

Path to Righteousness



Personal Bible Study Course

Compiled and Edited

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For a long time there has been a need to have something to put into the hands of people that would explain this great church – the United Pentecostal Church International. There has also been a sad lack of materials to help establish new converts in the biblical truths that we know, love, and have studied for many years. Especially in countries overseas, where books about our history and doctrine are not readily available, the need has become urgent.

When this need was presented to the leadership of the United Pentecostal Church International – Ghana, the brethren quickly agreed to work with us. They could readily see that this would be of great benefit to their local churches and the church as a whole. They all felt the burden to see something concrete that they could give their saints and newcomers as well, that would introduce them to this glorious way.

And so this book was born. It could never have happened without the vision of our superintendent, Rev. Jim Poitras. *“Where there is no vision, the people perish”* (Proverbs 29:18a). Solomon, the wisest of men, knew that God’s will and His righteous laws as found in the Bible, must be repeatedly kept before a people, or they will begin to take on the shape of the world, and go against God’s laws. Rev. Poitras found the answer to this dilemma in God’s Word. The prophet Habakkuk was concerned also when he saw the wickedness of the world in general, and a decline in God’s righteousness among the nation of Israel. But God had an answer – His Word always does! *“And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it”* (Habakkuk 2:2). That is what we have done.

Our superintendent alone could not have accomplished this work, however. He encouraged the able efforts of many people – executives and pastors, deacons and ladies auxiliary leaders – who make up the contributors to the lessons found here.

God bless you all for your burden and vision to see this Personal Bible Study Book become a reality. May it bless and strengthen your churches. May the hand of the Lord be upon all who read and study it. And may the Lord smile on all who had a part in its making.

“The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it”
(Psalm 68:11).

I N T R O D U C T I O N

MEMORY VERSE: *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).*

"Path to Righteousness" sounds like we are looking for the right way to walk. But are we not all innocent and good from the beginning of our lives? Do we not all have a heart that desires to do good and right? Are we not all doing our best to follow the right path?

I wish these questions could be answered with a "yes" voice, but unfortunately, they cannot. But why not? Why do we need to find a "Path to Righteousness?" What has caused us all to be "sinners?"

In the Word of God (the Bible), we find the answer to every question in life. These questions are addressed in both the Old and New Testaments – all through God's Word.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT SPEAKS

From the beginning, God had a plan. He did not just create the world with no vision or goal in mind for His creation. He knew what He wanted His creation to do, and He also knew how He wanted to bless and help them along the way. *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart"* (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

But God does not create machines. His creation is able to make up their own minds – the very mind He placed in them. Thus, He created the first man and woman and gave them only *one* restriction – they *must not eat* of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). There was only one thing man must not do, but God left him to choose whether or not he would obey.

Maybe you have heard the story of how Eve was deceived, but have you heard how her husband did not correct and help her? Oh, he told her about the restriction (Genesis 3:2-3), but he did not stop her when she was tempted by the serpent. How do I know? God's Word tells me plainly that Adam was *with her* when she ate of the fruit (Genesis 3:6).

There is a basic principle involved here that we need to understand. God had spoken. His Word was clear. He even told the man the consequences of a wrong choice. But when man doubted God's Word enough to go ahead and do the *one thing* that God had told him he must not do, God's Word was *still* clear. And God could not go against His own Word. He had to keep His promise of death. We need to make a special note of this and remember it throughout our search for the "Path to Righteousness."

"A man is free to make a choice, but not free to choose the consequences."

(T. F. Tenney)

The remaining portion of Genesis chapter three tells us what God did as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience. He told them exactly what life was going to be like from that point on, and history bears witness that His pronouncement was absolutely correct. God said:

"...for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

The fact that Adam and Eve did not fall down dead as soon as they ate of the fruit (like one would do when poisoned) has caused many people to doubt this scripture. Yes, Adam and Eve were still breathing after they disobeyed God. But their bodies began a process that eventually ended in death for them physically. The Bible tells us that God even put an angel at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to make sure they did not eat of the Tree of Life and live forever. This was not the tree God had commanded them not to eat of before. But after their disobedience, they were barred from eating of it (Genesis 3:24).

Adam and Eve DID die that day – they died spiritually! No more walking with God in the cool of the evening, no more close communion with Him daily. In fact, the Bible does not record that God ever again had a personal conversation with Adam. What a terrible price to pay for one piece of fruit that "was good for food" and "pleasant to the eyes," and a "tree to be desired to make one wise" (Genesis 3:6).

This is the first reference made to the *lust of the flesh* (was good for food); *lust of the eyes* (was pleasant to the eyes); and the *pride of life* (to be desired to make one wise). We cannot blame God when we sin. It is our own failure to heed God's Word and obey His voice.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13-15).

"And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life; And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:14-15).

The serpent did not go unpunished. Before he was used by Satan, he had been more subtle (cunning or clever) than any beast of the field. The fact that he could talk did not frighten Eve – she must have been used to it. The serpent certainly is not such an animal today. He now slithers along on the ground, unable to make a sound (not even a tweet, moo or bark) and without a bit of love from man or beast.

"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16).

No matter what people say, if a woman wants to give birth to a child, she will suffer pain and sorrow. And she can never produce a child without a man, therefore her desire is towards him.

"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

All over the world, men struggle and sweat and toil to bring the things they need out of the ground, to put bread on the table for their families, just as God said many hundreds of years ago.

Thus we learn that Adam and Eve began this thing we call "sin" when they chose to perform "an action contrary to the law of God" (according to *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language – Deluxe Edition* – definition of "sin"). The shepherd/king – David – wrote that this tendency toward sin began in every one of us at the time of conception in our mother's womb. *"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me"* (Psalm 51:5).

The greatest disaster to result from Adam and Eve's decision, however, was their separation from God. No longer did they commune with Him daily, walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. Now they could not reach God directly. He was unable to come to them as He desired, because their disobedience and unbelief in His Word had built a wall of separation. So, God had to set in motion another part of His plan.

"The most harmful part of sin is that it keeps us from God!"

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT SPEAKS

Does God's Word tell us what this "sin" is all about? Does it show us His plan to bring us back *close* to Him? Let us first find out what sin *is*, and how it affects our lives.

The Full Life Study Bible tells us that the Greek words used for "sin" in the New Testament describe different parts of it:

- 1) *hamartia* – wrongdoing, transgression, sin against God (John 9:41).
- 2) *adikia* – wrongdoing, wickedness, or injustice (Romans 1:18; 1 John 5:17) A lack of love, since all wrongdoing stems from a failure to love (Matthew 22:37-40). This word also means – a personal power that can enslave and deceive (Romans 5:12; Hebrews 3:13).
- 3) *anomia* – lawlessness, iniquity, and defiance of the law of God (Romans 6:19; 1 John 3:4).
- 4) *apistia* – disbelief, or unfaithfulness (Romans 3:3; Hebrews 3:12).

What do all these big words mean to me? All of these words from the Greek (the language used to write most of the New Testament) simply mean that the basic root of sin is selfishness. And so it is that we find ourselves on the “Road to please SELF – the SIN Road.”

- ☞ Sin begins with a grasping of things or pleasures for ourselves, regardless of the welfare of others and the commandments of God.
- ☞ This leads to cruelty to others and to rebellion against God and His law.
- ☞ Finally, sin becomes the refusal to be subject to God and His Word (Romans 1:18-25; 8:7).
- ☞ It is enmity against God (Romans 5:10; 8:7; Colossians 1:21).
- ☞ It is disobedience and unbelief (Romans 11:32; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 2:2; 5:6).
- ☞ Sin is not just wrong actions, it is a failure to do what we know is right. *“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”* (James 4:17).
- ☞ All *unrighteousness* is sin (1 John 5:17).

Adam and Eve didn’t want to do what God said was right; they wanted to find out for *themselves* about good and evil. Since the day they made that choice, all of humanity has been struggling with the same thing.

Sin makes it impossible to follow our best human intentions.

- ☞ It causes us to commit unrighteousness with delight (Genesis 6:5).
- ☞ It makes us take pleasure in the evil actions of others (Romans 1:32).
- ☞ It is powerful enough to enslave us and corrupt as we give ourselves over to it (Romans 3:9; 6:12; 7:14; Galatians 3:22).
- ☞ It is rooted in human desire (James 1:14; 4:1-2; 1 Peter 2:11).

Sin is something we ALL struggle with.

- ☞ Sin was brought into the human race through Adam (Romans 5:12).
- ☞ Sin affects everyone (Romans 5:12; Romans 3:23).
- ☞ Sin results in divine judgment (Romans 1:18).
- ☞ Sin brings physical and spiritual death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23; James 1:15).

How can we get rid of this sin/curse? The New Testament is a very special account of another part of God’s plan for man – JESUS.

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:22).

He *knew* no sin, but he *became* sin for us. He came to lead us from the SIN Road to the “Path to Righteousness.”

- ☞ God knew – as soon as Adam and Eve chose to know “good and evil” that He would have to do something about it. He knew that the next time He came close to mankind, He would have to do it in a different form. He would have to take on the same “flesh” that He had created for them. And so He “became flesh” and dwelt among us (John 1:14).
- ☞ The only way to eliminate the power of sin is by faith in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work for all men (Romans 5:8-11; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 4:20-24; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 1:5). There is a lovely story in the Gospel of John where Jesus Himself told us how this thing must be: *“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3). Jesus was trying to help Nicodemus understand that the first time you are born (flesh) you are born with a selfish, sinful nature. But when you are born “again” of water and of the Spirit, you are now a part of His own spiritual family – with an eternal home in heaven. What a blessed hope we have in Jesus!
- ☞ Romans 5:12, 19-21 tells us, *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”*
- ☞ In the writings to various New Testament churches, this wonderful plan that God had to bring us back into communication and fellowship with Him is spoken of again: *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”* (1 Corinthians 15:22). *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment. So*

Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:27-28).

III. GOD’S PLAN WILL LEAD US DOWN THE “PATH TO RIGHTEOUSNESS”

God STILL has a plan! He wants to help us every way He can, and He was willing to pay the ultimate price (His shed blood) to be sure that we get off this path of sin and self that we are born following and find a new road. Listen to the Apostle Paul as he writes to the church at Rome with this blessed hope:

- ☞ *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:12-13).*
- ☞ *“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18).*
- ☞ *“For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:20-23).*

Let us not continue down the path of “self” and the SIN Road, but let us seek and obey the “Path to Righteousness” as found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“He came to save us, not from poverty, or from ignorance, or from the ghetto, but from our sins. Sin must be dealt with first.”
(Vance Havner)

LESSON ONE

Welcome to the

“PATH TO RIGHTEOUSNESS”

MEMORY VERSE: *“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people”*
(Proverbs 14:34).

When we speak of a “path” to anything, we usually refer to the road or means used to arrive at that place. The “Path to Righteousness” then, must be talking about the “road leading to righteousness.” But where is righteousness? What is it?

Over 500 times in God’s Word the term “righteous or righteousness” is used. Since it is voiced so frequently, we surely need to know what it means and what it has to do with us.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The Revell Bible Dictionary tells us that this word has different meanings, depending on whether or not one is reading a scripture from the Old or New Testaments.

In the OLD TESTAMENT:

- ☞ Righteousness was first used to talk about something absolutely like God, who always acts in harmony with His moral nature (Psalm 4:1; Jeremiah 12:1).
- ☞ This word was also used when speaking about obedience to or the following of the moral and ethical norms revealed in God’s law, as given to Moses (Deuteronomy 6:25; Psalm 119:121).

These Old Testament definitions went beyond just the theory of being without sin to mean rather acting in harmony with man's obligations to God and to other people (1 Samuel 24:17). This same sense of righteousness is sometimes found in the Gospels, as when the writer of Matthew describes Joseph, the espoused husband of Mary (Matthew 1:19), or when Mark speaks of the character of John the Baptist (Mark 6:20).

In the NEW TESTAMENT the word "righteous" or "righteousness" was used to speak about:

- ☞ **Imputed (something put on or added) righteousness:** the declaration by God that a person is righteous in God's sight, not by virtue of that person's acts but by virtue of his faith in Jesus (Romans 1:17, 3:21).
- ☞ **Actual righteousness:** the inner moral conformity of one's character to the character of God, and the acts that flow from a righteous moral character (Romans 8:4; Ephesians 4:24).

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

The wisest man who ever lived (besides Jesus Christ) wrote about this "righteousness" at least 74 times in his book of Proverbs. In chapter twelve, verse 28, one of the greatest benefits of living a righteous life is given: *"In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death."* Does this mean that the righteous will never die? YES! Those who live a life of righteousness will be:

- ☞ Blessed (Psalm 5:12)
- ☞ Upheld (Psalm 37:17)
- ☞ Flourish (Psalm 92:12), and
- ☞ Remembered (Psalm 112:6)

Their lives on earth will be especially happy, and they will have a hope of living eternally with God, the righteous one.

David spoke of this "Path to Righteousness" in his special Shepherd's Psalm. *"The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake...."* (Psalm 23:1-3).

From the book *A Shepherd Looks at the Twenty-Third Psalm* we learn a lot about sheep – things that David already knew. He understood that sheep are very much creatures of habit.

- He knew they would follow the same paths and eat from the same hills until the paths became ruts and the hills desert wastes.
- David knew that his sheep would pollute their own ground until it was full of disease and parasites.
- Many people think that sheep can just "get along anywhere," but David knew this was not true. He knew that if he took care to lead them to new feeding places, show them a different path to follow – one which led to clear running streams and fresh green grass – he would have a good name and reputation as a watchful shepherd.
- David knew the greatest single safeguard a shepherd has in handling his flock is to keep them on the move. He knew there must be a predetermined plan of action, a deliberate, planned rotation from one grazing ground to another in line with right and proper principles of sound management. David's entire name and reputation depended on how effectively and efficiently he kept his sheep moving on to wholesome, new, fresh grass.

David knew what he was doing when he compared himself to his sheep, and his Lord to a good, diligent, watchful shepherd.

The Bible clearly makes this comparison to us as "sheep": *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way"* (Isaiah 53:6). We do this deliberately and to our own hurt. But Praise the Lord we have a SHEPHERD! Jesus said,

- ☞ *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6).
- ☞ *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

The Good Shepherd has come to lead us down the "Path to Righteousness," but most of us do not want to follow. We do not want to be led down these new paths where the grass is very green and the water flows freely with sparkling freshness. We prefer to turn to our own way even though it may take us straight into trouble. *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Proverbs 14:12).

Those who refuse to follow the “Path to Righteousness” will end up as pitiful, sickly sheep on a piece of ruined land. There are many such sheep all around us – those with broken homes, broken hearts, lives of greed and selfishness with nothing to leave behind them but ruin and remorse. They have no hope and have refused the help of their Shepherd – the same Good Shepherd who tells us in Mark 8:34-38: “...Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Most people who are charged with this failure to follow the Lord will claim that they are doing everything He has told them to. They say, “We ARE following Him. We ARE being ‘led of the Lord’.” Too many of us are going our own way, and there are truly few “sheep” who are honestly following their “Shepherd” as He leads them down the “Path to Righteousness.”

It is time for us to remember who is leading us – the GOOD Shepherd. He will not lead us in a bad path. He will not ask us to go somewhere that will cause us harm, but He will lead us all the way to heaven, the place He is preparing for those who love Him.

So, with all this talk about David, where does that leave me in this present day, almost two thousand years after David’s time? In the early days of this 20th century, when the Lord began to pour our His Spirit once again as He had done for His disciples, He was leading us into “new pastures.” He was, once again, being our “shepherd.” He was providing us with the “living water” that man can drink and never thirst again (John 7:37-39). He also gave us a warning, and this is a good place to be reminded of that, almost one hundred years later.

God spoke through one of His precious saints at the Azusa Street Mission in a prophecy that still resounds today. He said that in the end time church there would be three problems that would be seen worldwide:

- People would be more interested in PRAISES than PRAYER.
- They would care more for POWER than the LORDSHIP OF JESUS in their lives.
- Everybody would want a BLESSING, but few would seek after REPENTANCE.

Every word of this prophecy is true today. We need to earnestly seek the face of God to be sure that we are not a part of these problems, but that we are, in fact, seeking after the **Lordship of Jesus** in our lives as we **Pray** and humbly follow His leading with **Repentance** in our hearts. He truly wants to show us ALL the “Path to Righteousness.”

LESSON TWO

GOD’S WORD – OUR GUIDE

MEMORY VERSE: *“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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

INTRODUCTION

As with every other journey we embark on in this life, on the “Path to Righteousness” we need a road map, or guide to get us where we want go to – HEAVEN. The whole purpose for this journey is to live forever with Jesus in His eternal home. But what do we use to give us the directions and help we need to arrive? None of us have ever been there and returned to speak of it, so we do not have any personal guides. God Himself has provided all the guidance and help we need – His Word.

WHERE DID THE BIBLE COME FROM?

The Almighty God used three tools to give us this guidebook we call the Bible:

Revelation - This is the way God spoke to humanity and revealed Himself to their finite minds and hearts. He used many ways of doing this, as supported by Hebrews 1:1-2. *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”* Here are some of the ways God spoke:

- ☞ Through angels – Genesis 18, 19; Daniel 9:21-27; Luke 1:11-20; Matthew 28:5-7.
- ☞ Directly to men in a loud voice – 1 Samuel 3:1-14; Exodus 20:1-17; Genesis 6:13-21.
- ☞ Directly to men in a still, small voice – 1 Kings 19:11-12; Psalm 32:8.
- ☞ To one man through the mouth of a donkey – Numbers 22:28.
- ☞ To men through nature – Psalm 19:1-3; Acts 14:15-17; Romans 1:18-20.
- ☞ To men through dreams – Genesis 28:12; 1 Kings 2:4; 9:2; Matthew 1:20; 2:12.
- ☞ To men through visions – 1 Chronicles 21:16; Isaiah 6:1-8; Daniel 10:5-9; Acts 16:9; 10:10-16.

