, very few people understand this truth. Therefore God invites all who do believe it to share this truth with everyone.

12. What choice are people urged to make? 2 Corinthians 5:20

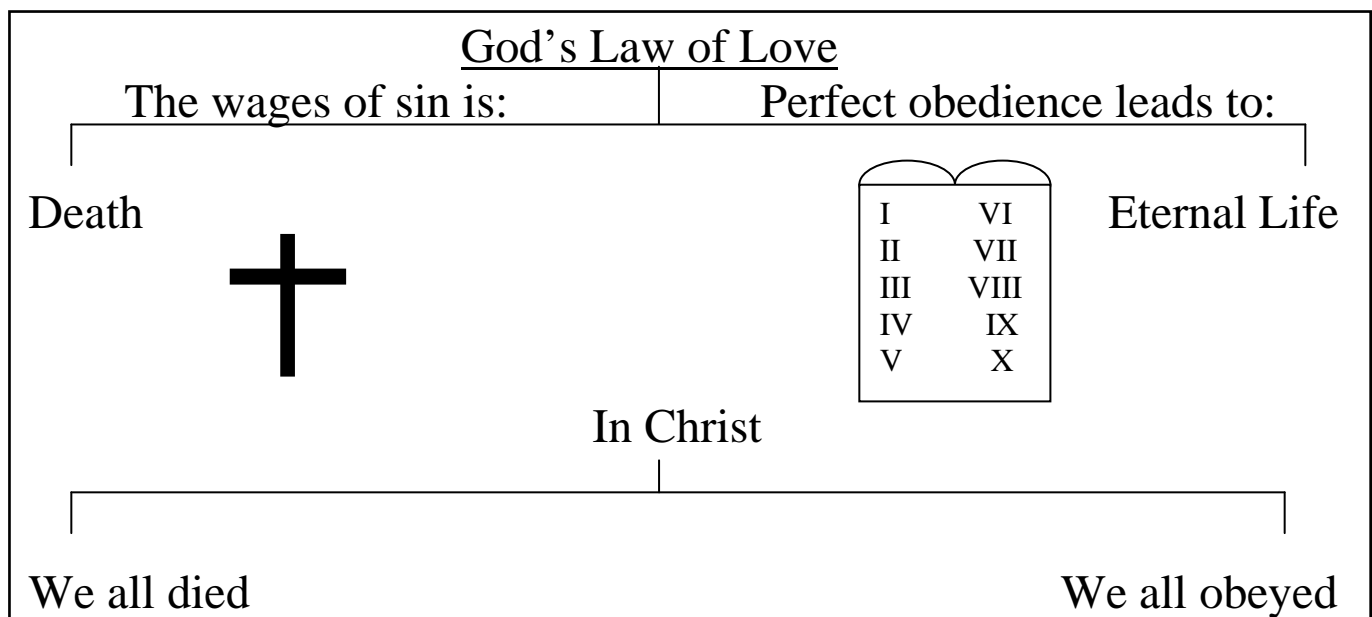
When two people are at odds with each other, it takes both parties to be willing to reconcile in order for the relationship to be fully restored. While God has taken the initiative to reconcile us to Himself, He will never force Himself upon us. He always maintains our freedom of choice. Through His ambassadors, God stands with open arms and says:

“Please come! I love you and want to live with you throughout eternity. You are free to come just as you are.”

13. What else has God given to us in Christ? 2 Corinthians 5:21

The word “for” shows there is a connection to verse 20. Paul explains why we have the right to be reconciled to God. Jesus was made to be sin so He could take us and our sins to the cross. He also lived a perfect life so “that we might become the righteousness of God *in Him*.”

In Christ, the legal demands of the law have been met for everyone. This means that legally God has qualified everyone for eternal life.



QUALIFIED FOR ETERNAL LIFE

14. Read Colossians 1:12-14

A. What has the Father qualified us to be partakers of? (12)

B. What has He delivered us from and conveyed us into? (13)

C. Who has been redeemed by Jesus' blood (v. 14; 1 Timothy 2:5, 6)

Jesus redeemed the human race when He gave Himself as a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6). Since Jesus redeemed everyone, the words "us" and "we" in verses 12-14 would also apply to everyone.

In other words, legally, we all have been qualified for heaven, delivered from the power of Satan and transferred into the Kingdom of Jesus.

15. Read 1 John 5:10,11

A. What happens when I believe the testimony God has given? (10)
(See also Romans 5:1; John 1:12,13; 1 John 5:13)

B. What do I call God if I don't believe the testimony? (10)

C. What is the testimony that God has given? (11)

When I believe the truth, I have the witness in myself. In other words, I *experience* peace and security with God and am born again. If I don't believe that God has given me eternal life, I am calling Him a liar. This makes it clear that through Jesus, God has given eternal life to everyone.

When Jesus redeemed the human race, He:

- Freed everyone from the condemnation brought by Adam.
- Qualified us all for eternal life.
- Restored our individual freedom of choice.

WHY WILL ANYONE BE LOST IN THE END?

16. What was Jesus' mission when He came to earth? John 3:16,17

Jesus came that He might “save the world.” He didn’t need to condemn us, for we were already condemned (Romans 5:18).

When He cried out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30), Jesus accomplished the mission that He came to fulfill on earth. He died for all so that “all” could be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” Romans 3:23,24. This enabled everyone to have freedom to choose to live with God forever or cling onto sin and perish in the end.

17. If God gave eternal life to the human race, why are some condemned and others are not in the end? John 3:18,19

The phrase, “he who does not believe is condemned already” is clarified in verse 19. The unbelief is based on rebellion, rather than ignorance. The condemnation is a result of rejecting the light.

In other words, no one will be lost because they have sinned. They are lost because they love sin. They “love darkness rather than light, for their deeds are evil.” They don’t want a Savior from sin. These people would rather die than come into the presence of God (Rev. 6:14-16).

In order for anyone to be lost, they must persistently resist the Holy Spirit. Jesus told Saul, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Acts 26:14. It is hard to fight against the conviction the Holy Spirit brings. It is hard to hold onto guilt, shame and bitterness. It is hard to be continually disappointed by the emptiness of sin.

Jesus invites everyone, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” Matthew 11:28-30.

18. What assurance does God want people to have who continue to believe in Jesus as their Savior? 1 John 5:12,13

God gave Jesus to the world. The question everyone has to decide is simple. What do I do with Jesus? Do I want to live with Jesus as my Savior and Lord or do I want to cling onto sin. Everyone will decide one way or another.

John is anxious for believers to have the security of knowing that they are going to live forever with God. Since Jesus earned eternal life for the human race through His perfect life and death, our assurance is not based on our performance.

John also encourages us to continue to believe in Jesus. He knows that the lies from Satan, the pressure from others, our desire to be in control, and our own attraction for sin will continually tempt us to satisfy “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” 1 John 2:16. If we persistently pursue these things, we will harden our hearts against the Holy Spirit and eventually reject Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

19. Who are we free to live for when we understand “that one died for all, therefore all died?” 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15

We are naturally selfish. A person who is trying to be good in order to get to heaven is still motivated by selfishness. When we understand we have already been given eternal life through the perfect life and death of Jesus, we no longer have to be focused on trying to get to heaven. We are free to live for God out of loving appreciation for all He has done.

20. How does this truth help us to see people and Jesus differently? 2 Corinthians 5:16

People

We tend to put people in different classes: rich and poor; good and bad; male and female; Jew and Gentile; black, white, Asian, Hispanic, etc. When we realize Jesus is the “Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14), we are able to see everyone in the same way. We are all equally lost and sinful through Adam’s choice. In Christ, we are all equally loved, valuable, redeemed, forgiven and qualified for eternal life. We can see every person as a brother or sister “in Christ.” This is how Jesus wants us to see others. He identified Himself with every human being when He said,

“I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.... Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My bretheren, you did it to Me” Matthew 25:35-40.

Jesus

Some saw Jesus as just another human being, an illegitimate child, a good person, a good teacher, and even associated with Beelzebub. Now we see Him as the Son of God, the last Adam, and the Savior of the world.

BEING IN CHRIST INVOLVES TWO CHOICES

21. What change takes place when we're in Christ? 2 Cor. 5:17

“If anyone is _____, he is a new _____; _____ things have passed away; behold, all things have become _____.”

There are two levels of being in Christ: the first is based on God's choice; the second is based on our choice.

God's Choice

In 1 Corinthians 1:30,31, Paul writes, “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-- that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.’”

There is absolutely no reason we can boast. We are not even responsible for placing ourselves into Christ. God did this so He could redeem the human race and make us holy and righteous in Christ. This is what enables us to have the freedom to choose.

In Christ, both demands of the law were met for everyone. The old that passed away is the condemnation that came to us through Adam's choice. The new that has come is the justification that Jesus brought to everyone (Romans 5:18).

Our Choice

By becoming the last Adam and redeeming the human race, God was able to be just when forgiving sinners and legally qualify everyone for eternal life so that everyone could choose for themselves, *life* or *death*.

When we believe the gospel and receive Jesus as our personal Savior, we express our choice to surrender our lives to Him. Jesus will then send the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. When He comes, He will transform our lives from the inside out.

The old things of sin that we once loved will become less and less attractive. The new that will come is a “love for the truth” and a “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:10; Matthew 5:6). Living for Jesus will become our primary focus. Through serving Him we will discover true joy and meaning in life.

AMAZING LOVE, AMAZING GIFT

Imagine a couple who would like to get married. They have come to love each other and they want to spend the rest of their lives together. However, the young lady has a secret she has kept from her fiancé. She is afraid that he would not want to marry her if he really knew the truth. However, she knows she must tell him, for he would find out eventually. So she arranges a time to meet with him to share her secret.

By the time their date begins, the young man is very worried. He wonders why his best friend is so concerned. After struggling over her words, she finally says, “I love you very much and want to spend my life with you, but there is something you must know. And if you don’t want to marry me after I tell you this, I will understand. I have a \$100,000 debt with nothing to show for it.” Her fiancé takes a deep breath and pauses while he thinks.

Finally he says, “Honey, I have come to love you. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. We will face that debt together. I still want to marry you!” Tears come to both of their eyes as they realize the honesty and commitment that was just shared. They continue with their wedding plans, get married and go on their honeymoon.

While they are on their honeymoon, the husband says, “Honey, there is something I really need to tell you that I haven’t shared before.”

“What! How can this be?” the Bride wonders. “After all, I was willing to share my worst secret. What is he hiding from me?” Then she remembers how gracious he was toward her, so she calms down.

The husband continues, “I have ten million dollars in the bank. I didn’t want to tell you, for I didn’t want you to marry me for my money.” He then writes a check for \$100,000 and gives it to his wife. And since they are married, she moves from being way in debt, to being a millionaire.

22. As human beings, how are we able to view ourselves in the light of what Jesus has done for all of us? 2 Corinthians 8:9

While the husband was very loving and kind toward his fiancé and wife, the story comes short of fully illustrating what Jesus did. For Jesus didn’t just take a little bit of wealth and share it with us, He became poor that we might become rich. We deserve nothing that Jesus gives us. For we have all “sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23. We have all failed Him. But God still loves us.

AN INVITATION FROM JESUS

Through the message of the cross, Jesus stands with open arms, saying:

I love you. I forgive you.

I know you are helpless to measure up to any standard.

You can stop trying. I know you can pretend for a while on the outside, but the inside is still hurting.

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me.

Get away with Me and you’ll recover your life.

I’ll show you how to take a real rest.

Walk with Me and work with Me--watch how I do it.
Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.
I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.
Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly”
(Matthew 11:28-30, The Message Bible).

If you want Me to,
I can heal you on the inside;
I can bring peace to the inner turmoil;
I can bring healing to the broken relationships.

I love it when people:
Are honest with Me;
and allow Me to be honest with them.

When we share openly, misunderstandings can be cleared up;
You won't have to pretend anymore;
You won't have to be afraid of Me anymore;
You won't have to hide from anyone anymore.

If you give Me permission to come into your life, you will not be sorry.
You will experience:
Security from My unconditional love;
Joy from serving others;
Meaning in life from accepting My plans for you.

“I stand at the door and knock. If you hear My voice and open the door,
I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.”
(Revelation 3:20 New Living Translation).

23. Share your thoughts in response to Jesus' love and forgiveness for you.

5 - JESUS, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

GOD IS CRAZY ABOUT YOU

By Cherie Peters

The coolest thing I've ever experienced from God happened when I was a new Christian. I was trying so hard, but felt so unworthy. Here I was, a recovering drug addict, trying to do and be right. One day I felt so discouraged that I just bawled. I'd never be worthy of God!

I'll never forget what happened next. God showed me a past event—myself, unconscious on the floor of a crack house, overdosed on heroin. We'd desperately waited for the shipment. When it finally arrived we measured out what we normally took, but it was way too potent.

There I lay on this filthy floor, and my panicked friends realized I wasn't breathing. I'd lost control of my bladder and bowels, so they dragged me into a cold shower and rubbed me with ice cubes. They scraped vomit out of my mouth and put their mouths over mine to breathe for me, but hey, it wasn't working. All this is what God showed me when I prayed that one day.

I have no memory of coming out of it. Just of coming to on the floor in that squalor. "God, why did You show me that?" I asked in horror.

"Cheri, I have always loved you," I felt Him kindly say. "I loved you just as much when you were lying on the floor in your own feces as I do now when you're trying to be 'good.' Please don't make this a behavior thing. I love you. You are My child."

Oh, how I needed to understand that early on in my recovery, and to have the assurance of His love. For understanding His love allowed me to change in response to Him, not because I had to. Because God loves me, I want to be more like Him. I want to be healed emotionally, physically, and spiritually. God had a work for me to do, but first I had to know that He loved me—unconditionally.

Then I read Psalm 51:10-13 and cried like a baby. All of a sudden it hit me, God saying, “Cheri, I want you to get this and then tell someone else. People are overwhelmed by not feeling worthy to sit in My presence, but I will make them worthy.”

He loves you, too, in just the same way, whether you’re struggling with an eating disorder, your finger jammed down your throat, or screaming or drinking or drugging . . .

The only way I can help hurting, recovering people is if I understand the depths of God’s love for them. God says, in essence, “Your past and your struggles don’t turn Me against you. I can help you.” God gives us forgiveness and repentance—true sorrow for sin, for what we did to ourselves and to others—then tells us, “Go find someone to tell what I did for you.”

GOD’S TOUCH

By age 13 I was homeless and on the streets. Ten years later God took me off the streets. I learned to read, went back to school, got my GED and a nursing degree, and started working with psych patients in rehab. I worked there for 15 years, frustrated because I could tell my patients, “If you take this medicine and go to therapy, you’ll get better,” but was not allowed to tell them how much God loved them and that only God could bring true healing.

I prayed for years that God would give me a ministry. Then in 1996 God made it possible for me to begin ministering to teens and anyone else at risk. (And we’re all at risk!) We call it True Step Ministries.

One of the first teens who came to us was a 17-year-old girl I’ll call Katie. Even though her mom flew her to Idaho from Oklahoma, Katie insisted that she had no problems. “My mom is crazy,” she said. I had some meetings coming up in Oregon so took her with me. A friend, Chris, came along to help drive so I could sleep. I woke up when Chris stopped to check on a racoon lying beside the road. It was injured, and immediately Chris and Katie decided to take it to a vet.

“It’s going to die,” I said.

“I’m not going to leave it,” Chris said. “It’s got to have help.”

Not long before that, Chris’s 22-year-old son had died from his drug abuse. I knew she was crying for her son, not the raccoon. I snuggled down in the back seat with the coon on my lap. Sensing it was dying, I cuddled it close, prayed over it, and sang while Chris and Katie cheerfully planned the fun they’d have when it was well.

We rolled on through the darkness. The little coon grew limp in my arms. I held it for a good five minutes before I had the heart to tell them it was dead. Chris pulled off the road to bury it, but as we were placing “Boo Boo” into the ground we saw a bear. Screaming, we leaped back into the car. Then, silly with relief, we laughed until Katie’s laughter choked into sobs. “I feel like I’m dying on the side of the road and no one is picking me up,” she cried.

KATIE’S SECRET

Katie told us that at age 15 she’d been raped by six boys at a party her parents had forbidden her to attend. For two years she’d kept the agonizing secret, but had grown so angry at her parents and God and the church that she started acting out with drugs, sex, and violence.

Every talk and every drama we heard that weekend was on forgiveness and healing. It was exactly what Katie needed, and as we watched, God miraculously healed her. No, Katie didn’t need forgiveness for the rape itself, but for all the junk she had added to her life after the rape.

Katie eventually understood that the rape was not a punishment for disobeying her parents. It was never God’s intention that abuse of any kind happen to us. Katie came to see that Satan has an agenda, and that he roams around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). He almost succeeded with Katie, but God never let go, and she finally saw His love and accepted His healing power.

Since that time, in both the U.S. and abroad, Katie has ministered to those in bondage as a result of sexual abuse and addictions.

To order the book, “God is Crazy About You,” go to www.truestep.org.

UNASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

1. Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel? Romans 1:16,17

(16)

(17)

The gospel is fantastic news: God is not counting any of our sins against us no matter who we are or what we have done. No wonder Paul is not ashamed! He urges everyone to embrace this truth and choose to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:19,20). All who believe the gospel will experience peace with God and the transforming power of His love, grace and forgiveness (Romans 5:1; 12:1,2; John 8:32; 16:13; Matthew 11:28-30).

The gospel also reveals the righteousness of God that Jesus earned for the human race through His perfect life and death.

- “[God] made [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” 2 Cor. 5:21.
- “But of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—” 1 Corinthians 1:30,31.

Because of this gift of righteousness, God is able to say that everyone is qualified for heaven and has been given the gift of eternal life (Colossians 1:12-14; 1 John 5:10,11).

John 17:1-3 - “Father, . . . Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Jesus was given authority over “all flesh” that He might give them eternal life. This gift gives everyone the opportunity and privilege of knowing the true God and experiencing a loving relationship with Him that would last forever. Sadly, many turn away from Him to seek the knowledge of evil instead. They won’t want to live with Him and God will not force them to.

2. Read Romans 3:23,24

A. How many have sinned? _____ (23)

B. Who falls short of God's glory? _____ (23)

C. Who are "being justified freely by His grace?" _____ (24)

All have sinned – The word translated "have sinned" is from the aorist tense. It refers to a 1 time happening in the past. When Adam sinned, we all sinned in him. Therefore we all were condemned (Rom. 5:18).

[All] fall short of God's glory – We also fall short by our own choices. Without a Savior, we are slaves to sin (John 8:34; 15:5; Rom. 7:18-23).

[All] being justified freely by His grace – Grammatically, "all" is the "subject" of each of these phrases. The way people are "justified freely by His grace" is "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." When Jesus gave His life as a "ransom for all," He redeemed the human race "from the curse of the law" (1 Tim. 2:6; Gal. 3:13). This is how He was able to justify everyone "freely by His grace."

God's choice to redeem the human race and justify everyone by His grace restores our freedom of choice. If Jesus hadn't promised to be our Savior, Adam and Eve would have died without any hope of the resurrection and the human race would have perished.

Redemption is a legal transaction. Jesus purchased all of us with His blood (1 Cor. 6:19,20; 1 Pet. 1:18). Those who deny "the Lord who *bought* them" will "bring on themselves swift destruction" 2 Pet. 2:1.

THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

A. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" Isaiah 53:4-6.

B. "John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" John 1:29.

C. "Jesus. . . gave Himself a ransom for all" 1 Timothy 2:5,6.

D. Jesus died for the sins of "the whole world" 1 John 2:2.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

The grammar of Romans 3:23,24 is easy to understand. It communicates that everyone is “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

However, some people have a difficult time believing this because it doesn’t fit with what they have previously understood. This leads all of us to honestly ask, “Does it really mean this? Has the verse been taken out of context to say something Paul didn’t mean to say?”

In order to answer these questions, we need to prayerfully study the immediate and broader context. After introducing the gospel in Romans 1:16 and 17, Paul describes the sinful condition of the human race in Romans 1:18-3:20. He knows that we will not recognize our need for a Savior if we believe our own righteousness is good enough. Paul then summarizes the sin problem in Romans 3:19 and 20.

3. What does the law teach us about ourselves? Romans 3:19,20

A clear understanding of God’s law helps us know that we have sinned and are guilty before God. It also helps us understand our need for a Savior and realize the futility of trying to justify ourselves. In Mark 12:29-31 Jesus describes the law as perfect love. How would you respond if you honestly asked yourself these two questions?

Have I loved God with *all* my heart, soul, mind and strength? Yes No

Have I loved my neighbor (everyone) as I love myself? Yes No

4. What is revealed apart from the law? Romans 3:21,22

Under the law, all are guilty before God! But now the righteousness of God is revealed. Paul now returns to the theme he introduced in Romans 1:16 and 17 when he said the righteousness of God is revealed through the gospel of Christ.

This righteousness is apart from the law, for we are not earning it ourselves. At the same time, it is consistent with the law and the prophets, for this is what they promised all along (Isaiah 53; John 1:29). Jesus was even called, “The Lord Our Righteousness” Jeremiah 23:6.

5. Read Romans 3:21,22 again. Compare with the King James Version. Whose faith reveals the righteousness of God?

NKJV ____ Our faith in Jesus

KJV ____ Jesus’ faith

NKJV – “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God *through faith in Jesus Christ*, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; . . .” Romans 3:21, 22.

KJV - “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is by faith of Jesus Christ*, to all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference; . . .” Romans 3:21,22.

- A. NKJV - “Through faith in Jesus Christ” means the righteousness of God comes only to those who have faith. The phrase, “to all and upon all who believe” would then refer to one group. Whether Jew or Gentile, all who believe are given the righteousness of God.
- B. KJV - “By faith of Jesus Christ” – In Romans 1:16,17, Paul said the righteousness of God is revealed through “the gospel of Christ.” The KJV continues this thought by saying the righteousness of God is revealed through Jesus’ faith and faithfulness, not by our faith.

The phrase “to all and upon all them that believe” would then refer to two groups:

- a. **To all:** Jesus earned the right to give the righteousness of God to everyone. Romans 3:23-26 expands on this truth.
- b. **Upon all who believe:** The righteousness of God comes “upon” those who believe the gospel and receive Jesus as their Savior.

They will experience “peace with God” and the blessing of having the “righteous requirements of the law fulfilled in them” (John 1:12; Rom. 5:1; 8:4). Romans 3:27-28 expands on this.

- c. **For there is no difference:** Jews and Gentiles are treated equally by God, for Jesus is the “Savior of the world” 1 John 4:14. In other words, the righteousness of God was given to everyone. All who believe the gospel will experience the peace and transformation Jesus gives. Romans 3:29-31 expands on this.

FAITH OF JESUS: “Though traditionally translated ‘faith in Jesus Christ,’ an increasing number of NT scholars are arguing that *pistis Christou* and similar phrases in Paul (Romans 3:22,26; Galatians 2:16,20; 3:22; Ephesians 3:12; Philippians 3:9) involve a *subjective* genitive and mean Christ's faith or Christ's faithfulness.”

“The faith/fidelity of Christ . . . implies that the object of faith is a worthy object, for he himself is faithful.” Translating the phrase *pistis Christou* as the faith or fidelity of Christ “is not a denial of faith *in* Christ as a Pauline concept, for the idea is expressed in many of the same contexts, only with the verb πιστεύω rather than the noun.” New English Translation: Translator & Study Notes for Rom. 3:22,26.

6. What did Jesus’ death reveal about God? Romans 3:25,26

In the beginning God said, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” Genesis 2:17. Adam and Eve ate from it, but continued to live. Did God lie? The human race multiplied and sin increased. It appeared that God was not being just, “For the wages of sin is death” Romans 6:23. Was He setting aside the law in order to keep us alive?

Jesus’ death answers the questions. When He died as the last Adam, God was able to say that in Christ, everyone did die the death that is the wages of sin. (2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:19,20). Jesus’ death revealed that God is righteous and just when He “justifies the ungodly” Romans 4:5.

The word propitiation refers to Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" 1 John 2:2. His death was not for the purpose of appeasing God's wrath so He could love us. Instead, Jesus died so the law could be fulfilled and God could be just when forgiving us. John wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" 1 John 1:9.

7. What does the law of faith exclude? Romans 3:27-30

Many have tried hard to be good so God will accept them. Some feel they have succeeded. All boasting is excluded, however, when we learn that everyone was "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." It is humbling to realize there is nothing we can do to make ourselves acceptable to God.

Those who believe this truth are "justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." They experience "peace with God" Rom. 5:1. Our faith does not make us justified, for God took the initiative to justify us when Jesus redeemed the human race. We either believe the truth or reject it. Faith is embracing what is true, not making something true.

8. Does faith in Jesus set aside God's law or uphold it? Rom. 3:31

The gospel says that in Christ we did die. It also says that in Christ we are righteous (Galatians 2:19,20; 2 Corinthians 5:14,21). So faith in Jesus is the only way to truly uphold God's law and have eternal life.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE – SAVED BY GRACE

The Bible is very consistent. God takes the initiative to:

- Redeem the human race from the curse of the law,
- Justify everyone by grace through the death of Jesus, and
- Save the world from the wages of sin.

God's grace restores our freedom of choice. We can embrace the truth and surrender our lives to God or choose to love and pursue sin. Ephesians 2:4-10 is another example of this balanced understanding.

9. Who was Paul referring to when He said, “By grace you have been saved?” Ephesians 2:4,5

Through God's unconditional love we all were made alive together with Christ, “even when we were dead in trespasses.” Before anyone believed, God took the initiative to save the human race from the wages of sin. Paul then proclaims, “By grace you have been saved!”

Many well meaning Christians have asked others the question, “Have you been saved?” The truth is, Paul wrote this as a statement, not as a question: “By grace you have been saved!” In other words, through Jesus' death, everyone has been saved from the wages of sin and from the condemnation and curse of the law (Rom. 5:18; 6:23; Gal. 3:13). We are now free to choose to let Jesus be our Savior or cling onto sin.

10. What else did God do for us “when we were dead in trespasses?”

A. “...made us _____ together with _____.” Eph. 2:5

B. “..._____ us up together, and made us _____ together in the heavenly places _____.” Eph. 2:6

Since Jesus created Adam, He had the legal right to become another head and representative of the human race. In order for Him to do that, He had to become one with us.

“He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren As the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” Heb. 2:11,14,15.

When Jesus was placed in Mary's womb (Luke 1:35) and was born as a baby, He became one with the human race. This qualified Him to be our representative. What He did, we did in Him. He created a new history for the human race, freeing us from condemnation and giving us His righteousness (Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:21).

We are even described as being in heaven "in Christ Jesus" now. Those who believe this truth and want Jesus to be their Savior are able to see themselves as citizens of heaven and ambassadors on earth (Ephesians 2:19; 2 Corinthians 5:20).

11. Read Ephesians 2:7-10

A. What will God's kindness show in the ages to come? (7)

B. What enables us to experience salvation that is by grace? (8)

C. What does God create in those who believe in Him? (v. 10)

A. In the ages to come, the redeemed will be a living testimony of God's amazing grace. There will be no room for anyone to boast. Their stories will testify that God was the source of life and of any good work that they did (Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 1:6; 2:13; Romans 5:6-10). Their stories will reveal how His:

- Forgiving grace freed them from slavery to sin.
- Healing love turned them from being enemies to being friends.
- Life in them enabled them to love others as He had loved them.

B. In verse 5 Paul wrote, "By grace you have been saved." This communicates what Jesus did for the human race. In verse 8 Paul wrote, "By grace you have been saved through faith." Faith is embracing the truth. Unbelief is rejecting it. Those who believe will experience inner peace and the assurance of eternal life.

C. We are God's workmanship. "We are God's masterpiece" (NLT). God's plan includes re-creating us, giving us a new heart and putting His Spirit within us (Ezekiel 36:26,27; John 1:12,13; 3:1-6). When we give God permission to live within us, the Holy Spirit will transform us and produce the fruit of righteousness that brings glory to God (Romans 8:2-4; Galatians 5:22,23). Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" Matthew 5:16. God is the One who is glorified, for He is the One doing the work through us.

A BALANCED VIEW OF SALVATION

12. Read Titus 2:11-14

A. What does the grace of God bring? (11)

B. How does the grace of God teach us to live? (12,13)

C. Why did Jesus "give Himself for us?" (14)

The NASB translates verse 11 in the same order that it is in the Greek. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men."

God's amazing grace provides security, belonging, and meaning in life. His nurturing love draws us to Himself and leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). The more we know Jesus, the more we will love Him. The more we love Him, the more we will hate sin, for it hurts everyone. Compelled by His love, we will live for Him and look forward to His return because we enjoy being with Him (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

Jesus gave His life that He might redeem the human race from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people who love what is right and good. Jesus came to be a complete Savior from sin. Our next lesson will focus on how Jesus saves us from all aspects of the sin problem: the wages of sin, slavery to sin, and the evil effects of sin.

6-JESUS, A COMPLETE SAVIOR FROM SIN

HAVE YOU BEEN SAVED?

This is a common question that many people have been asked by well meaning Christians. The question raises other questions.

What do I need to be saved from? How can I know if I have been saved? If I have been saved in the past, is it possible to turn away from Jesus later? Can Jesus forgive and accept me if I repeat the same sin again?

Jesus took the initiative to be our Savior to take “away the sin of the world” John 1:29. In order to have a balanced perspective, we need to understand how Jesus saves us from every aspect of the sin problem.

1. What are the 3 aspects of the sin problem Jesus saves us from?

A. Legal Consequences Of Sin = D____ _ H

Romans 6:23 “The _____ of sin is _____, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

B. Spiritual Consequences Of Sin = S ____ _ E to sin

John 8:34 “Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a _____ of _____.

C. Physical Consequences Of Sin = P__ _ & Evil Effects of Sin

“To the woman [God] said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in _____ you shall bring forth children;”

". . . Then to Adam He said, . . . ‘Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat *of* it all the days of your life. Both _____ and _____ it shall bring forth for you. . . . In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground; for dust you are and to dust you shall return.” Gen. 3:16-19

2. How did Jesus save everyone from the legal consequences of sin?

- A. 2 Corinthians 5:14 “For the love of Christ _____ us, because we judge thus: that if One died for _____, then _____ died.”
- B. Galatians 2:19,20 “I through the _____ _____ to the law that I might live to God. I have been _____ with Christ.”
- C. Hebrews 10:10 “By that will we _____ _____ through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Paul is motivated by the truth that, “through the law,” everyone has already died, in Christ, the death that is the “wages of sin.”

This means that everyone can say, “Legally, I have been saved from the wages of sin. Legally, I have been sanctified by the offering of Jesus.”

The offering of Jesus on Calvary enabled God to:

- A. Be just when forgiving sinners (1 John 1:9, Romans 3:26,31).
- B. Qualify the human race for eternal life (Colossians 1:12-14).
- C. Restore our individual freedom of choice (2 Corinthians 5:19,20).

3. How are believers being saved from spiritual consequences of sin?

- A. John 8:31,32 “If you abide in My word, . . . you shall know the truth, and the _____ shall make you _____.”
- B. Romans 8:2-4 “The law of the _____ of _____ in Christ Jesus has made me _____ from the law of _____ and _____. . . . He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirements of the law might be _____ us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”
- C. Hebrews 10:14 “For by one offering He has _____ forever those who _____.”

In John 8:36, Jesus said, “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” Jesus did free everyone from the legal consequences of sin when He redeemed the human race from curse of the law (Gal. 3:13).

However, many people are unaware of this good news. As a result, they have not experienced the freedom the gospel brings.

Jesus says that those who abide in His word will know the truth and the truth will set them free. They will experience freedom from guilt, shame, and condemnation. They will also experience freedom from slavery to sins such as pride, bitterness, hypocrisy, immorality and rebellion. They will begin to love others as Jesus has loved them.

The King James Version translates Hebrews 10:10 and 14 in the same way, “are sanctified.” However, the Greek uses the perfect tense in verse 10 and the present tense in verse 14 (Robertson’s NT Word Pictures).

The perfect tense refers to something that has happened in the past, but its effects are ongoing. The present tense describes actions that are in the process of happening today. Since there are two different tenses being used, there must be a different focus in each verse.

The focus of verse 14 is on those who have surrendered their lives to God and have given Him permission to transform them. They are able to say, “Through the indwelling Holy Spirit I am being saved from slavery to sin. I am being sanctified spiritually.”

It is important to remember that this process doesn’t make us more qualified for heaven, for Jesus already did that for the human race. Instead, this transformation enables believers to:

- A. Bring glory to God by being a blessing to others (Matthew 5:16).
- B. Enjoy fellowship with God now and look forward to living with Him forever. Enjoy fellowship with other believers.
- C. Enjoy the abundant life that comes from living with Jesus.

4. Who are the ones who remain “perfected forever”? Heb. 10:14

“Perfected forever,” refers to the truth spelled out in verse 10, “We have been sanctified.” However, in verse 14 there is a qualifying statement. The only ones who remain “perfected forever,” are the ones who allow the Holy Spirit to continue the process of sanctifying them spiritually.

Verse 10 relates to our title to heaven and verse 14 to our fitness for heaven. If we don’t allow God to transform us, we will not enjoy the fellowship with God and His followers. We would rather “tear up our title” and die than live with God forever (Revelation 6:14-16).

Our security in Christ is always based on the perfect life and death of Jesus, not on our performance. All the while we are growing, we can have peace with God and the assurance of salvation (1 John 5:13). This enables our focus to be on living for God’s glory and not for the “selfish” motive of trying to make it to heaven (2 Corinthians 5:15).

As the Holy Spirit is leading us into all truth and transforming us, He may convict us to turn away from something we don’t want to surrender. If we resist and reject the Holy Spirit, we are saying, “I don’t want a Savior from sin, for I love darkness rather than light.” Out of love for us, God will honor our choice and we will perish in the end (John 3:16-19).

5. How will believers be saved from physical consequences of sin?

A. 1 Cor. 15:52,53 “The dead will be raised _____, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

B. Rev. 21:4,5 “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more _____, nor _____, nor _____. There shall be no more _____, for the former things have passed away.”

C. Revelation 21:27 “There shall by no means enter it anything that _____, or causes an abomination or a _____, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.”

When Jesus returns believers will be resurrected with brand new bodies. Our sinful, corruptible natures will be no more (See Romans 5:19b). After God creates a new heaven and earth, there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain. All the evil effects of the curse will be no more.

These promises enable believers to say:

- A. Receiving Jesus as my Savior and Lord, I can have the day by day assurance of living forever with God (1 John 5:13; 2 Timothy 4:8).
- B. I will be made holy physically when Jesus returns and He gives me a brand new body without a sinful nature (1 Corinthians 15:52,53).
- C. I will be saved from the pain and brokenness that sin has caused when God creates a new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:4,5,27).

GOD IS THE ONE WHO MAKES US HOLY

6. What gift did God give us to remind us He is the One who makes us holy? Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 31:13,17; Ezekiel 20:12; Mark 2:27

To sanctify means to make holy. Every Sabbath God says, “Remember, I am the One who created you and I am the One who makes you holy.” When God made the Sabbath holy, He was giving us a weekly reminder of the true meaning of life. Rightly understood, the Sabbath answers:

Where have we come from? A loving and powerful Creator

Where are we going? To live forever with Jesus, unless we persistently reject Him as our Savior and Lord

Why are we here? To live for Jesus by loving others as He has loved us.

Each Sabbath God calls us to rest from our daily chores and activities so we can come together to celebrate His wonderful love and amazing grace. Each Sabbath reminds us that we are to rest every day in Christ for our salvation and trust Him to provide for our needs (Leviticus 23:3; Matthew 6:33; 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:1-10; Exodus 20:8-11; 31:13,17).

7. What does God promise to do for those who trust Him?

- A. 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24 “Now may the God of peace Himself _____ you _____; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you *is* faithful, who also _____ do *it*.”
- B. Ephesians 5:25-27 “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might _____ and cleanse her with the washing of water by the _____, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be _____ and without blemish.
- C. Philippians 1:6 “He who has begun a good work in you will _____ it until the day of Jesus Christ.”
- D. Jude 1:24 “Now to Him who is able to _____ you from _____, and to present you _____ before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.”

WHAT IS OUR PART?

8. What are we asked to do when we are convicted of sin and the truth? We could summarize our response in 4 steps:

A. Believe The Truth

Acts 16:31 “_____ on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be _____.” (Read the whole chapter to get the context.)

Paul saved the jailer's life by stopping him from killing himself. The jailer recognized Paul had something that he needed: love, joy, peace and hope for the future. He asked, “What must I do to be saved?”

Paul didn't give him a list of rules to obey. Instead he told him of a person to believe in, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord: As our Creator Jesus is the "Lord of lords;" the ultimate authority.

Jesus: The name means "Savior." He came to "save His people from their sins" Matthew 1:21.

Christ: Anointed to heal the brokenhearted; set people free. Luke 4:18.

Those who believe in Jesus as their Lord, Savior, and Redeemer will give Him permission to be their Savior from all aspects of sin. They will also choose His will, rather than their own, for He always knows best.

B. Confession:

1 John 1:9 "If we _____ our sins, He is faithful and just to _____ us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Confession is being honest with God and acknowledging we personally have sinned and are in need of a Savior. Confession and repentance are not for the purpose of convincing or begging God to forgive us. He took the initiative to reconcile us to Himself before we did anything. Paul assured us that He is not counting our sins against us (2 Cor. 5:19).

Believing the truth, confessing our sin and repenting are our way of communicating we want to be reconciled with God (2 Cor. 5:20).

When we confess our sins, God promises He will forgive us. We don't have to beg Him to do so. Because of Jesus' perfect life and death, God also says He is just when forgiving us. In the New Testament, there are two main Greek words translated forgiveness: *charizomai* and *aphiemi*.

Charizomai comes from *charis* which means grace. It communicates that God took the initiative to forgive us through Jesus. The underlined words in the next two verses are translated from *charizomai*.

"When you were dead in your transgressions. . . , He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions" Col. 2:13.

"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" Eph. 4:32.

Aphiemi means to let go, send forth, leave or left. When it is translated forgive, it is sin or a debt that is being let go, sent away or left behind.

Jesus used this word in Mark 11:25,26: “Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

If we refuse to forgive someone, we are saying we want to hold onto our bitterness and resentment. In other words, we don't want a Savior from this. If we persist in this attitude, we will not confess our sin to God. We will not want Him to forgive us and cleanse us from our resentment. He will then honor our choice and we will perish in the end.

An illustration: If we have hurt someone and want to be reconciled with them, we need to sincerely confess and repent of our wrong. We also need to accept the consequences of our choices, make appropriate restitution, and recognize we need to earn back the trust that was lost.

When we have confessed and repented, the other person has the choice:

- To hold onto our sin (with resentment) and refuse to be reconciled.
- To forgive (letting go of) our sin and be reconciled to us.

Forgiveness (from aphiemi) means a person chooses to let go of resentment and any desire to seek revenge. It opens the door for a relationship to begin to be restored when it is appropriate and for trust to be rebuilt as evidence is given that a person is trustworthy.

(This process takes time and sometimes needs the assistance of a trusted friend or counselor. Often the one who caused the hurt will ask or demand to be trusted before evidence is given. The person choosing to forgive need not give in to any demand or manipulation by others. They can follow the example of Jesus. He did not automatically trust people who believed in Him. John 2:23,24.)

In 1 John 1:9, the word translated forgive is aphiemi. When we confess our sins to God, we are bringing our sins to Him. What will He do with them?

He took the initiative to reconcile the world to Himself. He has already communicated He is not counting anyone's sins against them. Therefore He assures us that He is going to forgive (let go of) the sins we confess to Him. We can then pray, "Thank you for already forgiving me." We may not feel forgiven, but we can believe the truth because it is true.

C. Repent:

Acts 3:19 "_____ therefore and be _____, that your sins may be _____ out, so that times of _____ may come from the presence of the Lord."

Repentance comes from the Greek word metanoia, meaning change of mind. It is making a choice to follow God and turn from sin. (Many have heard of a similar Greek word, metamorphis, which means change of body. A caterpillar goes through a "metamorphis" when its body changes into a butterfly.)

If we fall, we need to acknowledge we have sinned (confession) and choose again to surrender our lives to God's will (repentance).

D. Renew the mind:

Romans 12:1,2 ". . . present your bodies a living sacrifice, _____, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be _____ by the _____ of your _____, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

In view of God's mercy and grace, we are invited to offer our lives as a living sacrifice to God. When we come to Him just as we are, God receives us as "holy and acceptable" because of Jesus. Notice that the transformation process begins after we come to Him just as we are.

We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Renewing the mind could be described as reprogramming the mind. We have been told

many lies about God, ourselves, and others. Satan has told us lies, the world has told us lies, and we have told ourselves lies. We need to replace the lies with the truth from the Bible's perspective. The truth will then set us free from fear, guilt, shame, pride, greed, and slavery to sin (John 8:32-36; 16:13).

The lifestyle for the Christian is a continual process of following these four steps. As we believe, confess, and repent in response to the truth the Holy Spirit brings us, He will then be able to lead us into more truth. God will work only as fast as we are willing to give Him permission. Jesus told the disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" John 16:12. He had to wait for them to be ready.

If God flooded us with light all at once, it would be too much for us. We would have a tendency to resist and harden our hearts. So God works patiently with us as He brings the emotional and spiritual healing that we need. While Jesus was able to instantly heal people physically, He is not able to instantly heal people emotionally and spiritually.

The more open we are to surrendering to truth, the more quickly the Holy Spirit will be able to lead us into all truth and into the plan God has for each of our lives (Galatians 5:22,23; Jeremiah 29:11-13).

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

In my family growing up, I was the youngest of four boys. We enjoyed many kinds of recreational activities. We loved playing basketball, football, softball, tennis, ping pong, and volley ball. We also enjoyed family outings of water skiing in the summer and snow skiing in the winter. We often watched professional football on television. Once in awhile we went to see a professional basketball or baseball game.

While our family was very active in our local church, sports and recreation were definitely the activities we looked forward to. During my freshman year in a Christian high school, I was excited to be playing football, basketball, softball or whatever sport was in season.

When I was 15, my family moved to Texas. There I attended a smaller Christian high school. The spiritual atmosphere on campus was very positive. But what impressed me the most was that the sports leaders on campus were also the spiritual leaders. Their influence, along with several of the faculty members, led me to seek and find a living relationship with Jesus for myself. No longer was it just my parents' religion. Jesus was becoming my Savior.

At this boarding school, the opportunity to watch professional sports was limited, for there were always things to do: work, study, and activities that were planned. For the next 16 years, I watched very little.

After I lived in Wisconsin awhile, I began to hear a lot about the Green Bay Packers. As they became a winning football team in the 90's, the excitement began to build. I read about the upcoming games and learned about the challenges and the stakes involved. Then I would watch some of the games when I had the chance.

After awhile, I began to experience a growing conviction that sports could easily get out of hand. For many people it seemed more like a religion than a game.

Every season the excitement would build. I began to recognize the need to keep it under control. I would tell myself that as long as I only watched part of a game, I wouldn't be wasting too much time.

When we moved to Indiana, I didn't hear much about the Green Bay Packers. Then I was given tickets to an Indiana Pacers basketball game. In preparation for attending, I wanted to read up on the game so I could know better what was happening and what to look for.

The Indiana Pacers basketball team and the Indianapolis Colts football team were doing very well. I found myself getting caught up in the same excitement that I had experienced in Wisconsin. I enjoyed watching or listening to the games, but would try to keep it under control. I didn't want to waste too much time.

THE CONVICTION

Then the Holy Spirit brought a conviction that cut to the heart. “The passion for sports was stealing from the passion that belonged to God.”

Ouch! That hurt. “I guess I need to be more careful,” I thought to myself. But then the conviction went deeper. “It’s poison to your soul!”

The conviction was clear. I knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking. I realized I had to make a choice. It was a choice that I didn’t want to make. I enjoyed watching football games when I had the opportunity. I thought I was keeping it under control. I thought I wasn’t wasting too much time, at least not compared to other people that I knew.

My rationalizations seemed reasonable. But the Holy Spirit wouldn’t let up. “It isn’t about the time. It’s about the passion of the heart. It is stealing from the passion that belongs to God. It is poison to your soul!”

The still small voice spoke gently. There was no condemnation. It was simply a call for a decision. I then remembered something I had read in a wonderful devotional book called, Steps To Christ. It was on page 58.

“There may be an outward correctness of deportment without the renewing power of Christ. The love of influence and the desire for the esteem of others may produce a well-ordered life. Self-respect may lead us to avoid the appearance of evil. A selfish heart may perform generous actions. By what means, then, shall we determine whose side we are on?

“Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Of whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are Christ’s, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things.”

A PRAYER AND A PLAN

“Dear God,” I prayed. “I don’t want anything to come in between You and me. I’m sorry that I have allowed the passion for sports to steal from

the passion that belongs to You. I choose You. But I am going to need You to save me from this, for I enjoy watching the games. I will make a choice to surrender to your will because I know it is what is needed, not because I feel like it. I am going to need help with this. I am not going to be able to change on my own. What should I do?"

Then a thought came to me. "Cancel the newspaper." The idea made sense. Reading the sports page is what fueled the passion for the sports.

I had tried previously to tell myself and others, "I am not going to watch any more games." But those promises and resolutions would melt away as I rationalized that I would be careful to only watch a part of a game, maybe the last half or quarter or even just the final minutes.

Colossians 2:20-23 fit me perfectly. "If you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle?... These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."

Just making rules and promises wasn't going to work. How much time I was or was not spending was not the issue. The passion of the heart was what needed to change. I needed a Savior to restore the passion for God on the inside. Colossians 3:1,2 affirmed the idea that canceling the newspaper was a good idea. "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

That day I canceled the newspaper. Without access to the sports page, the interest in the sports began to fade away little by little. I knew I could have gone to the internet to read the sports news. However, I was not in the habit of doing that and I did not want to create a new habit that would open the door to more temptations. I made a deliberate choice to avoid going to those pages. Instead of making rules and promises, I simply chose to seek God and be careful what I fed my mind.

“Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.” Philippians 4:8.

Little by little the passion for God began to be restored.

LIVING WITH JOY!

I share this story as an illustration of how the Holy Spirit will continue to bring truth and conviction to our hearts. We will never be able to say, “I have arrived! I don’t need to learn or grow anymore.”

I am thankful the Holy Spirit brought the conviction to my heart. God’s plan for my life is so much better. I have a joy and a purpose that is lasting and meaningful. As a result of the gospel foundation, I am able to experience an inner security and peace.

Instead of being motivated by guilt, fear, or a desire to get to heaven, I have a passion to live for God’s glory. As I maintain a sensitive conscience and a surrendered heart, the Lord is helping me to experience healing in life as I grow into maturity. God has a plan for each of us. And that plan is centered on a living relationship with Him.

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord.” Jeremiah 29:11-14.

A WORD OF CAUTION!

Each person is unique. Each of us has our own journey and relationship with God. What may be a problem for one person may not be for another. I do not condemn others for watching sports. It is not my place to condemn anyone for anything. If anyone had the right to condemn us, it was Jesus. He came to save us, not to condemn us (John 3:17).

The issue is not a specific activity. The questions we need to ask are:

1. On who or what is the passion of my heart focused on?
2. Is there any activity, person, or possession that has become more important to me than God?

If something has become more important to us than God, then we need to acknowledge the truth, surrender our hearts to God, and give Him permission to restore the passion that belongs to Him. Even religious activities can become more important to us than having a loving relationship with God. Jesus pointed this out to some Jewish leaders.

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

They thought studying the Bible earned them merit before God. The Scriptures pointed them to Jesus who wanted to give them the abundant life their hearts longed for. However, they refused to come to Him.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment of the law was, He focused on the passion of our lives, not a specific activity. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” Matthew 22:36-39.

We are not able to create this kind of love and passion in our own lives. Jesus invites us to come just as we are and give him permission to do this for us (Romans 12:1,2; Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 3:19,20).

9. Read Psalm 139:23,24 - Ask God to reveal to you any areas of your life that are stealing from the passion that belongs to Him and are keeping you from experiencing His love and freely loving others. If God brings something to your mind, would you be willing to surrender it to Him and ask Him to restore the passion for Him?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ I'll think about it

DON'T CONFUSE ME WITH THE TRUTH!

By Clinton Meharry, © 2006, 2012

“Don't confuse me
With the truth that's clear!
I know what I believe.
Just tell me what I want to hear
Or I may have to leave!”

“I'm comfortable the way I am;
I really don't like change.
The truth might make me feel . . .
Condemned,
Or lead to something strange.”

“When evidence is pointed out
From the Bible that is clear,
I'd rather question, run, or doubt!
For change is what I fear.”

“Don't confuse me
With the truth just yet,
Life is difficult enough!
With rejection, guilt, stress, and debt!
Adding change would make it tough.”

“Look and see! The majority
Would not believe a lie!
They are my authority;
On them I will rely.”

In the heart and in the mind,
The battle rages long.
God is patient and very kind
When He shows us right from wrong.

Like a Shepherd Jesus guides us
And gives us what we need.
But if we murmur and complain,
And refuse to let Him lead,

Then with sorrow He'll let us go,
Knowing the pain that sin will bring.
He'll wait for us to call on Him
To relieve our suffering.

With love He understands and hears
The earnest prayers of all.
He sees the grief, the pain, the tears,
And answers every call.

He doesn't use a Band-Aid though
To deal with cancerous sin.
He has to be more thorough
And free us from within.

With everlasting love He draws
The sinful human race.

He says to each,
“You're not condemned!
For You've been saved by grace!”

“Now if you choose to live with me,
I'll save you from all sin.
I'll heal you're empty, broken heart,
And make you whole again.”

7 – JESUS, OUR REDEEMER

When Jesus tried to help His disciples understand who was great in the kingdom of God, He used His own life and mission as an illustration.

“Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” Mark 10:43-45.

In 1 Timothy 2:6 Paul described Jesus as the One “who gave Himself a ransom for all.”

- Ransom is the price paid to free a person from captivity or slavery.
- Redeem is the act of paying the price.
- A Redeemer is the one who is paying the price.
- The redeemed are the people who have been set free.

Why was a ransom price needed in order for the human race to be redeemed? Was this necessary to:

- Appease God’s wrath so that He could love us and forgive us?
- Pay off Satan in some way so that we can be free from his control?

The first could not be right, for God sent His Son into the world *because* He loved us, not so that He *could* love us (John 3:16).

The second thought also has problems. It would mean the plan of salvation would be based upon God and Satan cooperating and agreeing upon the price of the ransom.

Building on what we have learned, this lesson will help us understand why Jesus needed to give His life as “a ransom for all” 1 Timothy 2:6.

AUTHORITY OVER THE EARTH

1. What was Adam given when he was created? Genesis 1:26-28

2. What does Satan claim was given to him? Luke 4:5-7

God gave Adam dominion over the earth. The word translated dominion also means to rule or exercise authority. Satan claims that this dominion and authority was given to him. (See also 2 Peter 2:19). Since Satan is a liar, we have to ask, “Is he telling the truth or is he lying?”

3. How does Jesus describe Satan’s authority on earth?

- A. John 12:31 “The _____ of this world will be cast out.”
- B. John 14:30 “The _____ of this world is coming...”
- C. John 16:11 “The _____ of this world is judged.”

4. Read Matthew 12:22-30

- A. What did some say when Jesus cast a demon out of a man? v.24

- B. If the demon was cast out by God, what has come upon us? v.28

- C. Who is the “strong man?” v.29

- D. Why did he need to be bound? v. 29

Jesus had just freed “a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute.” This was evidence that the kingdom of God had come and that Satan was being bound so people could be delivered from his control.

THE PRICE FOR OUR REDEMPTION

5. What price did Jesus pay to redeem everyone? 1 Peter 1:18,19

The price wasn't cheap. It cost Jesus everything. Having given His life as "a ransom for all," He doesn't want anyone to perish (1 Timothy 2:6; 2 Peter 3:9). He wants to take us home with Him. He wants to live with us now and forever (John 14:1-3, 23). Jesus' death assures us that God is on our side and that He graciously forgives us (Romans 8:31,32; Colossians 2:13,14).

6. What happens to those who refuse to belong to Jesus? 2 Peter 2:1

Even though Jesus has redeemed everyone, some people choose to deny the Lord who bought them. They bring destruction upon themselves.

7. Read 1 Corinthians 6:19,20

A. Why does Paul say we are not our own? Who do we belong to?

B. What does Paul say should be the focus of our lives?

DELIVERED FROM THE POWER OF DARKNESS

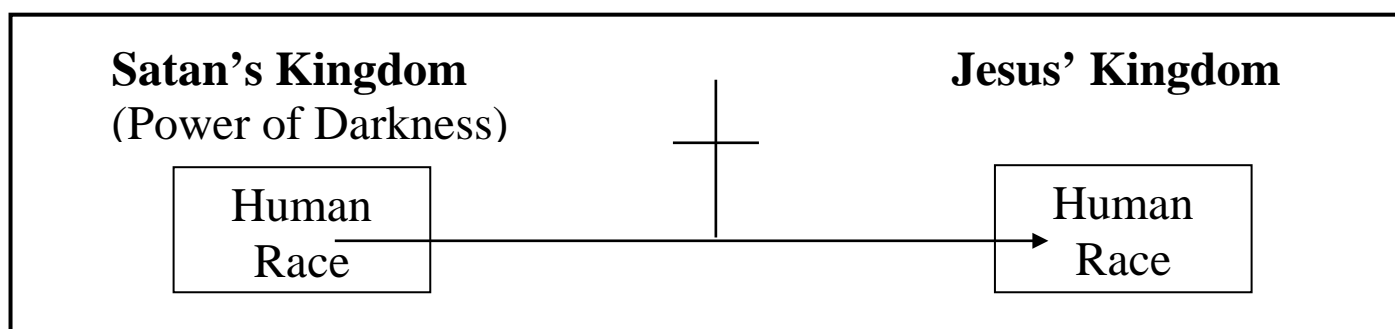
8. Read Colossians 1:12-14

A. What has God delivered the human race from?

B. What kingdom has He transferred everyone into?

Jesus' perfect life and death qualified everyone for eternal life. The redemption price that He paid enabled the human race to be transferred *legally* from the power and authority of Satan into the kingdom of Jesus.

As a result, everyone is individually free to choose whose authority and kingdom they want to be a part of. Paul was given the mission to share this good news with everyone. God wanted the truth "to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" Acts 26:17,18.



REDEEMED FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW

9. What are we under if we don't obey the law? Galatians 3:10-12

"Works of the law," describes any attempt to earn eternal life through our own obedience. If we are going to live by the law, we must follow it perfectly. Since "all have sinned," we have all earned death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). We all are under the curse of the law and must die.

10. How did Jesus redeem us from the curse of the law? Gal. 3:13

As the last Adam, Jesus took us and our sins to the cross. He redeemed all of us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

Based on God's choice:

- We all were in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30,31; 15:45)
- We all were crucified in Him (2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 2:19).

In this way, the wages of sin were paid, the law was upheld, and God was able to be just when forgiving us (Rom. 6:23; 3:26,31; 1 John 1:9).

11. According to Galatians 4:4,5, what did Jesus redeem us from?

By being born of a woman and born under the law, Jesus became united with the human race. He did this so He could take upon Himself “the iniquity of us all” and “redeem us from every lawless deed” Isaiah 53:6; Titus 2:14. Through His death, Jesus redeemed us from under the law. We are no longer under the curse and condemnation of the law.

12. What did Jesus’ death release us from? Hebrews 2:14,15

Through sin death entered the world (Romans 5:12). Satan took advantage of our fear of death to manipulate and control us. Since we all died in Christ, we no longer need to be afraid of death. Our security in Christ frees us to serve God and others out of love rather than fear. We are able to look beyond the grave to an eternity with God where there will be “no more death” or “anything that defiles” Revelation 21:4-8, 27.

FREEDOM TO “MARRY” AGAIN

13. What no longer has dominion over the human race now that Jesus has redeemed everyone from under the law? Romans 6:14

Under the law, we are all slaves to sin (John 8:34). Without a Savior, we can’t help but sin (Romans 7:18-21). But having been redeemed from under the law, we are now free to choose what kind of life we want: a life of slavery to sin or of loving service to God (Rom 6:13,16).

14. Read Romans 7:1-4. In verse 4, who does Paul say the woman is free to marry after she has become “dead to the law”?

When Adam chose to learn about evil, he delivered the human race over to the dominion and authority of Satan. We no longer had the Holy Spirit living within. Without a Savior we would be slaves of sin and under the curse and condemnation of the law.

Paul uses the law of marriage as an illustration of our situation. Because of Adam's choice, the human race was legally "married" to Satan. (The fruit of that "marriage" is sin.) Since the law says we're married as long as both are alive, it seems the only way to be free from this marriage is for the husband to die.

"The woman [the human race] is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, the woman marries another man [Christ], she [the human race] will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man [Christ].

You [the human race] have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." Rom. 7:2-4.

15. How were we delivered from the law of marriage to the first husband? Romans 7:3,4,6 (Compare with Galatians 2:19,20.)

Surprise! The husband doesn't die. We died in Christ! We are now free to choose to be married to Jesus and serve Him out of love. The law is not done away with or changed, but everyone is now free from the curse of the law. Satan is still alive, but he is no longer the ruler of the world.

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We have all sinned. We have all earned death, therefore we all must die. We were delivered from the law by having died in Christ, not by the law having been changed or done away with. Paul says that legally, or through the law, he did die the death that the law demanded. When did he die? He was "crucified with Christ" Galatians 2:19,20.

16. How does this truth change the focus of our lives? Romans 7:6

The good news for Paul is that everyone was crucified with Christ, for when Jesus died, all died (2 Corinthians 5:14). This truth helps us to understand God's unconditional love for the human race. It also motivates us to live for God, rather than for ourselves (2 Cor. 5:15).

The person serving in the letter of the law will ask, "What is the *least* I can do to gain acceptance with God and have eternal life?" The person who is born of the Holy Spirit and compelled by the love of God will ask, "What is the *most* I can do to bring glory to God and help others experience His loving salvation?"

17. Where does Paul say we are now "in Christ Jesus"? Eph. 2:4-6

God "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Paul talks about this as if it has already happened and is still going on. He can do this based on the foundational principle that what Jesus did, we were seen to have done in Him.

Physically we are still on earth. However, legally we have been qualified to live with God in heaven. Those who want Jesus to be their Savior and Lord will experience all the blessings that He earned for the human race.

AVOIDING LEGALISM AND LAWLESSNESS

18. Read Romans 10:1-10

A. What did many Israelites try to do? (3)

B. What did Christ bring to an end for the believer? (4)

C. How does a person respond with genuine faith? (9, 10)

The everlasting gospel protects us from both legalism and lawlessness.

Freedom from legalism

Legalism refers to the belief that I must do something to earn eternal life and be qualified for heaven.

Since Jesus took the initiative to save the human race from the wages of sin and to qualify us for heaven, we realize there is nothing we can do to make ourselves more holy or qualified for eternal life. Everything we do is a response. Even our faith is a response to the truth, for we believe the truth because it is true, not to make it true.

Many Israelites tried to establish their own righteousness. However, for those who believe, “Christ is the end of the law *for righteousness*.” Those who believe in Jesus are able to stop trying to earn their own righteousness. Paul did not say the law itself came to an end, but rather our looking to the law for our righteousness ended.

Freedom from lawlessness

Lawlessness refers to practicing or approving of a lifestyle that is contrary to God’s law of love (Matthew 7:23; Romans 1:32). When we believe the truth and surrender our lives to Jesus, we are choosing to let Him be the Lord and Savior of our lives. A modern word for Lord is Boss. When we choose Jesus as our Boss, we will regularly ask the question, “Lord, what is Your will for my life today?”

If we do fail, we simply confess our sin, choose again to surrender to God’s will, and thank Him for His forgiveness (1 John 1:9-2:2).

19. Out of appreciation for all that Jesus has done and promises to do, would you like to pray the following prayer?

“Dear God, Thank You for redeeming the human race from the curse and condemnation of the law. Thank You for freeing us from Satan’s authority and leading us into truth. Today, I choose to surrender my life to You and give You permission to save me from slavery to sin. I ask that You would live within me that my life may bring glory to You?”

8 - GRACE THAT IS GREATER THAN ALL OUR SIN

AMAZING GRACE

John Newton was born on July 24, 1725. He was raised by a Christian mother who taught him about God and prayed that God would use him as a minister. When he was 7, she died from tuberculosis.

His father was a captain of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean. When John was eleven, he joined his father on the ship. He made six voyages with him before his father retired. Life on board the ship influenced him in a negative way.

As a result of some challenging circumstances, John became a slave of a slave trader in West Africa. He was rescued by his father's friend. After becoming a captain of a slave trading ship, he found himself trying to steer through a violent storm.

When he felt sure the ship was going to sink, he cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us." When God did rescue them, he realized that God's grace was real. Later he wrote the well-loved hymn, Amazing Grace.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

T'was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come;
T'was grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

AMAZING LOVE

1. What were we all like when Jesus died for us? Romans 5:6-10

(Verse 6) _____

(Verse 6) _____

(Verse 8) _____

(Verse 10) _____

2. What did Jesus' death accomplish for everyone? Romans 5:9,10

(Verse 9)

(Verse 10)

We were justified and reconciled to God through the death of Jesus even when we were helpless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies.

3. What will Jesus' life save believers from? Romans 5:9, 10

Paul uses the future tense in these verses: “we shall be saved from wrath . . . by His life.” This means he is referring to what believers will experience, rather than to what Jesus did to reconcile the world to God.

The wrath of God will be revealed against those who suppress and reject the truth. God will give them up, allowing them to suffer the consequences of their choices. (Romans 1:18-20; 24,26,28). On the other hand, those who “receive a love of the truth” and want Jesus to save them from slavery to sin will be saved from the wrath of God (John 8:31-36; Matthew 5:3-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

As our High Priest, Jesus is “able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” Heb. 7:25. As a Priest, Jesus represents us before God, making us acceptable to Him. He also represents God to us. He leads us into the truth about God, hoping we will be willing to accept Him into our lives. God has no problem accepting us as we are. Are we able to accept Him as He is: our Creator, Savior, Redeemer, Healer, Lord and King?

4. What are we given the freedom to receive? Romans 5:11

God took the initiative to reconcile the world to Himself. He then invites everyone to be reconciled to Him (2 Cor. 5:19,20). Jesus describes Himself as knocking on the door of our lives waiting for us to invite Him in (Revelation 3:20). He will not force His way in. When we give Him permission, He will make His home with us (John 14:23; 15:1-8).

ADAM BROUGHT DEATH, JESUS BROUGHT LIFE

5. Read Romans 5:12-14

A. How did sin enter the world? (12)

B. Why did death spread to all men? (12)

C. What is not imputed, or counted, when there is no law? (13)

D. Were the sins of people from Adam to Moses like Adam's? (14)

In Romans 5:12-18 Paul refers to Adam as a type of Jesus (v. 14) and shows how each of them had an impact upon the whole human race. When Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, sin and death entered the world. As a result, “death spread to all men, because all sinned—” Romans 5:12. Paul stops his sentence. He could have said:

A. Death spread to all men, because all sinned *like Adam*.

B. Death spread to all men, because all sinned *in Adam*.

Paul stopped his sentence to explain that the first option could not be right. While sin was in the world since Adam, “sin is not imputed when there is no law.” In other words, a person cannot be held accountable for doing something wrong if the law was not clearly spelled out. For “where there is no law, there is no transgression” Romans 4:15. At the time of Moses, God clearly spelled out what was right and wrong.

Then Paul points out the obvious. “Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam.” Death reigned because they had sinned *in Adam*, not *like Adam*, for their sin was not like his transgression.

Adam knowingly chose to learn about evil. Since Adam represented everyone, we all were condemned as a result of his choice (Rom. 5:18).

At first, this seems unfair, for we had no choice in Adam's decision. However, Paul is quick to point out that Adam is a type of Christ. Therefore, we are encouraged to see Jesus as the "last Adam," as another representative of the whole human race (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Just as in Adam we all sinned and were condemned, so in Christ, we all obeyed the law and died the death that is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 21; Galatians 2:19,20). Therefore, we all are justified through Jesus' obedience (Romans 5:18).

On the other hand, if we believe death spread to all men because all sinned *like Adam*, then to be consistent, we would have to say people will only be justified when they have obeyed perfectly like Christ. This of course would be impossible and totally contrary to the gospel.

6. How is God's grace greater than Adam's sin? Romans 5:15,16

Adam's one sin brought death. The free gift brought justification after billions of sins.

7. What will people experience when they receive God's grace and gift of righteousness? Romans 5:17

Those who receive Jesus as their Savior will experience the reign of grace in their lives. The Holy Spirit will lead them into truth and set them free from guilt, shame, condemnation, and slavery to sin (John 16:13; Romans 8:2-5; 12:1,2; Galatians 5:16-23). He will fulfill the "righteous requirement of the law" in them (Romans 8:4).

But that is not all. Jesus has elevated the human race by becoming one with us. As a result, Christians will reign with Christ throughout eternity. "For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" 2 Timothy 2:11,12.

8. Read Romans 5:18, 19

A. What is the impact of Adam's offense or disobedience?

Verse 18 _____

Verse 19 _____

B. What is the impact of Jesus' righteous act and obedience?

Verse 18 _____

Verse 19 _____

C. What tense is used in v. 19 concerning their impact on others?

Adam _____

Jesus _____

Verse 18 - Our Legal Status Changed At The Cross

In verse 18, Paul refers to our legal status. In Adam, we all were condemned. In Jesus, we all were justified. Having been redeemed, we are truly free to choose life with Jesus or death with sin.

Verse 19 - Through Adam's Sin Our Human Nature Became Sinful

Here Paul refers to our human nature. Because of Adam's sin, we all have been born with a sinful nature (See also Romans 3:23; 5:12-18).

Because of Jesus we don't have to be a slave to our sinful nature. Jesus sets us free (John 8:34, 36). This freedom comes, not by our nature changing now, but by the Holy Spirit living in those who want Jesus as their Savior (Rom. 8:1-4; 2 Peter 1:4).

Verse 19 – When Jesus Returns, We Will Receive A Sinless Nature

At the second coming of Jesus believers will be changed. Their bodies will be recreated. Their corruptible, sinful natures will be gone. They will receive a sinless nature like Adam had before he sinned.

This is why Paul uses the future tense in Romans 5:19 when he says “by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.”

“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

Paul says “we shall all be changed.” Is he referring to everyone or just believers? Earlier in the chapter Paul clarifies who are raised at the second coming. “In Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming” 1 Corinthians 15:22,23.

In Revelation 20:5 we learn that unbelievers will be raised a thousand years later. So the “all” in 1 Corinthians 15:51 would refer to all who are resurrected at the second coming of Jesus.

In Romans 5:19, Paul uses the word “many” to be consistent in his comparison between Adam and Jesus. Many, [all], were made sinners as a result of Adam's sin. We all have a sinful nature (Eph. 2:3). Many, [those who believe], will be made righteous. They will receive a sinless nature when they are changed at the second coming of Jesus.

The word “many” can refer to a large group of people. It can also refer to everyone. Based on the broader context, we learn that Paul is using it in both ways in verse 19.

(See Mark 10:45 and 1 Tim. 2:5,6 for an example of the word “many” referring to all. Jesus said He came to give His life as a ransom for many. Paul wrote that Jesus gave His life as a ransom for all. There is no contradiction, for many can mean all.)

GRACE THAT IS GREATER THAN ALL OUR SIN

9. What was the purpose of the law? Romans 5:20

People cannot be held accountable for something they don't know is wrong. If after the law is spelled out, they continue to live contrary to the law, then the seriousness of the "offense" increases. It moves from ignorance to rebellion (or transgression).

The "offense" becomes even more serious when it is discovered that a person is incapable of following the law even if they try. Their very nature is corrupt. This is described in the Bible as iniquity, a word that means bent. Our love is bent inward – selfishness.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" Jeremiah 17:9, NIV. Even our best works are motivated by selfishness and so are referred to as "filthy rags" Isaiah 64:6.

10. What happens when sin increases? Romans 5:20

The law reveals how desperate our condition really is. However, God not only forgives our ignorance and transgression, He also takes responsibility for our iniquity. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" Isaiah 53:6. (See also Exodus 34:6,7.)

God doesn't clear the guilty by turning a blind eye to their failures. Neither does He make someone else pay for their mistakes. His law and justice are upheld because the human race is redeemed in the same way the human race is lost – through a person who represents everyone. In Adam we sinned and were condemned. In Christ we died and obeyed.