Which of these methods did God use to speak His Word to the forty men who wrote the Bible? We do now know. We only know each of them heard directly from Him – *“And God SAID”* (Genesis 1:3).

Inspiration - This involved God’s guidance as what He had spoken was written down on paper, parchment, or scroll. What must take place for the voice of God to be put in terms understood by man? Our memory verse speaks of this in 2 Timothy 3:16. In this verse, the word “inspiration” comes from the Greek, *theopneustos*, and literally means “God-breathed.” The Bible itself speaks of this inspiration in several key passages, as explained in *Wilmington’s Guide to the Bible* from the study entitled “The Doctrine of the Bible”:

- ☞ No Old Testament scripture was thought up by the prophet himself (2 Peter 1:20).
- ☞ All Old Testament scriptures were given by the Holy Spirit as He moved upon men (2 Peter 1:21).
- ☞ This Spirit-breathed inspiration was given in many ways (Hebrews 1:1).
- ☞ Once it was given, this inspired writing:
 - Could not be broken or shaken down (John 10:35).
 - Is exact in all details, down to the smallest stroke and letter (Matthew 5:18).
 - Would abide forever (Matthew 5:18; 1 Peter 1:25).
- ☞ The Old Testament writers did not always understand everything they wrote about (Luke 10:23-24; 1 Peter 1:10-12).
 - They did not completely understand the details of Christ’s suffering.
 - They did not understand that the mysteries would be clearer to a generation other than theirs.
- ☞ The four Gospels were given by inspiration of God (Hebrews 1:1; 2 Peter 3:2).
- ☞ Paul believed his writings were inspired by God (1 Corinthians 2:4; 15:3; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 4:15).
- ☞ Paul used the Holy Spirit’s words to explain the Holy Spirit’s facts (1 Corinthians 2:13).
- ☞ Paul’s writings were received through a special revelation from Christ (Galatians 1:11-12).
- ☞ Paul’s writings were to be read by all (Colossians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:27).
- ☞ Peter believed his writings were inspired by God (2 Peter 3:2).
- ☞ Peter believed Paul’s writings were inspired (2 Peter 3:15-16).
- ☞ John believed his writings were inspired (Revelation 22:18-19).

Illumination – This is the tool by which God shows men that His Word is true and guides them as they listen and obey its teachings. Illumination goes from the written word to the human heart and bears fruit. Why does God use this tool? Isn’t it enough that He reveals Himself to man and then helps man communicate that revelation?

What are the reasons for illumination?

- ☞ God had to use this tool because of man’s natural blindness (1 Corinthians 2:14).
- ☞ It is necessary because of satanic blindness (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).
- ☞ It is necessary because of carnal blindness (1 Corinthians 3; Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Peter 1).

What happens when the scriptures are illuminated?

- ☞ Sinners are saved (Psalm 146:8; 119:130).
- ☞ Christians are strengthened (1 Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Psalm 119:105).

HOW WAS THE BIBLE WRITTEN?

God's Spirit moved on the different authors of His Word and they used whatever writing materials were available during their time period in history. There is even a record of this in the Bible (Jeremiah 17:13; Exodus 24:12; 2 John 12; 2 Timothy 4:13; Job 19:24; Matthew 22:19-20). So what language was used by these different writers of God's Word?

Old Testament – with just a few exceptions, the entire Old Testament writings were penned in the Hebrew language. Scholars believe this was so because:

Hebrew was a language of pictures, using vivid, bold symbols and dramatized stories. As such, the language of the Old Testament presents a vivid picture of the acts of God among a people who became examples or illustrations for future generations (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Hebrew is a personal language. It speaks to the heart and emotions more than to the mind or intellect. This language was able to convey to the individual believer (as well as to the whole community of worshippers) the personal relationship of their God, who was very much alive in the recorded history of the nation of Israel.

New Testament – The New Testament, in its entirety, was written in Greek. Again, this was believed to be so by scholars because:

☐ Greek was the language of the intellect – more a language of the mind than the heart. The Hebrew language, used in the Old Testament to express the true story of the birth and growth of a nation, was not sufficient to portray the proposed truths of a modern world, which meant putting those old principles into action. The Greek language could put these truths in a very precise language for all to see and easily understand.

☐ Greek was very close to being a universal language. The truth of the one true God was revealed in the Old Testament to one nation – Israel – in their own language. But in the New Testament, the truth as revealed in the fullness of Jesus Christ was for the whole world. *“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things”* (Luke 24:45-48).

WHY WAS IT WRITTEN DOWN?

Not only was God's Word revealed and inspired, but He also planned for it to be understood by every nation and people in the whole world. What a plan! When God decided to keep a record of His acts and plan for man, He knew that the best way to do that was through a written method, since that is the best way to communicate with all men of all ages. Writing has several advantages:

Precision is the accuracy and exactness of the order of events and their importance. To write, you must take time to order your thoughts, as they appear strange if not in some type of order. Speaking or storytelling is not like this, one can skip around and still be understood. But in writing, careful thought must be used.

Propagation is the sharing of something with others who were not a part of the experience. The most accurate way to send a message is to write it down. That way, one can be sure that his own words will be used, and the message will not lose its power and impact with a different way of expression used by another voice.

Preservation is making sure that something valuable is not lost. Men die, memories fail, and sometimes people just get too busy to keep telling stories. But a written record remains. The New Testament especially had some specific reasons why it was written down:

☐ The early church needed direction (1 Thessalonians 5:27; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:16-17).

☐ False doctrines needed to be corrected by some authority.

☐ Missionaries needed something to leave with the people when they were forced to move on.

☐ Because of persecution and politics, it took more than the spoken word to pass along the message of hope and redemption given by Jesus.

CAN WE TRUST ITS ACCURACY?

How is it possible that so many men, over a period of so many years, were involved in the writing of a book that agrees scientifically, historically, socially, and morally? We have already learned how – an Almighty God

– in sovereign wisdom – breathed on mortal men His divine Word and inspired them to write it down. Here are some of the evident reasons, given in *The New Schofield Study Bible* that this is true:

- 📖 Throughout its pages, the Bible bears witness to one God who is consistent with Himself and the revelation concerning Him.
- 📖 The Bible gives one continuous account of humanity in relation to God.
- 📖 The Bible makes predictions about future events that are quite unlikely, then records their fulfillment when they have come to pass.
- 📖 The Bible is a progressive unfolding of truth. Several writers, moved by the Holy Spirit but separated by centuries, add new details until the whole revelation takes form.
- 📖 From beginning to end, the Bible testifies of one redemption.
- 📖 The Bible has one great theme throughout – the person and word of Jesus Christ.
- 📖 Some forty-four writers have produced a perfect harmony of doctrine over a two thousand-year period.

“The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it” (Psalm 68:11).

How does it all fit together?

- 📖 The Old Testament is the preparation for Christ;
- 📖 He is manifested to the world in the Gospels;
- 📖 In Acts He is preached and the gospel is propagated to the world;
- 📖 The Epistles explain Him;
- 📖 The purposes of God in Christ are consummated – brought to a climax – in Revelation.

Here are ten PROOFS that the Bible is the Word of God:

- 📖 Its Amazing Unity – we have already seen how God’s Word fits together – the Old and New Testaments agreeing in all areas.
- 📖 Its Ability to Remain in Spite of All Attempts to Destroy It – in spite of political, religious, and philosophical persecution, the Bible has endured.
- 📖 Its Historical Accuracy – historians and archaeologists the world over have found positive proof that the recorded history found in the Bible is totally accurate.
- 📖 Its Scientific Accuracy – the scientific statements found in the Scriptures can be taken at face value. They have been proven to be true, including the fact that all living things are reproduced after their own kind.
- 📖 Its Prophetic Accuracy – the Bible predicts future events with total correctness, including those about the nation of Israel and all Gentile nations.
- 📖 Its Universal Influence Upon Civilization – all of civilization is founded on the Bible and its teachings.
- 📖 Its Care and Copy – no other book in history has been copied as many times with as much care and as much sacrifice as the Word of God.
- 📖 Its Amazing Circulation – no other book in history has been around for so long or translated into so many different languages and dialects. How many other 2,000-year-old books have you ever read?
- 📖 Its Absolute Honesty – man could not possibly know all the history and scientific understanding, much less the prophecy found in the Bible. He had to be a sovereign author who inspired its writing.
- 📖 Its Life-Transforming Power – no other book in history has been so able to change corrupt humanity by the doing of its precepts.

We do not have to look anywhere else – God’s Word is the only guide we need.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN TO ME?

Nave’s Compact Topical Bible gives a list of things that let us know the Bible IS:

Tried	2 Samuel 22:31
Pure	Psalm 12:6
Cleansing	Psalm 119:9
The Sword of the Spirit	Ephesians 6:17
Food for the Soul	Job 23:12
Divinely Inspired	Acts 1:16
Written in my Heart	Romans 10:8
A Light	2 Peter 1:19

Path to Righteousness

A Lamp For My Feet

Mighty in Its Influence:

A devouring flame

A crushing hammer

A life-giving force

A saving power

A defensive weapon

A probing instrument

A Blessing to the Reverent

Purity for My Life

The Standard of Faith

Sacred

To Be Studied

Seed-Corn for the Sower

Absolutely Trustworthy

Profitable for Instruction

Africa Aflame Resources

Psalms 119:105

Jeremiah 5:14

Jeremiah 23:29

Ezekiel 37:7

Romans 1:16

Ephesians 6:17

Hebrews 4:12

Matthew 7:24

John 15:3

Proverbs 29:18

Proverbs 30:6

Romans 15:4

Mark 4:14

Psalms 111:7

Isaiah 2:3

"The Bible is the unfailing guide which points the way for men to the perfect life."

(J. Edgar Hoover)

LESSON THREE

FAITH

MEMORY VERSE: *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Hebrews 11:6).

We like to sing, "Faith, faith, faith! Just a little bit of faith..." But what is faith? Why faith? How can one receive faith? And what is the *object* of faith?

WHAT IS FAITH?

Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary defines "faith" as:

- Trust, confidence
- Complete acceptance of a truth which cannot be demonstrated or proved by the process of logical thought
- A virtue by which a Christian believes in the revealed truths of God

A man of faith is not someone who relies upon his own ability for his salvation from sin and for victory in life. A man of faith is someone who hopes and trusts in God and His Word. He is someone who considers Jesus his personal Lord and Savior who died and resurrected on his behalf.

Abraham demonstrated faith long before Jesus' time, to the point that he was described as the *"father of all them that believe"* (Romans 4:9-12). Abraham actually trusted and obeyed God. He was obedient to the demand by God to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah by burnt offering. Abraham's obedience was based on the fact that he trusted God. This extraordinary obedience and trust was counted as righteousness for Abraham (Romans 4:3, 9) – that was faith demonstrated.

The writer of Hebrews described faith as *"...the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Hebrews 11:1). God is presently invisible to the natural eye. He is a spirit (John 4:24). But He has not left us without evidence of Himself. He has, over the years, manifested Himself in several ways and spoken through His chosen prophets for various purposes (Hebrews 1:1; 2 Peter 1:20-21). When we 1) believe the Word of God delivered unto us, and 2) become obedient as we change our lives and rely upon God, trusting that He will take care of us and supply all our needs (both physical and spiritual), that is FAITH.

WHY FAITH?

Why is it necessary to have faith? The world today is like a boat in the midst of a severe storm on the high seas. Business, financial, marriage and family problems have become the worry of millions of people. Spiritual, mental, and physical diseases are bothering many who feel helpless to defend themselves. Everyone going through these troubles knows he needs words of encouragement from someone, somewhere, who will be able to give him assurance and help.

That *somewhere* is the Word of God. It is the best place to look for encouragement, assurance, and direction. This is so because the Word of God is powerful and creative. It gives knowledge, understanding and wisdom. It enables a person to go through life and overcome his problems. But it takes *faith* to believe that God's Word has any meaningful solutions to the problems of life. The truth is that in the face of all these struggles, faith is the one virtue all of us need most. Every area of life depends on faith in God's Word for total victory and ultimate salvation. The Bible says:

- ☞ *"The just shall live by faith"* (Romans 1:17).
- ☞ *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him"* (Hebrews 11:6).

These Scriptures state in clear terms that a person without faith can neither overcome in life nor please God. *The Thompson Chain Reference Bible* lists the following as reasons for needing faith:

- ☞ Faith assures success (2 Chronicles 20:20; Mark 11:22-24).
- ☞ Faith is a fundamental duty (John 6:28).
- ☞ Faith is a defensive weapon (Ephesians 6:16; Hebrews 10:22).
- ☞ Faith is essential in prayer (James 1:5-6).
- ☞ Faith justifies the believer (Galatians 3:6; Philippians 3:9).
- ☞ By faith we receive blessings (Matthew 8:13; 17:20).

HOW CAN I RECEIVE FAITH?

Romans 10:17 tells us, *"So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."* Missionary Dale Starks, in his book *Spiritual Growth – 2* says it like this: "Faith comes through familiarity with God's Word." Faith develops through the receiving and application of the Word of God we have read or heard preached. As we experience the unfailing result in the application of the Word of God, we get more excited and encouraged to live more by the Word. *Through the Bible Study Series* (Pentecostal Publishing House) tells us, "Faith, however, is not simply believing in the sense of giving passive mental assent to some idea or concept. Faith, *true faith*, is ACTIVE. It is moving in the direction of God's promises."

Many men of God received more faith as they continually experienced the Word of God:

- ☞ Caleb defeated the Anakims when he believed the promised Word of God (Joshua 14:6-15).
- ☞ Jonathan (1 Samuel 14), David (1 Samuel 17:32-37), and Jehoshaphat (1 Chronicles 20) bravely overcame their enemies because they continually trusted the Word that God had spoken to them.
- ☞ To the crew of the wrecked ship Paul said, *"Wherefore sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me"* (Acts 27:25).

The Bible is full of examples such as these; God's Word ALWAYS comes true!

How do we receive faith?

By expecting God to do what we know

He has said in His Word that He WILL do!

WHAT IS THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH?

Has anyone ever asked you, "Do you have faith in prayer?" Being a Christian, you probably answered, "Yes." But neither prayer nor any other thing should become the object of our faith. If that is true, what SHOULD we have faith in? Rev. K. A. Premph testifies:

When I first began my journey on the "Path to Righteousness," I still believed in the trinity. But one day a pastor of the UPCI came my way and shared the doctrine of the Oneness of the Godhead with me. At first, I was very skeptical, but something within me urged me to ask God in prayer for a revelation of Himself so I would be able to confirm or deny this doctrine.

While earnestly seeking God, I had a very strong vision in which I saw Jesus as the only exalted and Almighty God! I saw Jesus Christ as the everlasting Father, the Creator of the universe.

After this, I began to search the Scriptures for confirmation. While reading, the words seems to jump off the page at me to point to Jesus as the main character the Bible was testifying about. My faith in the *written Word* was transferred to Jesus, the *living Word*. John 1:1 and 1:14 became real to me:

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.'

Other Scriptures also came alive:

- 📖 *'Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me'* (John 5:39).
- 📖 *'And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not'* (John 6:35-36).
- 📖 *'Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live'* (John 11:25).
- 📖 *'Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me'* (John 14:6).
- 📖 *'He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God'* (John 3:18).

As if that were not enough, Paul sealed my testimony by plainly stating who the *object* of our faith should be – **Jesus Christ**, the author and finisher of our faith. *"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith"* (Hebrews 12:2).

CONCLUSION

So, to have this faith in Jesus Christ, we need **two things**:

- 1) A **clear understanding** and **knowledge** of what God’s Word says. This comes through reading and studying God’s Word ourselves.
- 2) A **confidence** that God cannot lie.

These two things produce a strong faith – the type that:

- **Sees** the invisible,
- **Believes** the incredible,
- **Receives** the impossible.

How does that chorus we began with end? *"You don't need a whole lot, just use what you've got! Faith, faith, faith, just a little bit of faith!"*

F.Forsaking
A.All
I.In
T.Trusting
H.Him

LESSON FOUR
REPENTANCE

MEMORY VERSE: *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent"* (Acts 17:30).

JUST HOW IMPORTANT IS REPENTANCE?

The doctrine of repentance is prominent throughout the Bible.

- ☞ John the Baptist began his public ministry (Matthew 3:1-2) as did Jesus Himself (Matthew 4:17) with the call to repentance upon his lips. When rebuked for this, Jesus told His accusers (those self-righteous scribes and Pharisees), *"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"* (Luke 5:32).
- ☞ When Jesus sent forth the twelve to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of heaven, He commanded them to preach repentance. *"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:47).
- ☞ Foremost in the preaching of the apostles was the doctrine of repentance:
 - Peter (Acts 2:38)
 - Paul (Acts 20:21)
- ☞ The burden of the heart of God, and His one commandment to all men everywhere, is that they should repent: *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9).

Does this doctrine of repentance find such a prominent place in the preaching and teaching of today? Has the need of repentance diminished? Has God lessened or changed the terms of admission into His kingdom? NO, NEVER! In fact, failure on the part of man to heed God's call to repentance means that he shall utterly perish:

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5).

This was so important that Jesus repeated the exact words in two verses in the same chapter. He was serious about this repentance business.

HOW DOES REPENTANCE WORK IN MY LIFE?

TRUE repentance involves three different areas of life, and each is equally important:

Mind/thoughts:

In Matthew 21:29 we read: *"He answered and said, 'I will not': but afterward he repented, and went."* The word here used for "repent" means **to change one's mind, thought, purpose, view, regarding a matter; it is to have another mind about a thing.** So we speak of this as a complete change touching our attitude and views towards sin and righteousness. This change is well illustrated:

In the action of the prodigal son (Luke 15) and

In the well-known story of the Pharisees and the Publican (Luke 18).

When Peter (on the Day of Pentecost) call upon the Jews to repent (Acts 2:14-40), he actually told them to change their minds and their views regarding Christ. They had considered Him to be a mere man, a blasphemer, an impostor. The events of the few preceding days had proven to them that He was none other than the righteous God manifested in the flesh. The result of their repentance, or change of mind, would be that they would receive Jesus Christ as their long-promised Messiah.

Emotions/feelings:

This is not a change of mind, and a mental belief only, for even the devil himself believes (James 2:19). There are those in many churches today who would have us believe that anything other than a simple belief is becoming a "work." But if that were so, why did Jesus command us to repent? No, repentance is definitely necessary, but it must also involve a complete change of heart: *"...for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness"* (Romans 10:10).

- ☞ 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 says: *"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."*
- ☞ The "sorrow of the world" was not true repentance, but being sorry that the consequences of sin had caught up with them. But "godly sorrow" caused them to be *careful, to clear themselves, to fear God, to have a burning desire, to have great zeal, to seek revenge against Satan, and to be highly indignant against the tricks of the enemy* (2 Corinthians 7:11).
- ☞ Luke 10:13 and Genesis 6:6 show us the connection of this godly repentance: it means to be a care to one afterwards, to cause one great concern.

- ☞ So, the Publican “beat his breast” indicating sorrow of heart (Luke 18:14).
- ☞ Just how much emotion is necessary for true repentance no one can definitely say. The Psalmist declared it like this: “*For I will declare mine iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin*” (Psalm 38:18).

Will/disposition:

One of the Hebrew words for **repent** means “to turn.” The prodigal said, “*I will arise*” (Luke 15:18-20) and he arose. He not only

- Thought about his ways, and
- Felt sorry because of them, but
- He turned his steps in the direction of home.

So, in a very real sense, repentance is a crisis with a changed experience in view. Repentance is not only a heart broken FOR sin, but FROM sin also. We must **forsake** what we would have God **remit**.

Paul wrote much about repentance as more of an experience than a single act. (Romans 2:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

God’s Word speaks much about this “turning” from our old ways when we TRULY repent.

- ☞ John the Baptist spoke of it when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to him for baptism: “*Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance* (Matthew 3:8). Again John says in Luke 3:8: “*Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance.*”
- ☞ The Apostle Paul spoke of it before Agrippa, “*But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance*” (Acts 26:20).

SO NOW, HOW DO I REPENT?

- ☞ In confession of sin to God (Luke 18:13; 15:21).
- ☞ In confession to man if I have wronged him by my sin (Matthew 5:23-24; James 5:16).
- ☞ In the forsaking of sin: “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord*” (Isaiah 55:7). “*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy*” (Proverbs 28:13).

The story is told of a couple who lived with their five-year-old child named “Kofi” in a certain village. This man and wife were not Christians, but little Kofi was faithfully carried to the Sunday school in the only Pentecostal church in that village by his nursery teacher, who was a co-tenant of the family.

One day, all the children were given memory verses in their Sunday school class and Kofi had Exodus 20:15: “*Thou shalt not steal.*” Kofi’s teacher explained to him that if one steals and is not caught, God in heaven still sees him. Kofi kept this verse in his heart, and always recited it to his friends in nursery school.

One bright Saturday morning, Kofi’s father asked Kofi to accompany him to the nearby farm to visit his traps. On their way, they came across a very big orange tree full of ripe fruit. Kofi’s father stopped and pulled out a sack. He then asked Kofi to watch while he plucked the oranges into the sack. Kofi knew very well that the oranges did not belong to his father, so he told him, “Papa, Papa, THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.”

Kofi’s father replied, “Keep watching and inform me if someone is coming.” Kofi replied, “Papa, Papa, God in heaven would see you if nobody else sees you.”

The father was so shocked by Kofi’s words that he came down from the tree and led the boy home.

- ☞ Little Kofi taught his father a very important lesson that day: we must confess and forsake our sins, for God sees and knows all things, even our heart. But even confession and forsaking of the sin is not complete repentance, for then we must turn in the direction God is moving.
- ☞ In turning to God, it is not enough to turn away from sin; we must turn unto God: “*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me*” (Acts 26:18).

HOW DO I KNOW MY REPENTANCE IS ACCEPTABLE TO GOD?

A beautiful example of godly repentance is shown in Luke 7:36-50, where the woman washes the Lord's feet with her tears and wipes them with her hair, and then kisses his feet and anoints them. After she has done this, the Lord says: *"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, 'Thy sins are forgiven.' And he said to the woman, 'Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace'"* (Luke 7:47-48, 50).

Godly repentance is a loving sorrow for having sinned against Him who first loved us (John 4:19).

- ☞ Job said, *"I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes"* (Job 42:6).
- ☞ The person who repents as David did when he said to the Lord, *"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight"* (Psalm 51:4), will loathe himself and have a deep hatred for sin, longing to be freed of it.
- ☞ Godly sorrow is a sorrow for sinning against God who bare our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24).
- ☞ Only godly repentance such as that is acceptable to God. It will produce faith to believe God when He says, *"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

WHAT IS THE RESULT OF MY TRUE REPENTANCE?

The first result is what happens in heaven: *"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth"* (Luke 15:7,10). All heaven rejoices that the will of God has been accomplished on earth – a sinner has repented.

True repentance makes God so happy. He is faithful to forgive us: *"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).

Peter told us the last thing that will be a result of our true repentance. He spoke to the people who were gathered around after the healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful. After telling them how they had abused and killed the very Messiah they had been waiting for, he then said, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19). Peter knew what those times of refreshing were; he had seen them take place on the Day of Pentecost. But refreshing cannot come until forgiveness and cleansing takes place. We must first. . .

R e p e n t!

LESSON FIVE

WATER BAPTISM IN THE NAME OF JESUS

MEMORY VERSE: *"Then Peter said unto them, 'Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of JESUS CHRIST for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost'"*
(Acts 2:38).

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

"Baptism" comes from a Greek word *baptizo*, which means "immersed, plunged into, or completely covered." Immersion is the only mode of baptism the Bible records.

John immersed Jesus: *"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water"* (Matthew 3:16). *"And straightway, coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened"* (Mark 1:10). Philip immersed the Ethiopian eunuch when he baptized him: *"And when they were come out of the water, the spirit of the Lord caught away Philip"* (Acts 8:38-39).

Christian water baptism is a ceremony in which one who has repented of his sins is immersed in water. This is a personal step of obedience taken by a repented soul.

WHY SHOULD WE BAPTIZE?

Water baptism held a crucial position of importance in the plan of the Tabernacle in the wilderness that was used by Moses and the children of Israel in the Old Testament. God gave them this plan, and it included a type of baptism – the washing of the priests in the brazen laver before they could enter the Holy Place (Leviticus 8:6; Exodus 30:19-21).

- ☞ In the New Testament, water baptism is an essential ingredient also. As our memory verse says, this baptism is not just for getting wet, but for the remission of sins, and must be applied with a specific formula.
- ☞ In the Old Testament, Leviticus chapter 16 tells us that it was very important that the priest was correctly attired and also washed before he offered the sin offering and the burnt offering, and before he entered the Holy Place. He only entered the Holy Place once a year, for the atonement of the sins of the people. This chapter was given as special instructions to the priesthood after Aaron's sons were killed when they did not carefully follow the instructions of the Lord concerning this sacred ritual of atonement. God does not approve those who do not 1) know His instructions and 2) follow them very carefully. Hebrews 9:22 tells us: *"And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."* The remission of sins does not come by the water or baptism, but by the name of Jesus, who shed His blood for us on Calvary (Hebrews 9:12-15) and by obedience to the instructions and example given to us by Jesus Himself.
- ☞ So, when we are obedient to the instructions given by Peter in Acts 2:38, we are committing an act of faith in Jesus Christ and in the power of His blood to wash us and cleanse us from all our sins.

Baptism is a type of burial as recorded by Paul in Romans 6:4-5: *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."* So Paul, in writing to the church at Rome, was letting them know that the death they would experience was not like the one Jesus experienced, but was a death to the sinful nature with which they were born. And the calling of His name – Jesus – the One who shed His sinless blood – was what gave them a new life, a cleansing from past sins.

Baptism is a very strong commandment of God's Word; the Lord Himself spoke about it on several occasions:

- ☞ He told the ruler of the Jews, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, that there were some special instructions for anyone who wanted to enter the kingdom of heaven: *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"* (John 3:5).
- ☞ After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the eleven and rebuked them because they didn't believe those who had reported seeing Him alive again. Then He gave them this commission: *"Go ye into the all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover"* (Mark 16:15-18).
- ☞ Just as there were serious consequences in the Old Testament when the priest did not follow the instructions given by the Lord, the New Testament also records grave results for those who do not obey the Lord's instructions regarding baptism:
 - *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:16).
 - *"...baptism doth also now save us"* (1 Peter 3:21).

Let us be very careful to obey the instructions of the Lord!

HOW SHOULD WE BAPTIZE?**Follow the example of the Apostles**

Jesus asked His followers a very important question one day. He said, *"Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"* (Matthew 16:15). They all gave various responses, and then Peter said, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:16). When Jesus heard this, He was pleased and told Peter that flesh and blood had not revealed this to him. He went on to give Peter a very important commission: *"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto"*

thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). This was no chance statement, but was Biblical authority given to one man who had received a revelation of who God really was.

Neither was it a chance happening when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, and the people asked him, "What must we do?" He used his revelation of who God was to tell them: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you, In the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

But what about the commandment of the Lord in

Matthew 28:19? "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

- ☞ So, what WAS His father's name? John 5:43 tells us: "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive."
- ☞ WHAT was the name that He came in? Matthew 1:21 says: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Luke chapter 1, verses 76-79 goes even further to speak about this child that would be born, and explains what He will do for us: ". . .to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins. . ." **WHAT A WONDERFUL NAME!**

WHAT WAS THE EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTLES?

Peter and the rest of the apostles went on to carry out this command in the New Testament. Their followers were baptized by immersion, and in the name of Jesus Christ. OTHER BELIEVERS who had not heard this truth before include:

- ☞ On the Day of Pentecost – those that received the word Peter preached were baptized (Acts 2:41) – JEWISH BELIEVERS.
- ☞ The Samaritans believed the preaching of Philip and were baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 8:12, 16) – SAMARITAN BELIEVERS.
- ☞ Cornelius, the first Gentile, was baptized when he heard the truth (Acts 10:47-48) – GENTILE BELIEVERS.
- ☞ Even John the Baptist's disciples at Ephesus – when they heard what God had done for His disciples, they obeyed the word also (Acts 19:1-7) – PREVIOUS BELIEVERS.
- ☞ Peter taught in Acts 4:12 – there is no other name that can save us.
- ☞ Paul taught it when he wrote to the church at Colosse – do ALL THINGS in the name of the Lord Jesus!

CONCLUSION

There is really no way around it. If we want to obey the Bible, baptism by immersion, in the name of Jesus is the only way. It was the way Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, and to the Samaritans and Gentiles. Jesus Himself gave Peter the keys to His kingdom, and Peter used them, right up until his death. Even in his first epistle to the church in general, supposedly written to believers scattered throughout the world through persecution, Peter reminded them of the importance of baptism: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21).

Water baptism saves us in the sense that it is an obedient expression of our repentance and faith in Christ and of our commitment to come out of the world. It is our confession and pledge that we belong to Christ and have died and risen with Him. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12).

Water baptism is not a magical act; it is without spiritual value unless it is accompanied by conscious faith and repentance. Baptism is important only because God has ordained it to be so. When we submit to water baptism according to God's plan, God honors our obedient faith and remits our sins.

Vance Havner, one of the most quoted preachers in America, said it like this:

"We may never be martyrs but we can die to self, to sin, to the world, to our plans and ambitions. That is the significance of baptism; we died with Christ and rose to a new life."

LESSON SIX

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

MEMORY VERSE: *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it set upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).*

INTRODUCTION

Many today speak of being “spirit-filled” and “born again.” But what are they talking about?

The term “born again” usually refers to Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to him at night in John 3:5-6: *“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* Nicodemus was having a difficult time understanding how someone who was grown could be “born again,” so Jesus explained that as the wind is real and you can feel and hear it but you can’t tell where it came from or where it is going – you can’t control it – so it is with every one that is “born again” (John 3:8).

So what do people mean by “spirit-filled?”

More than one Old Testament prophet wrote of this phenomenon of God’s Spirit actually living inside of us:

- ☞ Jeremiah 31:33-34 says: *“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*
- ☞ Ezekiel, in the passage of his important prophecy about the New Testament Messiah – in chapter 36, promises in verses 26 and 27: *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”*
- ☞ Probably the most well-known prophecy about being “spirit-filled” is found in Joel 2:28-29, *“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.”*

What does the New Testament say about this same phenomenon?

- ☞ Our memory verse (Acts 2:4) clearly states that the Spirit gave the disciples the utterance of “other tongues,” – the initial sign manifesting His indwelling presence.
- ☞ When Peter told the Jews assembled in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost that “this was that” spoken by the prophet Joel in Acts 2:16-18, his answer linked speaking with tongues to the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- ☞ Again, in Acts 2:33, later in his same sermon, Peter identified the sign of speaking with tongues as the evidence that the disciples had received the “promise of the Holy Ghost.”

Both the Old and New Testaments agreed that God would fill His people with His Spirit, and when that happened, the initial evidence was speaking in tongues. Fred Kinzie gives us several reasons in his tract about this subject:

The Sovereignty of God – God is not accountable to us for what He chooses to do. We have no reason to question His ways, nor dispute His actions. If you have any doubts that there is a decided connection between speaking with tongues and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, read the following Scriptures:

- ☞ Isaiah 28:11-12
- ☞ Mark 16:17

- 📖 Acts 10:46
- 📖 Acts 2:4
- 📖 Acts 19:1-6

An External Evidence – There are many evidences of the operation of the Spirit of God in one’s life. With some, such as the fruit of the Spirit, it is a matter of time before they are manifest. These follow after the Holy Ghost comes to live in our heart and life and are results of it. Peter and the six who went with him to Caesarea knew that the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost, not because of long-suffering, gentleness, meekness or temperance, but because they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Such is an outward, external evidence, instantly observed and heard.

A Uniform Evidence – In speaking about being born of the Spirit, Jesus states in John 3:8, “*So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.*” Certainly this is uniformity. By carefully analyzing this verse, you will see that Jesus places emphasis upon the word “sound.” You hear the sound of the wind blowing, and this is evidence of its presence. It is not seeing nor feeling that is important, though these evidences may be present, but hearing the sound. Some may conclude that this means the experience at Pentecost where they heard the sound as of a rushing mighty wind. However, this rushing mighty wind was not spoken of in Acts 10:46 or in Acts 19:6, but speaking in tongues was. We must conclude that the important part of the Spirit’s evidence at Pentecost was the speaking in other tongues. The WIND was impersonal; the SPEAKING was personal.

Complete Control – The speaking in tongues symbolized God’s complete control of the believer. James teaches very revealing things about the nature of the tongue:

- 📖 It is capable of defiling the whole body.
- 📖 Though it is a small member, it has never been tamed by mankind.

Since these things are true about the tongue, wouldn’t it need to be tamed before the whole body could be consecrated to God? In Matthew 12:29, Jesus tells us that before one can enter a strong man’s house and spoil or plunder his goods, he must first bind the strong man. The STRONG MAN OF OUR HOUSE IS OUR TONGUE. When God tames our tongue, we are under the control of the great God of the heavens, and we are endued with a spiritual force from on high and empowered for His service.

The Tongue is Man’s Greatest Expression of His Spirit – The ability and power to coordinate thought and tongue into intelligent speech is one of the highest prerogatives of man and elevates him above the beasts of the field – making him superior to any other of God’s creations. Therefore the tongue is the vehicle of expression for the spirit.

It is not difficult, after realizing these things about the tongue, to understand why God would use the **speaking in tongues** to express the greatest, most wonderful experience that mere man could receive. In the baptism of the Holy Ghost, God’s Spirit and ours become one. He uses our tongue and voice to express it, and it is the wonder chosen by God, the sovereign ruler of the universe.

WHO NEEDS THE HOLY GHOST?

There are six categories of Bible people who needed the Holy Ghost. By studying them, we can see who needs the Holy Ghost even in our modern society. Bro. Simeon Young wrote an excellent article on this subject, and he says:

Religious Activists Need the Spirit – Even the twelve apostles who had been with Jesus for three and a half years, healing the sick and casting out devils, still needed the Holy Ghost so much that Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until they were given the “power from on high” (Luke 24:49). In the book of Acts, Luke tells us that these twelve men received the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 1:13-14; 2:1-2).

Highly Favored and Blessed People Need the Spirit – Even Mary, the mother of Jesus who had been called “highly favored” and “blessed” at least five times in the first chapter of Luke needed the Holy Ghost. Her name was listed with the names of the twelve apostles and other family members of Jesus who were waiting in the upper room when the Holy Ghost first fell on the Day of Pentecost. Just because God blessed her and favored her did not mean that she was okay without God’s Spirit living inside her.

Those Healed and Delivered Need the Spirit – *“Unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many (Samaritans) that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city”* (Acts 8:7-8). Peter and John still came from Jerusalem and *“prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost”* because even with the divine touch of God in healing, they still needed His Spirit dwelling inside (Acts 8:15-17).