11. What is associated with the reign of sin and of grace? Rom. 5:21

A. Sin _____

B. Grace _____

In this verse, Paul implies that there are two opposing kingdoms in this world: the reign of sin verses the reign of grace.

Those who embrace sin and the kingdom of darkness will prefer death over life with God. “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light” John 3:20. When Jesus returns, these people would rather die than come into the presence of God (Revelation 6:16).

God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” 2 Peter 3:9. “ ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.’ ” Ezekiel 33:11. Death is associated with the reign of sin because that is the natural consequence of sin. It is not the result of God getting back at people and punishing them for rejecting Him.

Those who embrace the kingdom of grace will experience peace with God now and healing in their lives. Having learned that Jesus fulfilled the law for the whole human race through His perfect life and death, they are drawn by His unconditional love. This leads them to repent and surrender their lives to Him (Romans 2:4).

The Holy Spirit will then fulfill the law in them (Romans 8:4). When Jesus returns, they will say, “This *is* our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This *is* the Lord;. . . we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” Isaiah 25:9.

GRACE FREES US TO CHOOSE OUR MASTER

12. After writing, “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,” what questions does Paul ask in Romans 6?

A. Romans 6:1 _____

B. Romans 6:15 _____

Some thought, “If sinning a lot made God look good, why not continue in sin to show how abundant God’s grace really is?” Others thought, “Since Jesus freed us from being under the condemnation of the law, the law was done away with and it was alright to continue sinful behavior.”

13. Read Romans 6:14,15,23 along with Galatians 3:10-13; 4:4,5.

A. Why is it a problem to be under the law?

B. Who are the ones who are under grace and not under law?

C. When and how did people move to being under grace?

Being “under the law” is not a problem if a person has never sinned. Under the law, a righteous person would be able to live forever (Galatians 3:12). However, since we all have sinned (Romans 6:23), being under the law means that we are all under “the curse of the law” and must die. This is why Jesus is so important to all of us.

“As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’ . . . Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” Galatians 3:10,13.

14. What are we free from now that we have died? Romans 6:7,14

Verse 7

Verse 14

The word translated “freed” is the same word translated “justified” in Romans 5:9. Having died in Christ, we are free or “justified” from sin. The just demands of the law have been met, for “the wages of sin” have been paid (Romans 3:31; 6:23). Sin no longer has dominion over us. It no longer has the ability to control or destroy us, for in Christ everyone:

- Has died the death that the law demanded (2 Corinthians 5:14).
- Who was under the law has been redeemed (Galatians 3:13; 4:4,5).
- Has been freed from the condemnation of the law (Romans 5:18).
- Has been saved by grace (Ephesians 2:5,6).

**15. In the light of Jesus' death and resurrection (Romans 6:8-10),
how are we to think about ourselves? Romans 6:11**

In Christ we not only died, but also rose again. "God . . . raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus" Eph. 2:6. We are to choose to believe the truth from God's perspective that we are "alive to God" and no longer under a death sentence.

This can be very helpful when Satan presents his lies to us. When we have sinned, he tries to convince us:

"You'll never be good enough. There's no use trying. You have failed so many times, how can God still love you? You're making a mess of things. You might as well give up trying to be a Christian. If you didn't profess to be a Christian, you wouldn't be a hypocrite. Then you could really have some fun. You can come back to Jesus later. Maybe it won't be so hard then."

If we believe Satan's lies we will be tempted to turn away from God. He would then lead us into more pain and brokenness in his attempt to destroy us (John 10:10).

However, when we believe the truth from God's perspective, we will experience the security we need in order to be honest with God, confess our sins to Him, receive his forgiveness, and allow Him to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness" 1 John 1:9.

**16. What are we free to choose now that we are under grace and not
under the dominion of sin or the curse of the law? Rom 6:12-19**

Verse 12 _____

Verse 13 _____

Verse 16 _____

Being under grace means we are all free to choose who we will serve: God or Satan. We are not free to exercise dominion ourselves and be our own masters. Adam surrendered that privilege when he chose to learn about evil. We don't like the word slave, but Paul uses it so we can understand that our choice is not about performance, but about which kingdom we want to be a part of and who we want to have as our King.

- Do I choose to be a “slave of sin” and Satan? __Yes __No
- Do I choose to be a “slave of righteousness” and God? __Yes __No

FREEDOM TO LOVE AS JESUS HAS LOVED US

17. What did some people desire to be under? Galatians 4:21

Paul was shocked that anyone would want to be under the law. He asks, “Do you not hear the law?” He then summarized his conclusion:

“If you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Gal. 5:2-4.

Jewish Christians tried to convince the Gentiles that Jesus' perfect life and death was not sufficient to make them acceptable to God. Based on Genesis 17:10-14, they believed circumcision was still necessary. They thought Paul had rejected the law when he didn't require Gentiles to be circumcised. However, they had not understood the true meaning of the symbol. It was to lead them to trust in what God wanted to do in their lives. This is what Moses referred to in Deuteronomy 30:6.

“The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

Paul embraced the true meaning of circumcision. “Circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law,

your circumcision has become uncircumcision He is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter” Romans 2:28,29.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . , for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” Galatians 3:28,29.

Paul wanted everyone to understand there was nothing we can do to make ourselves more holy or acceptable to God. Jesus accomplished this for the human race through His perfect life and death. We are all free to come to Him just as we are. We are free to surrender our lives to Him and pray, “Let Your will be done in my life.” (Matthew 6:10).

18. What counsel does Paul give to those who realize they have been freed from the curse & condemnation of the law? Gal. 5:1,13-24

A. How are we to use our freedom? (1,13, 14)

B. How does the law relate to the fruit of the Spirit? (14, 22, 23)

C. What daily choice does the Christian make (24; Luke 9:23)

Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you” John 15:12. “Freely you have received, freely give” Matthew 10:8. We can use our freedom to love or destroy one another; to build up or tear down. Finding security in Christ frees us to love others rather than take advantage of them.

Jesus invites us to surrender our lives to Him and let Him save us from all aspects of sin. (This is what it means to take up our cross daily.) The Holy Spirit will then transform us so we can love others as Jesus has loved us. He will fulfill the law of love within us (Rom. 8:4). The law will then become a promise of what God will produce in our lives. We will not want to lie, steal, kill, etc. (Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 22:37-40).

9 - THE SUPREME SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

The truth that Jesus was crucified to be the Savior of the world is at the very heart of the gospel message. Therefore, it is Satan's determined purpose to distort this truth. While crucifixion was indeed horrible, the physical suffering Jesus experienced was similar to what other people endured, like the two thieves who were crucified with Him. However, the emotional and spiritual anguish that He suffered was so much greater, He died after just six hours. Normally it took much longer for a person to die on the cross (Mark 15:25,33-45; John 19:31-34).

When we understand the cross of Christ from the Jewish perspective, as the New Testament writers did, we are able to understand more clearly God's amazing love for us and the supreme sacrifice that was made for the human race.

Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). May our hearts be drawn to Him as we understand "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:18 NIV). Then we will be able to say with Paul, "The love of Christ compels us" 2 Corinthians 5:14.

JESUS HUMBLLED HIMSELF

1. What attitude or mindset are Christians to have? Philippians 2:5

2. What was Jesus' position in heaven before He came to earth?

A. Philippians 2:6

B. John 1:1-3,14

From the beginning, Jesus was with God and was God. Then He came to earth as a baby to be our Savior (Galatians 4:4; Luke 1:26-38).

3. List the five humbling steps Jesus took in His mission to save the human race. Philippians 2:7,8

- A. Made Himself of no _____
- B. Taking the form of a _____
- C. Coming in the _____
- D. Humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of _____
- E. Even the _____ of the _____

JESUS EMPTIED HIMSELF

4. How did Jesus make Himself of “no reputation”? Philippians 2:7

- A. Isaiah 53:2 “He has no _____ or _____; and when we see Him, there is no _____ that we should desire Him.”
- B. John 5:19, 30 “The Son can do _____ of Himself.... I can of _____ do _____.”
- C. 2 Corinthians 8:9 “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was _____, yet for your sakes He became _____, that you through His _____ might become rich.”

The Greek word translated “no reputation” means “to make empty, make (of none effect, of no reputation, void)” Strong’s Concordance.

Isaiah 53:2 – “He has no comeliness.” The Hebrew word translated comeliness means, “magnificence, that is ornament or splendor” Strong’s Concordance.

The New International Version translates Isaiah 53:2 this way: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”

Outwardly, Jesus was very plain. This was by design. He wanted people to be attracted to Him by His love and truth, not by His outward display. John describes what he saw in Jesus: “We beheld His glory . . ., full of grace and truth” John 1:14. The same is true today. The “fruit of the Spirit” makes a person attractive and a witness for Jesus (Gal. 5:22,23).

John 5:19, 30 – Jesus was helpless and dependent upon His Father. His Divine power and knowledge had been laid aside. On earth He grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52). He relied upon His Father, the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures to guide His words and empower His actions (Luke 4:18).

2 Corinthians 8:9 – There are two Greek words that describe poverty. "Penia" refers to someone who has the basic necessities. "Ptocheia" refers to someone who has nothing. The latter is used of Jesus in this verse. He emptied Himself that we might become rich. With the riches we have in Jesus, we are invited to serve others as He has served us.

JESUS LIVED TO SERVE

5. Why did Jesus take the form of a bondservant? **Philippians 2:7**

- A. Mark 10:44,45 “The Son of Man did not come to be _____, but to _____, and to _____ His life a ransom for many.”
- B. Luke 22:24-27 “I am among you as the _____ who _____.”
- C. John 6:38 “I have come down from heaven, not to do _____ own _____, but the _____ of _____ who sent Me.”

Mark 10:44,45 – The nature of God’s love is giving and serving. The human race needed to be saved from sin. Jesus, as the Creator of the human race, was the only One who could legally become the last Adam. Out of love, He came to serve, giving up His life in order to redeem us.

Luke 22:27 – In this world, the rich, powerful and important people are served by others. In the kingdom of God, those who serve out of love are the ones who are great. Jesus was simply carrying out the principles of the kingdom of heaven by coming here to serve.

John 6:38 – Jesus was tempted just as we are tempted (Hebrews 4:15). There were times when His desires were different than His Father's, but He always chose to follow His Father's will. (See Matthew 26:39-44.)

JESUS CAME TO REDEEM AND TRANSFORM US

6. Why did Jesus come in the likeness of men? Philippians 2:7

- A. Romans 8:3 "...by sending His own Son in the _____ of _____, ... He [God] _____ sin in the flesh."
- B. 2 Corinthians 5:21 God "_____ Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."
- C. Galatians 4:4, 5 "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to _____ those who were under the law."

We are "by nature children of wrath" Ephesians 2:3. Adam passed his sinful nature onto us and brought condemnation to everyone (See Romans 5:18). When God "condemned sin in the flesh," He was saying the sinful nature needed to die. (For example, if Jesus had condemned the woman who had been caught in adultery, He would have been saying she would need to be stoned. See John 8:1-11.)

Since Jesus created Adam, He could legally become another head of the human race. As the "last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45,47), Jesus became one with the human race. When Jesus was "born of a woman, born under the law," he took upon Himself our human nature.

By coming in the "likeness of sinful flesh" and being "made... sin for us," Jesus was able to take us, our sin and sinful nature to the cross and die for the sins of "the whole world" 1 John 2:2. This enabled Him to "redeem those who were under the law," for in Christ, we all died the death the law demanded (Galatians 4:5; 2:19, 20; 2 Corinthians 5:14).

Instead of saying Jesus had a sinful nature, it is more accurate to say that He took upon Himself our sin and nature that He might take us to the cross. It was our transgressions and iniquity that was laid upon Him:

“He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” Isaiah 53:4-6.

WHEN JESUS TOUCHED A LEPER

Some have thought that if Jesus received our iniquity, He would become a sinner Himself. But instead, His perfect life and death saved us from sin (John 3:17). This is illustrated by Jesus healing people with leprosy.

The law of Moses communicated that people would become “unclean” if they touched a leper (Leviticus 22:4-6). However, when Jesus touched a leper, he made the leper clean (Matthew 8:2-4).

“The work of Christ in cleansing the leper from his terrible disease is an illustration of His work in cleansing the soul from sin. The man who came to Jesus was ‘full of leprosy.’ Its deadly poison permeated his whole body.”

“The disciples sought to prevent their Master from touching him; for he who touched a leper became himself unclean. But in laying His hand upon the leper, Jesus received no defilement. His touch imparted life-giving power. The leprosy was cleansed.”

“Thus it is with the leprosy of sin,--deep-rooted, deadly, and impossible to be cleansed by human power. ‘The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores’ Isaiah 1:5, 6. But Jesus, coming to dwell in humanity, receives no

pollution. His presence has healing virtue for the sinner. Whoever will fall at His feet, saying in faith, ‘Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean,’ shall hear the answer, ‘I will; be thou made clean.’ Matthew 8:2,3, R.V.” The Desire of Ages, page 266.

7. What other reasons are given for Jesus becoming human?

- A. Hebrews 2:10,11 “Both He who _____ and those who are being _____ *are* all of _____, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.”
- B. Hebrew 2:14,15 “As the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might _____ him who had the power of death, that is, the _____, and _____ those who through _____ of death were all their lifetime subject to _____.”
- C. Hebrews 2:17,18 “In all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a _____ and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to _____ those who are _____.

Hebrews 2:10,11 - Jesus became one with us so He could be our Savior from all sin. This enabled Him to legally sanctify the human race through His perfect life and death and spiritually sanctify believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:10,14; Gal. 5:23,23).

Hebrews 2:14,15 - Since God is immortal, He cannot die (1 Timothy 6:16). Therefore, Jesus “shared in the same” flesh and blood so that He could die for the sins of the world and free us from our “fear of death.”

Satan has appealed to our fear of death in order to manipulate and tempt us. Freedom from this fear destroys Satan’s power over us.

The word translated “destroy” in verse 14, means, “To render inactive, idle, useless, ineffective” AMG Complete Word Study New Testament.

The NASB translates it, “that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death.” Understanding God’s perfect love will “cast out fear” and free us to be motivated by love (1 John 4:18).

Hebrews 2:17,18 - In order to be our High Priest, Jesus “had to be made like His brethren.” He is able to understand the suffering that we experience on this earth in the midst of our trials and temptations. Instead of being impatient with us, He encourages us to “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” Hebrews 4:16. As our High Priest, He is also able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before God because He gave His life for the human race (Rom. 12:1; Jude 24; Heb. 10:10,14).

JESUS LOOKED FORWARD TO BEING WITH US

8. Why was Jesus willing to die for us? Philippians 2:8

A. Isaiah 53:11 “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be _____.”

B. John 12:19-24 “Look, the _____ has gone after _____!.... Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and _____, it remains _____; but if it _____, it produces much grain.”

C. Hebrews 12:2 “... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the _____ that was set before Him _____ the cross, despising the _____, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

From the prophecy in Isaiah, Jesus was able to understand that His sacrifice would “justify many” and bear much fruit. The Greeks were a reminder of this truth. Through faith in the promises in Isaiah, He was

able to focus on the eternal joy of being united with people who received His gift of salvation and wanted to be reconciled to God.

THE CROSS FROM THE JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

9. Why did Paul say “even the death of the cross?” Philippians 2:8

- A. Galatians 3:13 “Christ has _____ us from the _____ of the _____, having become a _____ for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a _____’).”
- B. Deuteronomy 21:22, 23 “If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to _____, and you _____ him on a _____, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is _____ is _____ of God.”
- C. Joshua 10:26 “Joshua struck them and _____ them, and _____ them on five _____; and they were hanging on the trees until evening.”

Crucifixion in the days of Christ was synonymous to hanging on a tree (Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29; 1 Peter 2:24). When a person was hung on a tree, it signified the curse of God; death without the hope of eternal life. A story in Joshua 10 illustrates the concept spelled out in Deuteronomy.

Soon after Israel entered Canaan, five kings led armies against them. After the kings were killed, Joshua had their bodies hung on a tree until evening. This signified that the kings and their armies had rejected God and were cursed by Him. They had rejected the evidence that God was leading Israel. He had freed them from Egypt, kept them safe in the wilderness, helped them over Jordan and conquered Jericho.

10. What did Jewish leaders want to happen to Jesus? John 19:5-7

Pilate found no fault in Jesus. So the Jews had to give a reason why they were demanding His crucifixion. They accused Jesus of blasphemy for referring to Himself as the Son of God (John 5:18; 8:58,59; 10:30-33).

11. How were people to die if they blasphemed? Leviticus 24:16

The law against blasphemy demanded death by stoning. When Jesus said, “I and My Father are one,” the Jews took up stones “again” to stone Him (John 10:30-33). This proved they were aware that stoning was the method of death for blasphemy.

12. Thought question - Why did they want Jesus to be crucified?

The Jews believed that God would not allow a person to be “hung on a tree” unless he really was under the curse of God. In their minds, having Jesus crucified was a way to “prove” that He was not the Messiah.

Also, since Jesus predicted His resurrection (John 2:19-22; Mark 8:31), the Jewish leaders wanted to make sure God would “curse” Jesus so that He would not rise again.

JESUS GAVE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

13. How did people mock Jesus on the cross? Matthew 27:41-43

A. (42)_____

B. (42)_____

C. (43)_____

14. What happened soon after these taunts? Matthew 27:45

Darkness covered the land for three hours. This had an impact upon all those around, stopping the mocking and scorn. The people who were watching, “beat their breasts and returned” Luke 23:48.

15. What did Jesus cry out after 3 hours of darkness? Matt. 27:46

At the same time, Jesus was experiencing the “curse of the law,” feeling totally forsaken by God. He was dying without *feeling* any hope of being resurrected. Jesus was willing to say good-bye to life forever that He might give eternal life to the human race.

16. What were the last words of Jesus before He died?

A. John 19:30 “It is _____!”

B. Luke 23:46 “Father, into Your _____ I _____ My spirit.”

Jesus realized His mission of saving the world from death was completed. While He had felt forsaken, He chose to trust in His Father’s love and the promises from scripture. Isaiah promised that if He gave His life as an offering for sin, Jesus would “see His seed” and “prolong His days” Isaiah 53:10. He would leave His life in His Father’s hands.

17. What events happened after Jesus died that signified this was a very important moment in history? Matthew 27:51-54

A. (51) _____

B. (51-52) _____

C. (53) _____

When Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn in two. This signified the earthly temple and animal sacrifices were no longer necessary. A violent earthquake shook the ground. “The rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen

asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”

As a foretaste of the resurrection of the righteous, many saints came to life after Jesus rose from the grave. Their testimony added to all the evidence that Jesus truly was the Savior of the world.

After experiencing the mysterious darkness and the earthquake, soldiers at the cross “feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was “the Son of God.”’

THE SUPREME SACRIFICE

“Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. . . . The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation.”

“All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Savior in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.”

“Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Savior could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race.”

“It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.” The Desire of Ages, page 753

JESUS' LOVING GIFT INVITES A RESPONSE

18. What did Jesus say He would do if He was lifted up? John 12:32

19. In the light of what Jesus has done for the human race, what did John invite us to do? 1 John 3:1,16

20. As you contemplate the supreme sacrifice of Christ, what thoughts come to you? How does it lead you to respond to Him?

MARY'S SON

By Clinton Meharry, © 2005

Mary gave birth to a wonderful Son,
But experienced pain like everyone.

She couldn't have had a better child,
More loving, friendly, patient and mild,

More helpful, courteous, kind and strong,
Forgiving others, while hating wrong!

But that is why she experienced pain,
He hated wrong, and that was plain.

People who wanted to cling to their sin
Felt the rebuke that came from Him.

He didn't have to say a word,
Loud and clear, they still heard –

For the life He lived and choices He made,
Came from One who always prayed.

Abiding with His Father above,
He showed us how to truly love.

Those who felt the need for grace,
Were gently drawn by His smiling face.

Those who thought they upheld the law,
Didn't like the things they saw.

“Why do you want to eat your dinner,
With the Publican and sinner?

God condemns the thief and liar,
He will throw them in the fire.

If you approve of what they do,
Then surely God is not with You!”

Then Jesus looked around and asked,
“What do you think is the doctor's task?

He comes to help the ones in need,
The lame, the sick, the ones who bleed,

I've come to heal those who hurt;
Those who feel they're good as dirt.

I've come to love and save all men
From slavery to their selfish sin.

When you believe and trust in Me,
The truth will truly make you free.”

The Jewish leaders replied with scorn!
“Through fornication you were born,
How can you be teaching us?”
They looked at Him with mean disgust.

“We're sons of Abraham, you see,
We don't need to be made free!”

But as they spoke their anger grew.
Jesus knew what they would do.

When He was finally crucified,
He still loved them; He still replied,

“Forgive them, Father, they don't know
We're not doing this just for show.

When I am raised up from the grave,
They might believe I came to save

Everyone from every sin,
Simply because we love all men.”

As Mary stood beneath the cross
Weeping over the imminent loss,

She remembered the promise from years before,
A reminder of the spiritual war:

“A sword will pierce your soul too!”
She felt it now, it was surely true!

But on Sunday morning when the Son had risen,
In spite of the guards, from His tomb-sealed prison,

Mary now had a new song to sing,
Of her Son – The Savior, Creator, and King!

10 - JESUS RECEIVES SINNERS: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO HIS ENEMIES

MISUNDERSTANDING THE MISSION

The Jewish leaders had totally misunderstood the mission of the Messiah. As they studied the Hebrew Scriptures (Genesis – Malachi), they focused on the prophecies that referred to the Messiah coming as a conquering King and setting up His government on earth. (For example, see Psalm 2; Isaiah 2:1-4; 9:6,7; Micah 4:1-5).

They passed over the prophecies that spoke of the Messiah as the Lamb who would die for the sins of the world. (For example, see Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Daniel 9:26).

The Jews hated being ruled by the Romans and anxiously waited for the Messiah to come and deliver them. Their focus on a political deliverer led them to misunderstand their mission as a nation.

God had told them, “You shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5,6).

The Jews were not “above all people” because they were better than others. They simply had a special mission. They were chosen to be a kingdom of priests to lead everyone to know the true God. A priest had the role of representing God to the people and bringing people to God.

Unfortunately, the Jews lost sight of their mission and looked down at the Gentiles, publicans, and sinners. Gentiles included everyone who was not a Jew. Publicans were tax collectors who cooperated with Rome and often took advantage of others. The “sinners” were people who outwardly broke the laws as interpreted by the Jewish leaders. They all were considered condemned by God. So when Jesus mingled with these people, the Jewish leaders were sure that He could not be from God.

EATING WITH LEVI AND HIS FRIENDS

1. Read Luke 5:27-32

A. Who did Jesus invite to follow Him? (27)

B. What was the response to the invitation? (28)

C. Why did Levi invite people to a feast? (29; see also Mark 2:15)

D. What question did the Jewish leaders ask Jesus' disciples? (30)

E. How did Jesus answer them? (31, 32)

F. How does your heart respond to the answer Jesus gave?

G. What leads people to repentance today? (Romans 2:4)

WINNING THE HEART OF ZACCHAEUS

2. Read Luke 19:1-10

A. How did Jesus communicate love, acceptance, and forgiveness? (5)

B. How did Zacchaeus respond? (6)

C. What did the people complain about? (7)

D. How did Zacchaeus respond to Jesus' offer? (8; Numbers 5:6,7)

E. How does Jesus describe His own mission? 10

F. How would you respond if Jesus said He wanted to stay at your house? (See also John 14:23; Revelation 3:20)

G. Is there something specific you need Jesus to save you from?

H. Would you like to cooperate with Jesus in His mission today?

In these stories we learn the gospel according to Jesus' enemies – Jesus receives sinners! What they thought was bad is actually the greatest news of all. When we realize we are sinners, these stories can encourage us to receive Jesus' love and acceptance.

These stories also illustrate how “the goodness of God leads [us] to repentance” Romans 2:4. Both Matthew and Zacchaeus were drawn by the goodness and grace of God. Jesus took the initiative to reach out to them, just as He took the initiative to come to earth to save us from sin.

We often think of Zacchaeus as the one who was trying to see Jesus. While this is true, it is also valuable to notice that Jesus was seeking for Zachaeus. Jesus told him, “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” Luke 19:10.

LOVING THE LOST

3. How did Jewish leaders complain about Jesus in Luke 15:1,2?

“This Man _____ and _____ with them?”

In response to their criticism, the Bible says, Jesus “spoke this parable to them, saying...” Luke 15:3. The word parable is singular. Jesus tells three stories, but they all have the same message in response to their complaint. Jesus assures them that He came to seek and save the lost.

4. Read Luke 15:4-7 – The parable of the lost sheep

A. Who do the 99 sheep represent who do not need to repent?

_____ All of the heavenly angels and worlds that have never fallen.

_____ The people in the church who have already repented.

_____ The scribes and Pharisees who didn't see their own need.

_____ All of the above, for different reasons.

B. Why is the Shepherd anxious to search for the one lost sheep when He still has 99?

C. Have you ever felt like a lost sheep? When and Why?

D. What was it like?

E. Have you ever experienced the joy of:

a. Being found by the Shepherd? If so, what was that like?

b. Celebrating with someone who has been found?

c. Being used by the Shepherd to find someone who is lost?

5. Read Luke 15:8-10 – The parable of the lost coin

A. Have you ever lost something that was valuable and irreplaceable?
How did you feel about the loss? What did you do?

B. What message is Jesus trying to teach through this story?

6. Read Luke 15:11-32 – The parable of a father and two sons

A. How are the two sons portrayed in the story at the beginning?

Older son _____

Younger son _____

B. How are the two sons portrayed in the story at the end?

Older son _____

Younger son _____

C. What attitude did the father appear to have toward each son?

Older son _____

Younger son _____

7. Do you identify with anyone or anything in these stories? Why?

8. What did Jesus hope the leaders would learn from these stories?

9. In the following box, chart the significant events in your life.

Beginning with your birth, chart the significant events in your life that relate to your journey with God or away from Him. Events that drew you closer to God, put higher. Events that led you away from Him, put lower. Connect the dots with a line. Share your story with someone else and listen to theirs as well. Pray for each other.

Walking With or Toward God

Birth	Present
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Walking Away From God

10. What has drawn you closer to God?

11. What has tended to pull you away from God?

12. How have you seen God working in your life?

THE PARABLE OF THE FORGIVING FATHER, THE REPENTANT SON AND THE ANGRY BROTHER

This story is one of the most well known and loved stories in all of the Bible. It is often called the story of “The Prodigal Son.” A Dictionary defines prodigal as extravagantly wasteful.

It is a fitting title, for much of the story is about the younger son following his foolish fantasies and squandering his money until it was all gone. Poor and hungry, he offered himself to a farmer taking care of pigs, not even earning enough to feed himself. Neglected, forsaken, and desperately discouraged, he “comes to himself.” Reality sets in. He realizes how foolish he has been. “The Prodigal Son!” It is a fitting title.

The story could also be called, “The Forgiving Father.” For a major part of the story is about how loving, patient, and forgiving the father is. No matter what his sons did or said, the father continues to respond with graciousness and tenderness, along with wisdom and strength. “The Forgiving Father” would be a fitting title.

But then there is another aspect of the story that makes me wonder if the story should actually be called, “The Angry Brother.” In fact, when you look at the context and see who Jesus was talking to, it seems that this was the major point that Jesus wanted to drive home.

“Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to [Jesus] to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them’ So He spoke this parable to them” Luke 15:1-3.

The Pharisees and scribes were angry. How could Jesus be so loving and kind to tax collectors, people who had cooperated with the Romans and taken advantage of their fellow Jews? They had sold out to the enemy and Jesus was receiving them.

How could Jesus eat with sinners, people who were clearly immoral? How could He associate or help people with diseases and disabilities? Weren't they under the curse of God from having committed great sin?

The story concludes with the angry brother left outside, trying to decide what he should do. Should he forgive and celebrate that his brother has come home or should he stay away in order to communicate, "This is not right!" What should he do? What did he do?

There is so much meaning in this story, it seems appropriate to call it "The Parable of the Forgiving Father, The Repentant Son, and The Angry Brother."

It is easy to identify with the younger son. It seems that we have all experienced the inner desire to live as we please, to do whatever we want to do whenever we want to do it. There is something within us that is attracted by a life of ease. However, we soon realize there are consequences for being lazy or for doing something that is wrong.

Growing up in a wealthy home with servants to do much of the work, the younger son must have felt his father was a little too demanding. And when the younger son failed to fulfill his responsibilities, the discipline applied by his father must have seemed a little too harsh. Instead of learning from discipline, receiving his father's love and taking on responsibility, the son began to focus on negative thoughts.

"My father is the problem. He must lay awake at night thinking up things for us to do to make our lives miserable. If only I could get away from here, then I would be happy. If only I could figure out a way to live on my own, then I could really enjoy life."

“If only I could get away from my dad. He’s the one who makes life miserable around here, always telling us what to do, when to do it and how it should be done.”

“Sometimes I just wish he was dead. I know I shouldn’t feel that way, but I’m just being honest. If he really was dead, then I could.... Wait a minute. That’s not a bad idea. Why didn’t I think of that before?”

“Dad, there is something I would like to ask you. You know you have always said that this is a family business. And when you died, it would pass on to us kids. I know you were trying to make us feel as if we are part owners so we could take our responsibility seriously. But I’ve decided that I don’t want to stay around here. I want to establish my own life and do my own thing. I would like to have my portion of the inheritance now. I’m an adult now and I want to live on my own.”

The father knew his younger son was not happy. He loved his son dearly and wanted the best for him. But no matter what he said or how hard he tried to show his love, his love was not received. It seemed like his son had built up an invisible wall of bitterness, resentment, and anger that shut him out.

As the father thought about his son’s amazing request, he knew he didn’t have to comply with it. However, his concern was not for his own wealth, but for his son’s heart.

“How can I reach him? How can I help him? Maybe, just maybe, this is the only way he will learn. By suffering from the consequences of his own choices, he might understand his own need and be open to my love.”

It would be a huge risk to let his son go. The temptation would be great for him to waste his money. Many people would love to take advantage of him and help him spend it. Others would be anxious to steal from him. There would be a great chance he would lose everything and maybe even be killed. Inside, the father agonized over the decision.

“If I say yes, will I ever see him again? Will my son ever want to come back if he does stay alive? If I say no, forcing him to stay would only lead him to harden his heart even more!”

After much thought and prayer, the father finally said, “Yes.”

The son couldn’t believe his ears. This was a dream come true! An all expenses paid, lifelong vacation, free from all responsibilities. “I can travel, I can live it up, I can have fun. Why didn’t I think of this before?”

Soon he was off to see the world. Jesus uses just one sentence to describe his actions:

He wasted his substance with riotous living. KJV

He wasted his possessions with prodigal living. NKJV

He squandered his wealth in wild living NIV

He squandered his estate with loose living. NASB

The Greek word that is translated – riotous, prodigal, wild, loose – is asotos. In the Greek, “a” is like our English “un.” It turns the meaning of a word into the opposite. For example, loved versus unloved.

Sotos comes from the word sozo, meaning to save or to heal. So the prodigal son wasted his wealth with un-saved or un-healthy living.

Today the world is full of prodigals: people willing to spend their time, money, and energy in all kinds of ways that are unhealthy – spiritually, physically and emotionally.

No one ever gets away with sin. Sinful lifestyles will always lead to painful consequences: financially, emotionally, physically, spiritually, socially or a combination of all of them.

Fortunately, we have a forgiving Father who loves us and reaches out to us no matter what we have done. In reality, we have all been “prodigals,” for we have all sinned. We have all wasted our lives in some way with un-saved or un-healthy living.

The father genuinely loves his sons. When the younger son leaves, it is easy to read between the lines and see a father who thinks about his son, wonders how he is doing and hopes he will return. As he wonders and waits, he often looks in the distance to see if his son may be returning.

One day he does see him coming. He doesn't wait for the son to make it all the way back. He runs to meet him and welcomes him home. He doesn't say, "I told you so! It serves you right! Look what you have done to yourself!"

He's thrilled his son is back. With forgiveness and grace he embraces him. With a robe, a family ring and sandals, he communicates the loving message, "You are still my son." Then he leads his household in a celebration, saying, "My son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" Luke 15:24.

The older brother returns. Curious about the music, he asks, "What is happening? Why all this music?" One of the hired servants excitedly shares the good news.

"Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf. But he was angry and would not go in" Luke 15:27,28.

The father comes out and pleads with his older son.

"This is a day of rejoicing, please come in and let us celebrate together as a family."

The older brother responds with anger towards his father and his younger brother.

"Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him" Luke 15:29,30.

The father's next words are powerful and significant. "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found" Luke 15:31,32.

We can hear the father saying, "Son, my love for you is not any less by my giving love to your brother. You are always with me. You are always on my heart. You are always on my mind. I love you. Nothing can take that love away. Your brother will not be a threat to your finances. All that I have is yours."

"If all that we do with our wealth is hoard it and think about ourselves, we will miss out on what truly brings joy and meaning in life – being a blessing to others and serving the needs of others out of love."

Jesus ends the story with the father appealing to his older son to celebrate the return of the one who was "lost and is found."

The older brother represents the Pharisees and scribes who complained that Jesus received sinners and ate with them. They rejected Jesus as the Savior of the world. They refused to celebrate that sinners were repenting and returning to God. They held onto their resentment, pride, and jealousy. In the end they cried out,

" 'Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!'" John 19:15.

Lessons we can learn:

- Holding onto pride and resentment will lead us to reject Jesus as our Savior, just like the Jewish leaders did.
- Confessing our sinfulness and our need for a Savior will lead us to repent and be reconciled to God, just like the younger brother did.
- And love will lead us to celebrate when sinners repent, just like the father did; and just like the angels in heaven do today.

11 – EXPERIENCE THE ABUNDANT LIFE

Dear Friend,

By the time you read this letter, you will have already been sent a gift worth well over a million dollars. This gift is simply to help you become aware of a service that our company is offering to you and everyone else. We hope that you will take advantage of this offer so you may enjoy the lifesaving benefits we can provide for you. We hope that others will notice your relationship with our company and desire to become a partner with us also.