Sincere, But Misguided, Religious Zealots Need the Spirit – Saul of Tarsus was ALL of these things. But Saul desperately needed God’s Spirit living inside of him. God sent him a preacher and Saul became Paul with a NEW BIRTH (Acts 9:17).

Prayerful, Generous Friends of the Church Need the Spirit – Cornelius was very generous, and he prayed so hard that God sent an angel to speak to him! But this God-fearing Gentile STILL needed the Spirit of God dwelling within (Acts 11:14).

Long-Standing Church Members Need the Spirit – Paul found twelve men in the city of Ephesus who had been followers of John the Baptist for years. It was obvious that these men were true believers, but Paul STILL asked them, *“Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?”* (Acts 19:2). After Paul baptized them again – this time in the name of the Lord Jesus – he *“laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them: and they spake with tongues, and prophesied”* (Acts 19:5-6).

These six examples from God’s Word cover just about everybody. Anybody who doesn’t have the Holy Ghost NEEDS IT!

WHAT DOES THE HOLY GHOST DO FOR YOU?

- ☞ John 14:26 tells us that the Holy Ghost will teach us all things and bring all things to our remembrance, so we will have an understanding of the Word of God.
- ☞ Isaiah 28:12 lets us know that the Holy Ghost is the refreshing and gives rest to the weary.
- ☞ John 16:13 says that the Spirit of truth lets us know things to come in the future.
- ☞ Acts 1:8 tells us that the Spirit gives us power for witnessing.
- ☞ Romans 8:11 helps us understand that the Spirit is our promise that we will be resurrected.
- ☞ Romans 8:26 gives us assurance that the Spirit even helps us to pray – through intercession.
- ☞ Isaiah 59:19 says that the Spirit of the Lord will raise a standard against the enemy of our soul.
- ☞ Romans 8:9 says Christ places His seal of ownership on us by His Spirit IN US.

If someone were offering you a gift that would grant all of these benefits, would you actually refuse it? The gift of the Holy Ghost is a WONDERFUL thing that is needed by all and that has tremendous benefits. If you want this gift, just obey Peter’s instructions, given on the Day of Pentecost:

Receive Ye the Holy Ghost!

LESSON SEVEN

THE PATH TO RIGHTEOUSNESS – A “HOLINESS” HIGHWAY

MEMORY VERSE: *“And an highway shall be there, and a way; and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein”* (Isaiah 35:8).

INTRODUCTION

Now that we have understood the Plan of Salvation and have experienced obedience to it, we are no longer searching for the *Path TO Righteousness*. We can walk on the *Path OF Righteousness* .

It is no simple thing to follow the *Path OF Righteousness* in this present day, living righteously in an unrighteous world. The child of God must appear blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, as we are told in Titus 2:11-13: *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that,*

denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." We must:

- Deny ungodliness (a pagan-like disregard of God in thought and action)
- Deny worldly lusts (a strong desire and passion for things of this present world)
- Live soberly (seriously considering the laws/commands of God's Word)
- Live righteously (doing things in a right way as identified by the Bible)
- Live godly (according to the plan of God)

ALL should be done in this present world, and we should carefully prepare and look for the return of our Savior. And what is the thing that teaches us all of this? The Grace of God. God has equipped us so that we will be able to do it with His salvation and His grace and no other way. His Spirit IN US gives us hope: "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**" (Colossians 1:27).

What is this righteousness, this holiness that we need before we shall see God? *The Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines holiness as:

- 1) The quality or state of being dedicated for spiritual use.
- 2) The state of being spiritually perfect or pure, untainted by evil or sin.

This holiness refers to separation FROM the world and sin, and dedication TO God.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE FOR HOLINESS?

There are three basic purposes for a life of holiness:

- 1) To please God (1 Peter 2:9)
- 2) To communicate Christ to others (Matthew 5:16; 2 Corinthians 3:2-3)
- 3) To benefit ourselves both now and in eternity (Hebrews 12:14)

WHY IS HOLINESS NECESSARY?

Since the Lord God is holy and perfect, He demands holiness and perfection from all who come to Him.

Old Testament Call To Holiness

- ☞ He said to Abraham in Genesis 17:16: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be thou perfect." To the children of Israel after they had come out of Egypt (a type of sin and slavery) He demanded holiness of them saying: "Sanctify yourselves therefore and be ye holy; for I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 20:7).
- ☞ In the Old Testament, after God had reaffirmed His covenant with Abraham and the children of Israel, He decided to live among His people.
 - He demanded an offering (a sacrifice) from the people and a sanctuary (a holy place) for him to dwell in (Exodus 25:1-2, 8-9).
 - Moses prepared this sanctuary according to the pattern and materials God had revealed to him so God could live among His people (Exodus 40:33-35).
 - During their wandering in the wilderness, the Lord again spoke of dwelling with His people, this time not in the tabernacle or in the temple made by hands as in King Solomon's day (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 7:15-16), but with human flesh and using the human body as his temple (Joel 2:28).

New Testament Call to Holiness

- ☞ In Acts 17:24, Paul preached to the people of Athens on Mars Hill, and he said this about the temple dwelling place of God: "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands."
- ☞ In the Old Testament, when God dwelt among the children of Israel, He gave Moses the plan for building the Tabernacle. Today, in the building not made with hands, God still has a plan – just any old way will not do. Paul, in his writings to the church at Corinth, said: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for he temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

☞ Peter, in his epistle to the church in general, spoke of this also: *“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (1 Peter 1:15-16).

This preparation of the body as a sanctuary or temple, the dedicating of it for the Lord’s use, this call to BE HOLY, is what the Bible calls “holiness.”

PREPARATION OF THE BODY

Just as it was very important in the construction of the Tabernacle that the outer covering was properly put together so that the inner furniture and function could be correctly observed, so it is with the preparation of the body as God’s dwelling place: both inward and outward preparation is necessary. The Psalmist David understood this very well when he wrote in Psalm 24:3-5: *“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.”*

Inward Preparation – This involves a change of heart, or repentance.

- ☞ It is forsaking sin and never going back to it again. *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon”* (Isaiah 55:7).
- ☞ It is giving oneself to baptism in Jesus’ name for the washing away of one’s sins: *“To him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43).
- ☞ Paul in his letter to the church at Ephesus had this to say: *“That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5:26-27).

With repentance and baptism, the inner part of the body is prepared as God’s dwelling place. The Holy Ghost, by faith, can now reside in this temple: *“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God”* (Ephesians 3:16-19). But the word of holiness does not end here.

Outward Preparation – We all like to eat delicious food, prepared and arranged beautifully so that we enjoy looking at it before we eat it. But who will eat a beautiful meal that is served out of a chamber pot (toilet bowl)? The body, as the temple of God, should be seen in a way that actually reveals the attitude of God. Thus, the outward preparation of the body is very important. This outward preparation involves the transformation of the individual from his old ways of life. Paul had this to say to the church in Rome: *“I beseech (I beg) you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:1-2).

What is “this world” that we should not be conformed (made like) to? The Apostle John, in his first epistle (1 John 2:16) defines the world as:

- The lust of the flesh
- The lust of the eye
- The pride of life

And John made it a point to emphasize that whoever has his love in these things has no love of God in him. *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away; and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”* (1 John 2:15-17).

Given these Scriptures and an understanding that friendship with the “world” is enmity with God (James 4:4), there are seven questions you should ask yourself before you begin to do, say, think or enjoy anything:

- ☞ Can it be done for the glory of God? (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- ☞ Can it be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus” asking His blessing on the activity? (John 14:13)

- ☞ Can it be done while sincerely giving thanks to God?
- ☞ Is it a Christ-like action? (1 John 2:6)
- ☞ Will it weaken the sincere convictions of other Christians? (1 Corinthians 8:1)
- ☞ Will it weaken my desire for spiritual things, such as God's Word and prayer? (Luke 8:14; Matthew 5:6)
- ☞ Will it weaken or hinder my witness for Christ? (Matthew 5:13-16)

The Reason for Holiness Standards – Standards are supposed to protect us in one or more of these areas. A standard is a fixed rule or measure that is established by authority. God has never wanted His people to be frustrated about what will or will not please Him. So He has given us some biblical principles which have applied throughout the centuries of time and still apply today.

- ☞ We have already learned that in this present day, our bodies are the temple of the Lord. What are we supposed to do with His temple? Paul wrote the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; 7:1 and explained it like this: *“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”*
- ☞ The life of holiness is a continual striving for perfection (Philippians 3:12-17). No one is absolutely perfect, but we are holy if we place our faith in Christ, live a repented life according to God's Word, and seek to grow progressively more Christ-like by the power of the indwelling Spirit. God expects continued growth in grace and knowledge and increasing production of spiritual fruit (2 Peter 3:18).
- ☞ We may not be perfect, but we are supposed to be walking on a road that leads to heaven – one that is straight and narrow, one that is HOLY. The prophet Isaiah spoke about it in his 35th chapter, verse 8: *“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”*

CONCLUSION

The “Path of Righteousness” is a special path. Why? Because it is the road where God Himself walks, leading us to heaven, our eternal home. God knew we wouldn't be able to walk a holy walk without His help, so He provided all we need in the Comforter He sent us – that Comforter who works inside of us to make us Holy, like He is. There is a special chorus that plainly tells us how it all works together:

Jesus on the inside, working on the outside, Oh, what a change in my life!
Jesus on the inside, working on the outside, Oh, what a change in my life!
Jesus on the inside, working on the outside, Oh, what a change in my life!
Ooohhhh, what a change, in...my...life!

LESSON EIGHT

PRACTICING HOLINESS

MEMORY VERSE: *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).*

In Lesson Seven, we learned about the “highway of holiness” and what that meant. According to *The New Life Study Bible*, after we have receive God's Spirit living in us, with the resulting powerful revelation of God's glory and majesty, the way of holiness becomes so clear that even a fool could not miss it. All the redeemed should then walk in complete holiness. Do we claim to be redeemed? Are we walking in this “Way of Holiness?” In other words, after we get on this “highway” we must stay on it – no detours allowed.

It is impossible to make a list of all the things a person could be tempted to do that would take him off this “highway.” Anything that could be labeled “worldly” has already been shown to be wrong. Let us look at some of the “standards of holiness” that are given for our protection, with God’s Word and His Spirit as the source of warning against them.

ADORNING THE TEMPLE

The Bible has much to say about the adornment of God’s temple. In the Old Testament, the Tabernacle had to follow specific guidelines laid down by God, given to Moses (his servant) and carried out by the people (his children, the Israelites). There were instructions for every part of the adornment of the physical temple, and even for the adornment of the priests who officiated in that temple (Exodus 35-40).

God was very particular that His instructions be followed exactly for both. In the eighth chapter of Leviticus, Moses brought Aaron and his sons before the Tabernacle, and he gave them the clothes that God had said they should wear. He also washed them according to the instructions of the Lord. But in the tenth chapter of that same book, two of Aaron’s sons decided they would do something THEIR way, rather than as God had commanded. Remember that this was under the Law, and so God immediately sent out fire to consume them. They died right there. It did not matter that they were sons of the high priest. It did not matter that they were especially clothed to perform God’s work in His temple. Disobedience brought immediate death.

Does this tell you anything about how serious God is about His instructions? Even something so trivial as a little bit of incense not according to His instructions? GOD CARES! He notices what you are doing, and He will ask you to give an account of how you have followed His instructions on the judgment day (Romans 2:4-7). This is the day of grace, but grace will not help you on that day.

God’s plan for man and his “temple” began in the Garden of Eden and has continued up until today. God made the first clothes ever sewn, and He expected us to take note (Genesis 3:21).

Because of the built-in awareness in the human conscience of the difference between men and women, God commands a covering (Genesis 3:7-10). The clothes made by Adam and Eve were not correct or sufficient, so God made them some better ones. They made clothes of fig leaves – easily spoiled, not difficult to see through, not comfortable, and pieced together with possible holes (have you ever tried sewing leaves together?). In short, the clothes Adam and Eve made were not good. But when God began to sew, he did it right. He took material that wouldn’t tear, was all in one piece, couldn’t be seen through, and was durable enough to last a long time. God knows more about what we need than we do.

After this first clothing creation, God didn’t make any more clothes in the Old Testament, but He did make sure the Israelites were able to keep wearing the clothes and shoes they had on when they left Egypt (Deuteronomy 29:5). God still kept His people properly clothed. David, in some of his writings, along with his son Solomon, had some instructions about out adorning:

- ☞ Clothing should identify with the godly (Psalm 1:1).
- ☞ Clothing should be attractive (Proverbs 31:21-22, 24).

What do we read in the New Testament as Instructions given to God’s new people, His temple of clay? Paul and other church leaders had many instructions to give the churches. So it was not just the Old Testament writers who spoke out.

- ☞ Clothing should be modest (1 Timothy 2:9).
- ☞ Clothing should be moderate (1 Timothy 2:9, 15; Philippians 4:5).
- ☞ Clothing should not be costly (Matthew 6:25, 30-33).
- ☞ Clothing should not confuse the sexes (Deuteronomy 22:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9).

These Scriptures let us know that God STILL CARES about the adornment of HIS TEMPLE. The writer of Revelation even paints us a picture of what the Bride of Christ will look like at His appearing (Revelation 19:7-8). She is arrayed without ornaments, jewelry, or paint.

According to the *Accelerated Bible Curriculum – Lesson 7*, the custom of wearing ornaments and jewelry is almost as old as man. The earliest rings known are those found in the tombs of ancient Egypt.

- It is believed that wearing jewelry was more the result of a desire to secure various openings of the human body against the entrance of evil spirits than purely for female vanity (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*).
- *Encyclopedia Britannica* tells us that the symbolic significance of the ring is based on its being considered substantially a “magic circle.”
- In early times, it may be said that *every* ornament was an amulet. From the wearing of amulets, the use of ordinary jewelry originated (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*).
- Since jewelry and ornaments had such an early beginning in human history, it is not surprising to find them referred to in the first book of the Bible. After God told Jacob to return to Bethel and build Him an altar, Jacob told all the members of his household to be clean and change their garments and to put away strange gods (Genesis 35:2,4). So what did they do? They gave him all their strange gods, and all their earrings, and Jacob hid them under the oak by Shechem. The initial step in turning to God through consecration and prayer was to remove their jewelry.
- In Exodus 33:1-11, we read of how the children of Israel left Egypt with many golden and silver ornaments, given to them by their Egyptian neighbors. However, God was going to use them for His Tabernacle. The Israelites made a golden calf from some of these same earrings. When God required the removal of the ornaments for a consecration unto Him, the Israelites finally obeyed, and God accepted their consecration and self-denial. This attitude still touches the heart of God.
- The book of Revelation speaks of the harlot church and makes a contrast between her and the Lamb's wife: “*And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication*” (Revelation 17:4). A completely opposite picture than that of the Bride of Christ: “*...and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*” (Revelation 19:7-8). Christ's bride will be composed of Spirit-filled believers who have carefully and consistently obeyed the teachings of God's Word on godly dress and adornment.

Why do we take chances and believe that the grace of God will save us from His wrath on the judgment day? We may not be like Nadab and Abihu (Aaron's sons) who offered “strange fire” unto the Lord when He had given them explicit instructions, but when we disobey His instructions about the way we keep HIS TEMPLE, we are asking for the same punishment – the fire of His wrath.

The adornment God most appreciates is a meek and quiet spirit, humility, modesty, moderation, godliness, and good works (1 Peter 3:3-5). Relics from our old life of sin belong to the kingdom of this world, and simply take away from the Christian's testimony and distract attention from the adorning of the beautiful Spirit of God. Let us follow God's instructions and wear His adornment.

A “COVERING” FOR THE TEMPLE

The Tabernacle in the wilderness had a very special covering which was made with several different materials and fashioned after the direct order of God (Exodus 36). The curtains, the doors, even the wall around the Tabernacle on the outside had to be made according to these instructions. God is definitely a God of details!

When God decided to make our bodies His dwelling place, He again had a definite and specific plan. He did not leave it to chance, and He had already designed the covering He meant for us to use for HIS TEMPLE. This plan is revealed to us in Paul's writings to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16. There is much controversy about these instructions, even as in the Old Testament some did not believe it was necessary to follow God's instructions with regard to the Tabernacle. But clearly, 1 Corinthians 11:15 speaks of the God-given covering of a woman. This chapter also clearly speaks of the reason why a man should NOT have his head covered.

The length of one's hair is not merely a matter of style. It has a much deeper significance, and even involves a person's attitude toward God. That is why it is so important that we understand what Paul was teaching, so we can know God's plan for the covering of His temple.

A Sign of Submission to Authority

- ☐ 1 Corinthians 11:3 – Christ (the human side of Jesus) was glad to submit to the Father (the Spirit that dwelled within Him). He was willing to follow God's plan, even unto death (Philippians 2:8).
- ☐ The man must submit himself to Christ.

- ☐ The woman is to subject herself to the man, her OWN husband, and through the man, to Christ. When a woman chooses the man she will marry, she chooses the man she will obey. This submission is not to EVERY man, but to her OWN HUSBAND (Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1).

The key here is that it is not difficult for a woman to submit to the man she has chosen as her leader, since she knows he is following Christ. Our problems come when we choose a man who, according to God's Word, is supposed to be our "head," and we know he is not following after the lordship of Christ. Then, we are asking for trouble, because we are choosing to submit to someone who is not in submission to authority. This will only bring pain. Since the Garden of Eden, women have had problems discerning spiritual things. 1 Timothy 2:13-14 tells us: *"For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."* A woman's uncut hair is a symbol of the "covering" of a strong, godly man who is himself submitted to his authority – God.

Because of the Angels

1 Corinthians 11:10 tells us a woman should have power (authority) on her head *"because of the angels."* Why does it matter what the angels think? Why are they watching us? There are three reasons given:

- ☐ We know that angels are curious about the experience of the Holy Ghost (1 Peter 1:12).
- ☐ Because of pride and rebellion, many angels were cast out of heaven along with their leader, Lucifer. So, angels watch to see if women will also be rebellious, or if they will wear the mark of consecration, submission, and power. Since the church is referred to as a woman, women show the angels how submissive the church is to Christ, the head of the church. Their uncut hair is a symbol of submission to authority.
- ☐ Believers (both men and women) shall judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3). If someday we shall judge angels for their lack of submission to God's authority, we must presently show submission by obeying God's Word concerning the hair question.

A Woman's Hair is Not to Be Shorn or Shaven

1 Corinthians 11:5-6 says that when a woman prays or prophesies, her head must be covered, unless she wants to be disgraced or shamed. Some have interpreted this to mean that women must wear a veil or hat while worshipping at church. However, it is not possible to wear such a second covering at all times, and Paul admonished us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to *"pray without ceasing."* Are you to never remove the covering? Yes, because your hair is given to you for a covering (1 Corinthians 11:15).

A Man's Hair Must Be Cut

"Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him" (1 Corinthians 11:14). The *Accelerated Bible Curriculum, Lesson 7 – "Separated Because of Him"* – states:

- Man was made in the image of God, and he has been given the highest authority in the human race. That is why he must NOT have his head covered. If a man wears long hair, he dishonors his own head and also his head of authority – God. Long hair on a man directly opposed this line of authority.
- How short is "short hair" for a man? It must be short enough to distinguish him from a woman. This length may vary in different generations or in various national cultures.
- Did JESUS wear long hair? Many try to justify wearing long hair with the excuse that Jesus wore HIS long, but history does not support that idea. A German painter, L. Fahrenkrog, says: *"Christ certainly never wore a beard and his hair was beyond a doubt closely cut. For this we have historical proof. The oldest representations, going back to the first Christian centuries, and found chiefly in the catacombs of Rome, all pictures Him without a beard."*
 - ✓ History clearly states that all Jews, except those taking a Nazarite vow, wore short, trimmed hair. Christ was familiar with the Jewish Talmud which required priests to cut their hair every thirty days. They were not supposed to shave their heads – a sign of sorrow – nor let it grow long – a sign of rebellion.
 - ✓ Long hair today speaks of rebellion and casting off authority. It identifies the wearer with the anti-God, against authority crowd. Pastors and churches who are not aware of this evil and who allow rebellious young men a place of honor or leadership are actually fighting against God.

A Sign of Separation

The way we wear our hair – both men and women – is a declaration of our desire to be separate unto the Lord. God has always had a separated people – first the Jews, and now all those who follow His plan, given in His Word (1 Peter 2:9). Here are some of the signals given by the length of a person’s hair, both men and women:

- Hair provides a distinction between the sexes; it makes a woman appear feminine and a man appear masculine.
- A woman’s uncut hair shows submission to her own husband, and to the plan and will of God.
- Her uncut hair is a sign to the angels that she is not rebellious.
- A woman’s long, uncut hair identifies her with those who wish to please God.
- A woman’s long hair is given for her “glory,” the honor resulting from God’s good opinion of her.
- A man’s short hair shows that he is under submission to his authority, which is Christ.
- A man’s short hair is a symbol of his own authority.
- A man’s short hair identifies him with those who wish to please.

God’s Word gives no guarantee that following His plan will be easier, more fashionable, or healthier. But when men and women determine to please the Lord, they are rewarded with God’s promise to answer their prayers.

CONCLUSION

These two areas of “practicing holiness” in no way cover all the things we do or don’t do as Christians. They are simply the most talked about and often the most questioned of our Christian habits. They are also the most obvious to our fellow man, and show the world our desire to please the Lord and be a separated people.

Even though we know that the salvation of the soul is not by works of righteousness but by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), we know to demonstrate our faith with works. Why? Because our faith, without works, is dead (James 2:20-24). So, the “practice” of holiness serves as a demonstration of our faith in the Lord through works of righteousness (1 Corinthians 15:34).

The Path to Righteousness is a great place to be – right inside God’s Word – where He gives us the instructions for the correct use of His temple (2 Timothy 3:16).

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

LESSON NINE

THERE IS ONE GOD

MEMORY VERSE: *“Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? Ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any”*
(Isaiah 44:8).

INTRODUCTION

From the “Dark Ages,” theories and ideas of men have brought much confusion to the minds and hearts of people concerning the truth about ONE GOD. Without the knowledge of this truth, which only comes by divine revelation, men have groped in darkness, when the light was there all the time. From the beginning of Scripture, God’s Holy Word has given us this truth, if we will but open our minds and hearts to receive it.

When God decided to choose a people who would be peculiarly His own, He made this truth of “one God” especially known and understood for them: *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord”* (Deuteronomy 6:4). This special understanding was to be written on the very doorposts of their house, bound on their wrists, and forehead, and repeated to their children night and day, before they went to bed every night and the first thing when they arose every morning. Even today, Jews of all walks of life still know this truth.

When the Apostle James wrote to the church, He did not have to persuade them of this fact: he only reminded them that someone else knew and understood it. *"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble"* (James 2:19). Lucifer himself, who began his existence as a created being right in heaven, knows that there is only ONE GOD. The problem with Lucifer is that he refuses to worship that one God!

The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy of this truth in 1 Timothy 2:5: *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."* The old and wonderful truth is still alive today – our Lord is ONE!

WHAT IS "MONOTHEISM?"

The belief in only one God is called "monotheism" and it comes from two Greek words: "*monos*," meaning alone, single, one; and "*theos*," meaning God. In his book *The Godhead*, Kenneth Reeves gives this term a simple definition: "The ancient doctrine that God is one, not many." This is the

extreme opposite of a plurality of beings whether called "tritheism," or in its modified form "trinity." This term, and even this concept, is alien to Scripture and is not found in the Old or New Testaments. But the Oneness of God is a doctrine that is central to the entire Bible, for as we have already seen (look at previous Scripture references), both the Old and New Testaments teach it plainly.

GOD IS A SPIRIT

John 4:24 plainly states, *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* Webster's dictionary defines "spirit" as, "a supernatural, incorporeal, rational being, usually invisible to human beings but having power to become visible at will." God has many attributes, but He is the same one God.

- ☞ **God is Invisible** (unable to be seen) – Exodus 33:20 – *And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live."*
- ☞ **God is Omnipresent** (present everywhere, filling all space) – Isaiah 66:1 – *"Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest?"*
- ☞ **God is Omniscient** (all knowing, infinitely wise) – Job 42:2 – *"I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee."*
- ☞ **God is Omnipotent** (all powerful; having ultimate authority) – 1 Timothy 6:15 – *"Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and LORDS of LORDS."*

In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself in many forms and dealt with men on man's level, but in the last days, He revealed Himself unto us by His son. *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds"* (Hebrews 1:1-2).

JESUS IS GOD

"For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). The fact that Jesus is God is as firmly established in Scripture as the fact that God is one. The Bible teaches that Jesus is fully God and fully man. Isaiah 9:6 is one of the most powerful proofs that Jesus is God. *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."*

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be called "Emmanuel," which means, "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14). In Matthew 1:22-23, when the angel came and announced to Mary about the birth of the Christ child, the write of Matthew declared, *"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, GOD WITH US."*

GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH

The New Testament is full of references to the fulfillment of God's plan to bring us hope. 1 Timothy 3:16 lets us know that God didn't just SEND someone to do that, but He came himself! *"And without controversy great is the*

mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

The Apostle John also lets us know that he understood who Jesus was – God in the flesh. *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"* (John 1:1-4; 14).

When man fell into sin, there was no one to save him because *"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). But again, God had a plan. Galatians 4:4 tells us: *"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law."* And the writer of Hebrews goes a bit further when he tells us in Hebrews 2:14-16, *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham."*

God had a plan, and He chose to fulfill it HIMSELF, in the FLESH of His Son, JESUS. His love was so strong that He chose to feel what His own creation was feeling so He could intercede on our behalf (Hebrews 2:17-18).

SON OF GOD

The divine nature of Jesus and the fact of His virgin birth are prevalent throughout the New Testament.

- ☞ He IS the Son of God because He was conceived by the Spirit of God, making God literally His father. *"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"* (Luke 1:35).
- ☞ When Peter confessed that Jesus was *"the Christ, the Son of the living God"* he recognized the deity of Jesus. He knew that this was the Messiah of which the prophets had foretold: *"...Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?...But whom say ye that I am?...And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:13,15-16).
- ☞ Jesus' disciples (at least one of them) finally understood, and Jesus could say with all thankfulness that this was the reason He had come into the world. This was the rock on which His great church would be built. *"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:17-18).

There IS one God, and His name is JESUS. This is the foundation of our church, the cornerstone, and without it, nothing shall be built that will last.

***"One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
One God and Father of all,
Who is above all, and through all,
And in you all"
(Ephesians 4:5-6).***

LESSON TEN

GOD'S PLAN FOR PROSPERITY

MEMORY VERSE: *"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it"*
(Malachi 2:10).

INTRODUCTION

There are many new doctrines circulating in our world today, and millions of people are following after them (Matthew 24:11). One of these is the "Doctrine of Prosperity." People flock by the thousands to hear various speakers describe the latest "get rich quick" method, using the Bible in a twisted and perverted sense to accomplish their aims. These people have forgotten one very important passage of Scripture, in their desire to see their blessings with their natural eyes.

- Paul wrote to the church at Colosse: *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Colossians 3:2).
- Henry Ward Beecher once said, "No man can tell whether he is rich or poor by turning to his ledger. It is the heart that makes a man rich. He is rich according to what he is, not according to what he has."
- Solomon, that wisest of men, wrote in Proverbs 30:8-9: *"Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."*

If I will keep this in my heart, I will have the proper attitude when I look for the blessings God has promised me. Not all prosperity takes the form of money. In his lesson "Stewardship – Pushing Until Prosperity Happens," Rev. Jim Poitras writes: "God has many ways of causing His children to prosper, but not all prosperity is economic or financial. Spiritual prosperity is the most important." Jesus concluded His parable of the rich man who ended up in hell by saying, *"...so is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God"* (Luke 12:21). True prosperity is an all-around success that includes:

- ☞ Being exalted (Deuteronomy 7:14; 28:13)
- ☞ Being successful in the home and workplace (Deuteronomy 28:3, 8-12)
- ☞ Having sound health for the whole family (Deuteronomy 7:15; Malachi 4:2)
- ☞ Enjoying protection and victory over one's enemies (Leviticus 26:6-8; Deuteronomy 28:7)
- ☞ Childbearing and soundness (Psalm 113:9; Deuteronomy 7:14)
- ☞ Having favor with God and man (Leviticus 26:11-12; Deuteronomy 28:9-10)

So, how do we go about finding the prosperity that is God's plan for our lives?

WHAT ABOUT TITHES?

As with every other portion of His creation, God has a special and beautiful plan for His people to be happy, enjoy abundance, and know His richest blessings. He gave this plan very early to the children of Israel – all the way back at the time of Abraham. How do you suppose Abraham knew, in Genesis 14:20, to give a tithe after the Lord had blessed him and given victory in battle? Melchizedek was the first recorded priest of the most high God, and Abraham treated him accordingly. It is recorded that Abraham gave the priest *"tithes of all."* Some say that tithing is no longer necessary because we are not under the Old Testament Law. But Abraham paid tithes before the law.

Abraham is not the only example of tithing before the practice was actually defined. Abraham's grandson, Jacob, also practiced tithing. When he was running from Esau, after God had visited him at Bethel, he promised God one-tenth of all his increase (Genesis 28:22). Where did Jacob learn about tithing? The Bible does not record this, but traditions are usually passed down by the father of the family. The fact that Jacob knew about the

practice tells us that he had seen or heard of it before – probably from his own father, Isaac, who had in turn learned it from his father, Abraham.

What are tithes?

Tithes are a tenth part of one's income or substance, given to God in order to support the ministry. The Hebrew word for "tithe" (*ma'ser*) literally means "a tenth part."

- ☐ When God set up the laws and ordinances that ruled His people, He established tithing as a means of financial support for the priesthood.
- ☐ In the Old Testament, the word "tithe" usually refers to the tithe given to the Levites for their service in the Tabernacle. The Lord spoke unto Aaron and said, *"And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation"* (Numbers 18:21).

The Israelites were basically a farming people, so their tithes were usually in the form of farm produce, or every tenth among the animals.

- ☐ At harvest time, the tithes were brought to the Tabernacle, and later, to the Temple in Jerusalem.
- ☐ If a person lived far from the "storehouse," the law allowed him to convert his tithe into money and travel with it to pay his "tithe."

One-tenth of the general tithe went directly to the High Priest (Numbers 18:21-28).

Who received the tithes?

The Levites were set apart from the other tribes in Israel. They were not to labor in the fields or among the herds, but were to devote their efforts to the service of God in the Tabernacle. So that they would be able to perform their duties properly, God provided a living for them in the tithe. But when Israel forsook God, tithing was forgotten. Then the Levites were forced to make a living somewhere else, and they went to the fields. *"For the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field"* (Nehemiah 13:10).

What were the firstfruits?

Not only did God expect a tenth of all the increase in Israel, He required the firstfruits. God promised the Levites, *"All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the LORD, shall be thine"* (Numbers 18:12-13). God did not want the leftovers. He DEMANDS the BEST that we have. We should give the Lord the firstfruits of our labor too. Why not pay tithes *before* other bills are paid? We would be amazed at how God would bless our increase if we would practice putting Him FIRST!

"The first fruits belong to the Lord. That is why we should pay our tithes first. We then ensure God's blessings on the remaining ninety percent. If we spend it all before we pay our tithes, there is nothing for God to bless." (T. F. Tenney)

WHAT ABOUT TITHING TODAY?

Tithing was considered as a tax in some of the early churches, but in the real sense, tithing expresses the character and personality of God, demonstrated in the act of giving. *"For God so loved the world that He GAVE His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

The writer of Hebrews tells us how it all fits together to become the special practice that God intended it to be.

- ☐ His plan was that we would honor Him with our firstfruits in the understanding that He gave us all that we have and it all belongs to Him. *"The earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein"* (Psalm 24:1).
- ☐ In return, he planned to bless His own people in a way they could not even contain – true prosperity (Malachi 3:10).
- ☐ Hebrews 7:2 says: *"To whom Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace."* The beauty of Hebrews 7:2 is so simple, yet easily

overlooked. When we tithe to the “King of Righteousness,” he is also, after that, called the “King of Peace.” Most people in the world today clamoring for wealth are not happy, and they surely do not have peace. But when we give our tithe as God intended, we are actually giving them to the one who grants us peace.

- ☞ Tithing, which comes from the spirit of giving, invokes the blessing of God to ensure **Genuine Prosperity**. “The blessing of the LORD maketh rich and addeth no sorrow” (Proverbs 10:22).

A COMMITMENT TO OBEDIENCE

1 Samuel 15:22 is a very special Scripture whose principle is followed throughout the Word of God: “*And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*”

God is still looking for people who will simply obey His Word. He even tells us that the true test of our love for Him will be shown in our obedience: “*Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me*” (Luke 14:23-24). This is a very strong statement. No matter what we say, if we do not obey God’s sayings, we do not love him!

The unfortunate idea of millions of people in our world today is that “tithing” is a voluntary relinquishing of something valued, but in the sight of God, it is the key to emancipate his children from the scourge of financial and health problems. God has *always* wanted His children to be happy, healthy, and full of all the good things they need, but they persist in disobedience. God continues to call all His children to belong to His assembly of faithful givers. “*Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice...Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me*” (Psalm 50:5, 14-15).

When you study God’s relationship with the children of Israel, it becomes clear the source of their woes and suffering. Most people would attribute their mishaps, tribulation and upheavals to the devil. God claims responsibility in His Word for these perils and explains His actions to be the direct result of *disobedience* on the part of His beloved children. “*Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? Saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house*” (Haggai 1:9). Why had God’s people lost His blessings? Why do we not have them today?

- Because of self-seeking lives, and
- Because of very little interest in God’s goals and purposes

WHY GIVE TITHES?

It already belongs to God. The key to prosperity is given to those who believe that what they give comes from God, for everything, even our breath, is given by God. “*But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee*” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

I do not want to be cursed. “*Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation*” (Malachi 3:9). Many cultures and countries of the world understand what it means to have a curse placed on an individual with demonic powers. But how many of us understand about the curse we place on *ourselves* when we fail to obey God’s Word?

- ☞ Poverty is a curse in many parts of the world, but God never intended it to be so. The deceiver has blinded our eyes and made us believe that we “can not afford” to pay tithes. We can not afford NOT to! Haggai 1:6 tells us what happens when we fall into this “I can’t afford” trap. “*Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.*”
- ☞ When God branded His people as robbers,
 - He was drawing their attention to the fact that all they had was from His divine treasury.
 - They had no right, even as His children, to disburse these funds without recognizing Him as the owner.
 - The creator does not expect the creature to pay for the benefits of His grace. That is why He says *bring* and not *pay*. What you bring honors the Lord, but He does not rely on that to consolidate His position as God, for He cannot deny Himself.

- All God wants is for His children to demonstrate His quality of giving, as He did when He gave His own blood for our redemption.
- Tithing gives us protection from the devourer, the one who would take our blessings from us by sickness, trouble, and lack of food and shelter. God has promised to make us a blessed people when we commit ourselves to obedience to His word. *“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts”* (Malachi 3:11-12).