In simple terms, we offer you top quality health care that will enable you to experience the best possible life physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and socially. You will discover that your life will be full of meaning, hope, joy, energy, and long life - real long life. In fact, our experiments are revealing that people will be able to have life without end. Three people we are working with are still alive after 3000 years. You may have heard about them: Enoch, Moses, and Elijah.

When you get to know us and our company, you will discover that we are faithful in all that we do: we are honest and trustworthy and have your best interest at heart in all decisions that are made.

If you choose to invite us to manage your life, we will ask you to give us access to everything. We will give you directions concerning how to live and guide you as to what decisions we want you to make. We want you to experience abundant life in every area: physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially. We are confident that you will be satisfied with the overall plans we have for you.

Our confidence is based on several factors:

- We have much experience in working with people just like you.
- We have a keen ability to accurately know the future.
- Having been involved in the creation of the world, we provided the owner's manual for the human race.

Our plans for you are based upon careful analysis and evaluation of who you are as a person:

- Your likes and dislikes
- Your strengths and weakness
- Your personality and learning style
- Your history and genealogy
- Your needs, as well as the needs of everyone else

You will always have the freedom to choose to follow your own plans if you feel they are better. Many people have done that and have found themselves in a big mess and in a lot of pain.

We are always willing to help people pick up the pieces, to help them experience healing, and to reaffirm our love for them. Since the healing process takes time, we do not promise quick fixes or instant gratification. However, if you do choose to give us permission to manage all of your life, we can make the following promises:

- You will have peace that passes all understanding.
- All of your basic needs will be taken care of.
- Your life will make a positive impact on the lives of others.
- If you die, you will be resurrected with no more pain or death.

With love,

Jesus, The Creator and Savior of the world

TRUST THE SHEPHERD; TURN FROM THE THIEF

1. How does Jesus contrast His mission with Satan's? John 10:10,11

Satan _____

Jesus _____

The contrast is very clear: Satan steals and kills; Jesus gives life that is abundant. However, Satan is very clever. He doesn't present himself as a thief and a destroyer. His temptations and attractions appeal to our natural desires. He makes sin look enticing and pleasurable.

However, sin only brings temporary pleasure. In the end it leads to pain, broken relationships, and death (Heb. 11:25; Gal. 5:19-21). Satan loves no one. He tries to use people for his purposes and then destroy them.

On the other hand, Jesus loves us unconditionally (Romans 5:6-10). When we experience the pain and brokenness caused by sin, He says, “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . for your souls.” Matthew 11:28-30. (See also Psalm 107.)

2. How else does Jesus refer to Satan? John 8:44

Satan creates many lies in order to deceive people. He also mixes truth with lies to create confusion and make his lies harder to recognize.

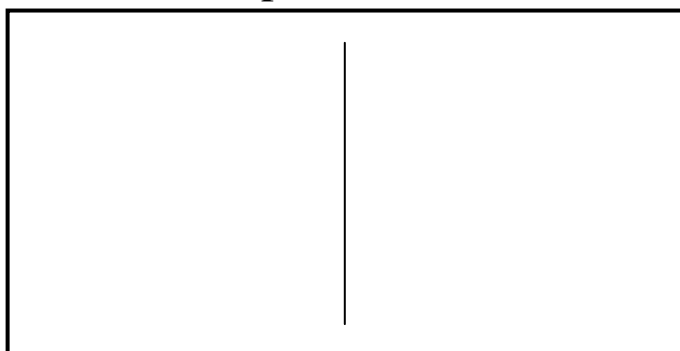
3. How can we discern what is truth and what is a lie?

- A. John 7:17 _____
- B. John 8:31,32 _____
- C. John 16:12,13 _____
- D. Rom. 12:1,2 _____

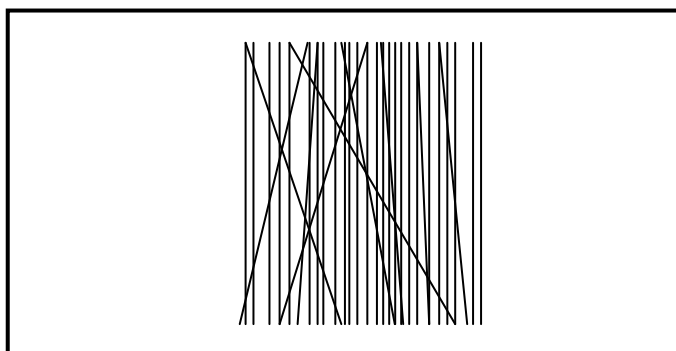
When we choose to surrender to God’s will, Jesus assures us the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. As we replace lies with the truth from the Bible, our lives will be transformed from within.

4. An Illustration: The boxes below are the same size and shape. The box on the right has the same line, in the same position, as the box on the left. Can you identify which line it is in the right box?

The Line Represents God’s Truth



Lies Mixed With Truth



Through measurements a person can discover which line in the right box is the same as the one in the left box. Also, when we prayerfully study the Bible and surrender to God's will, the Holy Spirit will be able to lead us into all truth and help us to discern the lies of Satan (John 16:12,13).

WHAT DOES THE ABUNDANT LIFE LOOK LIKE?

Jesus promised "life. . . more abundantly" John 10:10. If we misunderstand what the abundant life is like, we might expect Jesus to give us something He hasn't promised. If our expectations are wrong, we will think Jesus has failed us and that He isn't trustworthy.

5. Read the story in John 4:4-42

A. What did Jesus need? What did He offer the woman? 7, 10

B. What did Jesus know about the woman's past history? 17,18

C. Why was the woman excited that Jesus knew all about her? 29

D. After being with Jesus, how did the Samaritans describe Him? 42

Jesus offered "living water" that would truly satisfy and be "a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" John 4:10,13,14.

The Samaritan woman responded, "Give me this water that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw" John 4:15. She wanted Jesus to make her life easier on earth. She wanted less work to do. We often want the same thing: An easier life, less work, more time to relax and play. We think this would be the "abundant life," the life that is truly worth living.

Jesus didn't give the woman what she asked for. He also doesn't promise us a life of ease. He knows we need something far more significant: inner peace, unconditional love, joy in serving others, patience, forgiveness when others have hurt us, and hope for the future.

6. Who does John say the living water represents? John 7:37-39

The living water represents the Holy Spirit. (See also Isaiah 44:3). Through His perfect life and death, Jesus earned the right to give the Holy Spirit to all who ask (Luke 11:13; John 1:33; 14:15-26).

7. Read Galatians 5:22,23-Do you like being around people who have the fruit of the Spirit? Would you like these fruits in your life?

These are the qualities everyone is longing for. We can't produce them on our own. However, we often seek for them in unhealthy ways. For example, people seek love through sex, joy through entertainment, peace through pleasant circumstances, and being good to others so they will be good to us. The counterfeits will always leave us feeling empty and hurt.

Below there are questions that reveal what the fruit of the Spirit is like (+ sign). There are also questions that reveal the opposite (– sign).

Contemplate how God has manifested these qualities in His relationship with the human race. Thank Him for what He is doing to produce these in your life. Acknowledge those areas where you have fallen short. Give God permission to transform you in those areas you need to grow in. Remember He will complete the work He has begun in you. (Phil 1:6).

Love

___+ Do you choose to love others as Jesus has loved you?

___– Have you built “walls” around your heart to protect yourself from getting hurt? The walls keep you from giving or receiving love.

Joy

___+ Do you find joy in being with Jesus and choose to rejoice in the midst of trials because you know He will help you through them?

___+ Do you find joy in being led by God to be a blessing to others?

___– Is your joy based on entertainment, circumstances, activities, possessions, or people that are around you?

Peace

- ___+ Do you have peace as a result of trusting God in all circumstances?
- ___- Do you live with anxiety, fear, and guilt much of the time?
- ___+ Do you surrender your life to Jesus each day and have assurance you will live forever with Him based on His perfect life and death?

Patience (Longsuffering in dealing with people)

- ___+ Do you have an inner security that enables you to look beyond the faults of others and minister to their needs?
- ___- Do you easily get offended or irritated by what others say or do?
- ___+ Are you able to be patient and concerned about others even when you are mistreated, misunderstood, or ignored by them?

Kindness

- ___+ Are you focused on serving God and being a blessing to others?
- ___- Are you more focused on satisfying your own needs and desires?

Goodness

- ___+ Do you choose high moral, ethical & Biblical standards to live by?
- ___- Do you take advantage of others in order to benefit yourself?

Faith / Faithfulness

- ___+ Have you experienced the love and faithfulness of God that leads you to trust Him in all areas of your life, without murmuring or complaining, while you wait for Him to lead and provide?
- ___- Do you find yourself looking to God only when you are in trouble or are in need of something that you want?
- ___+ Having been created and redeemed by God, everything we have and are really belongs to Him (1 Cor. 6:19,20). Can God trust you to seek His wisdom each day so you may learn how to use your time, energy, talents, and resources that you may be a blessing to others?

Gentleness

- ___+ When others criticize you, do you seek to understand them in order that you may grow and also that you may learn how to love them?
- ___– When others criticize or hurt you, do you criticize or hurt them back? Do you hold onto resentment and try to avoid them?
- ___+ Are people able to share honestly with you without fearing you will react negatively by withdrawing, getting defensive, or retaliating?
- ___+ Are you able to honestly share with others and speak the truth in a spirit of love and concern, even if they react negatively?

Self-control

- ___+ Do you choose to surrender to God's will for your life, knowing that He loves you and that His will is always best in the long run?
- ___+ Do you confess and repent to God and others when you recognize you have strayed from His will or hurt someone in any way?
- ___– Do you satisfy cravings in unhealthy ways, experiencing temporary pleasure or relief, but then more guilt, shame, and pain later?

SUCCESSFUL ON EARTH, EMPTY ON THE INSIDE

8. What questions did a rich young ruler ask Jesus? Matt. 19:16-26

v. 16 _____

v. 20 _____

9. Thought Question: What do you think the young man lacked? v20

10. What role did the young man have among the Jews? Luke 18:18

11. What did Jesus invite the young ruler to do? Matthew 19:21

Jesus assured the rich young ruler that keeping the commandments perfectly was the only way he could “earn” eternal life. The man thought he had done this, but he knew he lacked the love, joy, and peace that he saw in Jesus’ life. He was successful on earth, but empty on the inside.

If he had followed Jesus, he would have discovered He was “the Savior of the world” John 4:42. He would have experienced “the living water” that truly satisfied and never ran dry (John 4:10,14). The truth would have set him free from his selfishness, pride, and love for money (John 8:31-36). He would have received what money could never buy—abundant and eternal life with God. He chose instead to walk away.

12. How did Paul describe His life before His conversion? Phil 3:6

Just like the rich young ruler, Paul described himself as “blameless” in relationship to the law. But when He came to know Jesus, he realized that everything he relied upon to make himself acceptable to God was worthless (Philippians 3:7,8).

13. What are the two different ways of relating to the law? Rom. 7:6

A. _____

B. _____

Paul compares the letter of the law with the spirit of the law. The letter of the law relates to our outward behavior. The spirit of the law includes our thoughts and also has love as the motivation of all our behavior.

Both the rich young ruler and Paul (before his conversion) had a shallow understanding of the law. They thought that outward actions were all that mattered. That is the way it is with human laws. Police will not arrest us for thinking unhealthy thoughts, for they have no way of knowing what we are thinking. But if we act on those thoughts and do something wrong, then we are seen as lawbreakers. As humans, we can also fall into the trap of thinking we are “righteous” as long as we look good on the outside or don’t get caught doing something wrong.

God's perspective is different. He "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. . . . All things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account" Hebrews 4:12,13.

In Matthew 5 -7 Jesus revealed how the spirit of the law goes much deeper than the letter of the law. Love is what matters, not simply looking good on the outside. The empty life focuses on behavior. The abundant life focuses on the inward qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Love or Murder In The Heart-“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘*You shall not murder* and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” Matthew 5:21,22.

Purity In Thought or Lustful Adultery - “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘*You shall not commit adultery.*’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” Matthew 5:27,28.

Forgiveness or Desiring Revenge - “You have heard that it was said, ‘*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” Matthew 5:38,39.

Being a Blessing Or Embracing Bitterness - “You have heard . . . , ‘*You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” Matthew 5:43,44.

Loving God or Loving Money - “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,. . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... You cannot serve God and mammon” Matthew 6:19-24.

Living For The Glory of God or Practicing Lawlessness – Jesus said some people will make a profession to follow Him, but He will say to them, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” Matt. 7:21-23.

THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH

14. What law helped Paul understand what sin is? Romans 7:7

Some might think Paul was denigrating the law when he said we were delivered from the law. However, Paul says the law of God is not the problem. In fact, the law is what helped him understand what sin really was. The commandment against coveting pointed out that sin included selfish thoughts and desires and not just outward actions.

15. Read Romans 7:8-12

A. How does Paul describe himself “without the law?” (v. 9)

B. What happened “when the commandment came?” (v. 9)

Before Paul understood the spiritual nature of the law, he thought he was spiritually alive. He thought he was righteous and worthy of eternal life. He described himself as “blameless” as far as the law was concerned (Phil. 3:6). But when he understood God’s perspective and saw the spiritual nature of the law, he recognized how great a sinner he was. His proud heart was humbled. His self-esteem, based upon his performance, was destroyed. He realized he was actually spiritually dead.

The deeper meaning of the law revealed to Paul that all he had done to “earn” eternal life was worthless (Phil. 3:7,8). He realized he was far from righteous and deserved death. He discovered he was “dead in trespasses and sins” and helpless to do anything about it (Eph. 2:1-5).

16. Read Romans 7:13-23

A. What was Paul sold under and captive to? (v. 14, 23)

B. What did Paul find himself doing? (v. 15,16,19)

C. What did Paul discover was the problem? (17,18,20-23)

D. How did Paul describe himself? (v. 24)

Paul describes the frustration we have when we understand the deeper significance of the law and honestly try to follow it *in order to earn acceptance with God*. When this is our motive, God allows us to attempt to obey on our own. For if He helped us fulfill our selfish motive, we would think we had earned salvation partially through what we have done. This would encourage a spirit of pride within us. (Eph. 2:6-9).

Having tried to obey in his own strength, Paul discovered the real problem was “the law of sin” that dwelt within him (Rom. 7:23). The law of God was not the problem, for it is “holy and just and good” Rom. 7:12. He learned that he had a sinful nature that was wretched and selfish and unable to do anything that was good.

Our wretched condition is not a surprise to Jesus. He never expected us to earn His acceptance and salvation through our obedience. In His letter to the church in Laodicea, He tries to help people see their true condition, as well as the solution He has for each of one of us:

“You say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” Revelation 3:17,18.

We are spiritually blind. Without the Holy Spirit we are unable to understand the truth about ourselves or the plan of salvation. He is the eye salve that enables us to see. He is given to all who ask for Him.

We are spiritually naked, for “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” Isaiah 64:6. Jesus invites us to “buy” His white robe by “exchanging” our filthy garments for His perfect one.

We are spiritually poor. We have nothing to offer others until we are born again and find security in Christ through His unconditional love. His love is the gold that enables us to love others as He has loved us.

17. How does Paul summarize his internal conflict? Romans 7:25

A. With his mind he chooses to serve: _____

B. With his flesh he serves: _____

Paul could choose to “serve the law of God,” but He had no power to carry out that choice. He discovered his “flesh” would always “serve the law of sin.” He knew He needed a Savior to transform Him on the inside.

18. What truth does Paul share that gives us hope? Romans 8:1

There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Remember there are two levels of being in Christ. (See page 75.) God placed everyone in Christ when Jesus came to earth as our Savior (1Cor. 1:30). As the last Adam, Jesus represented the human race and redeemed us from the curse and condemnation of the law (Gal. 3:13). Everyone is now free to choose to receive Jesus as their Savior or to cling onto sin. Those who love sin are the ones who will be condemned (John 3:19).

In Romans 8:1, the phrase, “. . . who do not walk according the flesh, but according to the Spirit” is not included in many translations. Why? Most Greek manuscripts do not have it there. All manuscripts have the phrase in verse four. There is evidence that some scribes took the phrase from verse four and added it to verse one thinking it should be there.

19. What sets us free from the law of sin and death? Romans 8:2

The law of sin could be likened to the law of gravity. It is always pulling us down. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus could be likened to the law of aerodynamics.

Utilizing the law of aerodynamics, airplanes are able to overcome the law of gravity and fly. As a result, people are able to experience something that is impossible on their own.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit overcomes the law of sin within us and enables us to experience the abundant life that consists of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the qualities that truly make life worth living.

An illustration – Try holding a book in your hand with your arm straight out to the side. How long can you hold it there? Eventually the law of gravity overcomes our muscles and causes us to bring our arm down. The law of gravity is a constant force; our muscles are not. In the same way, the law of sin is a constant force. Our will power is like a muscle trying to overcome the law of sin. Eventually the law of sin will prevail. Fortunately *the law* of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is able to set us free from *the law* of sin.

20. How did God deal with the “sin in the flesh?” Romans 8:3

“Sin in the flesh” refers to our sinful natures that are selfish. Our love is focused on ourselves. Our sinful nature is also referred to as “iniquity.” The root meaning of the Hebrew word translated iniquity is bent or crooked. (See Strong's Concordance.) Our love is bent inward. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” Isaiah 53:6.

Our sinful nature needed to die, not simply be refined. God condemned our sin in the flesh and laid our iniquity on Jesus. He took it to the cross.

21. What is fulfilled in all who walk according to the Spirit? Romans 8:4-6

Jesus fulfilled the law FOR everyone through His perfect life and death. The Holy Spirit fulfills the law IN all who receive Jesus as their Savior.

22. What happens when we are connected with Jesus? John 15:4-8

The focus of the Christian life is not about trying to be good. We are invited to abide in Jesus and let Him abide in us. The fruit of the Spirit will then be produced within us [super] naturally.

The abundant life will then be experienced by all who recognize they are wretched and choose to surrender their lives to Jesus day by day.

DISCOVER THE POWER

By Clinton Meharry, © 1998, 2009

Discover the power,
The gospel power,
Of Jesus' love for you.

When helpless you feel,
Before Him you kneel
And surrender your life today;

Discover the power,
The dynamite power,
When Jesus lives in you.

He'll give your heart
A brand new start,
And transform you day by day.

There's nothing to fear,
When Jesus is near.
His death has made you free!

Discover the power,
Compelling power,
Of Jesus' love for you.

There's no need to hide
With Him by your side.
He redeemed you at Calvary.

Discover the power,
Miraculous power,
When Jesus lives in you.

Discover the power,
The healing power,
Of Jesus' love for you.

In a world of pain
The mission is plain,
Love others as Jesus loved you.

Discover the power,
Transforming power,
When Jesus lives in you.

Discover the power
In this final hour –
What love and truth can do!

12-LIVING BY FAITH OR BELIEVING A LIE

Imagine you are shopping in a mall and a stranger asks, “Could you give me the keys to your car? My car won’t start and I need to jumpstart it using jumper cables. By the way, do you have any jumper cables?”

“I don’t have any jumper cables in my car,” you respond. “They are at home in the garage.”

Boldly the stranger says, “I don’t want to keep you from shopping. If you give me the keys to your house I can go get the jumper cables and come back and start my car. Then I can bring your keys back to you.”

Would you give the stranger the keys to your car and house? Of course not! Before you are willing to trust someone, you have to get to know them in order to learn if they are trustworthy.

If God is a stranger to us, or worse, we have believed many lies about Him, it will be very difficult for us to give Him the “key” to our lives. If we don’t believe that He loves us or if we believe that He will make our lives miserable, we will want to maintain control of our own lives. However, there is a problem with wanting to maintain control.

- “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” Proverbs 14:12.
- “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” Jeremiah 17:9.

When we are in charge, we will make the best choices we can make. The problem is, our perspective is limited. God is able to see “the end from the beginning” Isaiah 46:10. He knows what is best for us and for those around us.

Everyone must ask themselves: Can I trust God with my life? Do I believe He is telling me the truth? Do I want to follow His will? All of these questions relate to faith and how we live.

UNDERSTANDING FAITH

1. What is the healthy response to the gospel? Romans 1:16,17

The gospel is the power of God. It is the only answer God has for the sin problem. Jesus' faith enabled Him to live a perfect life and then take us and our sin to the cross. This enabled Him to:

- Be the Savior of the world from the wages of sin (1 John 4:14),
- Qualify everyone for eternal life (Colossians 1:12-14),
- Restore our individual freedom of choice (John 3:16-20).

Those who believe the truth and choose to surrender their lives to Jesus will receive the Holy Spirit. He will then save believers from slavery to sin (John 1:9-13; 3:1-7). Our response from beginning to end is faith, for "the just shall live by faith." Since living by faith is the way of life for the Christian, it is crucial that we understand what this means.

2. How is faith defined? Hebrews 11:1

The word substance came from Latin. Sub means under, like in subway or submarine. Stance refers to the way a person is standing physically. It can also refer to an intellectual stand a person takes on a particular issue. The Greek word that is translated substance, hupostasis, has the same meaning. Hupo means under; stasis means to stand.

In other words, faith is what we "under – stand" is true based on the evidence we are given. The truth that we believe "stands – under" us, providing the foundation for what we hope for and build our lives on.

3. What evidence reveals that God exists? Heb. 11:3; Rom. 1:19, 20

True faith is based on evidence we honestly observe in nature, history, archeology, and life in the light of what God has revealed in the Bible.

A new car gives evidence that there is a designer and manufacturer. We know it could not have accidentally fallen into place. In the same way, the existence of complex life on earth gives evidence there is an Intelligent Designer who created life on this world. Even though we don't see the car manufacturer or the Divine Creator, we can know they exist.

This leads Paul to conclude: "Since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they [human beings] are without excuse." Romans 1:20.

Humans are without excuse, for there is **NO** scientific evidence that:

- Non-living matter in the universe could exist without a Creator;
- Life could spontaneously come from non-living matter; and
- One species can evolve into a different species (macro-evolution);

As humans, we have the ability to rationalize and convince ourselves of something in order to believe what we want to believe (2 Timothy 4:3,4; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). When we do this, we are building our lives on sand, rather than on a solid foundation (Matthew 7:24-27).

Faith is not a "blind leap in the dark" as some describe it. It is a "leap in the light," for it is based upon evidence. For example:

- God's ability to know the future is evidence He is God (Is. 46:9,10).
- Fulfilled prophecy is evidence the Bible is trustworthy (2 Pet. 1:19).
- All the evil in the world is evidence that we need a Savior.
- History, archeology, and the Bible give abundant evidence that Jesus lived in the first century AD and died on a cross.
- After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to over 500 people. He also showed how the Old Testament Scriptures foretold His death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:6; Luke 25-27). With this evidence the disciples were transformed. They were willing to share with boldness that Jesus is alive and is the Savior of the world (Acts 2-9).

While the complexity of life affirms there must be a God, it is impossible for us to reason out on our own what God is like. This had to be revealed to us by God (2Tim. 3:16,17). Since the Bible is a trustworthy revelation of God, our faith will grow as we study it and understand God's perspective of life and His gift of salvation.

4. Read Hebrews 11:5,6

A. Why is faith necessary in order to please God?

B. Who are the ones He rewards?

God is pleased when people come to Him and walk with Him through life. However, we will not want to come to Him if we believe:

- He does not exist;
- He would hurt us if we came to Him.

It is important that we believe the truth about God. When we know He loves us and wants what is best for us, we will “diligently seek Him.”

While God loves everyone unconditionally, He is not pleased with our sinful actions. He knows our sin will always hurt us and those around us.

Enoch pleased God because he wanted to be with God. In John 16:27, Jesus used the friendship and enjoyment kind of love [phileo] when He said, “The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me.”

“After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” Genesis 5:22-24.

5. What do we receive when we seek God?

A. Jer. 29:11-13 _____

B. John 14:23 _____

C. Luke 11:13 _____

The “reward” we receive when we seek God is a living relationship with Him! He is waiting for us to open our lives to Him so He can fellowship with us (Revelation 3:20). God is not hard to find. He is not playing “hide and seek” and trying to avoid anyone. We are the ones who make Him hard to find when we fill our lives with all kinds of activities and distractions in an attempt to satisfy the emptiness within.

Our natural tendency is to look to:

- People to satisfy our need for love.
- Possessions to make us feel secure.
- Positions in life to make us feel more important.
- Pleasures of the world to bring us happiness.

However, these do not provide lasting security, belonging, and meaning in life. They provide temporary satisfaction, then leave us empty and thirsty. However, when we seek Jesus, we will find Him and experience the living water that never runs dry (Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:10,14).

FAITH ALWAYS LEADS TO ACTION

6. Read Hebrews 11:13-16

A. How did Abraham and others see themselves on earth? (13)

B. What was their heart’s desire? (14-16)

C. What was God’s attitude toward them? (16)

People who love God will never feel at home in a world of sin. They long for the new heaven and earth where there will be no more sin, pain or death (Revelation 21:1-8). God is happy to be called their God, for He enjoys their fellowship and the joy they receive from being with Him.

7. Hebrews 11 is often referred to as the “Faith Chapter.” It reveals the choices people made based upon their faith in God. List the belief and action that relate to these individuals in Hebrews 11.

Heb 11	People	Belief	Choices/Action
4	Abel Gen. 3:21-4:6		
7	Noah Genesis 6-9		
8-10	Abraham Gen. 12:1-4		
17-19	Abraham Gen. 22; 17:19; 21:12		
24-29	Moses Exodus 2:1-22; Acts 7:20-36		

Our actions will always flow out of what we truly believe. While some profess to follow Jesus, their actions reveal that they do not believe in Him as their Savior and Lord. (Matthew 7:20-23). Those who choose to follow Jesus will confess their sin and repent, choosing to turn away from their sin. Those who want to follow their own desires will

rationalize and make excuses for their behavior. If they persist in that path, they will eventually believe a lie and approve of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Romans 1:32).

8. Compare Hebrews 11:32-35a with Hebrews 11:35b-38

A. Did one group have more faith than the other group? Yes No

B. Did God love one group more than the other group? Yes No

Some think faith is a way to twist God's arm to get Him to act. When they don't get what they ask for, many get discouraged and give up on God. Others try to figure out some other way to manipulate Him.

Faith is trusting God, not manipulating Him.

The more we know Him, the more we will love and trust Him. The Bible portrays God as one Who knows us intimately, loves us fully, understands the future, and has all power and authority (Psalm 139; Romans 8:31-39; Isaiah 46:9,10; Matthew 28:18).

True faith is trusting God and surrendering to His will, knowing He will always provide whatever we need. Since God knows what is best, there is peace and security in trusting His plan for our lives (Phil. 4:6-19).

Jesus did this when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemene: "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*." Matthew 26:39.

Paul prayed three times to be delivered from a "thorn in the flesh." When God said no, He promised, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" 2 Corinthians 12:9.

THE OPPOSITE OF FAITH

9. In the Bible, what is the opposite of faith? Hebrews 3:12-4:2

_____Ignorance _____Rational Thinking _____Rebellion

The Israelites had plenty of evidence of God's power and love. However, they hardened their hearts and departed from God through an "evil heart of unbelief." When God wanted to lead them into Canaan, they rebelled and refused to go in.

Rebellion is the opposite of faith, for it is rejecting the light and truth that has been given. Unbelief is also used to describe this, but it is helpful to understand that this unbelief is a result of rejection and not ignorance.

No one will be condemned out of ignorance, for everyone is given light (John 1:9; 9:41; Romans 1:20). People will be lost because they refuse to believe the light they have been given. They reject the truth because they love darkness rather than light. (John 3:18-20,36; 2 Thess. 2:12).

Since faith is based on evidence, rational thinking helps us understand the truth when we honestly seek to know God's will for our lives (Isaiah 1:18; John 7:17; Romans 12:2). When people receive light from God, they will choose to believe and surrender to the light or resist and reject it. Everyone will move toward a life of faith or a life of rebellion.

THE WRATH OF GOD

10. Who experiences the wrath of God? Romans 1:18-20

11. When people suppress the truth, how do they begin to think of God? Romans 1:23

12. Who do they begin to worship when they do this? Romans 1:25

13. What do people try to avoid doing? Romans 1:28a

14. How is the wrath of God revealed? Romans 1:18,24,26,28

24 “God also _____...”

26 “God _____...”

28 “God _____ them over to a _____ mind, to do those things which are not _____.”

The wrath of God is revealed against those who suppress the truth and believe lies. Since He will never force anyone to follow Him, God gives people up to suffer the consequences of their choices. When He gave Israel up, it hurt Him deeply. You can feel the emotion in His voice.

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son... I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love. . . . My people are bent on backsliding from Me. . . . How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?. . . . My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred” Hosea 11:1-8.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate.” Matthew 23:37,38.

When God gives people up to suffer the consequences of their choices, He is always hoping that they will recognize their need for a Savior and turn to Him for help and healing (2 Peter 3:9; Psalm 107).

15. What will people think and how will they live if they continue to resist and reject the truth? Romans 1:32; Isaiah 5:20

When people call evil good and good evil, they will reject the conviction the Holy Spirit brings related to sin and righteousness (John 16:8-10). Jesus referred to this as the sin that would “not be forgiven” Matt. 12:31,32. People won’t confess something is wrong if they approve of it.

RECEIVING A LOVE OF THE TRUTH

16. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Compare with 2 Timothy 4:3,4

A. Why will people perish in the end? 10

B. What will we believe if we don't receive a love of the truth? 11

C. Why will anyone be condemned in then end? 12

Satan is working hard to deceive everyone. However, there is good news. He is only able to deceive those who want to believe a lie. Some people will choose to surround themselves with “teachers” who “will turn their ears away from the truth” 2 Timothy 4:3,4. They want to believe a lie so they can justify themselves and feel comfortable pursuing the temporary pleasures of sin.

When Paul says, “God will send them strong delusion,” it makes it sound like He is responsible for people believing lies. However, it is clear they do not want to believe the truth, for they have “pleasure in unrighteousness.” When God honors their choice and “gives them up,” Satan is ready with clever lies to deceive them. (See John 8:44).

The phrase, “receive the love of the truth,” implies we cannot create a love for the truth within ourselves. Since we are selfish by nature, it is natural for us to put ourselves first, rather than focus on serving others.

Knowing we can't create a love for the truth within ourselves is good news. It gives us permission to stop trying to change ourselves and freedom to stop pretending to be something we are not.

When we understand the everlasting gospel, we realize we are truly free to come to God just as we are. We can come to Him with all our fears and failures, our addictions and discouragements, our brokenness and bitterness, and our guilt and shame. When we offer ourselves as a “living

sacrifice” to God, He receives us as “holy and acceptable” because of Jesus (Romans 12:1).

Then the Holy Spirit begins the work of transforming us by leading us into the truth that sets us free from our guilt, shame and slavery to sin (John 8:31,32; 16:13). The truth will help us understand more clearly the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God” Romans 12:2.

God promises to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you” Ezekiel 36:26,27.

“I will put My laws in [your] mind and write them on [your] hearts; and I will be [your] God, and [you] shall be My people” Hebrews 8:10.

A commentary on the life of Christ communicates very well what God will do in the lives of all who give Him permission to live in them.

“All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.”

“The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.” Desire of Ages, page 668.

17. How do God’s people overcome Satan’s lies? Revelation 12:11

- A. “The _____ of the _____.”
- B. “The _____ of their _____.”
- C. “They _____ not their _____ to the death.”

All of Satan's lies could be summarized into three areas: We need not, should not, or cannot obey God (See lesson 1). Notice how the three ways that we overcome Satan counteract his three main lies.

Satan's Lies See Lesson 1, pages 19-21	We Overcome Satan By: See Revelation 12:11
We need not obey God , for the consequences that God says are going to happen, will not happen.	The blood of the Lamb - The wages of sin is death. God's people recognize the death of Jesus is the only reason they are alive now and have the gift of eternal life.
We should not obey God , for we will miss out on so much pleasure if we do.	The word of our testimony - God's people testify that obeying God through the power of the Holy Spirit is the best way to live.
We cannot obey God , for we have a sinful nature that automatically sins.	Being willing to die rather than hurt God or anyone else. Satan hates those who keep the commandments of God, for they prove that he truly is a liar (Revelation 12:17).

THE BE-ATTITUDES VS. THE ME-ATTITUDES

In Matthew 5:3-12, Jesus describes the path people take as they grow and mature in the Christian life. Each step prepares them for other steps. Notice that a hunger and thirst for righteousness comes after the first three steps. There is no shortcut. In other words, this is the pathway that enables us to "receive the love of the truth" 2 Thessalonians 2:10.

These statements of blessing from Jesus are sometimes referred to as the beatitudes. We could refer to them as the Be-Attitudes, for they reveal the attitudes people will experience who live by faith and grow into maturity in their walk with Jesus.

On the other hand, those who persistently rebel against the Holy Spirit's leading will reveal selfish attitudes. We could refer to their pathway as the Me-Attitudes. "Lawlessness will abound" in their lives and their "love . . . will grow cold" Matthew 24:12.

THE BE-ATTITUDES

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus gives a wonderful promise to those who feel helpless, empty, broken, and without hope. “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Even when we were helpless, ungodly, sinners and enemies, Jesus loved us, died for us, justified us and reconciled us to God (Romans 3:24; 5:6-10; 18). Having legally transferred the human race into the kingdom of heaven (Colossians 1:12-14), Jesus invites us to come to Him just as we are (Romans 12:1). At every stage of growth we can have *peace* with God and the assurance of eternal life.

2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

The love and grace given by God frees us to be honest with Him, ourselves, and others. The pain that sin has caused leads us to mourn and repent, developing a hatred for sin. The assurance of God’s forgiveness and presence brings *comfort* and enables us to *experience* reconciliation with God. His comfort also encourages us to seek to be reconciled with others.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Having experienced security in Christ through His unconditional love, Jesus invites us to love others as He has loved us (John 13:34). True love is being humble and meek – serving others (John 13; Mark 10:45). Love leads us to look beyond the faults of others and minister to their needs. Those who are meek give because there is a need, not in order to get something in return. They serve out of strength, rather than weakness; out of fullness, rather than emptiness. Freely they have received from God; they freely give to others (Matthew 10:8). While people may take advantage of those who are meek, Jesus promises that they will inherit the earth in the end.

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

The desire to serve and help others will always lead people to hunger and thirst for more of Jesus. They long to represent Him correctly so that others will be drawn to Him. They long to receive more from Him so they have more to give. They love righteousness, for it leads to healing, joy, and peace. They learn to hate sin and evil, for it brings pain to everyone.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

These next three are ongoing, instead of progressive. The Christian wants to be merciful to others, for Jesus has been merciful to them. Mercy and forgiveness are never “deserved.” They are given because there is a need. Love awakens love. Forgiveness and mercy often lead others to be forgiving and merciful. This is why those who are merciful obtain mercy.

6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

The pure in heart are open and honest. They have nothing to hide. They long for truth and justice. When Jesus comes again, they will look up into the clouds and say, “This is our God; we have waited for Him and He will save us” Isaiah 25:9. But even on this earth, the pure in heart have their spiritual eyes opened and see the truth about God more clearly (John 8:31-36; 9:39-41; 16:13; 2 Corinthians 4:15-18; Hebrews 11:27; Revelation 3:18).

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Since the gospel leads us to see everyone as loved and redeemed by God, Christians seek harmony and peace in all their relationships with others. Paul wrote, “Repay no one evil for evil. . . If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” Romans 12:17,18. Peacemakers also maintain healthy boundaries. They choose not to compromise their convictions. They also recognize where their responsibility begins and ends. They understand that saying “no” can be healthy. Even God says “no” if we ask for something that would not be the best for us.

8. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, & say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

Those who continue to embrace the love and truth of God will grow into maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16). The promise that the kingdom of heaven is theirs is repeated to reassure them when they are faced with persecution. They trust God with their lives and are willing to suffer persecution and die rather than hurt God or anyone else. They rejoice, knowing that their influence will lead others to surrender their lives to God and be in heaven also. This is the great reward that they will have in heaven (See Daniel 12:3).

THE ME-ATTITUDES

1. How miserable it is for those who do not recognize their need for help and healing, for they continue to live in the kingdom of darkness.

Those who do not recognize their need for help will continue to seek for life, happiness, and peace through their own wisdom and strength. Instead of looking to Jesus to satisfy their deepest needs, they will look to:

- People to satisfy their need for love and acceptance.
- Money to satisfy their need for comfort and security.
- Status symbols to satisfy their need for value and importance.
- Pleasure and entertainment to make them feel good.

Then they turn to “pain-relievers” to numb the pain of disappointments, failures, guilt, and shame.

2. How miserable are the unrepentant, for they will continue to hurt.

Those who refuse to repent of their sin will continue to repeat the same mistakes. They may experience temporary pleasure, but in the end, they will experience more emptiness. Sin never satisfies. It always leads to more pain.

3. How miserable it is for those who are proud and selfish, for in the end, they will be left with nothing.

Instead of seeking to serve and bless others, proud and selfish people are focused on serving themselves. They tend to blame others for their problems so they won't have to admit their need for help. They also tend to manipulate others to get what they want. (A selfish person can appear very kind in order to get something in return.) In the end, they will inherit nothing.

4. How miserable it is for those who continue to crave unhealthy things, for they will never be satisfied.

Satan makes sin and selfishness look attractive so people will pursue the wrong thing and then experience more sickness and pain. It leads to a cycle of addiction: sin → guilt → shame → pain → unhealthy pain-reliever → guilt. In order to satisfy their cravings, people will often take advantage of others by lying, stealing, or being abusive in order to get what they desire. This creates more guilt, shame, and pain and the cycle continues.

5. How painful it is when people refuse to be merciful and forgiving to others because they choose to hold onto bitterness and resentment. They won't experience mercy or forgiveness for they don't want it.

Hurt people will hurt other people as long as they refuse to see their own need for healing. Healing will begin when they are honest and choose to surrender their lives to Jesus as their Savior from sin. Until they do so, they will try to make themselves look better by criticizing and condemning others.

6. How painful it is for those who are deceptive, for they will want to hide from God and from others. (John 3:19,20; Revelation 4:14-16).

Those who are deceptive are trying to take advantage of others; therefore they hide their true motives. The truth would reveal their manipulation, so they stay away from anyone who could expose them. They hate the light. They will seek to avoid God or anyone who loves to talk about Him.

7. How painful it is for those who create division and strife, for they will be called the children of Satan.

Those who persistently cling onto their selfish lifestyles will be willing to argue and fight rather than admit their failure or need to change. They will continue to do whatever it takes to satisfy their selfish cravings.

8. How painful it is for those who are so desperate to hold onto their sin that they will make fun of those who are trying to do right. They will attempt to ruin their reputation. They will get to the point of wanting to hurt them emotionally and physically and even try to kill them. Be very sad, for great is the emptiness and destruction that awaits them.

Holding onto selfish cravings and desires will lead people to develop the mature fruit of hate and revenge toward those who love the truth. It will also lead to increased emptiness, shame, guilt, and pain. In order to numb the pain, they increase the use of their "pain-reliever." Eventually they will come to the point that they would rather die than live, for a life of sin becomes more and more miserable. They would rather cry for the rocks and mountains to fall on them than come face to face with God (Rev. 6:14-17).

*Everyone will follow one path or the other:
Jesus and the Be-Attitudes or Satan and the Me-Attitudes.*

13 - LORD, INCREASE OUR FAITH!

FORGIVENESS IS A PROCESS

On the night of December 30, 1993, Lyndi Fourie was visiting with friends at the Heidelberg Café in Cape Town, South Africa. A beautiful 23 year old, Lyndi was just completing her degree in civil engineering at the University of Cape Town. Suddenly, without warning, a hail of automatic gunfire tore through the restaurant. Four were killed. Lyndi was one of them.

Three men from the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) had been ordered to “make Whites suffer as Blacks had suffered under apartheid.” It became known as the “Heidelberg massacre.” Hearing the news the next day, Lyndi’s parents were devastated. Ginn grieved deeply the loss of her only daughter. The joy they experienced together was gone forever.

Describing her daughter, Ginn said, “She was a humorous, outgoing, friendly person who loved the outdoors. That’s why she went for civil engineering—so she could be out in the field rather than sitting in an office all day. She was a great horseback rider, loved hiking in the mountains and played a good game of tennis.”

Ginn found great support among the members of the church where her faith had been nurtured. At Lyndi’s funeral, Ginn shared this prayer:

Gracious Parent, Great Spirit, You gave Your only Son to bring healing for every soul on earth. Thank You for our only daughter. May healing come through her death to each person she touched--especially those who murdered her. I identify with Mary, Jesus’ mother; our children died at the hands of evil men. Lyndi had no choice, no time, but Your Son said it for her: “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they do.” We gave her bed and board and some love. You gave her forgiveness and a love that was honest, pure, selfless, color- and gender-free.

Dear God, she taught me well of You, able to listen, able to hear. That was her life that You gave her. Her death was swift and painless, thank goodness. My heart is broken; the hole is bottomless, it will not end, but You know all about it. Thank You for the arms, the lips, the heartbeats of family

and friends to carry us. I trust You with my precious Lyndi. This planet is a dangerous place to live. I know You will come soon to fetch us, I wish it were today, but I will wait for Your time.

In November, 1994, the three men who were on trial for the murder denied any knowledge of the event, even though the evidence against them was overwhelming.

As Ginn observed and listened, she said, “I was confronted by my own feelings of anger and sadness, and how I could possibly respond appropriately. Somehow I could engender no hate, in spite of the grim reminders presented by video and close-up, colored photos of Lyndi and three others lying dead in the tavern. In their eyes I saw what I thought must have been enormous confusion. I sent them a message through the translator that if they were or felt guilty, then I forgave them.” They thanked her, though still denying any participation in the murder. They were sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Three years later they requested amnesty from the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” Again Ginn reaffirmed her forgiveness for the three. They thanked her and said that they would take the message of forgiveness and hope to their communities and to their graves, whether they received amnesty or not. Amnesty was granted to them in 1998.

In 2002, Ginn met Letlapa Mphahlele, the former commander of the military wing of the PAC who ordered the attack that killed her daughter. “I’ve been to court, accused of this and that, and when the charges were later withdrawn, nothing inside of me was moved. But it took one sentence from Ginn Fourie saying, ‘I forgive you for what you have done; I forgive you for killing my only daughter, Lyndi,’ something was restored in me, and that something was humanity.”

Ginn and Letlapa are now working together to bring healing through forgiveness, education, and retraining people who have been abused and shamed through oppression and poverty. Their story of forgiveness and reconciliation can be found at www.theforgivenessproject.com.

“Forgiveness is a process, which involves a principled decision to give up ones justifiable right to revenge.” Ginn Fourie

A LIFESTYLE OF FORGIVENESS

1. Why did the disciples say, “Increase our faith?” Luke 17:1-5

Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness was not what they believed. It seemed unwise, for people would take advantage of them. It seemed impossible. They would need more faith in order to carry out Jesus’ instruction.

2. How did Jesus respond to their request? Luke 17:6-10

Jesus implied the size of their faith was not as important as who their faith was in. Faith the size of a small mustard seed could uproot a large mulberry tree. In other words, the impossible is possible with God. (Jesus wasn’t telling them to change the landscape to show they had faith. He didn’t “show off” his faith by working a senseless miracle.)

When we learn God is not counting any of our sins against us, no matter who we are or what we have done, we realize how unconditional God's love is (2 Cor. 5:19). When we invite Jesus to be our Savior and Lord and receive His love and forgiveness for ourselves, we will experience the security we need that will enable us to love and forgive others.

Jesus also implied that forgiveness is what is normal and healthy in the kingdom of God. It is what is expected. It is not “extraordinary” and deserving of special praise or honor. It is what His servants will do.

If we persistently refuse to forgive, we are saying that:

- We want to cling onto our hate, bitterness, and desire for revenge.
- We don’t want God to work a miracle in our lives.
- We don’t want a Savior from our sin.
- We don’t want forgiveness, for we don’t want to confess or repent.

That is why Jesus said, “If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” Matt. 6:15.

Forgiveness leads us to:

- Not count the sin of others against them (2 Corinthians 5:19).
- Look beyond the faults of others and try to understand their needs.
- Pray for and serve our enemies, rather than forget or avoid them.
- Allow a person an opportunity to *earn* our trust. Jesus didn’t trust people automatically, for “He knew what was in man” John 2:25.

3. Read Luke 6:27-38

A. Does this make you feel like saying, “Lord, increase my faith?”

B. What enables us to continue to give love to others? (38)

This passage is first a revelation of how God treats us. We are the enemies He has blessed with the gift of life, salvation, and forgiveness (Romans 5:6-10; 2 Corinthians 5:19). We are the ones He is praying for.

When we experience His amazing love, we begin to have a desire to share His love with others. Jesus promises that whatever we need to fulfill that mission will be supplied. “Give and it will be given to you.” When we think of ourselves as a channel of God’s blessings, it frees God to continue to supply our needs. (See also Deut. 15:6-10). Those who receive in order to give will find joy in being a blessing to people.

Jesus says to give to everyone who asks of you. He didn’t say, “Give *what* they ask of you!” God doesn’t give us everything we ask for, but He does give us what we need when we trust Him (Matthew 6:33). Sometimes saying no is what is needed (Mark 1:35-38; 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

God is anxious to bless everyone (Numbers 6:23-27). However, He has to be very careful. He knows His blessings could appeal to our selfish natures and lead us to use what He has given us only for ourselves. We

will then be tempted to neglect and reject God. If we do, God will allow us to suffer the natural consequences. (Deut. 8,28,29,30; Rom. 1:18-28.)

JEALOUSY LEADS TO UNBELIEF

4. Read Matthew 17:14-21 to see how Jesus used the mustard seed illustration another time. The context is very different.

A. What were Jesus' disciples unable to do? (14-16)

B. How did Jesus describe the general problem that needed to be corrected? (17)

“Then Jesus answered and said, ‘O _____ and _____ generation, how long shall I be with you?’”

C. How did Jesus respond when the disciples asked why they were not able to cast the demon out? (19-21)

“Because of your _____.... This kind does not go out except by _____ and _____.”

D. What did Jesus say could be moved if one had faith as a mustard seed? (20)

5. What event took place just before the above story? Matt. 17:1-13

In order to understand this story, it is valuable to see the broader context.

Previous Experience

Jesus had already given His disciples “power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease” Matthew 10:1. Since they had cast out evil spirits in the past, they must have wondered why they were not able to do it this time.

Current Jealousy

While Peter, James, and John were with Jesus was on the mountain, the other disciples were in the valley waiting. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the same three stories in the same sequence. Each of them have unique details that add to the whole picture.

Mark lets us know the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest (Mark 9:34). This spirit of envy, jealousy, and pride fostered an attitude of unbelief. If God had used them to cast the demon out at that time, it would have only encouraged their prideful attitude. The disciples' unbelief not only prevented them from healing the boy, it led the crowd to question Jesus' ability to heal.

Prayer and fasting are necessary to keep our focus right, not to manipulate God into acting. By humbling ourselves and becoming teachable, God is able to communicate more clearly to us and trust us with His power and presence.

When we slip back into fulfilling “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” 1 John 2:16, we open the door to Satan and become part of the “perverse generation.” The word “perverse” comes from a Greek word meaning to distort; to misinterpret truth; to morally corrupt someone (Strong's Concordance).

Jesus used the mustard seed illustration to communicate that God is able to do the impossible through us when we are humble, teachable and submissive to His will. Our faith must be in Him and not in ourselves.

THANK YOU FOR THE TRIALS

6. Read 1 Peter 1:6-9

A. What emotion do we experience when we are tested by trials? (6)

B. What does Peter say is more precious than gold? (7)

C. How is gold tested? (7)

D. How are people tested? (7; compare with 1 Peter 4:12; Is. 48:10)

E. What attitude does faith enable a person to have? (8)

Trials often lead to a loss of something or someone dear to us. This is why we experience the natural emotion of grief. However, the one who has faith in Jesus can “rejoice with joy inexpressible,” for they know that God is able to bring good out of evil. He will also make all things new in the end (Romans 8:28; Revelation 21:1-5).

Trials provide opportunities for us to learn to trust God more and more. If we were never tested, we wouldn’t know if we were living by faith in God or by our own wisdom and strength.

7. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

A. Why was Paul allowed to experience a “thorn in the flesh”? (7)

B. What did God say to Paul when he asked for it to be removed? (8)

C. What was Paul’s attitude as a result of God’s answer? (10)

Pride is very dangerous to our selfish nature. God allowed Paul to have a lifelong trial to keep him humble. At first, Paul was thinking it would hinder him from doing God’s work, so he prayed earnestly for God to remove it. However, when God said no, He assured Paul that His grace

would be sufficient to help him carry out the mission he was given. This led Paul to rejoice. He learned that it would help keep him looking to God for strength and help.

God is big enough to handle all the trials we experience. When we are weak, we recognize our need to trust God. When we trust Him, we become strong. Living by faith includes remembering we are weak all of the time and that we can do nothing apart from Jesus (John 15:4,5).

8. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

A. What truth can keep us from throwing a pity party?

B. What does Paul say God will not allow?

C. What does Paul say God will do?

It is easy to murmur and complain when we go through trials and temptations. It is easy to feel we have it worse than other people do. However, Paul assures us that the temptations we face are similar to what others have faced.

John tells us why. He says all temptations fall into one of three categories: “. . . the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” 1 John 2:16. This is why it can be said that Jesus “was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin” Hebrews 4:15.

In the Old Testament, God summarized all sin into two categories. “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, *And* hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water” Jeremiah 2:13.

1 Corinthians 10:13 is often summarized in this way: “God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. . . to bear.”

By itself, this leads to an unhealthy expectation, for we will face temptations that are beyond our ability to handle on our own. However, God does promise that He will provide a way of escape so we can stand up under the temptation. Since God may not reveal His plan right away, we tend to get nervous and try to figure out our own plan.

This is what Abraham did when he lied by saying his wife, Sarah, was only his sister. He did this to try to protect himself from perceived danger (Gen. 12,20). He and Sarah also thought they had to help God fulfill His promise for a son. Since Sarah was no longer able to have children, she suggested that Abraham have a child through her servant Hagar (Genesis 16).

If we are willing to disobey God in order to free ourselves from any trial, we are trusting in ourselves. But if we wait upon God, He will provide the plan of escape that is best. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength” Isaiah 40:31.

9. 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

A. How did Paul feel about a trial he faced?

B. What was the escape plan he believed God would provide?

The trial Paul faced was beyond what he could bear on his own. He thought for sure he was going to die. The only plan of escape he could see was the resurrection. He was at peace with that. But God had another plan. Paul wrote, God “delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.”

Nebuchadnezzar threatened to throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego into the fire if they didn't bow down the image he erected. They replied, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” Daniel 3:17,18.

The ones who threw them into the fire died from the extreme heat. However, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were unharmed. In fact, Jesus came and talked with them in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:22-26).

Daniel was threatened with being thrown into the lion's den if he prayed to God. He prayed anyway. When he was thrown in, God shut the lions' mouths. The next day, those who plotted against him were thrown in. No deliverance was provided for them (Daniel 6).

It would have been easy for Paul, Daniel and the three Hebrews to rationalize and compromise in order to avoid the consequences. But they would have missed out on the amazing miracle God provided for them.

Sometimes God chooses not to provide a miraculous deliverance. When John the Baptist was put in prison, he wasn't sure what would happen. He sent a message to Jesus, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Matthew 11:3.

Jesus replied, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 'The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me'" Matthew 11:4-6.

God chose not to deliver John from prison or death (Matthew 14:1-12). Instead, Jesus sent him a message that encouraged him to remain faithful, even unto death. Learning to trust God in every aspect of life is part of the process of growing into maturity.

CHOOSING TO BE JOYFUL IN OUR TRIALS

10. Read James 1:2-4

A. What are we to do when we fall into various trials? (2)

B. What can the testing of our faith produce in us? (3)

C. What will happen to those who patiently trust in God? (4)

We are to *count* it all joy when we face trials. We may not feel joyful. Trials bring pain. It is OK to grieve (1 Peter 1:6). However, we can *choose* to rejoice when we remember that God will bring something good out of every difficulty when we trust Him (Rom. 8:28).

James does not designate what kind of trials he is talking about. He simply refers to trials of various kinds. In other words, he is referring to all kinds of trials, even when they are a result of our own failures.

Teachers use tests to reveal what students have learned from previous study and experience. Trials in life provide us with opportunities to:

- Learn whether our faith is in God or in ourselves.
- Learn that God is faithful and trustworthy.

The testing of our faith develops patience. The Greek word translated patience is *hupomeno*. *Hupo* means under and *meno* means to abide. A greater confidence in God will enable us to “abide under” the trials while we wait for His plan of escape. Learning to depend wholly on God will lead to healing in our lives. We will grow into maturity, becoming “perfect and complete” in loving others as Jesus has loved us.

11. Read James 1:5-8

A. What does God promise to give us when we face trials? (5)

B. Why does James add, “...without reproach”? (5)

C. What are we like when we doubt after asking for wisdom? (6-8)

In the midst of trials we are encouraged to ask God for wisdom. He promises to give it “liberally” to all who ask. Sometimes trials are a

result of our wrong choices. It would be easy to think we don't deserve God's help. James assures us He is **not** going to find fault with us and say, "How dare you ask for wisdom. You got yourself into this mess, you can get yourself out. You didn't take it seriously when I gave it last time, why should I give you any more?" God is wants us to follow His will, so He is anxious to give us wisdom.

Those who doubt God will try to take matters into their own hands. Their questioning will lead them to mix their own ideas with whatever wisdom God gives. As a result, they will be like the waves, going back and forth, rather than trusting in God's promises. (See Numbers 14 for an example of people doubting God and refusing to follow Him.)

CHOOSING TO BE THANKFUL IN OUR TRIALS

12. Read Philippians 4:6,7

A. What are we asked to do when we are faced with anxiety?

B. Why is it important to be thankful when we pray?

C. What will we experience when we trust God?

Every difficulty is a call to prayer. Every trial is an opportunity to see God work and to learn that He is trustworthy. He will fulfill His promises in a way that is consistent with His wisdom, power and love.

Our choice to thank God even before we see the answer is an act of faith. We are trusting that He has heard us and that He will answer us in the time and way that He sees is best. Trusting God with our lives and situation will enable us to experience inner peace. The following verses also emphasize the peace we can have:

Isaiah 26:3 - “You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose* mind is stayed on *You*, Because he trusts in *You*.”

John 14:27 - “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

John 16:33 - “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

FAITH IN THE LAST DAYS

13. What question does Jesus ask related to faith? Luke 18:8

14. How are God’s followers described at the end? Revelation 14:12

Jesus implies that faith in God will be very limited at the end. However, God’s followers will place their faith in Jesus. Their one desire will be to live for the glory of God and bring honor to Him. The promise is that they will follow Jesus wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4,5).

15. What is the key to overcoming trials and temptations?

A. 1 John 5:4 “And this is the _____ that has _____ the world--our _____.”

B. 1 Timothy 6:12 “_____ the good fight of _____, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called.”

Learning to trust God is the most important lesson we can learn in life.

THE TRUST FALL

The “trust fall” is a wonderful way to illustrate how God teaches us to trust Him. When working with children, I will say, “I will catch you. I promise, I will not let you fall. Would you like to do the trust fall?”

When they say yes, I ask them to stand up on a chair and then I tell them, “Stand straight with your arms folded. Close your eyes and then fall straight back without stepping back or bending at the waist or the knees. I will catch you! I promise.” When I say this, I am right behind them with my arms ready to catch them.

The child usually looks back to see if I am truly ready. They wonder if they should trust me or not. If the child falls back exactly as instructed, I know they have chosen to trust me. Most often, they hesitate, look again and pause some more.

If this happens, I put my hand on their back and tell them to lean backward, showing that I can hold their weight. Then I have them stand up straight again and fall back an inch, then two inches, then three and four and five until their trust in me builds up. Then they are usually able to fall straight back with eyes closed and no bending.

God is also trying to teach us to trust Him. He allows trials to help us learn that He truly is able to “catch us.” If we hesitate, He is patient with us. If we compromise our convictions to escape the trial, He allows us to experience the painful consequences of our sinful choices and waits for us to be willing to return to Him.

He always forgives. He will then allow other trials that we may have the opportunity to learn to trust God’s promises and see how He will work. Our faith in Him increases each time we experience that He is faithful. It is very important that we are open to His “plan of escape,” rather than simply telling Him what He should do. We may miss the very plan that He has prepared for us if our expectations are wrong.

14 – BORN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

My wife and I were about to have our first baby. We were nervous and excited at the same time. Anxious for everything to go smoothly, my wife tried to plan ahead by preparing the house and the baby room, cooking extra food, and packing for the hospital stay. When the labor pains began to be regular, we knew it was time to get to the hospital.

Out of nervousness and habit, I turned the wrong way and ended up driving the longer way around the lake to the hospital. My wife was sure I hit every railroad track and bump in the road that was possible. 15-20 minutes later we arrived at the emergency room. About three hours later we had the privilege of holding a healthy baby boy.

David wrote, we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Psalm 139:14. What a privilege it is to be alive and participate in creating new life. May we never lose sight of how precious every person is to God.

Unfortunately, sin has brought tremendous pain, heartache, and brokenness to the human race. Without a Savior, there is no hope for anyone. Without the Holy Spirit living within, there is no spiritual life within us. Jesus communicated this to Nicodemus when He said, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3.

THE NEED TO BE BORN FROM ABOVE

1. What position did Nicodemus have? John 3:1, 10

2. When did Nicodemus come to meet with Jesus? John 3:1

Nicodemus was a “ruler of the Jews” and “the teacher of Israel.” He was highly respected. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme judicial and administrative council of the Jews (Matthew 26:3,47-59). As a Pharisee, he took the scriptures seriously, as opposed to the Sadducees, who said “there is no resurrection” Matthew 22:23.

Like many others (John 2:23-25), Nicodemus believed in Jesus because of the signs He did. However, he wasn't ready to publicly profess his conviction, so he met Jesus at night.

By referring to Jesus as a teacher from God, Nicodemus must have thought he was affirming Him. He revealed his desire to have a theological discussion with a colleague, another teacher. In reality, by *not* referring to Jesus as the Messiah, Nicodemus revealed his belief in Jesus was limited. Jesus recognized Nicodemus needed a Savior from sin more than an intellectual discussion.

3. What do we need to experience if we are going to “see the kingdom of God?” John 3:3,7

The Greek word translated “again” is *anōthen*. It means “from above.” (Strong's Conc.) This is how it is translated in John 3:31 and 19:11.

4. What choice enables us to be born from above? John 1:11-13

5. What kind of birth did Nicodemus ask Jesus about? John 3:4

Nicodemus was surprised. He asked a question about being reborn physically, knowing this was impossible. But he must have wondered, “Why do I need to be born from above? I am a teacher of Israel. God has already chosen Israel as His special people (Exodus 19:5,6). I am already part of the Kingdom of God, aren't I?”

6. In John 3:5-8, how did Jesus clarify His message to Nicodemus?

A. What is associated with being born of the Spirit? (5)

B. How did Jesus describe the two kinds of births He referred to? (6,8)

Born of the _____

Born of the _____

Jesus refers to two kinds of birth, not three. Being “born of water” is associated with being “born of the Spirit” because it is a tangible way to communicate we have repented.

7. Who are the ones that Jesus calls to repentance? Luke 5:31,32

Those who are sick need a physician. Jesus invites us to come to Him just as we are to receive the healing that we need (Psalm 103).

8. What were people to do before they were baptized? Luke 3:7,8

John wanted people to bear fruits that were consistent with repentance before they were baptized. When people asked what they were to do, John gave them some examples (Luke 3:10-14):

- Share with others in need;
- Do not abuse people or take advantage of them;
- Do not falsely accuse others;
- Be content with what you have.

In other words, they were to confess their failure in these and other areas and repent by choosing God’s will for their lives. “Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to [John] and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins” Mark 1:5.

Baptism in water is a symbol that we have repented. Unfortunately, many people have been baptized in water for the wrong reason. Some have been “baptized” as infants by the choice of their parents. There was no opportunity for them to repent. Others have been baptized because they thought the act itself was required in order to go to heaven. This would have been an attempt to earn their way to heaven.

Baptism without repentance appeals to our human nature, for we like to maintain control of our own lives. However, this will lead to “having a form of godliness” without the presence and power of God (2 Tim. 3:5).

Baptism without repentance will create the same kind of experience the Jews had when they looked to “circumcision” to make them acceptable to God. The true meaning of circumcision was lost. The history and meaning of circumcision can help us understand the proper role of water baptism and other symbols in the Christian life.

THE HISTORY OF CIRCUMCISION

Abram, age 75 – Abram received a promise from God in Genesis 12:1-4:

“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”

Abram, age 85 – Abram and Sarai were still childless.

“Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing *children*. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.’ And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in . . . Canaan. So he went in to Hagar and she conceived” Gen. 16:2-4.

Abram and Sarai doubted that God could fulfill His promise to give them a child. Sarai felt she needed to help God out. Instead of trusting in God, Abram listened to his wife and had a son named Ishmael.

Abraham, age 99 – God communicated the following:

1. Every male child in the household must be circumcised (17:9-14).
2. Their names would be changed to Abraham and Sarah (17:5,15). Abraham means father of a multitude. Sarah means princess or woman of nobility. Kings would come from her.
3. Abraham would have a child through Sarah. His name would be called Isaac and the everlasting covenant would be fulfilled through him, rather than through Ishmael (17:16-21).

Abraham's willingness to have a child through Hagar revealed his lack of faith. Circumcision was to be a tangible reminder to Abraham and all his descendants of their need to trust God, rather than themselves.

God chose to wait to give Abraham and Sarah a son until it was humanly impossible for them to have a child on their own (Gen. 18:11). Isaac was a miracle from God. The symbol of circumcision was able to remind the descendants of Isaac that they were alive physically because of the miracle of God. It would also be an illustration of the spiritual circumcision God desired to perform on their hearts.

Deuteronomy 10:16 – “Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.”

Deuteronomy 30:6 – “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

Jeremiah 9:26 – “. . . all *these* nations *are* uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel *are* uncircumcised in the heart.”

Romans 2:28,29 – “For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.”

Galatians 6:15 – “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

Unfortunately, the Jews misunderstood the symbol of circumcision. They began to believe the act of circumcision made them acceptable to God. This led them to see themselves as better than everyone else.

Just before Stephen was stoned to death, he pointed out the hypocrisy of those who rejected Jesus. “*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they

killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers” Acts 7:51-53.

It took the supernatural providence of God to help Jewish Christians accept Gentiles as people whom God loved and redeemed. Immediately after receiving a vision from heaven, Peter received an invitation to go to the home of a Gentile. When he arrived, he shared the lesson he was learning. “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” Acts 10:28.

Since circumcision had been so badly misunderstood, God inspired Paul to bring an end to the division created by circumcision. “Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters*” 1 Corinthians 7:18,19.

Those who follow Jesus today need to remember that water baptism is an outward symbol that communicates a person has already repented and chosen to surrender their life to Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

If water baptism is “required” before a person can be accepted by God, then the gospel would be perverted. This perversion would make it easy for people to add other requirements to a list to earn God’s acceptance.

Jesus’ perfect life and death is what makes us holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 10:10) Our growing into maturity leads us to hate sin, love righteousness, and enjoy being with God and serving Him.

NICODEMUS RECEIVES TIME AND EVIDENCE

9. How did Nicodemus respond to the truth Jesus shared? John 3:9

Nicodemus appears to be totally bewildered. What Jesus was saying was so different and new. It didn’t fit into his system of beliefs. We have the

same problem. When the Bible presents ideas that contradict what we believe, we are faced with a decision. Will we believe the truth and surrender to God's will or hold onto what is familiar to us?

God is anxious to share truth as fast as we are willing to receive it. He wants us to be transformed and experience the abundant life. When we abide in His truth, we will experience freedom from fear, guilt, shame, and slavery to sin (John 8:31-36; 10:10; 16:12,13; Rom. 12:2; 1 Jn 5:18).

10. What prophecy did Jesus give that helped Nicodemus choose to follow Him later on? John 3:14-16; 19:39

Jesus used an Old Testament story to illustrate His mission to save the world. A bronze serpent was lifted up on a pole to save those who were bitten by a snake (Num. 21:4-9; Deut. 8:15). Those who looked on the bronze serpent were healed. This illustrated the truth that Jesus would be made "sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" 2 Corinthians 5:21. Those who believe in Him will live.

Jesus said He would be "lifted up." At the time, this phrase referred to being crucified (John 12:32,33). This prophecy seemed unbelievable to Nicodemus. He taught "the Christ remains forever" (John 12:34; 3:10).

Nicodemus was expecting the Messiah to deliver the Jews from the Roman Empire, not to save the world from sin. He observed Jesus' life and listened to what He said (John 7:50, 51). After Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus believed in Him and helped with his burial (John 19:38-42).

Everyone is given "light" and evidence of truth (John 1:9; Rom. 1:20). God is very patient, forgiving, and compassionate as He draws us to Himself (John 12:32). However, putting off making a decision for selfish reasons can harden our hearts. Any time we are willing to resist the Holy Spirit and violate our conscience, we become less sensitive.

Our conscience begins to be “seared with a hot iron” 1 Timothy 4:2. The more we do this, the less offensive sin will appear in our own eyes.

11. How can our conscience become sensitive again? Ezekiel 36:26,27

Fortunately, when we are born of the Spirit, God is able to give us a new heart that is sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We can then learn to recognize Jesus’ voice and follow Him (John 10:11, 27).

12. What right is given to those who receive Jesus? John 1:12,13

The word translated “right” in John 1:12 is “exousia.” It has a full range of meanings: “privilege, freedom, delegated influence, authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength” (Strong’s Concordance).

Those who receive Jesus as their Savior can live with the assurance that they are the children of God (1 John 3:1). They can also experience freedom from slavery to sin and the power to live for the glory of God.

BLESSINGS AND PROMISES

13. What blessings does a person experience as a Christian?

- A. John 10:10 “I have come that they may have _____, and that they may have it more _____.”
- B. Revelation 21:1-5 “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

C. Matthew 6:33 “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things [food, clothing, and shelter] shall be added unto you. Therefore _____ about tomorrow.”

D. Mark 10:28-30 Those who have left all for Jesus and the gospel will receive “a _____ now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.”

All who are born from above can experience security, belonging, and meaning in life. They become part of a new family. Jesus said, “Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother” Mark 3:35. While these blessings are wonderful, Jesus doesn’t gloss over the challenges. He assures us there will also be persecution in a world that is at war with His love and truth.

COUNTING THE COST: A CALL TO SURRENDER

14. What may be the result of following Jesus? Matthew 10:28, 34-39

A. “Do not fear those who _____, but cannot kill the soul.” (28)

B. “I did not come to bring peace but a_____.” (34)

C. “A man's _____ will be those of his own_____.” (36)

When the gospel is revealed, everyone must respond. When some accept Jesus as their Savior and others reject Him, there will be division.

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” John 15:18,19.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” John 16:33.

Those who choose to reject Jesus are the ones who will be inspired by Satan to fight and hurt others (1 Peter 5:8, 9; Revelation 12:17).

15. Jesus says we are to “count the cost” before we make a decision to follow Him. What cost is involved? Luke 14:25-33

A. “If anyone comes to Me and does not _____ his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his _____ also, he _____ be My _____.” (v. 26)

B. “Whoever does not _____ his _____ and come after Me _____ be My _____.” (v. 27)

C. “Whoever of you does not _____ that he has _____ be My _____.” (v. 33)

Jesus’ words are unmistakable. We are to forsake everything. We are to put Him above our family and even our own lives. If family members do not want us to follow Jesus, it may appear to them that we “hate” them if we choose to put Jesus first in our lives. In reality, Jesus will enable us to truly love them. However, they may not see it that way and may refuse to receive the love we have to give them.

16. What truth does Jesus understand that enables Him to lovingly ask for total surrender? Luke 9:23-25

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him _____, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to _____ his _____ will _____ it, but whoever loses his life for

My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he _____ the whole world, and is himself lost or destroyed?”

Jesus knows the only way to experience abundant and eternal life is through Him. The most loving thing He can do for us is to invite us to surrender and offer ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Any sin we refuse to surrender will spread like cancer and destroy us.

While Jesus asks for total surrender, He is not asking for perfect performance before we come to Him. He knows we cannot give it. We are to come Him just as we are and let Him save us from the wages of sin, the power of sin, and the evil effects of sin (See lesson 6).