When the people asked God, *“Wherein have we robbed thee?”* He answered, *“In tithes and offerings.”* Are not “tithes” and “offerings” the same thing? Absolutely not! They are both a very important part of God’s financial plan, but their purposes in the work of God differ, and they should never be joined or confused.

- There were many types of offerings in the Old Testament – peace offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings, thanks offerings, and many more.
- These offerings were either fulfilled or altered by the New Covenant. IN the New Testament, we find different examples of offerings, such as those taken for the needy saints in Jerusalem.
- Today when we give from a heart of love, our offerings are used to support many worthy causes in the church.
- The tithe is God’s perfect plan for supporting the ministry of the church. Offerings should be given over and beyond the tithe as God prospers us. Never keep only your tithe and divide it, calling a portion “offerings.” You are still cheating God when you practice this.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the Lord’s calling is to give life – not just ordinary life, but abundant life – here on earth for His people (John 10:10). He wants us to show forth His glory, and the only way is to bless His work with our substance, recognizing that it all comes from Him. In this way, he can open the windows of heaven and bless us as He planned to do from the beginning, and we shall receive our eternal reward also with joy, knowing that we have done our best and given our best while on earth.

The *Full Life Study Bible*, published by Zondervan Press, gives us a very good lesson on the “Stewardship of Money.” Let us live by these seven important principles found in the New Testament church, striving to be the best stewards we possibly can be of God’s blessings.

- ☞ We must remember that everything we have belongs to the Lord, so that what we do possess is not our own, but is what God has entrusted to us. We have no rightful ownership of our possessions. *“John answered and said, a Man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven”* (John 3:27).
- ☞ We must decide within our hearts to serve God and not money (Matthew 6:19-24). The Bible makes it plain that any greed is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5).
- ☞ Our giving must be:
 - To advance the kingdom of God, especially the work of the local church and of the spreading of the gospel throughout the world (1 Corinthians 9:4-14; Philippians 4:15-18; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).
 - To help those who are in need (Galatians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 8:14).
 - To lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20).
 - To learn to fear the Lord (Deuteronomy 14:22-23).
- ☞ Our giving should always be in proportion to our income. In the Old Testament the tithe amounted to one-tenth. Giving less than that was disobedience to the law of God and was in effect robbing God (Malachi 3:8-10). Similarly, the New Testament requires that our giving be in proportion to what God has given us (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:3,12).
- ☞ Our giving should be voluntary and generous; this practice is taught in both the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 24:8-11) and in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 11-12).
 - We should not hesitate to give sacrificially (2 Corinthians 8:3) for that is the spirit in which the Lord Jesus gave Himself for us.
 - Far more important to God than the monetary value of the gift is the sacrifice involved (Luke 21:1-4).

- ☞ Our giving should be cheerful (2 Corinthians 9:7). Both the example of the Israelites in the Old Testament (Exodus 35:21-29; 2 Chronicles 24:10) and the Macedonian Christians in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 8:1-5) serve as models for us.
- ☞ God has promised to reward us according to how we have given to Him (Deuteronomy 15:4; Malachi 3:10-12; Matthew 19:21; 1 Timothy 6:18-19).

Why not follow God's Plan for prosperity?

LESSON ELEVEN

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

MEMORY VERSE: *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).*

INTRODUCTION

Notice that our memory verse talks about what happens when a "righteous" man prays. It is amazing how often the Word of God speaks of special things happening to the "righteous." There is something about walking down the "Path to Righteousness," that makes many of life's troubles easier to bear.

James specifically speaks about the kind of prayer this "righteous" man prays: it is both "effectual" and "fervent." We know that "fervent" means to be very eager, excited, or emotionally involved in something. "Effectual" means that it works! It gets the desired results. So, James was telling us that the "righteousness man" (the one who does things according to God's laws, in a correct way) can pray in a very excited, emotional, involved way for something, and his prayers will work. What an exciting promise. But what is this "prayer" business?

WHAT IS PRAYER?

According to *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, prayer is "a humble communication in thought or speech to God or to an object of worship expressing supplication, thanksgiving, praise, confession, etc; an entreaty made to someone."

In *The Accelerated Bible Curriculum* – "Lesson 8," a story is told of a tourist to China who visited a heathen temple on a great feast day and observed hundreds of worshippers surrounding the hideous idol encased there. Most of the worshippers brought prayers written on small pieces of paper and wrapped in balls of stiff mud to fling at the idol. He inquired of the purpose for the strange and appalling practice, and learned that if the mud ball stuck to the idol, the prayer would surely be answered. If the mud fell off, their god had rejected the prayer.

This story may cause us to feel sad at the ignorance of praying to an idol, but may times we who serve a LIVING God do not really know how to pray or how to get answers.

Many people pray, believing that this is a "magic" formula that will get them whatever they are praying for. Prayer is NOT magic, but law. It works, regardless of whether man recognizes it or not.

Prayer is a need finding a voice. When hungry hearts cry out to God, He always meets them at their point of need (Luke 11:9).

Prayer is essential in a Christian's life. It does many things for us and to us, things which we will list here to help us understand what it really is:

- ☞ Prayer draws God's attention close to us and draws us near to Him (2 Chronicles 7:14-15; Psalm 25:1).
- ☞ Prayer gives us strength to bear our daily burdens (Psalm 18; Psalm 86:6-7).
- ☞ Prayer is the link that connects God's fulfillment of His promises to our daily lives (Luke 11:5-13; Matthew 9:38).

- ☐ Prayer is the only means through which we can be filled with His Spirit (Acts 1:12-14; John 14:12-26). Peter and the rest of the apostles, and even Jesus' own mother were together in prayer for the promise of the Holy Ghost. And it came! Jesus always keeps His promises, but He always expects us to fulfill our part too. Did the Holy Ghost fall on people who were not in the upper room obeying the command of Jesus to wait in Jerusalem until they were filled with power from on high? (Acts 1:4) No. The apostles had to obey God's Word, and THEN He kept His promise.
- ☐ After we have been obedient to His commandment to receive His Spirit, then He again commands us to continue to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. It is only through prayer that we can accomplish this (John 4:24).

Prayer is more than important, for without it, we would be without a means to communicate to God or a way to come before His throne. We have the great privilege of becoming acquainted with our God through prayer, just as we become acquainted with our earthly father through daily association and communication.

We learn much about the Lord by reading His Word (the Bible) but we begin to *know* and *enjoy* Him when we pray. Prayer is simply *talking to God*.

HOW DO WE PRAY?

There are many examples of prayer in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus Himself prayed and gave us examples, but there is one thing common with all His prayers. Jesus was always careful to "give thanks." The Psalmist David knew about this secret, long before Jesus ever came to the earth, and he used this key to unlock heaven's door many different times (Psalm 100:4; 116:17).

Start With THANKSGIVING.

Everyone is thankful *after* a prayer is answered. But it takes divine faith to thank the Lord and praise Him *before* the need is met, or the circumstances change and get better.

- ☐ Do not mention mistakes and failures now; let God know that you understand He is not the author of confusion, sickness, trouble or heartache. He is the Almighty, all-loving, all-powerful creator of everything good, and pure, and loving, and holy. Hallelujah!
- ☐ God desires our praise and His Word says He "*inhabits the praises of His people Israel*" (Psalm 22:3).
- ☐ In Hebrews 13:15 it is written: "*By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*" Let us begin our prayer with *praise*.

Continue with CONFESSION.

It is not easy to confess a wrong that we have done, or something that we have left undone, but until we do, it feels like a giant weight is keeping us from the presence of God.

- ☐ Be specific: tell God exactly what you have done that was not pleasing to Him.
- ☐ God is looking for a "*broken and a contrite heart*" (Psalm 51, especially verses 10-12). We must be honest and sincere with our confession, and God looks at our heart.
- ☐ Confession bridges the awful gulf between a righteous God and an unrighteous man. If you fall into sin, be sure to confess and ask for forgiveness (1 John 2:1). God's forgiveness will remove every weight and usher you right into the presence of the King (Hebrews 12:1).

Send God your SUPPLICATION.

The Apostle Paul talks of this portion of prayer in Philippians 4:6, "*...in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*" This expresses concern for our own welfare. We tell God about these needs because we cannot supply them from our own resources.

"It is strange that in our praying we seldom ask for a change of character, but always a change in circumstances."

(Bits & Pieces)

Supplication goes beyond communication.

- God's presence is very real, and your needs are specific. The Holy Ghost many times will direct your thoughts to particular needs and then you should voice them to God.
- State the exact problem and the circumstances causing you difficulty.
- Let God know that you are totally helpless unless He intervenes.
- Make sure you voice your complete trust in God's power.
- Let Him know that you are believing Him to perform His perfect will in the entire situation, for He has it all in His hands. When you expect Him to answer, He will!

Another form of supplication is when we talk to God for someone else's need. This is called **intercession**. There are many examples of this type of prayer in God's Word:

- ☞ Abraham prayed for Lot and his family (Genesis 18:23-32).
- ☞ Moses prayed for the children of Israel many times (Exodus 32:31-32). He was so serious and concerned that his own life became of little value beside the need of the nation he was leading.
 - It is at this point that *intercession* becomes different from *supplication*.
 - Now we are desperate for God to answer for the other person, and we forget about ourselves.
- ☞ There is another type of intercession that is very special, and that is **prayer for our enemies**. This one is most difficult, but more powerful than any other.
 - This type of praying is a direct commandment of Jesus in His "Sermon on the Mount." "*Love your enemies, . . . and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you*" (Matthew 5:44).
 - Jesus not only commanded it, but he practiced it. His final prayer from the cross released the power that resulted in the thief's repentance and salvation (Luke 23:34).
- ☞ It is not easy to forgive an enemy or pray for him as a friend.
 - When we find ourselves in this type of predicament, we turn to God again – first for ourselves. We ask the Lord to give us the grace and strength to forgive this person and love them. If we keep our bad feelings, we are harming ourselves seriously.
 - Before we can expect good results from our prayers, we must first forgive someone who has wronged or hurt us.
 - Then we must seek that person and make peace; otherwise, we cannot lift clean hands before the Lord and expect Him to answer our requests. "*Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift*" (Matthew 5:23-24).

"One way to have fewer conflicts with our fellowman is to wrestle with God in prayer."

(Quotable Quotations)

Take Time to BE QUIET.

To be considered "communion" there must be a two-way conversation. This is a part of prayer that many times is sadly neglected. David knew about this (Psalm 85:8), and we need to practice it.

"It is good to pray for the repair of mistakes, but praying earlier would keep us from making so many... When puzzled, go to prayer and LISTEN." (J. C. Macaulay)

- ☞ When we stop our talking and listen with an open heart and a mind fixed on Jesus, He can speak to our hearts, usually through a Scripture passage or a thought from Him.
- ☞ Very close friends do not need to talk all the time – they enjoy just being together. The same is true with Jesus and me – He needs to be my closest friend. I need to talk to Him often, I need to listen often, and sometimes, we just need to be together.

Some Requirements of EFFECTIVE PRAYER

Several conditions must be met for our prayers to be the best they can possibly be. According to the *New Life Study Bible* article entitled "Effective Prayer," these include:

- ☞ Our prayers will not be answered unless we have a sincere, true faith (Mark 11:24).

- Jesus reminded the father of the demoniac of this (Mark 9:23).
 - The author of Hebrews reminds us of this (Hebrews 10:22).
 - James encourages us to ask of God *“in faith, nothing wavering”* (James 1:6).
- ☞ Prayer must also be made in Jesus’ Name. Jesus Himself expressed this principle when He said, *“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it”* (John 14:13-14). Our prayers should be made in harmony with the person, the character, and the will of Jesus Christ. God will honor any prayer that He would have prayed Himself. There is no limit to the power of prayer when addressed to God in faith according to His desire.
- ☞ No prayer is effective until it is made according to the perfect will of God. 1 John 5:14-15 says: *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”*
- In many instances we know God’s will because He has revealed it to us in His Word. We can be sure that any prayer that is truly based upon the promises of God in His Word will indeed be effective (1 Kings 18:1; 21-24).
 - At other times, God’s will becomes clear only as we earnestly seek to determine what it is. Then, once we know His will about any given issue, we can pray with confidence and faith that God will answer.
- ☞ Not only must we pray according to God’s will, but we must be IN God’s will if we expect Him to hear and answer us.
- God will give us the things we ask for only if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).
 - The Apostle John states: *“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight”* (1 John 3:22). Obeying God’s commandments, loving Him, and pleasing Him are indispensable conditions for receiving answers to prayer.
 - When James wrote that the prayers of the *righteous* are effectual (see Memory Verse), he meant both a person who has been made righteous by faith in Christ, and one who is living a righteous, God-fearing, and obedient life (James 5:16-18; Psalm 34:13-14).
 - The Psalmist David lets us know what will happen if we cherish sin in our lives: *“The Lord will not hear”* our prayers (Psalm 66:18; James 4:3). But God also promises to listen and forgive our sins, and heal our land when we obey His laws (2 Chronicles 7:14; Luke 18:14).
- ☞ Finally, for our prayers to be effective, they must be persistent.
- The persistent widow (Luke 18:1-7)
 - Jesus’ instructions to *“ask...seek...knock”* (Matthew 7:7-8)
 - The apostle Paul admonishes us to be steadfast in prayer (Colossians 4:2).
 - Old Testament saints recognized this principle (Moses – Exodus 17:11 and Elijah – 1 Kings 17 & 18).

A S K	<i>“<u>Ask</u>, and it shall be given you, <u>Seek</u> and ye shall find, <u>Knock</u> and it shall be opened unto you”</i> (Matthew 7:7).
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LESSON TWELVE

MECHANICS OF PRAYER

MEMORY VERSE: *“Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice”* (Psalm 55:17).

INTRODUCTION

Many times, people hesitate to pray unless they are in a given place, at the right time, with the perfect situation. They feel they must kneel, fold their hands, close their eyes, and speak aloud for the Lord to hear them. But this is a mistake. God is more interested in our heart or motive, as always. *“...for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart”* (1 Samuel 16:7b).

“Most men pray for power, the strength to do things. Few people pray for love, the quality to be someone.” (Robert D. Foster)

WHAT COUNTS WITH GOD

How does it all fit together (that is what mechanics are) in this prayer business? During His most often quoted “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus took time to teach His followers how they should actually go about the process of praying.

The ATTITUDE of Prayer: (Matthew 6:5-8)

- ☞ Not seen of men (in secret)
- ☞ Not boasting of our closeness to God (we have already gained our reward by the acclaim of men)
- ☞ To be heard by God without much repetition and long speaking (Jesus states that the heathen believe that the more they speak, the more chance they will have of being heard.)
- ☞ God knows what we need even before we ask. He just wants us to communicate with Him, but that includes listening to His voice, and not just hearing our own.

“Prayer is not a substitute for working, thinking, watching, suffering, or giving: prayer is a support for all other efforts.”
(George Buttrick)

The EXAMPLE of Prayer: (Matthew 6:9-13)

The disciples knew that the followers of John the Baptist said many prayers, fasted often, and were devoted to John. They came to Jesus asking Him to teach them how to pray, and so we have the most famous prayer in the Bible. It is the “Lord’s Prayer” and has been misused by many. Jesus did not mean for His disciples to just memorize and repeat after Him this same prayer every time they prayed. He was giving them a formula (pattern) to follow about things that should be important and included in all their prayers. The Lord’s Prayer contains three petitions concerned with the holiness and will of God and three concerning our personal needs. Let us look at this model prayer in different segments:

- ☞ *“Our Father which art in heaven”* – This acknowledges God as superior to all things and each of us.
- ☞ *“Hallowed by thy name”* – We give worship to Him for blessings – magnify His Holy name.
- ☞ *“Thy kingdom come”* Consecration to Him, and surrender to God’s will in our daily lives.
- ☞ *“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”* – Submit to His will, let God lead and direct our lives, plans, actions, and thoughts. In heaven, nobody argues with God’s design and plan. We should not here on earth either.
- ☞ *“Give us this day our daily bread”* – We petition God for our needs. But notice that it is not for all of our needs for the rest of our lives, but for our needs TODAY.

- ☞ *“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”* – We petition God for mercy, but notice that God’s forgiveness is connected with our own forgiveness of those who wrong us.
- ☞ *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”* – We petition God for protection from the devil and all forces of evil.
- ☞ *“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever”* – We praise the Lord for He alone is worthy!
- ☞ *“Amen”* – We close our prayer with confidence that we have prayed according to His will and plan for us.

“Lord, make me more like Yourself, less like myself.” (Lester Case)

The TIME of Prayer:

Every believer should pray, but when you pray is up to you. However, the Bible does tell us on several different occasions, that we should pray *always, without ceasing, constantly*. No matter what time of day it is – IT IS TIME TO PRAY. No matter where you are – THAT IS A PLACE OF PRAYER. No matter what is happening around you – THAT IS A REASON FOR PRAYER.

- ☞ Always (Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18)
- ☞ Without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- ☞ With importunity (persistence) (Luke 11:5-10)
- ☞ Continuing instant (Romans 12:12)
- ☞ Continually (Colossians 4:2)

WHAT CAN HINDER MY PRAYERS?

Is it possible that I can pray and it will not do me any good? Is there anything that can keep my prayers from reaching heaven and the ears of God? Oh, yes. There are a number of things that can block to my prayers. I need to know what they are to avoid them.