We are to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow Jesus. A decision to follow Jesus yesterday or last year is important, but not sufficient for life today. Each day and in each situation, we are to have the attitude Jesus had when He said, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father” John 5:30. This led Him to pray, “Not my will, but Yours be done” Luke 22:42. As we surrender to God’s will and let the Holy Spirit lead us into all truth, we will grow in our ability to discern what is the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God” Romans 12:2.

17. How should we respond to abuse from others? Romans 12:17-21

In response to threats and abuse, we are called to fight back with faith and love, not revenge or retaliation. The best way for us to win family and friends to Jesus is to follow the outline in Revelation 12:11:

- Cling to Jesus as our only hope for life now and forever.
- Share our testimony of what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do.
- Grow into maturity that we may love others as Jesus has loved us and trust God for our needs and for life itself.

WALKING AWAY FROM JESUS

18. Why did many follow Jesus when He was here? John 6:14,15, 26

When Jesus fed the large multitude with five loaves and two fish, the crowd got excited. They thought for sure He was the Messiah who would deliver them from the Roman Empire and lead them to rule the world. He could feed armies and heal the wounded. They couldn't lose!

They were following Jesus for the temporal advantages and benefits they thought they could get from Him.

19. What did many do when they learned the truth? John 6:66

In John 6:27-59 Jesus made it clear that His mission on earth was to save the world from sin. He wanted to give them eternal life, but they wanted physical food. They wanted to conquer the Romans, but Jesus came to give His life for the world (John 6:51). After this, "many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more" John 6:66.

If we follow Jesus out of selfish motives, we will be disappointed. He will not satisfy our sinful cravings and desires (1 John 2:15-17).

On the other hand, if we want Jesus to be a Savior from every aspect of the sin problem, we will experience what our hearts long for: a living relationship with God that is full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23).

In the light of this, surrendering everything to Jesus is like exchanging:

- A broken, dried up pen for a trillion dollars.
- A life that is sickly and terminal for a life that is whole and forever.
- A life of selfishness for an eternity with people who are loving.

SURRENDERING TO HIM WHO LOVES US MOST

“Whatever shall draw away the heart from God must be given up. Mammon is the idol of many. The love of money, the desire for wealth, is the golden chain that binds them to Satan. Reputation and worldly honor are worshiped by another class. The life of selfish ease and freedom from responsibility is the idol of others. But these slavish bands must be broken. We cannot be half the Lord's and half the world's. We are not God's children unless we are such entirely.”

“There are those who profess to serve God, while they rely upon their own efforts to obey His law, to form a right character, and secure salvation. Their hearts are not moved by any deep sense of the love of Christ, but they seek to perform the duties of the Christian life as that which God requires of them in order to gain heaven. Such religion is worth nothing.”

“When Christ dwells in the heart, the soul will be so filled with His love, with the joy of communion with Him, that it will cleave to Him; and in the contemplation of Him, self will be forgotten. Love to Christ will be the spring of action. Those who feel the constraining love of God, do not ask how little may be given to meet the requirements of God; they do not ask for the lowest standard, but aim at perfect conformity to the will of their Redeemer. With earnest desire they yield all and manifest an interest proportionate to the value of the object which they seek. A profession of Christ without this deep love is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery.”

“Do you feel that it is too great a sacrifice to yield all to Christ? Ask yourself the question, ‘What has Christ given for me?’ The Son of God gave all--life and love and suffering--for our redemption. And can it be that we, the unworthy objects of so great love, will withhold our hearts from Him? Every moment of our lives we have been partakers of the blessings of His grace, and for this very reason we cannot fully realize the depths of ignorance and misery from which we have been saved....

“But what do we give up, when we give all? A sin-polluted heart, for Jesus to purify, to cleanse by His own blood, and to save by His

matchless love. And yet men think it hard to give up all! I am ashamed to hear it spoken of, ashamed to write it.”

“God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. In all that He does, He has the well-being of His children in view. . . . Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by Him who knows what is best and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of transgression is the path of misery and destruction” Steps To Christ, 44-46.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

20. Read John 16:8-11. What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would convict the world of? What reason is given for each?

(9) _____

(10) _____

(11) _____

Sin – The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, not to condemn or criticize us, but to help us realize our need for Jesus.

Righteousness –Jesus goes to the Father to represent us. His righteousness makes us acceptable to God. When Jesus was on the earth, He was their Teacher. Now the Holy Spirit is also able to lead us into all truth and through the Bible help us to discern what is right and wrong.

Judgment – Our natural tendency is to be attracted to sin and to be motivated by fear. Satan appeals to both of these tendencies to lead us away from God. The Holy Spirit convicts us that following Satan is a dead end. He also brings hope through the conviction that Satan, rebellion and evil is judged / condemned and will be brought to an end.

21. What will the Holy Spirit do for us when we are born again?

A. John 14:16,17 _____

B. John 14:26 _____

C. John 16:13,14 _____

BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

22. What does Paul say we should be filled with? Ephesians 5:18

When we are born of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is abiding within us. When this happens there are two natures battling for control.

“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” Galatians 5:16,17.

It is possible to be born again, but still be dominated by the flesh. Paul described some of the Christians in Corinth as “carnal” or “babes in Christ” 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Carnal comes from the same Greek word that is translated flesh in Galatians. They hadn’t grown up into maturity. The “envy, strife, and divisions” among them convinced Paul that the flesh was still in control of their lives. (Lesson 16 will focus on this.)

23. As Christians, what are we to set our mind on? Romans 8:6,7

A Christian who fills their mind with the things of the world will eventually not want God in their lives (John 3:19,20). Those who fill their minds with the truth and promises from God’s perspective will want more and more of Him. The Holy Spirit will live in them and enable them to bring glory to God.

24. What does God want to baptize us with? Acts 1:5; Luke 11:13

The word baptism comes from the Greek word, baptizo. It means to totally immerse something. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is another way to describe being filled with the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was on earth, the disciples could have been described as carnal Christians, for they were filled with envy, strife and divisions. They were so convinced the Messiah was going to overthrow Rome and set up an earthly kingdom, they didn't understand why Jesus was willing to be arrested and go to the cross. They "forsook Him and fled" Matthew 26:56. Their whole outlook on life was being torn apart.

After Jesus was resurrected, they were humble and teachable. They became unified and full of love for one another (Acts 1:14; 2:1; 4:32-37). They grew more in a few weeks than they had grown throughout their lifetime. Emptying themselves of pride and jealousy, they made room for the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. They were baptized with the Holy Spirit and empowered to share the gospel "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" Acts 1:8; 2:4.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with:

- How old we are, but how broken and humble we are.
- How long we have been a Christian, but how open we are to truth.
- What position we might hold, but how empty we are of self.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit empowers and equips us for ministry in cooperation with the whole body of Christ. In freely giving and receiving love, the whole body grows into maturity and bears much fruit for the glory of God (Ephesians 4:11-16; John 15).

25. Is there anything the Holy Spirit is convicting me of now?

26. What would God have me do today to be a blessing to others?

15 - CELEBRATING NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told his disciples, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” Matthew 28:18-20.

The Greek word that is translated disciple is *mathēteuō*. “*Matheteuo* means not only to learn, but to become attached to one's teacher and to become his follower in doctrine and conduct of life.” From the AMG Complete Word Study New Testament.

When Jesus was on this earth, twelve disciples left everything in order to attach themselves to Jesus. They were given the privilege of learning from His teaching, observing His miracles, and following His example. The experience was priceless.

Fortunately, the experience is still available! Everyone can attach themselves to Jesus and be born again by the Holy Spirit. We can learn from His teaching, experience His miracles, and be living examples of the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives (Galatians 5:22,23).

Being a disciple of Jesus is the greatest privilege on earth. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him. He works through His disciples to share His message, show His love, and shine His light in the world. Those who are searching for truth will welcome the light.

BRINGING LIGHT TO THE DARKNESS

If you take a tour in an underground cave, the guide may ask everyone to turn off their flashlights for a short time so everyone can experience total darkness. In such a setting you can put your hand an inch in front of your face and see nothing. It is an eerie feeling. It is a welcome relief when the lights are turned on again.

Now imagine the tour guide plays a horrible trick on everyone. He leads them deep into the cave and then hides from them, leaving them to find their way out on their own. The cave has many passage ways and many dead ends. After hours of trying various paths, the flashlights begin to get dim and then go out. All the spare batteries are used up. The group is in total darkness with no hope of getting out on their own.

Many hours go by. The group begins to wonder if anyone will find them. They pray for help, asking God to send a search party to find them and lead them out. More hours go by. Despair begins to set in. Then all of a sudden a voice is heard calling, “Can you hear me?”

“Yes, Yes! We hear you! Please help us!” Soon a light is seen. Everyone rejoices. Help has arrived!

The enemy, Satan, has led the world into darkness and despair. He wants us to be lost and dead. When someone you love is lost, your focus in life is to find them before it is too late. Jesus loves us. He came to rescue everyone from our hopeless situation. He doesn’t want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Unfortunately, many people have become comfortable in the darkness and refuse to come into the light even when help has come.

When Jesus went back to heaven, He sent His disciples into the “cave” with His light, love, and power to lead everyone who wants to be helped “out of the darkness and into His marvelous light” 1 Peter 2:9.

WHY WAS JESUS BAPTIZED?

1. What did John say is the reason for water baptism? Matthew 3:11

For John, water baptism was a symbol of the repentance that had already taken place in a person’s life. When some Jewish leaders wanted to be baptized, John told them they needed to repent first. “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” Matthew 3:8, NIV. Repentance is a choice to turn away from sin and choose to follow God’s plan for our lives.

2. Why did Jesus ask to be baptized? Matthew 3:13-15

If Jesus had not sinned, why did He need to participate in a symbol that expressed repentance? John resisted at first, but Jesus insisted that it was necessary in order to “fulfill all righteousness.” We can better understand this when we realize the challenge Jesus faced on earth.

3. What did Jesus increase in as He was growing up? Luke 2:52

When Jesus was in heaven, He chose to be our Savior. He could see the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:9,10). When He was on earth, He “increased in wisdom.” He had to learn what His mission was. He studied the Scriptures and observed the temple services. We can also assume that His parents told Him the stories of:

- His miraculous birth.
- The angels who sang and announced His birth to the shepherds.
- The wise men from the east worshipping Him and giving Him gifts.
- Simeon recognizing him as “the Lord’s Christ” Luke 2:25-35.

Gradually He began to understand that He was to be the Lamb of God who would “take away the sin of the world” John 1:29.

4. Read the following verses. What did Jesus continue to choose throughout His life on earth? _____

- A. John 5:30 “I can of myself do nothing. . . . I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”
- B. John 6:38 “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”
- C. Matthew 26:39 “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as You will.”

Having taken our nature upon Himself, Jesus often faced temptations. For example, after Jesus said He would be killed and resurrected on the third day, Peter objected. He “began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’” Matthew 16:22.

Jesus replied, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” Matt. 16:23.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus faced a very intense struggle. “He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to [His disciples,] ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*’” Matthew 26:37-39.

In each situation Jesus had to choose, “Do I turn away from My mission to save the world or do I surrender to My Father’s will? Am I willing to be ‘obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross?’” Phil. 2:8.

At His baptism Jesus chose to publicly accept His mission to save the world from sin. He knew this meant “the iniquity of us all” would be “laid on Him” and that He would be “led as a lamb to the slaughter” Isaiah 53:6,7. At His baptism He communicated His willingness to:

- Pour “out His soul unto death.” Isaiah 53:12
- Be “numbered with the transgressors.” Isaiah 53:12
- Bear “the sin of many.” Isaiah 53:12
- Make “intercession for the transgressors.” Isaiah 53:12
- Make “His grave with the wicked.” Isaiah 53:9
- “Make reconciliation for iniquity” Daniel 9:24
- “Bring in everlasting righteousness” Daniel 9:24.

Because of Jesus’ decision to accept His mission, God made “Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” 2 Cor. 5:21. As a result of His perfect life and death, Jesus was able to “fulfill all righteousness” for the human race (Matt. 3:15).

5. What did the Holy Spirit do for Jesus at His baptism?

A. Luke 3:22 _____

B. Luke 4:18 _____

Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit. Christ (in Greek) and Messiah (in Hebrew) mean “Anointed One.” At His baptism, Jesus accepted His mission to be the Savior of the world and was anointed to:

- Share the gospel.
- Heal the brokenhearted.
- Set people free from guilt, shame, slavery to sin, and death.
- Open the eyes of people that they might see the truth.

Soon after His baptism Jesus began “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’” Mark 1:14,15. When Jesus said “the time is fulfilled,” He was announcing that He was the Messiah referred to in the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27.

Jesus’ example of being baptized is an important lesson for all of us. It was a public and tangible way for Him to communicate His:

- Belief - Based upon the Scriptures and the providence of God, Jesus understood that He was born to be the Savior of the world.
- Acceptance of His mission – As our representative, Jesus was to live a life of perfect love and then die for the sin of the world.

Our faith is not to be a private matter either. Baptism is a tangible expression of the truth we have believed, the choice we have made, and the mission we have accepted.

6. What message did Jesus receive after He was baptized? Luke 3:22

The anointing of the Spirit and the words from His Father empowered Jesus to overcome Satan and fulfill His mission on earth. Since Jesus represents the human race, God communicates the same message to us.

Because of Jesus, we are children of God (1 John 3:1). He adopted, accepted, and redeemed us (Ephesians 1:5-7). He invites us to cast all our cares upon Him, for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

THE SYMBOL OF BAPTISM

7. What is the meaning of the symbol of baptism in Romans 6:2-5?

D_____ B_____ R_____

Baptism is a symbol of our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. It is a tangible expression of faith that:

1. Legally, in Christ we have died the death we earned by our sin and have been raised with Jesus (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:19,20).
2. Personally, we have chosen to “deny” ourselves, take up our cross daily, and let Jesus live in us and be our Savior and Lord (Luke 9:23-25; Romans 6:11-13, 16-18; Galatians 2:20).

8. What does Paul say was crucified with Jesus? Romans 6:6

The “old man” refers to the human race that was condemned by Adam’s sin and died in Christ. Each person is now free to choose on a daily basis to “put off the old man” and “put on the new man” (Colossians 3:9,10; Ephesians 4:22-24). We do this by embracing the truth the Holy Spirit teaches us (John 16:13; Romans 12:2).

9. What is the result of our having died with Christ? Rom. 6:7

Having died in Christ, we all “have been freed from sin.” (The word translated freed is from the same Greek word translated justified in Rom. 5:9.) In other words, the law can no longer condemn us to death if we have already died the death we deserved. We are now free from the condemnation of the law. We are now to “reckon [or count] ourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” Romans 6:11.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

10. Read Matthew 28:18-20

A. What did Jesus say had been given to Him?

B. What did Jesus command His followers to do?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Satan was cast out of heaven when he rebelled against God (Rev. 12:9). He was cast out as “the ruler of this world” when Jesus died on the cross (John 12:31). Satan could no longer claim to have authority on earth (Luke 4:6). Instead, Jesus was able to say, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.”

Having redeemed the human race, Jesus qualified everyone for heaven and legally transferred everyone from Satan’s kingdom into God’s kingdom (Colossians 1:12-14). In the light of this good news, Jesus said:

1. Be willing to disciple others; be the kind of Christians others will want to follow and learn from.
2. Baptize people who receive Me as their Savior and Lord, choosing to represent God and His name in all they say and do (2 Chron. 7:14).
3. Teach people all that I have commanded you, including,
 - a. Love others as I have loved you (John 13:34,35; 15:12).
 - b. Love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets.

For 3½ years Jesus taught the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven. However, the disciples did not begin to understand what the Kingdom of Heaven was really like until after Jesus died and rose from the grave.

Kingdom of Heaven Other-centered Love	Kingdom of Satan Self-centered Love
The love of Christ motivates people to live for God and freely share with others (2 Cor. 5:14,15; Matt. 10:8).	Insecurity and fear motivates people to live for self. People give in order to get.
Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing good. (John 15:4,5; Rev.3:17).	People are basically good, but capable of doing evil.
Everyone is equally valuable in Christ, for He redeemed everyone.	Our value is based on our performance and possessions.
The fruit of the Spirit is what makes a person attractive (Gal. 5:22,23).	Beauty is based on outward looks and display (1 Pet. 3:3,4).
People seek God's will first as they consider how to use their time, energy, & money. They even seek to honor God in what they eat and drink (Matthew 6:33; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Exodus 20:8-11; Malachi 3:8-10).	People seek first what feels good, looks good, & tastes good at the moment, even though it may lead to more pain & brokenness in their lives (1 John 2:16; Phil. 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:10; 2 Tim. 3:1-5).
People have respect for what God has created/made holy: life, people, tithe, marriage, His name, His Sabbath, His growing church (Eph.2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5).	People are willing to steal from God & others, destroy marriages, hurt & even kill others, ignore holy time, and take God's name in vain.
"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16. God gives everyone the freedom to choose. All who receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord will live forever. All others will reject the light & perish in the end.	There are many different ideas about what happens after this life: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All will live forever with God. 2. All will live forever: some with God; others tortured in hell. 3. No one will live forever. 4. Undecided or other ideas.
God will bring an end to sin & create a new heaven & earth. There will be no more pain, sorrow or death. Rev 21.	Since there is so much evil in the world today, it is hard to believe there truly is a God of love.

Baptism is a tangible way for people to communicate they have:

- Died in Christ the death the law demands (2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:19).
- Chosen to die to sin and receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord.
- Embraced the truth and mission of the Kingdom of Heaven.

If people are rushed into baptism without the above three in place, the motive for being baptized will be fear or reward. They will be baptized in order to earn God's favor or the acceptance of others. Their attitude will be, "What is the least I can do to be accepted by God?" The wrong foundation will leave them weak and vulnerable.

On the other hand, the right foundation will enable people to live for the glory of God, even when faced with opposition and challenges (2 Corinthians 5:14,15; 11:22-28).

11. What promise did Jesus give His followers in Matthew 28:20?

The mission Jesus gave His followers is not easy, for "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" have a strong hold on people (1 John 2:15,16). These temptations can lead people to have no interest in living with Jesus, even though He loves each person and has qualified everyone to live forever with Him.

The lies of Satan have led many people to reject Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Some will even try to ridicule and fight against those who choose to receive Jesus as their Savior.

In the midst of the challenges, Jesus promises, "I will be with you always." Since He has all authority in heaven and on earth, this assurance is a great source of encouragement to His disciples.

He promises to give us whatever we need in order to represent Him (John 14:14). He also assures us that He will provide for all our needs when we seek first His kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

MINISTRY AND GROWTH IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

12. How does Jesus describe the intimate oneness Christians are able to have with God? John 14:23; 17:20,21

13. What kind of relationship does Jesus have with His church? Ephesians 5:25-32

Paul uses two illustrations to describe the relationship Jesus has with the church. He is the husband, the church is His wife. He is the head and the church is His body. “We are members of His body” Ephesians 5:30.

14. How do people become united to the church, the body of Christ?

A. 1 Cor. 12:12,13 _____

B. Acts 2:41 _____

“By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” Those who are born of the Spirit are spiritually connected to Jesus and to each other.

In Acts 2:41, baptism is associated with being added to the 120 believers referred to in Acts 1:15. Through baptism we communicate our choice to receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord and join with others in building up the body of Christ and sharing the gospel with the world.

As we build our lives on the gospel foundation, active membership in a church family helps us grow into maturity and live for the glory of God.

15. How are the members of the body to view each other and work together? 1 Corinthians 12:14-31; Ephesians 4:15,16

When our physical bodies are healthy, all the cells and organs work together under the direction of the brain. When the church is healthy, every member compliments the ministry of others and works in harmony with Jesus, the head of the body. Every person is important and has a work to do. Each person needs the ministry that others provide.

If people stop listening to the head, that part of the body could be described as paralyzed. Jesus is sending instructions, but the message is not getting through. The ministry that God intended for that member to fulfill is not accomplished. As a result, the whole body suffers. Unless there is a sincere repentance, those members will reject Jesus altogether.

On the other hand, when we experience God's unconditional love, we will discover it is a joy to be a channel of God's love to others. When we find our security in Christ, we will see the church family as a wonderful place to grow into maturity by learning how to:

- Freely give and receive love.
- Freely forgive and receive forgiveness when necessary.

16. What evidence reveals that we love God? 1 John 4:16-21

We show love to God by loving our "brother." Our "brother" would include: Our relatives by birth, adoption, and marriage, our spiritual family (Matt. 12:46-50), and our human family (Matt. 25:31-46).

God does not love us in order to get us to love Him, for that would be manipulation. He loves us freely because that is His nature. "God is love" 1 John 4:8. Love awakens in our hearts when we understand and experience His unconditional love for us. When He abides within us, we will be able to freely love others as He has loved us (Gal. 5:22).

17. What evidence reveals we are Jesus' disciples? John 13:34,35

Since all believers are in the process of growing into maturity, it is possible for other Christians to say or do something that offends us.

When this happens, we have to decide, “Am I going to harbor resentment or am I going to forgive and seek reconciliation?”

Paul tells us to forgive others as God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). Forgiveness is the highest form of love. It is graciously given to people who don’t deserve it. God’s kind of forgiveness isn’t simply canceling a debt, it also seeks reconciliation. This kind of love is truly a miracle. That is why Jesus said love for one another is evidence we are His disciples. It truly takes a miracle for us to love others as He has loved us.

Sometimes we may be hurt by someone who is “speaking the truth in love” Eph. 4:15. The truth can hurt our pride or point out something we need to surrender to God. We then need to humble ourselves, receive the truth, and accept Jesus’ plan for our lives, rather than become resentful.

18. What is the value of Christian fellowship? Hebrews 10:23-25

Satan is constantly working to lead us away from following Jesus. It is easy to get distracted by the pleasures of the world and the pressures of life. Through regular Christian fellowship we are able to encourage each other and be reminded that “the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal” 2 Corinthians 4:18.

19. Would you like to be baptized as a tangible expression of your:

- Belief that you have died in Christ and are qualified for eternal life?
- Decision to surrender your life to Jesus as your Savior and Lord?
- Decision to embrace the mission of building up the kingdom of God in cooperation with others in the body of Christ?

_____ Yes _____ Not now _____ I am considering it

Jesus desires every person to come to repentance and join Him in sharing the good news of salvation with the world (2 Peter 3:9). He is anxious to find all who have been “lost in the dark.” He wants to lead them out of the “cave” and “into His marvelous light.”

A PARABLE: THE FIXER-UPPER

Imagine buying a house. You paid cash for the house, so there is no mortgage. It is all yours. The house isn't in very good shape. You know that you are going to have to do a lot of work to make it a solid, nice looking home.

However, there is a problem. The person renting the house thinks the house belongs to him, for he has lived there a long time. He has also been very sick and unable to work, so he doesn't have any money to pay rent, fix up the house, or keep it clean.

As the new owner, you have all the right in the world to go to the police and have him evicted. But you are kind and compassionate. You are anxious to help him.

You knock on the door and wait for the door to open. For a long time there is silence. You know someone is in the house, for you have seen movement and even lights being turned on and off periodically.

You patiently wait and continue knocking. Finally, a person inside yells, "Go away. I'm not feeling very well. Leave me alone."

You knock again and say with a loud voice, "I would like to help you. Would you let me in?"

"No! Go away!" The voice inside responds.

Out of respect, you leave. But on the next day you come back and knock again.

Again there is silence for quite awhile, but the person finally yells, "What do you want?"

You quickly respond, "I want to help you!"

"I don't want your help!" the voice replies.

Owner: "Why?"

Renter: "I can take care of myself!"

Owner: "Are you sure?"

Renter: "Yes! Get off my property!"

The next day you knock again. The renter responds, "What do you want? Who are you anyway?"

Owner: "I am the new owner of the house. I have come to help you."

Renter: "Oh yeah, sure you've come to help me. You've come to help me out of the house... This is my house. I've lived here for many years and I'm going to stay here. Just leave me alone."

Owner: "Why don't you believe I have come to help you?"

Renter: "Because all you are interested in is your house. You don't even know me, so why would you want to help me?"

Owner: "I am your relative!"

Renter: “You’ve got to be kidding! You just want to come in here and kick me out.”

Owner: “I do want to help you. I bought the house so you can remain in the house.”

Renter: “Are you serious?”

Owner: “Of course I’m serious! I would even like to fix up the house, doing the necessary repairs and even adding some features. If you are interested, I would even move in with you to help you regain your health.”

Renter: “How can I trust you?”

Owner: “Simple. I haven’t kicked you out have I? You know I could have received a court order and had you evicted. The fact that you are still here is evidence I really am here to help you.”

Renter: “I guess you’re right. But I still don’t want you to come in.”

Owner: “Why?”

Renter: “Because the house is such a mess. I’m embarrassed to have you see it this way.”

Owner: “I realize that. I also know that you are too weak to do anything about it now. It will simply get worse and worse. If you give me permission, I will work to not only clean the house, but also to help restore you to health.”

Renter: “I’m still not sure I want you to come in though.”

Owner: “Why?”

Renter: “Because you will probably start throwing things away that I want to keep.”

Owner: “I would only throw things away that are unhealthy and that are hurting you in some way. Why would you want to hold onto something that makes you sick?”

Renter: “I’m comfortable with how I live. I’m used to it. I don’t like change.

Owner: “You’re comfortable with all of your pain?”

Renter: “No. But there’s no use talking about it. I’ve tried to change, but I can’t. I just have to get used to it and learn how to live with it.

Owner: “I know you’re helpless to change. That is why I am here. If you give me permission, you’re life will be transformed. You will experience love, joy and peace like you never imagined.

Renter: That sounds too good to be true. I can hardly believe it....

Owner: But it is true!

Renter: You have been very loving and patient with me. Maybe I can trust you. Please come in.

Owner: Thank you.

Renter: What if I change my mind later?

Owner: You are always free to change your mind. I will never force myself on you. I love you. I will take good care of you forever!

16 – GROWING INTO MATURITY

When a baby is born, parents are excited. They are also anxious to know if the baby is healthy, with ten fingers and toes, two arms and legs, and all the other vital parts in place. Over time, parents look for their children to crawl and sometimes fall, to walk and talk, to run and have fun, to pray and obey, and to love and receive love.

They long for their children to grow up into healthy and mature adults, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. However, many things can slow down or even stop that growth:

- Some children are born physically or mentally handicapped.
- Accidents or diseases can disable or even paralyze people.
- Unhealthy lifestyles can promote disease, damage the mind, and stifle emotional and spiritual growth.
- Abuse can hinder healthy emotional and spiritual development.
- Clinging onto pride, rebellion, bitterness, immorality, or selfishness will also prevent emotional and spiritual growth.

Everyone recognizes the importance of babies wearing diapers. However, if a teenager is still wearing diapers, we know that something has gone wrong physically. Toddlers may throw temper tantrums during the “terrible two’s.” However, if a teenager or adult is still out of control, we know something is wrong emotionally and spiritually.

Jesus is not only interested in forgiving our sins and qualifying us for heaven, He wants us to experience spiritual, emotional, mental and physical healing (1Thessalonians 5:23,24; John 10:10).

WHAT DOES A SPIRITUAL INFANT LOOK LIKE?

1. How did Paul describe Christians in Corinth? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

It seems contradictory for Paul to describe them as carnal and as babes in Christ at the same time. He acknowledges that they had accepted Jesus as their Savior when he refers to them as “babes in Christ.” However, they were allowing their selfish nature to be in control.

2. How does Paul describe them in 1 Corinthians 1:2?

Because of what Jesus has done for the whole human race, Paul was able to describe them as “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” (Compare with Hebrews 10:10.)

In the phrase, “called *to be* saints,” the words, “*to be*” are in italics in the New King James Version. That means they were added by the translators. Paul actually wrote, “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints.” He was able to refer to them as “saints” because of Jesus’ perfect life and death, not because they had grown into maturity.

3. What convinced Paul that the believers in Corinth were spiritual infants? 1 Corinthians 3:3

Jesus said, “By their fruits you will know them” Matthew 7:20. They were manifesting the fruit of the flesh, rather than the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-23).

Evaluating fruit is different than judging. In Matthew 7:1, Jesus said, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” He used the Greek word, *krino*, which also means to condemn. To condemn someone is to think of them as lost, without hope of salvation. We don’t have the right to make that kind of judgment, for we don’t have all the facts.

We can, however, evaluate the fruit of a person’s life so we may better understand what a person needs and learn how to love them in ways that bring healing and hope.

Evaluating fruit can also help us understand how much we should trust a person, for trust is something that is earned. Jesus did not trust everyone. He knew many would turn away from Him when they didn't get what they wanted (John 2:23-25; 6:66).

THE REWARD FOR GROWING INTO MATURITY

4. How did Paul try to correct the divisions in Corinth? 1 Cor. 3:4-9

The Christians in Corinth were dividing into two camps. Some followed Paul; others followed Apollos. Paul reminds them that they were on the same team, not working against each other. While God had a different assignment for each of them, they were working for the same goal.

5. Paul changes the illustration from farming to building. What is the foundation we are to build our lives on? 1 Corinthians 3:9-11

When we build our lives on Jesus, our “houses” will not collapse when the storms of life beat against us (Matthew 7:24-27). Jesus came that there might be good news to share. Paul was handpicked by God to explain the good news to the world (Acts 9:15; 26:14-18). Through the inspiration of God, he wrote over half of the New Testament.

6. Read 1 Corinthians 3:12,13

A. What building materials are referred to in this illustration?

B. What will test the work of each person?

Fire will destroy wood, hay and straw, but not the gold, silver, and precious stones. (Fire is used to purify gold and silver.) When we are building our lives on Jesus, we want something that will last for eternity.

7. Read 1 Corinthians 3:14,15

A. What happens to the one whose work endures? 14b

B. What happens to the one whose work is burned up? 15a

C. What can still be experienced by the one whose work is burned? 15b

D. Thought question - What is the reward the first one receives?

Notice that people may still be saved even if their work is burned up. They will suffer great loss. They would miss out on the blessings Jesus wanted to give them on earth. But if in the end they choose to trust in Jesus and remain on the gospel foundation, they will experience eternal life. The thief on the cross is an example of this (Luke 23:40-43). This means the reward for the first person must be different than eternal life.

Paul is writing to spiritual infants. A Christian who remains an infant can have a negative influence on others, even leading some to turn away from Jesus. While the Christian would rejoice in being able to live with God and others throughout eternity, the loss of others would be felt.

When Christians grow into maturity, their loving influence will lead people to Jesus. Sharing eternity with people we have had a positive influence on will be a wonderful reward.

Experiencing a living relationship with God on this earth is also a great reward. God told Abraham, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” Genesis 15:1. May we all grow up into maturity that when people see us, they may be drawn to Jesus and desire to receive Him as their personal Savior.

8. What will happen if we refuse to grow into maturity and choose instead to defile the temple of God? 1 Cor. 3:16,17; 2 Peter 2:1

Those who persistently and continually resist the Holy Spirit are saying they do not want Him in their lives. They defile the temple of God when they resist the Holy Spirit. They will try to satisfy their selfish desires in unhealthy ways (1 Peter 2:1; Galatians 5:13-21) and begin to:

- “Call evil good, and good evil”
- “Put darkness for light, and light for darkness;”
- “Put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” Isaiah 5:20.

When they attribute the convictions and work of the Holy Spirit to the enemy, there is nothing more that God can do for them. Jesus referred to this as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:22-32).

When they defile the temple of God in this way, they bring destruction upon themselves (2 Peter 2:1). They would not be happy living with God and would rather die than come face to face with Him. So God will honor their choice and they will perish (Revelation 6:14-16; John 3:19).

9. What can lead us to turn away from Jesus? Matthew 13:18-23

A. (v. 21)

B. (v. 21)

C. (v. 22)

D. (v. 22)

The immature person will find it easy to be distracted from Jesus and focus on the pleasures of the world, the problems of life, the faults of others or their own faults and weaknesses. Instead of trusting Jesus during difficulties, they may seek quick fixes that promise immediate relief, even though it includes disobeying God. If they persist in that pathway, instead of repenting, they will eventually turn from Jesus.

FEEDING ON POISON, MILK, OR SOLID FOOD

10. What kind of food did Paul say he fed them? 1 Corinthians 3:2

The best food for babies is mother's milk. As children are able, it is healthy for them to eat solid food in order to grow into maturity. The believers in Corinth were remaining spiritual infants, unable to eat solid food. Some people remain spiritually immature for a long time, even though they have been Christians for many years.

11. Read 1 Peter 2:1-3

A. What "poison" did Peter encourage Christians to lay aside? (1)

B. What does he want them to feed upon instead? (2)

Peter said we should long for the pure milk that we may grow. If babies don't drink milk, they will never be able to eat solid food. Instead of drinking "the pure milk of the word," some baby Christians get sidetracked and feed on "deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking."

Deceit and hypocrisy refer to people pretending to be something they are not. Instead of growing into maturity, some try to rush the process and focus on outward performance instead. They will eventually become frustrated and begin to envy the genuine experience that others have. This emptiness and envy often leads people to criticize others in order to make themselves feel they are just as good as everyone else.

12. Read Matthew 23:23-28

A. What were the scribes and Pharisees neglecting? (23)

B. How does Jesus describe what they were really like? (24,25)

Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites because they looked righteous on the outside, but they were full of selfishness.

Abraham Lincoln once said, “You may fool all the people some of the time, you can even fool some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time.”

We could add, you can fool God none of the time, you can fool yourself much of the time, and rationalization is the art of fooling yourself.

Fooling ourselves is much easier than we think, for “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” Jeremiah 17:9. Maybe that is why we think we can get away with fooling God or others.

When we stop feeding upon “deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” and choose to feed upon the gospel, “the pure milk of the word,” we will begin to grow. For it will provide the emotional and spiritual security we need in order to grow into maturity.

13. Read Hebrews 5:12-14

A. What are babies unskilled in? (13)

B. What are the mature able to discern? (14)

Babies are “unskilled in the word of righteousness.” Before a person understands the gospel, the focus is often on what is the least I can do in order to be accepted by God. After a person experiences the grace of God, the focus is on what is the most I can do to serve and honor God.

Building on the solid foundation of the gospel, growing Christians will study the Bible to seek a fuller knowledge of truth. The “solid food” will enable them to understand God’s will for their lives (Romans 12:2) and help them to discern the difference between good and evil.