- ☞ Un-confessed sin (Psalm 66:18)
- ☞ Insincerity (Matthew 6:5)
- ☞ Carnal Motives (James 4:3)
- ☞ Unbelief (James 1:5-6)
- ☞ Satanic Activity (Daniel 10:10-13)
- ☞ Domestic Problems (1 Peter 3:7)
- ☞ Pride (Luke 8:10-14)
- ☞ Robbing God (Malachi 3:8-10)
- ☞ Refusing to Submit to Biblical Teaching (Proverbs 1:24-28; Zechariah 7:11-14)
- ☞ Refusing to Forgive or be Forgiven (Matthew 5:23-24; 6:12-14)
- ☞ Refusing to Help the Needy (Proverbs 21:3; 1John 3:16-17)

As with every other type of mechanics, the “mechanics” of prayer are simply the tools that make it work. Let us use them!

*“Let’s not just study about it, read up on it, or discuss it; **LET US PRAY!**”*
(Linda Poitras)

LESSON THIRTEEN

“WHEN YE FAST...”

MEMORY VERSE: *“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:16-18).*

INTRODUCTION

Our memory verse is from Jesus famous “Sermon on the Mount.” Here the Lord is talking about “when” we fast, and is letting us know that if it is not practiced correctly, it will not do us any good. Jesus did not take time to explain fasting to the people He was talking to, so they must have already known what He meant. What IS it, and how do you DO it?

WHAT IS FASTING?

Many people fast for lots of different reasons. People like Socrates and Plato, Polycarp, early Egyptians, Arab physicians, American Indians, and biblical Hebrews all practiced fasting. They fasted for many different reasons: to preserve good health and youthful appearance, to get in a creative mood, to enhance their mental faculties, as a cure for certain diseases, and even to induce mystic visions and appease their gods. There are just as many people today fasting for just as many different reasons. But we are concerned with why Jesus spoke of it in His Word and what He said to His followers.

In the Bible, fasting refers to the discipline of completely avoiding food (not eating) for spiritual purposes. Most of the time, fasting was linked with prayer, but we should consider it as something on its own also. We can even call fasting *prayer without words*.

Three main forms of fasting are mentioned in the Bible:

- ☐ **The normal fast:** abstaining from all food, solid or liquid, but not from water (Matthew 4:2 – after Jesus fasted forty days, He was “*an hungered*” but the Bible says nothing about His being thirsty).
- ☐ **The absolute fast:** abstaining from both food and water (Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9 – normally this type of fast should last no more than three days, since the body cannot go without water any longer than this without beginning to dehydrate.) Moses and Elijah practiced the absolute fast for longer than three days, but only under supernatural conditions (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9, 18; 1 Kings 19:8).
- ☐ **The partial fast:** a restriction of diet rather than complete absence of food (Daniel 10:3).

WHY SHOULD I FAST?

There are a number of reasons for fasts, as recorded in the Bible. These are almost *always* accompanied by prayer. The two seem to fit together. Neither one should be avoided, and both are necessary disciplines of a true Christian’s life who wants to draw closer to the Lord, but when joined together, they are powerful! Jesus Himself practiced this discipline, and it made a difference in His ministry. Before He fasted, Luke 4:1 says: “*And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan...*” But *after* he had fasted, just a few verses later, Luke 4:14 says: “*And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee...*” As our perfect example, Jesus was showing us what happens when we put these two weapons together and use them against the devil – we have more **power**.

Never make the mistake of believing that when you fast, you gain favor with God. Fasting will NOT give you special points in God’s eyes. It WILL, however, make your flesh humble and put your mind and heart in a place where you can hear from God and understand His voice more clearly. Anytime we put our flesh under subjection, God can be magnified and lifted up. His plan, purpose and will become more important than our personal, physical needs. Fasting brings that selfish ME under subjection, and it is something that I choose to do.

So why choose to humble myself? The *Full Life Study Bible* note for Matthew 6:16 says it like this:

- ☞ To honor God (Zechariah 7:5; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2)
- ☞ To humble one's soul before God (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 69:10; Isaiah 58:3)
 - In order to receive more grace (1 Peter 5:5)
 - To get closer to God and feel His presence (Isaiah 57:15; 58:6-9)
- ☞ To mourn over personal sin and failure (1 Samuel 7:6; Nehemiah 9:1-2)
- ☞ To seek grace for a new task and to reaffirm our consecration to God (Matthew 4:2)
- ☞ To seek God by drawing near to Him and prevailing in prayer against opposing spiritual forces (Judges 20:26; Ezra 8:21,23,31; Jeremiah 29:12-14; Joel 2:12; Luke 18:3; Acts 9:10-19)
- ☞ To show repentance and to make a way for God to change His declared intentions of judgment (2 Samuel 12:16,22; 1 Kings 21:27-29; Jeremiah 18:7-8; Joel 2:12-14; Jonah 3:5,10)
- ☞ To save souls from the bondage of evil (Isaiah 58:6; Matthew 17:14-21; Luke 4:18)
- ☞ To gain revelation, wisdom, and understanding concerning the will of God (Isaiah 58:5-6, 11; Daniel 9:3,21-22; Acts 13:2-3)
- ☞ To open the way for the outpouring of the Spirit and Christ's return to earth for His people (Matthew 9:15)

SHOULD WE FAST TODAY?

God's Word is full of examples of people who fasted. In fact, in the Bible, it was a way of life. No one questioned it – they just practiced it.

The nation of Israel had one compulsory annual fast, the Day of Atonement. God explained to Moses: *"It shall be a Sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls by a statute forever"* (Leviticus 16:31). "Afflicting the soul" was another term for fasting. This was a time to deprive the natural appetites and divert attention *inward* to more pressing needs. If all were going to rest, no one could be cooking and washing pots. God's people were supposed to be denying themselves the usual comforts and distractions of eating. They were to come before God and experience sorrow for their sin and express it by fasting and weeping. It was a very emotional time. It was a time when a whole nation looked to God, instead of looking after their personal needs.

Some understood more about why they were doing it, and that always helps to bring better results. Jesus Himself fasted, as did the first church. One can find this talked about in Acts 13:2-3; 14:23; and 27:33.

What happens to someone who fasts? Does he starve to death? No! When practiced properly and with the correct motives, fasting is good for your health.

The men and women in the Bible who practiced fasting learned that when they refused natural food, they were more free to focus on God. They saw things spiritually and understood better than they ever had in the rush and worry of routine living. And God focused on them too, with a more direct quickening of His Spirit in their hearts and lives.

When we deliberately turn our attention from food and look toward God, we are concentrating on something much more important.

What are some of the good things that happen when I fast?

My physical health actually improves:

- Overweight persons can actually lose weight.
- We conserve the energies of the body that are regularly employed in the digestive system and send them to be used in other areas of the body.
- There is a physiological REST for your body – a rest of the digestive, glandular, circulatory, respiratory, and nervous systems. When no food is taken, all these systems rest and have much less work to do.
- The fast is the best way of increasing the elimination of waste from the blood and tissues.

Fasting does wonderful things for the mind also. The five senses become more acute during a fast.

Fasting helps retain a youthful complexion and appearance. We are only as old as the number of dead cells in our body. Fasting converts dead cells into food fuel and burns them off.

The power of evil spirits can be broken or “cast out” through combined efforts of prayer and fasting. Medical science in recent years has documented what Christ said all along about fasting: *“And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting”* (Mark 9:29). Habits such as smoking, drinking, and drug abuse are actually evil spirits through which Satan gains control of a person. Through the power of God’s Spirit, these evil spirits can be eradicated. However, the lingering physical effects have become a part of the physical body. As the body becomes purified through fasting, there seems to be a built-in resistance against once again polluting it.

With all these physical benefits, there must be a spiritual side to something practiced so frequently and by so many in the Bible.

WHAT ABOUT SPIRITUAL BENEFITS?

There are always MANY benefits to drawing closer to God – they are actually innumerable. Anytime we get “self” out of the way and get “God” as our main focus, we will truly begin to know Him in His power and glory. From the PBS lesson “Fasting Facts,” we learn some of the ways we benefit spiritually:

- ☐ Fasting is a vital spiritual discipline for ALL believers. Jesus did not say, *“IF you fast,”* but He said, *“When you fast...”*
- ☐ The Apostle Paul knew fasting helped to control his flesh. Paul fasted often because he wrote, *“In fastings often”* (2 Corinthians 11:27). In 1 Corinthians 9:27, he said it best: *“But I keep my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”*
- ☐ Fasting keeps us humble before God (Isaiah 58:5; Psalm 69:10).
- ☐ Fasting will bring spiritual determination and understanding as we ask God to give us help and direction in our problems (Joel 2:12).
- ☐ Fasting is our way of telling God how hungry we are for the things of the Spirit rather than just the things of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-17; Job 23:12; Matthew 4:4).

HOW DO I BEGIN FASTING?

With all these benefits and blessings, I surely want to begin. But it is not easy to start denying myself.

If you are completely new to fasting, try easing into it gradually.

- ☐ First, decide on a day to fast. It will be best if it is a day you can devote to prayer and time to get into God’s Word.
 - Skip the first meal of the day.
 - Drink water when you feel hungry.
 - Spend time in prayer and Bible study.
 - You can break your fast when you normally eat your second meal.
 - This is only a few hours, but it is an important first step.
- ☐ Repeat this exercise a week later.
- ☐ After four weeks, you should feel comfortable about skipping one meal.
- ☐ You can then go on to the second step – a whole day.
 - Take as much time as possible in prayer and Bible study.
 - At the end of the day, eat a light meal. (Fruit or porridge may be best.)

Have a PLAN for fasting.

- ☐ Set a goal/purpose for your fasting. Why am I doing this?
- ☐ Repent of any sin in your life. The death to “self” will usually bring to mind any wrong that is being practiced. Lay it on the altar before God, and leave it there.
- ☐ Prepare physically. Begin with smaller fasts, and work your way to more extensive ones.
- ☐ Limit your activities. There is nothing wrong with resting more during a fast, since your whole body system is at rest during this time.
- ☐ Plan prayer times. If you do not plan to pray, something will always come up to hinder you.
- ☐ Plan times of Bible reading. During a fast, more than ever, God’s Word is “food for your soul.”

CONCLUSION

Many who have vaguely heard of this practice, and who do not really understand it, believe that it is something one does to gain favor with God. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”* Nothing we do, not even denying our physical self in fasting, can make God love us more or want to answer our prayers sooner. Fasting is for MY benefit: it helps me humble myself, and get a clearer picture of Jesus. I can hear His voice more clearly with “self” out of the way, and I am ready to do His will more quickly.

You are not heard because you fast, but because of God’s mercy. Walking on the “Path to Righteousness” will make fasting easier, and the results more certain. Let us draw near to God, get “self” out of the way, and walk *“in the power of the spirit”* that comes through fasting.

“When you practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don’t make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity, but it won’t make you a saint. If you ‘go into training’ inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn’t require attention-getting devices. He won’t overlook what you are doing. He’ll reward you well.”

(Matthew 6:16-18, *The Message*)

LESSON FOURTEEN

EVANGELISM – SAVED TO SAVE OTHERS

MEMORY VERSE: *“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise”*
(Proverbs 11:30).

INTRODUCTION

What does the word “evangelism” mean to you? Do you think of large crusades, huge tent meetings, loud gospel bands attracting crowds, speakers blaring advertisements of special meetings? For so long, we have associated these things with evangelism, and we have almost forgotten the primary purpose and meaning of the very word.

THE PURPOSE AND MEANING OF EVANGELISM

Where do we go to find this purpose and meaning? Our greatest example has always been Jesus, our Savior. He not only taught us what evangelism meant and how to do it, He practiced it Himself. *“And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities”* (Matthew 11:1).

Jesus Teaches Us the Meaning

Jesus’ entire ministry was devoted to reaching the lost: *“For the son of man is come to save that which was lost”* (Matthew 18:11). The religious leaders of His day did not understand this, but Jesus kept repeating it for their benefit, and ours too:

- ☞ He ate with publicans and sinners after the calling of Matthew (Levi) to be one of His disciples (Matthew 9:12-13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31-32).
- ☞ He told them a parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:11-14).
- ☞ He went home with Zacchaeus after calling him down from the tree (Luke 19:9-10).

Jesus expected *us* to continue this task after he was gone. The Great Commission is very clear: *“And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15).

How is This Possible?

When we look at the task of winning the lost, the job seems impossible, especially for simple, ordinary folks like you and me. Did Jesus REALLY mean what He said? Yes! He even gave us lessons on how it was to be done – “on the job training” so to speak.

- ☞ Jesus sent His disciples out two by two (Mark 6:7). He knew they would need encouragement and help along the way, so He gave them a simple plan for accomplishing this: **work together**. “*And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where*” (Luke 9:6). Jesus was giving them training in His work, before He left them on their own to continue it. But He never left them without help...
- ☞ The last instructions Jesus gave the disciples before He went back into heaven reminded them that this was still His whole plan for the remainder of their lives. Luke 24:45 is very enlightening: “*Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.*” In the next few verses, he once again explained to us all what evangelism is about: “*And said unto them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high*” (Luke 24:46-49).
- ☞ They were supposed to tarry in Jerusalem to receive “power.” What kind of “power?” Most of the time, “power” is associated with faith to perform miracles or some awesome act seen by others as supernatural. But this is not correct. Acts 1:8 tells us exactly what kind of “power” and also what this “power” was to be used for: “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” This “power” is the promised Gift of the Holy Ghost. One of the main purposes and functions of receiving the Holy Ghost is that we will have the “power” we need to be a proper witness for Jesus and to win the lost to Him by teaching them to observe all that He commanded in His Word.

WHO IS TO BE INVOLVED?

Jesus meant for *everyone* who knows Him to share that knowledge with everyone they meet or have a chance to talk to.

- ☞ Revelation 22:17 tells us, “*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*” The Spirit of God inspired John to write, hoping to inspire the church of the Living God to invite *everyone* who wants salvation to come to Christ. Now that the church is full of the “power” to witness, we have no excuse.
- ☞ Pastors need to be aware of the need to train converts to win souls for the kingdom. This is not a job just for the ministry, it is for *everyone*.

HOW DO I TAKE PART IN EVANGELISM?

Many people would love to become personal evangelists, but they have no idea how to go about it. Here are seven keys to sharing your faith more effectively, as found in an article by Peter Lowe, in the *New Man* magazine – September/October 1995:

- ☞ **The word “gospel” means good news.** We do not need to apologize or be ashamed of the message we have. We know what it takes to keep someone from spending eternity in hell!
- ☞ **Share the benefits first.** This follows an idea presented by David Wilkerson, called the “lamb chop method” of evangelism. If you see a dog with a dirty, rotten bone, you would not go up to him and try to remove the bone. If you did, he would only growl at you, try to bite you, and hang on to his bone even harder. What you should do, is throw out a nice juicy “lamb chop” in front of the dog, and see how quickly he will drop his torrent old bone for the nice juicy one.
- ☞ **Don’t downplay the cost.** Jesus sure did not make light of the value of salvation! Remember the parable of the “Pearl of Great Price?” When you find something as valuable as salvation for your soul, it is WORTH whatever it costs. Present Jesus and the price He paid on Calvary, and people will willingly give up anything and everything to follow Him. “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*” (John 12:32). Claim that promise of Jesus!

- ☞ **Pray passionately.** Passionate praying is *specific*. Make a prayer list of ten people about whose salvation you are most concerned. Then talk to God about them. When you have done this, go and talk to those people about God. Prayer is essential to soul winning.
- ☞ **Speak their language.** This is not talking about your dialect or language (such as English, Twi, French, etc.). It means the *WAY* you explain to people. Do not talk to unbelievers in the language of the church. They will not have a clue what you mean. Many people have never heard or understood about repentance or baptism, or many other things that are common words to a believer. Talk to them in a way that they will know exactly what you mean. Do not just transmit the message of Jesus; *translate* it to fit today's world.
- ☞ **Be passionate about your faith.** The word "passion" is defined by *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary* as: "intense or violent emotion." Be sold on what you are trying to sell others. They will see your convictions before they will listen to your arguments.
- ☞ **Evangelism is for your benefit too.** Philemon, verse 6 says, "*That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*" Our faith grows by expression, so if we want to keep our faith, we have to SHARE it!

RESULTS AND REWARDS OF PERSONAL EVANGELISM

The Results: The desired result of effective evangelism is to bring the convert to a place of decision. Not all will accept the message of Jesus Christ, but they must be brought to a place where they have to make up their minds if they will live for God or if they will continue living in sin (Acts 17:32-34).

The Rewards: The practice of evangelism towards unbelievers will also bring some results to the one doing the evangelism. These results are actually rewards.

- ☞ Paul told Timothy that he would save himself and those that heard him (1 Timothy 4:11-16).
- ☞ We actually speed up the coming of the Lord the second time when we continue to win souls everywhere we go (Matthew 24:14).
- ☞ Soul winners will shine like the stars for ever and ever according to Daniel 12:3.
- ☞ When we evangelize, we actually save souls from death (James 5:20).

Jesus always had a plan. He fulfilled His part and sent back His Spirit to give us the "power" to fulfill our part. What is the final result? That Jesus may be known, loved, honored, praised, and made Lord of His chosen people. What a great task! What a glorious opportunity! What a blessed hope!

CONCLUSION

If we know that someone is dying and that they have only a few more days to live, but we know that someone has the cure for their disease, would we not rush to try to give it to them? Then why do we not take our responsibility as soul winners more seriously? Paul gave us an idea of just how important soul winning is when he wrote the church at Corinth: "*To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some*" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Most of us, at one time or another, have failed to take an opportunity to tell someone about Jesus. But we would be much quicker to do this if we really believed that lost souls will spend eternity in a literal, burning hell (Revelation 20:15).

You can not win the whole world. But you CAN win one. Jesus never asked us to win the whole world ALONE. He asked each one of us to win one, and to keep on doing that until all those around us who are lost have heard the gospel and have come to a place of decision. Then each of those should win one, and His arithmetic was good enough that He knew the whole world would be reached, ONE SOUL AT A TIME. Our job is for "each one to reach one."