14. What does the grace of God teach us? Titus 2:11-14

The grace of God has appeared to all. Jesus took the initiative to save the world from the wages of sin and redeem everyone from the curse of the law. His unconditional love draws us to Himself and teaches us to deny ourselves and serve others for the glory of God. Our love for Jesus will lead us to avoid anything that would draw us away from Him. Having the assurance of salvation, we will look forward to Jesus' return.

RUNNING THE RACE WITH JESUS

15. Hebrews 12:1,2 compares the Christian life to running a race.

A. What are we encouraged to lay aside as we run the race? (1)

B. How are we encouraged to run the race? (1)

C. What is the secret to running the race? (2)

D. What enabled Jesus to endure the cross? (2)

We are encouraged to lay aside anything that might hinder us from keeping our eyes on Jesus and following His will. Even good things can weigh us down and hold us back from doing His will. We are to forsake any known sin and remove anything that easily tempts us into sin.

We are called to run with endurance. The Greek word is *hupomone*, which means to abide under. In John 16:33, Jesus told His disciples, "In Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." In the midst of tribulation, it would be easy for people to give up or cave into the pressure.

Our focus instead is to be on Jesus. As we behold His sacrificial love for the human race, we are reminded that He alone is the One worth living for and even dying for. Our confidence in Jesus will grow as we learn He is faithful and trustworthy in all He says and does. He will lead us to be so settled into the truth of His love and plan of salvation that nothing will be able to turn us away from Him (Revelation 12:11).

It is easy to compare the Christian life to running a marathon. Finishing a 26.2 mile race takes focus, preparation, training, and discipline. If a person chooses to run a marathon, they will need to:

- A. Spend many hours jogging to get their body in shape, laying aside many other activities, even good ones, in order to have the time.
- B. Lay aside food that is high in fat and sugar and low in fiber.
- C. Eat more fruit, vegetables, legumes and whole grains. These provide the best nutrition for strength and endurance.
- D. Drink plenty of water.

The person who has chosen to run a marathon will be willing to make these lifestyle changes in order to accomplish the goal. In the same way, Christians are called to lay aside anything that would distract them from Jesus and keep them from fulfilling the mission He has given them.

When running a marathon, the goal is clearly defined: 26.2 miles. In the race of life, the goal is Jesus! “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. . .” The Christian race is not about trying to get to heaven, but about knowing God and experiencing a living relationship with Him. Jesus prayed, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” John 17:3. In other words, those who are abiding with Jesus and letting Him abide in them are experiencing a taste of eternal life with God (John 15:4,5; 5:24).

Paul prayed that we might be “rooted and grounded in love;” that we might “know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” so that we will want to be “filled with all the fullness of God” Ephesians 3:17-19. Learning to trust Jesus in every situation is the most important lesson we can learn in life. The song, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” says it well:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.
Look full in His wonderful face.
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

16. Read Matthew 11:28-30

A. In this passage, who does Jesus invite to come to Him? (28)

B. What will we experience when we come to Jesus? (28b,29b)

C. What two things does He invite us to do? (29)

a. _____ b. _____

D. How does Jesus describe Himself? (29)

E. How does He describe the yoke and burden He gives us? (30)

Jesus invites everyone to come just as we are, with all the heavy burdens that we carry. Sin is the heaviest burden that we bear. It comes with guilt, shame, and many painful consequences, like broken relationships, insecurity, emptiness, and hopelessness.

Since Jesus has already carried our iniquities to the cross (Isaiah 53:6), He invites us to give our sin and other burdens to Him. He will take the heavy load from our shoulders and give us rest and peace. He promises “rest for our souls,” rather than a life of ease.

Jesus invites us to take His yoke upon us. The yoke He refers to is a wooden bar or frame that joined two animals so they could work together in pulling a wagon or plow. When we take His yoke, we are working with Jesus. He is providing the love, wisdom, and strength we need to carry out the mission He has for us.

Jesus also invites us to learn of Him and from Him. (The Greek can be translated both ways.) The more we get to know Him, the more we love Him and enjoy working with Him. He even describes His yoke as easy and light when we work together with Him.

A PARABLE - THE HARD WORKING FARMER

Early one morning a farmer got up to work. He had a load of hay on a trailer that he wanted to put into the barn. Knowing he would need lots of energy, he had a good breakfast. Saying good-bye to his wife, he went out to begin his work.

Putting his hands on the back of the trailer, he began to push with all of his might. He strained and grunted. Pretty soon sweat began pouring down his face. This was indeed hard work. After awhile he looked to see if he had made any progress. The wheels hadn't moved an inch. This was going to be harder than he thought.

Again he began to push as hard as he could. After several hours, his energy was almost spent. While he hadn't gotten anywhere, he had certainly worked hard. Needing more energy, he went back into the house for lunch. The rest was also helpful.

In the afternoon he again tried to move the heavy load. After awhile, the neighbor saw his hopeless struggle and decided to offer some help.

“Would you like to hook your trailer up to my tractor?”

“That would be wonderful!” the struggling farmer replied. When the trailer was connected, the struggling farmer put the tractor in gear, increased the throttle and the trailer moved forward effortlessly.

FINDING JOY IN SERVING OTHERS

Life with Jesus is like trying to move a full trailer with a tractor. God provides the power, we make the choice. He invites us to partner with Him in ministry (Isaiah 40:28-31; Matthew 11:28-30).

We will find meaning and fulfillment in life when we:

- Rest in Jesus' love and salvation.
- Serve others out of love and not think we have to change them.

- Learn to wait upon God, trusting in His promises and providence.
- Serve in an area that God has given us a passion for.
- Serve in an area that is consistent with our personality & maturity.
- Maintain a spirit of cooperation with others in the body of Christ.
- Maintain balance in life in our health and relationships.

We will experience true joy as God uses us to be a blessing to others. His yoke will be easy and light when we are connected with Him and know that our service is making a difference for eternity.

A THOUSAND WAYS TO PROVIDE

“Love for God, zeal for His glory, and love for fallen humanity, brought Jesus to earth to suffer and to die. This was the controlling power of His life. This principle He bids us adopt.”

“There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world's standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. In order to gratify ambition and worldly desires, they wound the conscience, and bring upon themselves an additional burden of remorse.”

“The continual worry is wearing out the life forces. Our Lord desires them to lay aside this yoke of bondage. He invites them to accept His yoke; He says, 'My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' He bids them seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and His promise is that all things needful to them for this life shall be added.”

“Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet.”

“Learn of Me,’ says Jesus; ‘for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest.’ We are to enter the school of Christ, to learn from Him meekness and lowliness. Redemption is that process by which the soul is trained for heaven. This training means a knowledge of Christ. It means emancipation from ideas, habits, and practices that have been gained in the school of the prince of darkness. The soul must be delivered from all that is opposed to loyalty to God. . . .”

“It is the love of self that brings unrest. When we are born from above, the same mind will be in us that was in Jesus, the mind that led Him to humble Himself that we might be saved. Then we shall not be seeking the highest place. We shall desire to sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn of Him. We shall understand that the value of our work does not consist in making a show and noise in the world, and in being active and zealous in our own strength”

“The yoke is placed upon the oxen to aid them in drawing the load, to lighten the burden. So with the yoke of Christ. When our will is swallowed up in the will of God, and we use His gifts to bless others, we shall find life's burden light.” *The Desire of Ages*, 330, 331.

OBEDIENCE FROM THE HEART

“All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.” *The Desire of Ages*, 667, 668.

THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM TO GROW

BY CLINTON MEHARRY, @ 2004,2015

When Jesus came to live on earth
To show us how to love;
He taught us there's a better way-
To live for God above.

He loves us freely as we are,
But wants us all to know,
There's so much more
 He's planned for us,
There's always room to grow.

Be wise enough to realize
You still have much to learn;
Mature enough to understand,
Respect and trust are earned.

Prayerful enough to follow truth
In a world of sin and fraud;
Humble enough to recognize,
Your constant need for God.

Careful enough to guard the heart
And thoughts that fill the mind,
Keeping what is pure and true,
And also good and kind.

Thoughtful enough to appreciate
All that the Lord has done;
Thankful enough to share His love
With each and everyone.

Caring enough to listen
to understand each other;
Seeing everyone, "in Christ,"
As your sister or your brother.

Treating others in the way
You would want them
 treating you;
Loving one another
Just as Jesus has loved you.

Loving enough to look beyond
Their faults and see their need;
Secure enough to give what's best
And not give in to greed.

Content enough with who you are
And what the Lord can do
To bless the ones around you
With the gifts He's given you.

Joyful enough so others will
Enjoy you being near;
Trusting enough in Jesus,
So His love may cast out fear.

Be patient with your family,
Yourself and others too;
Accept and give forgiveness,
For God has forgiven you.

17 - CELEBRATING THE NEW COVENANT

From the very beginning, God has provided tangible ways for us to express our faith in Him or to choose to disobey. His government of love will always uphold our freedom of choice. While God is able to discern “the thoughts and intents of the heart” Hebrews 4:12, everyone else is not. To help others know He is being fair and just, He will point to tangible expressions of faith and the fruit of the Holy Spirit to reveal what is in our hearts (Matthew 7:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10) .

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil gave Adam and Eve a tangible way to express their faith in God or choose to learn about evil (Genesis 2:17). When they ate from the tree, everyone in the universe knew what choice they had made and that the wages of sin is death.

After they sinned, the plan of salvation went into effect immediately, for Jesus was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” Rev. 13:8. Jesus promised to redeem the human race through His death on the cross so the human race could continue to live and every person would be free to choose life or death for themselves.

1. What does Genesis 3:21 say that lets us know an animal died the same day that Adam and Eve chose to learn about evil?

The fig leaf clothes Adam and Eve had made were very inadequate. God “made tunics of skin, and clothed them.” The garments of skin were a constant reminder that the wages of sin was death. It also reminded them that they were alive because Jesus promised to be their Savior.

2. What offering did Cain give? Genesis 4:2,3

3. What offering did Abel give? Genesis 4:4

As Cain and Abel were growing up, they would have been able to see the “cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” Gen. 3:24.

Adam and Eve would have shared with their children the story of their own sin and God’s wonderful promise to save the world from sin.

Abel believed the promise and offered the firstborn of his sheep as a tangible way to express faith in the coming Savior, repentance for his sin, and appreciation for God’s forgiveness. When Cain brought “an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord,” he was expressing his choice to rebel against God and reject the plan of salvation.

4. How did God respond to their offerings? Genesis 4:4-7

God respected Abel’s offering, but not Cain’s. God appealed to Cain to reconsider and warned him of the danger of continuing down the path he was headed. Unfortunately, Cain held onto his bitterness and rebellion. This spirit led him to kill his brother and lie to God (Genesis 4:8,9).

Outward actions always flow from our thoughts. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” Matthew 12:34. Therefore it is vital that we resolve unhealthy thoughts and attitudes as soon as possible through confession, repentance, receiving forgiveness and forgiving others.

SAVED FOR A MISSION

5. What yearly feast did Jesus and His disciples celebrate together just before Jesus died on the cross? Matthew 26:17-20

6. What event was the Passover a celebration of? Exodus 12:21-24

7. How did this help parents teach their children about God's saving them from Egypt? Exodus 12:25-28

The Israelites were instructed to celebrate the Passover as a reminder that God had delivered them from slavery and established them as a nation. This yearly event was also a tangible way for them to express their faith in the Savior to come. When children asked why they were doing this, parents were able to share the meaning behind the symbols.

8. What mission did God have for Israel? Exodus 19:5,6

They were to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” As priests, they were to represent God to the people and bring people to God. While they were a “special treasure” to God, they were to remember that God said, “all the earth is mine.” God’s plan of salvation was to include everyone, not just the nation of Israel (John 3:16,17).

Unfortunately, Israel repeatedly failed to understand and carry out their mission. They often turned away from God and tried to be like the nations around them and worship their gods (See Jeremiah 2:11-13, 28).

Because of their persistent rebellion, God allowed Assyria and Babylon to conquer them and take them captive. They learned their lesson! After returning from their captivity in Babylon, the Jews never went back to worshipping other gods.

However, out of a desire to keep themselves pure, the Jews went to the other extreme. They began to see themselves as better than everyone else and believed that Gentiles were “unclean” Acts 10:28. Through misunderstanding the Scriptures, they thought their destiny was to rule the world. They believed the Messiah would conquer the Romans and set up His kingdom on earth.

This was so ingrained in the popular teaching that Jesus had a hard time helping people understand He was coming to save the world from sin. Even the disciples dreamed about positions of power they might occupy when Jesus set up His earthly kingdom. “A dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest” Luke 9:46.

The mother of James and John asked Jesus, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom” Matthew 20:21. This caused the other disciples to be “greatly displeased with the two brothers” Matthew 20:24.

A SYMBOL OF TRUE GREATNESS

9. How did Jesus describe true greatness? Matthew 20:25-28

10. What attitude did the disciples have when they celebrated the last Passover with Jesus? Luke 22:23, 24

The spirit of pride and jealousy continued to manifest itself among the disciples. Jesus again said the greatest is “he who serves” Luke 22:26.

11. What did Jesus do that evening to help the disciples understand the true nature of the kingdom of God? John 13:3-11

It was very difficult for the disciples to see Jesus fulfilling the role of the servant. Peter exclaimed, “‘You shall never wash my feet!’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’”

Jesus knew that the spirit of selfishness, pride and jealousy was deeply rooted in the sinful nature of the human race. As the Savior of the world, He came “to forgive us our sins *and* to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” 1 John 1:9. If we don’t allow Him to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, we are saying we don’t want a Savior from sin.

12. What did Jesus say we should do for each other? John 13:12-17

Jesus instructed the disciples to follow His example and “wash one another's feet.” In the time of Jesus, washing feet was a necessity. People wore sandals without stockings and the streets were dirty. While the physical need for washing one another's feet is not as great today, the spiritual need for cleansing is vital. Jesus asked us to wash each other's feet as a tangible reminder that:

- We need to be cleansed from all unrighteousness.
- Jesus is the One who cleanses us from all unrighteousness.
- We are representatives of Jesus to serve and help one another.

This tangible expression of faith is a humbling experience. That is why Jesus asked us to do it. He knew how easy it is for us to fall back into the spirit of pride, greed, and jealousy.

CELEBRATING THE NEW COVENANT

13. How is Christ referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:7 and 1 Peter 1:19?

Jesus is the Passover Lamb. The Passover lamb was to “be without blemish” Exodus 12:5. It represented “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” 1 Peter 1:19. In order for Jesus to be our Savior, He had to live without sin Himself. Fortunately, He “committed no sin; nor was deceit found in His mouth” 1 Peter 2:22.

14. What did the unleavened bread represent? 1 Corinthians 5:7,8

The Passover was the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, which lasted for 7 days. Throughout the week, they were not to eat anything with leaven. Paul compares the leaven to malice and wickedness. As Christians, He encourages us to live with sincerity and truth.

15. What meaning did Jesus give to the bread and juice when He celebrated the Passover just before he died? Matthew 26:26-29

A. Unleavened Bread “This is My _____.”

B. Fruit of the Vine “This is My _____ of the new covenant.”

Two days earlier Jesus had announced that He would be crucified on Passover (Matthew 26:2). Jesus knew He was “the Lamb of God” who would take “away the sin of the world!” John 1:29. After His death, animals would no longer need to be offered as a sacrifice. This was communicated in a very dramatic way. As soon as Jesus died, “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” Matthew 27:51.

In place of the Passover lamb, Jesus said the unleavened bread and “fruit of the vine” would represent His death, reminding everyone that we do have a Savior from sin. Before His death, animal sacrifices were a tangible expression of faith in the gospel. After Jesus died, offering them was an expression of unbelief and rejection. Since they were no longer necessary, they were referred to as part of the “old covenant.”

16. How long are we to use the bread and juice as symbols to remind us of what Jesus did for us? 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Paul was not with Jesus at the last Passover meal. However, he “received from the Lord” a message to pass onto the church. Whenever we eat the unleavened bread and drink the grape juice, we are remembering what Jesus did for us and also proclaiming His “death till He comes.” In other words, until Jesus returns, we are to celebrate His amazing grace by receiving these symbols as an expression of faith.

17. How should we prepare to receive these symbols? 1 Cor. 11:27-29

We are to honestly and prayerfully examine ourselves, rather than focusing on the faults of others. We need to ask ourselves:

- Is there any sin that I have refused to confess and repent of?
- Is there anything I need to make right with another person?
- Is there anyone I need to forgive?

If we answer yes, we need to take the appropriate steps to seek reconciliation and healing. If we refuse to do this, we will remain “sick and weak.” We will not experience the healing and growth that we need.

Some feel they are not worthy to receive communion. They know they have failed God and do not feel good enough. The truth is, the unleavened bread and grape juice are a reminder that Jesus died for us even when we were “without strength,” “ungodly,” “sinners,” “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” Romans 5:6-8; Rev. 3:17.

When we realize our helplessness, acknowledge our sinfulness, and receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord, then the bread and juice become meaningful symbols. Through receiving them, we are expressing that:

- Jesus died for our sins, as well as for the sins of the world.
- We have chosen to receive Him as our Savior and Lord.
- We believe He will return so we may spend eternity with Him.

Another part of the preparation includes parents explaining the meaning of the symbols to their children, just as the Israelites were instructed to do when they celebrated Passover (Exodus 12:26; 13:14-16).

18. What are we guilty of if we receive the bread and the juice in an “unworthy manner”? 1 Corinthians 11:27

If we receive the bread and juice without surrendering our lives to Jesus, we are simply going through the motions. We are receiving the bread and juice in an “unworthy manner.” We are pretending to be a follower of Jesus, but not wanting Him as our Savior and Lord.

This is the attitude the Jews had. When Jesus described them as sinners in need of a Savior and claimed to be the God who could save them, they wanted to kill Him (John 8:31-59). They eventually “cried out, ‘Away with him, away with him! Crucify him!’ Pilate said unto them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar’” John 19:15.

If we refuse to have Jesus reign over us, we will eventually want Him dead also. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters” Matthew 6:24.

THE PROMISES OF THE NEW COVENANT

19. What promises are included in the new covenant? Heb. 8:10-12

- A. “I will put My _____ in their minds, and write it on their _____.”
- B. “I will be their _____, and they shall be My _____.”
- C. “None of them shall _____ his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me.”
- D. “I will be _____ to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will _____ no more.”

The gospel is all about what God promises to do for us, not what we promise to do for Him. He will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He will write His law of love on our hearts and minds so that we enjoy doing His will and have a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

20. Personal thought questions to respond to. Do I want God to:

- _____ Transform me on the inside so that I delight in doing His will?
- _____ Be my God, to guide, protect, provide for, and work through me?
- _____ Give me eternal life with Him in a place where everyone is loving and trustworthy and enjoys being with God?
- _____ Forgive my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness?

Before we are born of the Spirit, we see the Ten Commandments as prohibitions: “You shall not....” Our sinful nature doesn’t like to be told what to do. We like the freedom to live as we please. Of course, the consequences of sin will eventually come. Self-centered living will always lead to pain, suffering, and broken relationships. The good news is that God will always be there to save us from ourselves and our sin when we cry out for help (See Psalm 107).

When we confess and repent of our sin and receive God’s forgiveness, we will experience reconciliation with Him. He will then cleanse us from all unrighteousness and transform us on the inside by the renewing of our minds. The truth will set us free so that we will enjoy doing God’s will. After we are born of the Spirit, the Ten Commandments become Ten Promises. They reveal what God is going to do in the lives of all who trust Him. The Hebrew can be translated, “You will not....”

In essence, God is saying, “Out of a motive of love, you will not want to steal, kill, lie, or commit adultery, for you will not want to hurt anyone. You will honor and respect the authority and wisdom of your parents, for you will not have a spirit of rebellion in your heart.”

“You will not worship anyone or anything else, for you will learn that I am the kind of God that your heart longs for: loving, merciful, gracious, patient, faithful, just, and full of truth. You will not covet what others have, for you will be content with what I provide for you. You will find peace, joy, and fulfillment as you walk in My plan for your life.”

“When you love Me, you will want to represent Me correctly to others, rather than take My name in vain. You will also look forward to the times we have to be together. The Sabbath will be very special for this purpose, for I have given you the freedom to rest from all your daily work. As you gather with other believers to celebrate My love for you, I will bless you in order that you may be a blessing to others. Every Sabbath I want you to remember that I created you and I am the One who sanctifies you. This truth will enable you to live throughout the week with peace, security, and purpose in life.”

21. What message was preached to Israel? Hebrews 4:1,2

The gospel is the same for us as it was for them. Some have believed that before the cross, people were saved by “works” and after the cross people were saved by “grace.” The Bible is clear that Jesus is the Savior for the whole human race. “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12.

The gospel hasn’t changed, but the symbols ordained by God to express faith in the gospel have. The laws related to the sacrificial system are no longer necessary, but the moral law of love that God promises to write on our hearts remains unchanged.

22. The promises of the New Covenant are similar to the promises God made to Israel. He promised to:

- A. Make them “a kingdom of _____ and a _____ nation” Exodus 19:6.
- B. Be their God: “I am the Lord _____ God” Exodus 20:2.
- C. Forgive their “iniquity and transgressions and _____” Exodus 34:6,7
- D. “God will circumcise your heart . . . to _____ the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” Deuteronomy 30:6.

23. How did Israel respond to God’s covenant and promises?

- A. “All that the Lord has spoken _____” Exodus 19:8.
- B. “My covenant which _____” Jeremiah 31:32.
- C. Jesus is the “Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better _____. For if that first covenant had been _____, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding _____, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...’” Hebrews 8:6-9

Exodus 19:5 says, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant. . .” The word translated “obey” means to “listen intelligently.” The word translated “keep” means “to guard, protect.” (Strong’s Conc.)

God was not asking them to make promises to obey. He was asking them to listen carefully to what His plan was so that they would want to be His people and share in His mission. However, instead of trusting in God, they promised, “All that the Lord has spoken *WE* will do.” While it sounds wonderful, they didn’t realize how helpless and sinful they were.

24. What was the result of not trusting God? Hebrews 3:12-19

- A. They had an evil heart of _____. 12
- B. They were hardened through the _____ of sin. 13
- C. They hardened their _____. 15
- D. They _____, even though they heard God’s voice. 16
- E. They did not _____ God. 18
- F. They could not enter Canaan because of their _____. 19

As a result of their unbelief, Israel rebelled, hardened their hearts and disobeyed God. Their lack of faith and their fear of the giants led them to refuse to follow God into the Promised Land (Numbers 13:31-14:4).

LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF ISRAEL

25. How can the stories of Israel help us today? 1 Cor. 10:5,6,11,12

We can learn from their failures and also from those who had great faith (See Hebrews 11). Our sinful nature is the same as theirs. Every day we are faced with temptation and trials. Paul warns us to take heed. If we ever think that we are so strong that we don’t have to watch and pray, we will fall (For example, see Matthew 26:41).

26. What does God promise to do for us when we are tempted? 1 Corinthians 10:13

When we are tempted to compromise, rationalize, and disobey God in order to get ourselves out of a trial, we are encouraged to trust God's plan of escape instead. When we focus on God's promises, power, and plan for our lives, we will begin to see life from His perspective, rather than from our limited viewpoint. God is bigger than our circumstances. He knows what He is doing. We can trust Him with our lives.

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” 2 Corinthians 4:17,18. (2 Kings 6:8-23 illustrates this idea.)

27. What is God wanting us to experience when we receive the bread and juice? 1 Corinthians 10:16,17,21

When we eat the bread and drink the juice, we are expressing our choice to be united with Jesus. We accept His death as our death, His life as our life and invite Him to live within us. Jesus takes our invitation seriously and becomes one with us (John 14:23; Revelation 3:20). It is also a reminder that we are joined to each other, for we are “one body.”

May Jesus prayer for unity in John 17 be fulfilled in us as we:

- Rest in His grace so we may experience peace & security in Christ.
- Experience His unconditional love that we may freely love others;
- Grow into maturity that His name may be glorified;
- Proclaim the everlasting gospel so others may be drawn to Him.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS FOR QUESTIONS

1 In The Beginning: The Good News About The Bad News

17

1. He wanted to deceive Eve.
2. God made two statements. Satan took one phrase from each and turned it into a question. “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat from every tree of the garden?’”
3. Satan said “You will not die.” You don’t need to obey God. The consequences God said would happen, will not happen.
4. They should know about evil. He implied they should not obey God.
5. Realizing they were naked, they tried to cloth themselves with fig leaves and then tried to hide when God came.
6. God asked, “Where are you?” God respects our freedom. He wanted to give them an opportunity to be honest and confess what they did.
7. Adam: He blamed God and Eve, but acknowledged what he did. The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit and I ate.
Eve: She tried to justify herself by saying she was deceived, but then acknowledged what she did. The serpent deceived me, and I ate.
8. The serpent would crawl on its belly.
9. Satan is called “that serpent of old” in Revelation 12:9.
10. Satan’s head would be bruised. He would be destroyed. Jesus’ heel would be bruised. He would be hurt, but not destroyed.
11. Enmity or hatred
12. A. Women would bring forth children with pain and sorrow.
B. She would desire to belong to her husband. He would rule over her.
13. Men would need to work in order to eat, for the ground would grow thorns and thistles rather than food. They would die and return to dust.
14. A. one; B. one, offense, condemnation; C. disobedience, made sinners; D. in me; flesh nothing good; law, evil, present
15. We were brought forth in iniquity. We go astray from birth.
16. We all have gone astray and turned to our own way – selfishness.
17. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

18. Jesus described Laodicea as “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.” They described themselves as rich, increased with goods and not needing anything. Jesus is right. He is the true Witness.
19. Nothing
20. Bad trees produce bad fruit. Good trees produce good fruit. The Bible says there is nothing good in us, so we can only be described as bad trees.
21. 1. Love 2. Joy 3. Peace 4. Longsuffering 5. Kindness 6. Goodness
7. Faithfulness 8. Gentleness 9. Self-control
22. A. No one is good but God. B. Jesus refers to us as evil, even though we can give good gifts to our children.
23. Verse 6: without strength, ungodly; verse 8: sinners; verse 10: enemies
24. Jesus died for us, loved us, justified us, and reconciled us to God.
25. God made clothes from the skin of animals that died that day. The animals represented Jesus who would die for the sin of the world.
26. Thought questions:

2 The Love Of God

33

1. What did Paul pray that we might experience?
 - A. That Christ might dwell in my heart;
 - B. That I might be rooted and grounded in love;
 - C. That I might understand how wide, long, high, and deep is God’s love;
 - D. That I might be filled with all the fullness of God.
2. God is love
3. A. love; B. love; C. love
4. Thought questions
5. He wrote on the ground. Then He said, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”
6. Thought question
7. Condemn; world; saved
8. Luke 7:36-50
 - A. washed his feet with her tears; kissed his feet; anointed his feet with fragrant oil.

B. If this man were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman is touching him.

C. A person owed 500 denarii and another owed 50. The person who was owed the money forgave them both. Jesus asked, which one loved him more?

D. Those who are forgiven much, love much. Those who are forgiven little, love little.

9. Enemies; hate; curse; pray; spitefully; Give; asks; want; do; do
10. Loving those who love us; Doing good to those who do good to us. Lending only to those we know will pay us back.
11. The world loves its own.
12. A. Be able to speak with the tongues of men and angels; B. Have a faith that can work miracles; C. Give all I have to the poor or become a martyr
13. He makes the sun shine and the rain fall on the just and unjust.
14. We are to love others as Jesus has loved us.
15. Revelation 2:1-5
 - A. They would not tolerate evil; they were able to test and discern who was a false prophet; they were persevering in their labor for Jesus without becoming weary.
 - B. They had left their first love, working for God out of a selfish motive.
 - C. Their light would go out, their candlestick would be removed.
16. Matthew 24:12-14
 - A. The love of many would grow cold.
 - B. Lawlessness leads to love growing cold.
 - C. This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness or testimony to all nations.

3 Motivated By Fear Or Love

47

1. 2 Timothy 1:7
 - A. Fear; B. Power, Love, Sound Mind
2. Mark 4:35-41
 - A. They thought they were going to die.
 - B. Don't you care that we are perishing?

- C. Thought Question can lead to various answers. One might be they wanted Him to help bail water.
- D. Jesus commanded the storm to stop; He asked, “Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?”
3. Mark 5:1-20
- A. An uncontrolled demon possessed man met Jesus.
- B. Come out of the man;
- C. The Swine ran into the sea and drowned.
- D. Sitting and clothed and in his right mind.
- E. They began pleading with Him to leave.
- F. He proclaimed in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him.
4. They forsook Him the fountain of living water and dug out cisterns that could hold no water.
5. Fear (Greek word is phobos)
6. Thought question
7. Thought question
8. Thought question
9. A. beginning, knowledge, wisdom;
B. hated knowledge, choose, fear;
C. hate evil;
D. wisdom;
E. prolongs days, shortened.
10. Fear God rather than men
11. God understands our needs and cares for us, for we are very valuable to Him.
12. Reverence and godly fear
13. Jesus described them as being fearful (deilos). After the storm Mark says they feared (phobeo) exceedingly.
14. What ultimately leads us to repent and to surrender our lives to God?
- A. everlasting, drawn;
B. peace, evil, future, hope;
C. goodness, leads, repentance

15. Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you shall follow me afterward.
16. Lord, I will lay down my life for you.
17. Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.
18. Jesus promised He would not forsake them. He would be going to prepare a place for them so they could be together forever. He also told Peter He would be praying for Him.
19. A. Three times; B. Two times; C. One time
20. Jesus was communicating that Peter would one day be crucified.

4 The Gospel: Finding Security In Christ

63

1. A. Love; B. Love; law
2. Law, faith, does, live
3. Death
4. A. just; B. just; C. establish, law
5. The soul who sins shall die.
6. A. condemnation; B. die
7. A. Justification, life; B. alive
8. The last Adam or the second Man
9. Mankind
10. Judge, one, all, all died
11. God reconciled the world to Himself. He is not counting their transgressions against them.
12. People are urged to be reconciled to God
13. Jesus became sin for us in order that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ.
14. Colossians 1:12-14
 - A. The inheritance of the saints;
 - B. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of Jesus;
 - C. everyone

15. 1 John 5:10,11
 - A. I experience the witness in my life – peace with God and being born again;
 - B. a liar;
 - C. God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son.
16. Jesus came to save the world, not to condemn
17. People are condemned because they love darkness and hate the light.
18. God wants us to live with the assurance that we have eternal life.
19. Instead of living for ourselves, we are free to live for Jesus, the One who died for us and rose again.
20. We are to view people based upon God's perspective. Everyone is equally lost and sinful because of Adam's choice. We all are equally loved and redeemed because of Jesus' choice.
21. In Christ, creation, old, new
22. Rich in Christ
23. Thought question

5 Jesus, The Savior Of The World

79

1. A. The gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes
B. The gospel reveals the righteousness of God.
2. A. All; B. All C. All
3. We all are guilty and cannot justify ourselves
4. The righteousness of God is revealed apart from the law.
5. Jesus' faith
6. God is righteous and just
7. Faith in the gospel excludes all boasting
8. Faith in Jesus upholds God's law.
9. Everyone was saved by grace, for Jesus did this "even when we were dead."
10. A. alive, Christ; B. raised, sit, in Christ Jesus;
11. A. The exceeding riches of God's grace
B. Faith in Jesus enables us to experience the blessings of His salvation.
C. Good works

12. Titus 2:11-14

- A. Brings salvation to all men;
- B. Soberly, righteously and godly as we look forward to Jesus' return.
- C. To redeem us from every lawless deed; and to
To purify for Himself a people who are zealous for good deeds.

6 Jesus, A Complete Savior From Sin

91

- 1. A. Death; wages, death; B. Slave; slave, sin; C. Pain; pain, thorns, thistles
- 2. A. compels, all, all; B. law died, crucified; C. have been sanctified
- 3. A. truth, free; B. Spirit, life, free, sin, death, fulfilled in C. perfected, are being sanctified.
- 4. Those who are being sanctified
- 5. A. incorruptible; B. death, sorrow, crying, pain; C. defiles, lie.
- 6. The weekly Sabbath
- 7. A. Sanctify, completely, will; B. sanctify, word, holy; C. complete; D. keep, stumbling, faultless
- 8. A. Believe, saved; B. confess, forgive; C. repent, converted, blotted, refreshing; D. holy, transformed, renewing, mind.
- 9. Thought Question

7 Our Redeemer: Jesus Gave His Life A Ransom For All

107

- 1. Dominion over all the earth
- 2. Authority over the kingdoms of the world
- 3. A. ruler; B. ruler; C. ruler
- 4. Matthew 12:22-30
 - A. He casts out demons by the power of Beelzebub;
 - B. The kingdom of God has come upon us;
 - C. Satan is the strong man;
 - D. Jesus needed to regain the rightful dominion over the human race so He could free us from Satan's control.
- 5. His own blood – Jesus gave His life for us

6. Those who deny that the Lord bought them will bring on themselves swift destruction.
7. A. Because we have been bought with a price, we belong to God;
B. Living for the glory of God in all we do.
8. A. The power of darkness;
B. The kingdom of the Son – Jesus’ kingdom
9. The curse of the law
10. By becoming a curse for us
11. From under the law
12. Jesus death released us from the fear of death.
13. Sin
14. Jesus
15. We died in Christ the death the law demanded.
16. It frees us to live for God out of love, rather than out of fear or reward. The law doesn’t change, but our motive does.
17. Sitting together in the heavenly places.
18. A. They tried to establish their own righteousness, rather than submit to God’s.
B. Seeking to earn righteousness through their own keeping of the law.
C. Believe and confess that Jesus is their Lord and Savior.

8 Grace Is Greater Than Our Sin

115

1. V. 6-Without strength; V. 6-ungodly; V. 8-sinners; V. 10-enemies
2. V. 9 - Justified by His blood; V. 10 - Reconciled to God
3. Saved from wrath by His life
4. Reconciliation with God
5. A. through one man (Adam); B. because all sinned; C. sin; D. no
6. Adam’s 1 sin brought death. The free gift brought justification after many sins.
7. They will reign in life with Jesus
8. A. V. 18 – all were condemned; V. 19 – Many were made sinners;
B. V. 18 - Justification of life to all men; V. 19 - Many will be made righteous.
C. Adam – past tense; Jesus – future tense

9. The law entered that the offense might abound
10. Grace abounds much more
11. A. death; B. righteousness and eternal life
12. A. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?
B. Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?
13. Romans 6:14, 15, 23 along with Galatians 3:10-13; 4:4,5
A. We have all sinned and the wages of sin is death;
B. Everyone is under grace and not under law;
C. At the cross, Jesus redeemed the human race from the curse of the law.
14. V. 7 – we are free from sin; V. 14 – We are free the dominion of sin
15. We are dead to sin and alive to God.
16. V. 12 – We don't have to let sin reign over us or control us;
V. 13 – To present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness;
V. 16 – To present ourselves as slaves of obedience & righteousness;
17. under the law
18. A. Serve one another with love;
D. Love and the fruit of the Spirit is fulfilling the law;
E. Take up our cross daily and follow Jesus.

9 The Supreme Sacrifice Of Christ

127

1. The attitude or mind of Christ
2. A. Equal with God;
B. In the beginning Jesus was with God and was God. Through Jesus, all things were created.
3. A. reputation; B. bondservant; C. likeness of men; D. death; E. death, cross
4. A. from, comeliness, beauty; B. nothing, myself, nothing; C. rich, poor, poverty
5. A. served, serve, give; B. One, serves; C. My, will, will, Him
6. A. likeness, sinful flesh, condemned; B. made; C. redeem
7. A. sanctifies, sanctified, one; B. destroy, devil, release, fear, bondage;
C. merciful, aid, tempted

8. A. satisfied; B. world, Him, dies, alone, dies; C. joy, endured, shame
9. A. redeemed, curse, law, curse, tree; B. death, hang, tree, hanged, cursed; C. killed, hanged, trees,
10. They wanted Jesus to be crucified
11. They were to be stoned
12. If God allowed Jesus to be crucified, that would prove Jesus was not the Messiah.
13. A. He saved others; Himself he cannot save; B. If he is the King of Israel, let Him come down from the cross and we will believe Him. C. He trusted God; Let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him.
14. Darkness covered the land for 3 hours.
15. My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
16. A. finished; B. hands, commit
17. A. The veil in the temple torn in two from top to bottom;
B. An earthquake opened graves and many of the saints were raised
C. After Jesus was resurrected, the resurrected saints appeared to many.
18. He would draw all people to Himself.
19. Behold or contemplate the great love that God has for us. In the light of Jesus laying down His life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for others.
20. Thought question

10 Jesus Receives Sinners: The Gospel According To His Enemies

141

1. Luke 5:27-32
 - A. Levi, a tax collector, (Matthew 9:9 refers to him as Matthew.)
 - B. Levi left all and followed Jesus.
 - C. He wanted his friends to meet Jesus and follow Him also.
 - D. Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?
 - E. The sick need a physician. I have come to call the sinners to repentance.
 - F. Personal response
 - G. The goodness of God leads us to repentance

2. Luke 19:1-10
 - A. Jesus took the initiative to stay at Zacchaeus' house
 - B. He received Jesus joyfully
 - C. Jesus went to be the guest at the house of a sinner
 - D. Zacchaeus said he would give half his goods to the poor and repay people fourfold if he cheated them. (This shows he was familiar with the law in Numbers 5:6,7. It also shows how Jesus' graciousness in accepting him led him to repentance.)
 - E. The Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost.
 - F, G, H - Personal response
3. Receives sinners, eats
4. A. Multiple choice, Personal response

(Author suggests "All of the above.")

The focus of heaven is reaching out to this world.

People who have repented are also seeking to help others know Jesus.

The scribes and Pharisees didn't feel their need to repent. They considered themselves as part of the 99, but in reality they were in need of being "found" by the Good Shepherd.

B. Jesus loves every one of His sheep. No one is left out of His care.

C, D, E - Personal response
5. A, B - Personal response
6. Luke 15:11-32
 - A. Older: obedient and hardworker; Younger: Lazy, unloving, rebellious
 - B. Older: – angry, rebellious, selfish, uncaring; Younger: – repentant, loving
 - C. Older: – loving, pleading; Younger: - patient, loving, forgiving
7. – 12 Personal responses

11 Experiencing The Abundant Life

153

1. Satan – comes to steal, kill and destroy
Jesus - came that we might have abundant life
2. Murderer and a liar

3. How can we discern what is truth and what is a lie?
 - A. Make a choice to embrace God's will when it is revealed.
 - B. Abiding in the Word of God will enable us to know what truth is.
 - C. The Holy Spirit will lead us into truth as we are able to receive it.
 - D. Transformation comes when we replace lies with Bible truth.
4. In the left hand box, follow the diagonal line that begins at the top left. At the bottom of that diagonal line, the line that is just to the right is the same line that is in the box on the left. (There are two lines close together. It is the line on the left.)
5. John 4:4-42
 - A. Jesus needed physical water; He offered living, spiritual water
 - B. She was married 5 times and was living with a man who wasn't her husband.
 - C. Even though Jesus knew she had sinned, He didn't condemn her. She pointed to this as evidence that Jesus may be the Messiah.
 - D. The Savior of the world.
6. The Holy Spirit
7. Thought questions
8. What questions did the rich young ruler ask Jesus?
 - V. 16 – What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?
 - V. 20 – What do I still lack?
9. Thought question (Options: peace, security, love, joy, hope)
10. Ruler (in the synagogue or in the Sanhedrin)
11. Sell what he had, give to the poor, and follow me.
12. Blameless
13. What are the two different ways of relating to the law?
 - A. Newness of the Spirit;
 - B. Oldness of the letter
14. The 10th commandment - You shall not covet.

15. Romans 7:8-12

- A. Paul was alive without the law;
- B. When the commandment came sin revived and he died.

16. Romans 7:13-23

- A. The law of sin;
- B. Paul did what he hated; what he didn't want to do; what was evil
- C. Nothing good dwelt in him; The law of sin within him did the evil.
- D. Wretched man

17. How does Paul summarize his internal conflict? Romans 7:25

- A. The law of God
- B. The law of sin.

18. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

19. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

20. Condemned sin in the flesh

21. The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in them.

22. We bear much fruit and bring glory to God.

12 Living By Faith Or Believing A Lie

167

1. Faith

2. Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.

3. The creation of life reveals that God exists.

4. Hebrews 11:5,6

- A. Without a clear understanding of God we won't want to come to God
- B. God rewards the ones who diligently seek Him

5. What do we receive when we seek God?

- A. We find God when we seek Him with all our hearts.
- B. God wants to live in us and make our lives His home.
- C. The Holy Spirit will be given to all who ask for Him to come.

6. Hebrew 11:13-16

- A. Strangers and pilgrims on earth; The world of sin was not their home
- B. They desire a homeland that is better – a heavenly home
- C. God is not ashamed to be called their God

7. Belief and Action

Heb 11	People	Belief	Choices/Action
4	Abel Gen. 3:21-4:6	He needed a Savior from sin. He trusted in God's plan to come into the world to save the human race.	Abel sacrificed a sheep that represented the Savior who would die for the sin of the world.
7	Noah Genesis 6-9	God would destroy the world with a flood.	Built an ark as God instructed.
8-10	Abraham Gen. 12:1-4	God called him to leave home to go to an unknown place. He would be the father of a great nation. In him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.	Abraham left his home, not knowing where he was going.
17-19	Abraham Gen. 22; 17:19; 21:12	God asked him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. He believed God would raise him up for God had said earlier that through Isaac he would be the father of a great nation.	Offered Isaac on the altar. When he made a commitment to sacrifice him, God stopped him and provided a ram.
24-29	Moses Exodus 2:1-22; Acts 7:20-36	Believed God's plan to free Israel from slavery to Egypt.	Refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; chose to suffer with the people of God and lead Israel out of Egypt.

8. A. No

B. No

9. Rebellion

10. Those who suppress the truth

11. Think of God as selfish like themselves or even worse, someone who acts like an animal, out of instincts and passions, rather than out of reason.
12. The creature, rather than the Creator
13. Retain God in their minds
14. How is the wrath of God revealed?
 - A. Gave them up
 - B. Gave them up
 - C. Gave, debased, fitting
15. They will practice and approve of evil; call evil good and good evil
16. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 compared with 2 Timothy 4:3,4
 - A. Those who perish will refuse to receive a love of the truth
 - B. Believe a lie
 - C. They have pleasure in unrighteousness
17. How do people overcome Satan's lies?
 - A. The blood of the Lamb
 - B. The word of their testimony
 - C. They love not their lives to the death

13 Increase Our Faith . . . Thank You For The Trials

183

1. Jesus said to forgive a person repeatedly if they repent repeatedly.
2. Faith the size of a mustard seed can move a mulberry tree. In other words the size of your faith is not as important as who your faith is in.
3. A. Personal Response
 - B. God promises that when we give to others, He will continue to give to us so that we may have more to give and also have what we need.
4. Matthew 17:14-21
 - A. Heal the boy that was an epileptic.
 - B. Faithless; perverse
 - C. Unbelief; prayer; fasting
 - D. A mountain

5. Jesus took 3 disciples up a mountain where He was transfigured and met with Elijah and Moses. The other disciples stayed behind.
6. 1 Peter 1:6-9
 - A. Grief
 - B. Faith that is genuine
 - C. By fire
 - D. By fiery trials
 - E. Rejoice with joy inexpressible
7. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
 - A. To keep him humbly relying upon God
 - B. My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.
 - C. He took pleasure in his infirmities knowing they would help him rely upon God, rather than in his own strength.
8. 1 Corinthians 10:13
 - A. The temptations we face are similar to what others have faced.
 - B. God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able.
 - C. God will provide a way of escape that we may be able to bear it.
9. 2 Corinthians 1:8-10
 - A. He felt the trial was beyond what he was able to handle.
 - B. The only escape plan he could see was the resurrection.
10. James 1:2-4
 - A. Count it joy (Choose to rejoice)
 - B. Patience (as we learn to trust God, waiting upon His plan of escape).
 - C. They will grow into maturity, becoming perfect and complete in loving.
11. James 1:5-8
 - A. Wisdom
 - B. When we have failed, it is easy to think we don't deserve help from God. We are assured of help when we honestly seek Him.
 - C. A wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; double-minded; unstable in all our ways

12. Philippians 4:6,7

A. Make our requests known to God

B. Thanking God expresses our confidence that God has heard and will answer in the time and way that He sees is best.

C. Inner peace that cannot be explained.

13. When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?

14. Those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.

15. What is the key to overcoming trials and temptations?

A. Victory, overcome, faith

B. Fight, faith

14 Born Again: Spiritually Alive

197

1. Ruler of the Jews; teacher of Israel

2. At night

3. We must be born again or more accurately, born from above.

4. Believe in Jesus and receive Him as our Savior and Lord

5. Physical birth

6. In John 3:5-8, how did Jesus clarify his message to Nicodemus?

A. Being born of water

B. Flesh; Spirit

7. Those who are sick; those who are sinners

8. Bear fruits worthy of repentance; or consistent with repentance

9. How can these things be?

10. As the serpent was lifted up on a pole, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.

11. When we are born of the Spirit, God gives us a new heart.

12. The right to be called children of God.

13. A. Life; abundantly

B. No blanks

C. Do not worry

D. Hundredfold;

14. What may be the result of following Jesus?
 - A. Kill the body
 - B. Sword
 - C. Enemies; household
15. What cost is involved in following Jesus?
 - A. Hate; own life; cannot; disciple
 - B. Bear; cross; cannot; disciple
 - C. Forsake all; cannot; disciple
16. Deny himself; save; life; lose; gains
17. Do not repay evil with evil; do good to others; live at peace with others as far as is possible; let God be the judge and bring justice;
18. They wanted the earthly benefits Jesus could give.
19. Many turned their back on Jesus and walked with Him no more.
20. John 16:8-11 – The Holy Spirit convicts of:
 - A. Sin, because they don't believe in Jesus
 - B. Righteousness, because Jesus goes to the Father and we don't see Him anymore.
 - C. Judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.
21. What will the Holy Spirit do for us when we are born again?
 - A. Abide with us forever; living in us
 - B. Teach us and help us remember the truth Jesus taught.
 - C. Lead us into all truth; tell us things to come; glorify Jesus.
22. The Holy Spirit
23. The things of God – His truth, perspective, and promises.
24. The Holy Spirit
25. Personal thoughts
26. Personal thoughts

1. It is a symbol of repentance
2. To fulfill all righteousness
3. Wisdom
4. The will of His Father in heaven
5. What did the Holy Spirit do for Jesus at His baptism?
 - A. Descended upon Him in the form of a Dove.
 - B. Anointed Him for ministry
6. You are My Beloved Son; in You I am well pleased
7. What is the meaning of the symbol of baptism in Romans 6:2-5?
 - A. Death
 - B. Burial
 - C. Resurrection
8. The old man that represents the human race
9. We have been freed or justified from sin
10. Matthew 28:18-20
 - A. All authority in heaven and on earth
 - B. What did Jesus command His followers to do?
 - a. Go and make disciples of all nations
 - b. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - c. Teaching them to observe all that He has commanded us
11. I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world
12. God will make His home with us; we will be one with Him
13. Jesus is like a husband to His church and the Head of the body.
14. How do people become united to the church, the body of Christ?
 - A. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the body
 - B. Through baptism we communicate to others our decision to surrender our lives to Jesus and join with others in building up the body of Christ.
15. Each member is important and respected. As they work together and speak the truth in love, the whole body is able to grow into maturity.

16. Loving our brother freely – our brother is any fellow human being.
17. Loving fellow church members is evidence we are Jesus' disciples.
18. We encourage one another to continue to trust God and love others.
19. Personal response

16 Growing Into Maturity

227

1. Carnal; babes in Christ
2. Sanctified in Christ; called saints
3. There was envy, strife, and divisions among them.
4. Paul wrote that he and Apollos were both working for Jesus. They were given different assignments, but working for same goal.
5. Jesus is the foundation we are to build upon.
6. 1 Corinthians 3:12,13
 - A. Gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw
 - B. Fire will test each one's work.
7. Questions related to 1 Corinthians 3:14,15
 - A. The one who's work endures will receive a reward
 - B. The one who's work is burned up will suffer loss.
 - C. He can still be saved, but will be tested by the fire himself.
 - D. Thought question. See note for author's answer.
8. God will destroy us; We will destroy ourselves.
9. Dangers Jesus warns against that could lead us away from Jesus:
 - A. Tribulation – Trouble of all kinds in a world of sin
 - B. Persecution – As a result of being a Christian
 - C. Cares of this world
 - D. The deceitfulness of riches (the love of money)
10. Milk
11. What kind of "food" were they to A.) lay aside; B.) eat
 - A. Malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,
 - B. Pure milk of the word

12. What the scribes and Pharisees neglected and were like:
 - A. The weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith or faithfulness.
 - B. Blind guides; hypocrites; full of extortion and self-indulgence
13. What are babies unskilled in and the mature able to discern?
 - A. The word of righteousness
 - B. Able to discern both good and evil
14. To deny or say no to ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously, and godly.
15. Comparing the Christian life to running a race in Heb. 12:1-3:
 - A. Any weight, even good things, and sin or temptations to sin
 - B. With endurance
 - C. Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the One who makes life worth living
 - D. The joy set before Him enabled Him to endure the cross
16. Matthew 11:28-20
 - A. All who labor and are heavy laden
 - B. Rest; rest for their souls
 - C. Two things He invites us to do:
 - a. Take His yoke
 - b. learn from Him
 - D. Gentle and lowly in heart
 - E. His yoke is easy

17 Celebrating The New Covenant

241

1. When God made clothes from “skin,” an animal had to die.
2. An offering of fruit from the ground.
3. An offering from his flock of sheep.
4. Abel’s offering was accepted, but Cain’s was not. Then God appealed to Cain to not continue in the path he was heading.
5. The Passover
6. God delivering the Israelites out of Egypt and passing over the houses that had the blood of the lamb on the doorposts.

7. By celebrating the Passover, children would ask why this is being done. Parents would then be able to explain how God delivered them.
8. They were to be a kingdom of priests to lead others to know God.
9. In the kingdom of God, true greatness is being a servant to others.
10. The disciples were still arguing over who would be the greatest.
11. Jesus washed all of the disciple's feet.
12. We should wash one another's feet.
13. The Passover Lamb
14. Living with sincerity and truth.
15. A. Body; B. blood
16. Until Jesus returns
17. We are to prayerfully examine ourselves to see if we need to confess and repent of any sin or whether we need to forgive anyone. If the answer is yes, choose to do so.
18. We are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.
19. What promises are included in the new covenant?
A. Law; hearts; B. God; people; C. Teach; D. Merciful; remember
20. Personal responses
21. The same gospel that is preached in the New Testament
22. God's promises to Israel
A. Priests; holy; B. Your; C. sins; D. love
23. How did Israel respond to God's covenant and promises?
A. We will do; B. They broke; C. Promises; faultless; fault with them
24. What was the result of not trusting God?
A. Unbelief; B. Deceitfulness; C. Hearts; D. Rebelled; E. Obey; F. Unbelief
25. Their lives can be an example to us. Since we have the same nature and tendencies, we can learn the lesson that we need to trust God and not ourselves.
26. God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able. He will make a way of escape so we may be able to bear it.
27. God wants us to experience unity with God and with each other.

SCRIPTURE INDEX

Listed in this index are Bible verses that are part of a question or are quoted in a note.

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A LOVE LETTER FROM JESUS

I love you very much. You are so precious and valuable to Me. I think about you all the time and have wonderful plans for you. The thoughts and plans that I have for you are to give you a future and a hope that is beyond what you could ask for or even think. (John 3:16,17; Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 139:1-18; 103:1-18; Ephesians 3:20; Isaiah 55:8,9)

You are my child. You belong to Me for I not only created you, I also redeemed you when I died on the cross for all the sins of the world. (John 1:1-4,14; 3:16,17; Col. 1:12-16; Gal. 3:10-13; 4:4,5; 1 John 2:2)

GOD IS NOT COUNTING YOUR SIN AGAINST YOU

Through My perfect life and death, you have been reconciled to God. No matter who you are or what you have done, God is not counting your sin against you. You are free to come to Him just as you are and be reconciled to Him. (2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Romans 12:1)

I will tell you the same thing I told a woman who had committed adultery. “I don’t condemn you! Go and sin no more.” You are free to experience My unconditional love for you and leave your life of sin and pain. (John 8:11; Romans 2:4; 5:18; 6:14-16; 8:1)

When you call to Me, I will answer. When you seek Me with all your heart, you will find Me, for I am anxious to be found by you. When you give Me permission, I will make My home with you. (Jeremiah 29:12, 13; Matthew 11:28-30; John 14:23; Revelation 3:20)

I love you with an everlasting love! Nothing can change that. When you hurt, I hurt with you, just as a parent suffers when their child is in pain. (Jer. 31:3; Romans 8:31-39; Matt. 23:37-39; 25:34-45; Hosea 11:1-8)

All human pain and suffering is ultimately a result of Adam and Eve’s choice to learn about evil. When they sinned, I immediately stepped in to be the Savior of the world. (Genesis 2:15-17; 3; Revelation 13:8; Romans 5:12-18; Isaiah 53:4-6; John 1:29; 4:42; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 John 2:2)

HEALING THE BROKENHEARTED AND SETTING PEOPLE FREE

Through My perfect life and death, I was able to free the human race from the kingdom of darkness and qualify everyone for eternal life. As a result, everyone is now free to choose to live with Me now and forever or persistently cling onto sin and evil. (Colossians 1:12-14; Romans 5:18; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; 1 John 5:10,11; John 1:9-13; 3:16-20)

When I was on this earth, My mission was to share good news with the poor, heal the brokenhearted and free people enslaved by sin. Satan has told many lies about Me in order to lead people to reject Me. He seeks to steal, kill, and destroy as many as he can. I came so everyone might experience the abundant life that was originally intended for the human race. (Luke 4:18; Rev. 12:7-9; 1 Peter 5:8; John 8:31-36, 44; 10:10)

I invite you to come to Me just as you are. I will accept you with all of your hurt and failure. In fact, the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are “poor in spirit,” those who recognize their brokenness and need for Me as their Savior. (Matthew 11:28-30; 5:3; Rom. 12:1; Ps. 51:17)

When you invite me to be your Savior and Lord, you will be “born again.” The Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth and the truth will set you free. As you replace the lies of Satan with the truth from the Bible, your life will be transformed. You will experience freedom from fear, guilt, and shame. (John 1:12,13; 3:5,6; 8:31-36; 16:13; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 1:9; 3:1; 4:18)

You will discover new meaning and purpose in life as you share your story with others and invite them to experience My love and be reconciled to God. (Mark 4:20; 5:19,20; Revelation 12:11; 2 Cor. 5:19,20)

YOU'RE INVITED, PLEASE COME

I will never force you to receive the truth or the blessings I am anxious to give you. If you don't want them, I will allow you to pursue the pathway you choose, even though it will bring you much pain and heartache. Even then I will be waiting for you to call out for help. When you do, I will reassure you of My forgiveness and help you experience healing from the

brokenness caused by your sinful choices. (Prov. 14:12; Matthew 7:13,14; James 1:14,15; Romans 1:18-28; Psalm 107; Hebrews 12:5-11; Revelation 3:19,20; Luke 4:18; Matthew 5:3-12; 1 John 1:9)

If you persistently choose to cling onto sin, you will eventually hate Me and not want to come into My presence. In fact, you will come to the point that you would rather die than live with Me forever. Out of love, I will honor your choice and you will perish in the end. (John 3:16-20; Revelation 6:14-16; 20:7-15; 1 Corinthians 15:26; Romans 6:23)

EXPERIENCE THE LOVE, JOY AND PEACE YOUR HEART LONGS FOR

But if you want Me to be your Savior, you will not be disappointed. You will experience love that casts out fear, peace that passes understanding, and joy that no one can take away. (1 John 4:17-19; Philippians 4:6,7; John 16:22)

When you are tempted to satisfy your cravings in unhealthy ways, I will enable you to have self-control and remind you that the blessings I give you will truly satisfy. (1 John 2:15,16; Galatians 5:23; John 4:14; Philippians 4:4-19)

I will enable you to be patient with others as they are growing and will transform you so that kindness, compassion, and forgiveness flow from within. (Galatians 5:22; John 7:37-39; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:32)

TRUST ME TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR ENEMIES

When you are mistreated, misunderstood, or taken advantage of, your natural desire will be to seek revenge. Choose instead to allow Me to discipline those who have hurt you. While doing so, I will also seek to reach their hearts. (Rom. 12:17-21; Hebrews 12:5-11; Rev. 3:19; Luke 4:18)

In the long run, the best way to relate to your enemies is to love them. They will either humble their hearts and become your friend or try to avoid you out of their own shame. When I was mistreated and nailed to the cross, I prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." After I was resurrected, many confessed their sins, repented, and became My disciples. (Matt. 5:3-12; Luke 6:27-38; 23:34; Acts 2:36-42)

Instead of seeking revenge, choose to be gentle with people. Look beyond their faults, understand their needs, and care for them in healthy ways, while maintaining proper boundaries. (Romans 12)

Don't be afraid to speak the truth, but do it always in love. I know all this will take a miracle, for you are helpless to do anything good apart from Me. Your part is to choose to love; the Holy Spirit will work the miracle within you. (Ephesians 4:14-16; John 15:4,5,12; Galatians 5:13-25; Phil. 2:12,13)

As you experience My unconditional love, you will grow into maturity and learn to love others as I have loved you. People will be drawn to Me by the light that shines out of your life. (John 12:32; 13:34,35; 15:12; Matthew 5:16)

I WILL SOON BRING AN END TO ALL SIN AND DEATH

Soon the day will come when I will return to earth and take to heaven all who want to live with Me forever. All those "who have fallen asleep" trusting in Me will be resurrected with brand new bodies. (John 14:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54)

I long for the day when we will be together again in person. After all sin is destroyed and the earth is cleansed by fire, I will create a new heaven and a new earth. All tears will be wiped away and there will be no more pain, crying, sorrow, or death. (John 14:1-3; 2 Peter 3:10-13; 1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 20:14; 21:1,4)

Until then, trust Me! I will take care of you, for I love you with all My heart. (Matthew 6:33; Phil. 4:19; Romans 5:6-10; 8:31,32; 1 Peter 5:7)

With Love Always,

Your Creator, Savior and Friend,

Jesus

God's Perfect Love

1 John 4:8, 17-19; John 15:12

God's perfect love includes all four aspects of love listed on the outside. A growing understanding of His perfect love enables us to grow into maturity and love others as He has loved us.

3. Healing Reconciling Love

Luke 4:18; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 John 1:9;
Rom. 2:4; 5:9-11; 12:1,2; Rev. 3:20

The goodness of God leads us to:

1. Embrace God's forgiveness;
2. Repentance, confession, surrender to God
3. Be born of the Holy Spirit
4. Be transformed by the renewing of our minds

2. Convicting Disciplining Love

Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 8:5; 28;
2 Sam. 7:14; John 16:7-15;
Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 3:19

God convicts us of:

1. Sin and evil;
2. Righteousness;
3. Judgment with loving discipline

**Loving others
as Jesus
loves us**

Jesus' love motivates
us to live for the
glory of God and be a
blessing to others.

4. Transforming Abiding Love

John 13:34,35; 14:12-18; 15:1-12;
Gal. 5:22,23; 2:20; Rom. 12:2
Matt. 5:14-16; 11:28-30

1. Unconditional Redeeming Love

1 Tim. 2:5,6; Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:14; Col. 1:12-14;
John 3:16; Rom. 3:23,24; 5:6-10; 18; 1 John 5:10-13

From "The Compelling Love of God" page 287;
www.compellinglove.org

Salvation From All 3 Aspects of the Sin Problem

On the following pages there are three columns related to the three aspects of sin that we need salvation from:

1. The wages of sin - death
2. Our slavery to sin;
3. All the evil effects of sin.

Each column contains verses from the Bible that explain what God has done, is doing, and will do to save us from all aspects of the sin problem.

Disappointments and misunderstandings occur when we focus on just one part of the plan of salvation and fail to see the whole picture.

For example, many people get angry at God for allowing bad things to happen on earth. The truth is God promised freedom from all pain and death only after He returns to earth and brings a complete end of sin.

Some people think there couldn't be a God of love when there is so much suffering on earth. The opposite is true. When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, God had three choices.

1. He could have prevented them from experiencing evil. If He did that, we would be like robots who didn't have freedom of choice. However, love never forces anyone to love and obey them.
2. He could have let them die and not created a plan of salvation.
3. He could take the initiative to save the human race from the wages of sin and restore the freedom of choice to every person.

When we understand that Jesus took the initiative to save the human race from the wages of sin, we will recognize what our choices are: Do we want to be reconciled to God and receive Him just as He is, our Savior and Lord? Or do we want to cling onto a life of sin and selfishness?

Misunderstanding what Jesus accomplished for the whole world has led many to think that getting eternal life is our greatest need. "Getting saved" and helping others "get saved" becomes their main focus.

But the good news is so much better than that. Jesus took the initiative to love, redeem, and save us before we did anything.

Ephesians 2:4,5 - "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). . ."

Romans 5:6-10 - "When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

1 John 5:10,11 - "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."

When God gave Jesus to the world, He earned eternal life for everyone. If we don't believe that, John says we call God a liar. So the real question for each person is simple. "Do I want to be reconciled to Jesus. He has accepted me just as I am. Do I want to accept Him just as He is, a loving Savior from all aspects of the sin problem. Can I trust Him to be the Lord of my life and to always know what is best for me."

The only reason anyone will be lost in the end is because they choose to love sin. "This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." John 3:19,20.

When Jesus returns, they would rather die than live with Jesus forever (Revelation 6:14-16). Out of love, God will honor their choice and they will perish, for he will never force Himself on anyone (John 3:16).

Salvation From The Three Aspects of the Sin Problem

	God's Choice Thru Jesus' perfect life and death the human race has been saved legally from the wages of sin	Our Choice Through the Holy Spirit believers are being saved spiritually from slavery to sin	God's Choice To Return Our Choice To Want Him When Jesus returns, believers will be saved physically from the evil effects of sin
Salvation	<p>Ephesians 2:4 God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <u>even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).</u></p> <p>2 Timothy 1: 9 [God] has saved us and called <i>us</i> with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,</p>	<p>1 Corinthians 1:18 The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but <u>to us who are being saved</u> it is the power of God.</p> <p>2 Corinthians 2:15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.</p>	<p>Isaiah 25:9 This <i>is</i> our God; We have waited for Him, and <u>He will save us.</u> . . . ; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.</p> <p>Hebrews 9:28 Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.</p>
Redemption	<p>1 Timothy 2:5,6 For <i>there is</i> one God and one Mediator between God and men, <i>the</i> Man Christ <u>Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.</u> See Romans 3:23,24</p>	<p>2 Peter 2:1 There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even <u>denying the Lord who bought them</u>, <i>and</i> bring on themselves swift destruction.</p>	<p>Romans 8:23 Wwe also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, <u>the redemption of our body.</u></p>

Reconciliation	<p>2 Corinthians 5:19 God was in Christ reconciling the <u>world to Himself</u>, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.</p> <p>Romans 5:10 When we were enemies <u>we were reconciled to God</u> through the death of His Son,</p>	<p>2 Corinthians 5:20 We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore <i>you</i> on Christ's behalf, <u>be reconciled to God</u>.</p> <p>Romans 5:11 We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom <u>we have now received the reconciliation</u>.</p>	<p>Revelation 21:3,4 The tabernacle of God <i>is</i> with men, and <u>He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people</u>. God Himself will be with them <i>and be</i> their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, or pain.</p>
Adopted	<p>Ephesians 1:4,5 ". . . before the foundation of the world," God "predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself."</p>	<p>Galatians 4:5 Jesus redeemed us so we might "receive the adoption as sons."</p> <p>Romans 8:15 "You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."</p>	<p>Romans 8:23 We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.</p>
Justification	<p>Romans 3:23,24 <u>All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus</u>. (See also Romans 5:8,9, 18)</p>	<p>Romans 5:1 <u>Having been justified by faith</u>, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>Revelation 15:3 "Great and marvelous <i>are</i> Your works, Lord God Almighty! <u>Just and true <i>are</i> Your ways</u>, . . ." God is very concerned about justice and upholding His law. (See also 1 John 1:9)</p>

Salvation From The Three Aspects of the Sin Problem

	God's Choice Thru Jesus' perfect life and death the human race has been saved legally from the wages of sin	Our Choice Thru the Holy Spirit believers are being saved spiritually from slavery to sin	Our Choice When Jesus returns believers will be saved physically from the evil effects of sin
Sanctification	<p>Hebrews 10:10</p> <p>"By that will <u>we have been sanctified</u> through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once <i>for all</i>."</p> <p>Hebrews 10:29</p> <p>How much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, <u>counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing</u>, and insulted the Spirit of grace?"</p> <p>1 Corinthians 1:2, NASB</p> <p>To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those <u>who have been sanctified in Christ</u> Jesus, saints by calling."</p>	<p>Hebrews 10:14</p> <p>"For by one offering He has perfected forever <u>those who are being sanctified</u>. "</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 5:23,24</p> <p>"Now may the God of peace Himself <u>sanctify you completely</u>; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you <i>is faithful</i>, who also will do <i>it</i>. "</p>	<p>1 Corinthians 15:51-53</p> <p>"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and <u>the dead will be raised incorruptible</u>, and we shall <u>be changed</u>. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal <i>must</i> put on immortality."</p> <p>Those who "love darkness rather than light" (Jn 3:19), will cry for the rocks to fall on them (Rev 6:16). They would rather die than be with Jesus.</p>

<p>Forgiveness</p> <p><u>Charizamai</u> (Graciously give, forgive)</p> <p><u>Aphiemi</u> (Send away, leave, let go, forgive)</p> <p>2 Cor. 5:19 expresses the same idea as Charizamai</p>	<p>Colossians 2:13 (Charizomai)</p> <p>"Even when we were dead in our trespasses, Jesus made us alive with Him, <u>"having forgiven (charizomai) you all trespasses."</u></p> <p>Ephesians 4:32 (Charizamai)</p> <p>"Let all bitterness, . . . be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, <u>forgiving (charizomai) one another, even as God in Christ forgave (charizomai) you."</u></p> <p>2 Corinthians 5:19</p> <p>"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them."</p>	<p>1 John 1:9 (Aphiemi)</p> <p>"If we confess our sins, <u>He is faithful and just to forgive</u> us <u>our</u> sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."</p> <p>Matthew 6:15 (Aphiemi)</p> <p>"If you do not <u>forgive</u> men their trespasses, neither will your Father <u>forgive</u> your trespasses."</p> <p>(If we confess our sins, God assures us He will "<u>let go</u>" of them. If we choose to hold onto our bitterness, God will honor our choice.)</p>	<p>Revelation 22:14,15</p> <p>"Blessed <i>are</i> those who do His commandments, that they may . . . enter through the gates into the city. But outside <i>are</i> . . . murderers and idolaters, and <u>whoever loves and practices a lie."</u></p> <p>(Forgiveness will not be necessary in the new heaven and earth that God will create, for love will reign in the hearts of all. See Rev. 21:8,27)</p>
<p>What this accomplishes</p>	<p>This enables God to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be just when forgiving us (1 John 1:9) 2. Qualify everyone for eternal life (Colossians 1:12; 1 John 5:10,11) 3. Restore our individual freedom of choice (John 1:12; 3:16) 	<p>This enables believers to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enjoy being with God and others who love God also 2. Be a blessing to others 3. Bring glory to God 	<p>Believers will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be resurrected with new bodies when Jesus returns the 2nd time 2. Inherit the new heaven and earth 3. Dwell with God forever

HONEST WITH GOD

By Clinton Meharry, © 2007

Practicing fraud
When dealing with God;
How foolish it is -
All knowledge is His!

Instead He dies
To save our lives,
With forgiving grace
Upon His face.

He knows the heart
Right from the start.
So why pretend
With a loving Friend!

The ground then shakes,
Jesus awakes!
Enemies tremble,
Friends assemble.

He knows our need;
Sees every deed.
He loves us still
And always will.

Truth is revealed;
People are healed.
Hope is revived,
For Love has survived!

Amazing Grace
For the human race;
Amazing love
From heaven above!

Joy will soon reign:
Peace without pain;
No tears in the eye;
Death will then die!

Just as I am,
He could condemn;
He could neglect;
He could reject!

This guarantee
Frees us to be,
Honest with God,
With no façade.