LESSON FIFTEEN

PRAISE & WORSHIP

MEMORY VERSE: *“God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).*

“Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 150:6).

INTRODUCTION

Many times we talk about praise and worship as the same thing, but this is not correct. I can “praise” many things – my children, my husband, a delicious meal – but I certainly do not “worship” them when I do that. What DO these two closely related things actually mean?

TO “PRAISE” MEANS:

- To speak well of
- To express admiration for
- To compliment
- To commend
- To congratulate
- To applaud
- To eulogize (speak highly of)
- To extol (praise enthusiastically)

Praise is a vital part of God’s Word. There are so many commandments which encourage our praise of God. The books of Psalms is full of them (Psalm 9:1-2; 18:3; 22:23; 52:9; 108:1,3; 145). Psalm 107 along tells us four different times: *“Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men” (Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31).*

“Praise God! . . . even when you don’t understand what He is doing.”
(Henry Jacobsen)

Praise is used in many ways throughout Scripture. In the article entitled “Praise,” found in the *Full Life Study Bible (KJV)*, we learn more about it:

Barak – is usually translated in the *KJV* to mean “to bless” God.

Halal – means “praise the Lord,” and this is where we get the universal praise word “Hallelujah.

Yadah – sometimes translated as “give thanks.”

In the Old Testament, **praise** is a common commandment.

- ☞ Moses commanded the children of Israel to praise God for the Canaan land that He had given them (Deuteronomy 8:10).
- ☞ When Deborah sang a song of victory, there was a commandment included for the people to bless the Lord (Judges 5:9).
- ☞ David praised the Lord in the writings about his life (2 Samuel 22:4, 47, 50; 1 Chronicles 16:4).
- ☞ The prophets urged the children of Israel to praise God (Isaiah 42:10,12; Jeremiah 20:13; Joel 2:26; Habakkuk 3:3).

In the New Testament we find many times when praise is given special attention:

- ☞ Jesus praise His Father (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21).
- ☞ Paul expects all the nations to praise the Lord (Romans 15:9-11; Ephesians 1:3, 6, 12).
- ☞ James tells us we need to praise the Lord (James 3:9; 5:13).
- ☞ John the Revelator writes of wondrous praise around the throne of God (revelation 4:9-11; 5:8-14; 7:9-12; 11:16-18).

“WORSHIP” INVOLVES MORE THAN JUST “PRAISE”

“To worship means to recognize supreme worth.”

(Harold C. Bonell)

Worship means:

- To express reverence
- To have a sense of awe
- To bow low before the object of worship
- To make obeisance (bow down before)

Worship is the highest form of praise. However, praise is actually only ONE of several different ways we can worship. This brings some questions to mind, namely: How, Where, When, Why, and Who to worship?

HOW DO WE WORSHIP?

Our memory verse gives a very good answer to this question: *“In spirit and in truth.”* But what is this speaking about? According to the *Full Life Study Bible*, (Donald C. Stamps, General Editor), we learn exactly what this means:

“In spirit” points to the level at which true worship occurs.

- One must come to God in complete sincerity
- With a spirit that is directed by the moving of the Holy Ghost.

“Truth” comes from the Greek *“aletheia,”* and is:

- Characteristic of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 15:8)
- Impossible to separate Jesus from “truth” – He was “truth” in the flesh (Ephesians 4:21)
- The spirit that would come and live in them, even the Holy Ghost (John 14:17)
- At the heart of the gospel (Galatians 2:5; Ephesians 1:13)

You cannot really worship unless you are doing so according to the truth and doctrines of the Word of God. And what does God’s Word tell us about the way we are supposed to worship? Does it give any guidelines? Of course! As with every other requirement for our salvation and victory, God’s Word tells us plainly how TRUE WORSHIP should be practiced. This will answer the Where? When? And Why? of worship.

THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIP

WHO do we worship? The English word “worship” comes from an Old English word “worth-ship” and makes one know that worship is first and foremost those actions and attitudes that honor and give exaltation to God for His worthiness as the great Creator of all things, both in heaven and on earth (Exodus 20:3-6). This definition answers the question “WHY” we worship God also.

We worship God BECAUSE:

- ☞ He is WORTHY (Deuteronomy 32:29; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Isaiah 43:10-11; Revelation 4:11).
- ☞ We are CALLED to Worship (Exodus 32:11-14; Matthew 4:10).
- ☞ We were CREATED for worship (Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:12).
- ☞ We NEED to worship, and we will worship something, so it should be something WORTHY (Genesis 32:24-29; John 4:15; Acts 2:4; Mark 10:35-37).

ATTITUDES of Worship – All worship begins as an attitude. It is the reverent occupation of the human heart with its Creator, an inner depth of meditation on the greatness and worthiness of God. It is an inner sense of awe and respect for the Almighty. But our attitudes must work in harmony with the Holy Ghost in order to produce true worship. We must be careful to have the following:

- ☞ Brokenness (Psalm 51:17; Jeremiah 23:29; Matthew 21:44)
- ☞ Humility (Luke 7:37-38; James 4:6)
- ☞ Love (Mark 12:30)
- ☞ Reverence (Psalm 89:7)
- ☞ Obedience (1 Samuel 15:22; Genesis 22:5)

☞ Not Ashamed (2 Samuel 6:21-22; Mark 8:38)

These attitudes all speak of our relationship with God. But it is also important that we have a correct attitude toward:

- ☞ Others – we must make things right before we can truly worship God (Matthew 5:23-24).
- ☞ Ourselves – we must be very careful that our worship is not for show (Romans 1:21-25).
- ☞ Our Circumstances – we must be very careful to worship God when things are going wrong, because He is STILL WORTHY (Revelation 4:11). Job is our example of such a difficult task, and he proved that it CAN be done (Job 1:20-22). We must give thanks – no matter what comes our way, because our God is supreme, and He will work all things for our good (1 Thessalonians 5:10; Romans 8:28).

An OVERFLOW – Worship then becomes an overflow of those thoughts and emotions. They flow forth spontaneously. They should not have to be pumped up or forced out. Our cup, like David's should *"run over joyfully"* (Psalm 23:5).

The ACTIONS of Worship – Worship finally becomes an outpouring of the soul in deep expressions of reverence, awe, wonder, and adoration.

- ☞ God commanded Abraham to go and worship (Genesis 22:5). This act of worship would cost Abraham his very best and highest offering. It was to truly be a "sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15).
- ☞ A life of worship demands everything we are and have (Romans 12:1-2). There has to be a complete surrender of our whole self to God in order for us to become true worshippers, because worship touches every area of our lives.

"The Truth About Worship – Biblical Principles" by Eddie Jones is a timely tract that gives us some interesting insight into the ways we worship:

Giving – true worship GIVES glory to God. I do not get anything, because I bless God not to *receive* a blessing, but to *be* one (Acts 20:35). What should I give?

- ☞ My substance (Exodus 23:15; Deuteronomy 16:16-17; Malachi 3:8-10; Leviticus 27:30-32; Mark 12:17; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14; Hebrews 7:4-10).
- ☞ My time (Hebrews 10:23-25; 1 Peter 3:15; Isaiah 43:10).
- ☞ My talents (Acts 9:36-39 gives examples).

Prayer – as worshippers, we need to communicate with God in order to commune with Him (Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18; Acts 4:31).

Praise – When we approach God (Psalm 100:4), and when we respond to Him (Psalm 103:2), there is ALWAYS praise (Hebrews 13:15; Psalm 95:1; 149:1-3; Acts 15:14-17; Ephesians 5:18-19; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:19).

Lord' Supper – Communion is a memorial unto the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:26). It is important that we understand the purpose of this memorial service, and it is also important that we practice it as we worship the One who made our salvation possible through His shed blood (1 Corinthians 11:28-30).

Foot-washing is an act of humility that helps produce a bond of unity in our performance of worship. According to the Bible this is connected with the Lord's Supper and was instituted by the Lord Himself (John 13:8-15).

Where? . . . and When?

When to worship? The Psalmist David had the right idea when he wrote: *"I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth"* (Psalm 34:1). David understood that a heart that was continuously lifted toward God would be careful to avoid sin. All of the different forms of worship can be practiced no matter where we go – they are not just for a church service. However, every one of them SHOULD be practiced during a proper "worship" service today. This is the ideal setting and situation for each one. But do not limit your worship to when you are in church.

Where to worship?

- ☞ There is no Scripture in the entire Bible that commands me to worship God only at church. However, there are MANY Scriptures that command me to worship (1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalm 29:2; 96:9; Luke 4:8; Matthew 4:10).
- ☞ The only “church” ever commanded to be built by God was the Tabernacle in the wilderness. God gave Moses explicit instructions about its construction, and for every aspect of worship there (Exodus chapters 24-27).
- ☞ God’s plan has always been to live in the hearts and lives of His people. When David desired to build a temple to house his God, God agreed, and gave him the plans. But the idea did not originate with God (2 Samuel 7).
- ☞ God had another plan. Even with the Tabernacle, God had devised a house that was portable. God planned to make His next home in the hearts of His people. No matter where they went, they would have a place to worship Him. He would live inside of them and talk to them and change them, and they would worship Him everywhere, because He was right there with them (2 Corinthians 6:16). God ALWAYS has a plan!

THE REWARDS OF TRUE WORSHIP

What happens when we are obedient to God’s plan for worship and understand that praise is only a small part of our worship? The *Full Life Study Bible* lists at least twelve of the blessings God has promised when we worship Him:

- ☞ To be in our midst and have close communion with us (Matthew 18:20; Revelation 3:20)
- ☞ To overshadow us with His glory (Exodus 40:35; 2 Chronicles 7:1; 1 Peter 4:14)
- ☞ To bless us with an abundance of blessings, especially peace (Ezra 34:26; Psalm 29:11)
- ☞ To impart to us an abundance of joy (Psalm 122:1; John 15:11)
- ☞ To answer the prayers of those who pray to Him in sincere faith (Mark 11:24; James 5:15)
- ☞ To freshly fill His people with the Holy Ghost and with boldness (Acts 4:13)
- ☞ To send manifestations of the Holy Ghost among us (1 Corinthians 12:7-13)
- ☞ To guide us into all truth through the Holy Ghost (John 15:26; 16:13)
- ☞ To sanctify us by His Word and Spirit (John 17:17-19)
- ☞ To comfort, encourage, and edify us (Isaiah 40:1; 1 Corinthians 14:26; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- ☞ To convict us of sin, unrighteousness, and judgment by the Holy Ghost (John 16:8)
- ☞ To save sinners who become convicted of sin at a worship service (1 Corinthians 14:22-25)

And if that list was not enough, the tract “The Truth About Worship” gives us three more:

Transformation – we will become like Him (Psalm 115:4-8; Romans 1:23-24; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 12:2; Romans 8:29; Galatians 4:19)

Victory – worship brings victory (Joshua 6:20; 2 Chronicles 20:21; Acts 16:25-26; 1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Heaven – our greatest joy will be to worship Him forever (John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelations 19:6-7; John 4:23). Let us worship and praise our God both now and always!

Here I am . . . to worship God!

Lesson Sixteen

Marriage & the Home

Memory Verse: *“But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh; so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”* (Mark 10:6-9).

Introduction

We cannot begin a discussion about marriage without first understanding what is involved. Mark 10:6-9 indicates marriage is a joining of one man and one woman by a holy God. This is how God created man and woman in the Garden of Eden – to be the completion of each other. Genesis 2:20-25 tells the complete story of the first marriage. Verse 24 is almost an exact replica of our memory verse: *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.”*

Today, the majority of young people (and even older folks) do not really understand what is involved in this idea of “1 + 1 = 1.” Notice this concept does not make room for mothers, fathers, aunts, and uncles. It is just a man and a woman. That is why Jesus said, *“...For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh”* (Matthew 19:5).

People everywhere have taken this serious and binding contract, and made it as meaningless as a piece of paper. God does not look at it so. We would be wise to go back to His original plan for joining two into one. Then, carefully and prayerfully follow His instructions.

To those who are considering marriage, pray for God’s will in the choice of a mate. When repeating the wedding vows, seriously consider what you are promising to each other.

To those already married, remember the solemn vows made before God, the officiating minister, and the congregation. Pray that the Holy Spirit will bring all things to your remembrance. Only physical death should bring separation. It is a vow we must pay (Ecclesiastes 5:4). Remember all those witnesses around you that day? *“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him”* (Psalm 89:7). Marriage is no joke!

The Purpose of Marriage

Many people have the wrong idea about why they should get married. Some look on marriage as a legal means to satisfy their lust. Others enter into marriage to get children, or to have someone to work and care for them. One lady said, *“To give out ‘food money’ is a difficult experience. I must marry so that the man will shoulder this responsibility.”* But does she have any guarantee the he will take on any responsibility? Many times, the wife ends up working harder than ever to support the husband’s education or other desires. On the other hand, the man who chooses a wife simply because he wants someone to cook for him can find himself having much difficulty meeting her demands for this same “food money,” not to mention clothing and adequate housing. What is the correct reason for marriage? What does the Bible have to say on this important subject?

Marriage is union. Marriage is not two people living their own lives under the same roof, doing things to please themselves. It is the union of one man and one woman in the sight of God, becoming one flesh. This is the most sacred of relations ordained by God on earth. It needs to be treasured with love and sincerity. Both partners have to sever all relations and old ties, and please each other in order for this new important step to work. This union is for a lifetime.

Marriage is commitment. We need to remind ourselves of the value of this important word. It means “a continuing obligation, promise, pledge” (*Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary*). This is what Jesus meant when He said: *“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife”* (Mark 10:9). There is a “continuing obligation” to work, grow, and live together until death. The “promise, pledge” of your marriage vows should mean something to you.

The Principles of Marriage

Married people should be easy to identify. It is sometimes difficult to tell which woman in a group is a man's wife, since he is laughing, joking, and making intimate comments to them all. Women can also have close association with married men, never giving honor to their husbands, as is their due. This is not Scriptural, and will cause much heartache. What does the Scripture say about my actions as a married person?

Marriage is binding. The Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus and get Him to say something that would turn the people against Him. They asked Him if it were okay for a man to put away his wife for any reason. It is in response to this question that Jesus spoke the words of our memory verse.

- ☞ Matthew records it in almost the exact words Mark used: *"And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"* (Matthew 19:4-6).
- ☞ Paul, in his writings to the church at Corinth, taught this same principle when he said: *"And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband; But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife"* (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

This principle needs to be considered prayerfully before the marriage contract is ever entered into. We must not think like the world around us that enters into marriage with the notion "if it doesn't work, I'll just get a divorce." Knowing that God's Word is clear about the duration of marriage would make a difference in the number of broken marriages.

Marriage is until death. Paul spent much time speaking of the state of matrimony to new churches. They were from heathen societies. Their culture and traditions meant they had many questions as to what was right and wrong. He devoted 1 Corinthians 7 to this topic. 1 Corinthians 7:39 gives another principle that makes a lot of difference in a marriage: *"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord."* Death was the only thing that freed a person from the marriage contract.

Marriage is between only one man and one woman. Another principle that would make a big difference today is that there are no sexual relationships outside of the marriage contract. Husbands and wives do not play around; they remain faithful and true to each other. The writer of Hebrews had some sobering comments to make about this: *"Marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge"* (Hebrews 13:4). Some may choose to play around while married, but God will be their ultimate judge. As God's Word says: *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Hebrews 10:31).

Who Should I Marry?

This question has been debated and passed around for centuries. Many times the choice was made according to the financial status of the partner, and even sometimes because of fame or position. All of these are shaky foundations on which to build a lifelong relationship. They will not last. God's Word gives us the answer we need, and the foundation He gives will never crumble or fall.

Christians should marry only Christians.

- ☞ The first question that comes to mind is "Who is a Christian?" It is anyone who has believed? James tells us that the devils believe. Are they Christians? *"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble"* (James 2:19). Is it only those who attend my church? God does not look on the outward appearance, but on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). How do I know someone is a Christian? James 1:19-27. Verse 22 says it best: *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."*
- ☞ Why is the devil not a true believer? Because he will not obey. You can know for sure that the person you want to marry is a Christian when he has obeyed the gospel, which is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ at work in his life. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).
- ☞ *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might*

be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Romans 6:3-6). That is why marrying within your church is encouraged. You can be more sure of what the person has been taught. You also have the opportunity to see what he is practicing in his life.

Christians should follow God's instructions for choosing a partner. God has made a distinction between those who are true believers and those who are not. He tells us repeatedly in His Word, that we should, *"come out from among them and be ye separate"* (1 Corinthians 6:17; Isaiah 52:11; Revelation 18:4).

- ☞ Many people "profess" Christianity, but they do not obey. Be careful to know the type of person you are joining yourself with until death. *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"* (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).
- ☞ When you become "one flesh" with another person, you become what he is. *"Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh"* (1 Corinthians 6:15-16). Be very careful and extremely prayerful!

What if I am already married to an unbeliever?

This question is an important one, since many times we come to a saving knowledge of Jesus after we have been married many years. God's Word even has answers for this situation, as He promised to meet our every need.

Should I stay or go? Being married to an unbelieving (disobedient) partner can be a frustrating and trying situation, but do not despair. Paul spoke of this dilemma to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16. His advice was to stay with them in the hope that they too would come to know Jesus. *"For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"* (1 Corinthians 7:16).

How can I help save my partner? It is an old adage that "actions speak louder than words." Many times preaching will only drive the unsaved loved one further away. But what partner can stand against a godly spirit and submissive attitude in love that is seasoned with much prayer? It may not come in a day or two, but God's Word is true, so it will come. The Apostle Peter wrote of this in his epistles to the New Testament Church in 1 Peter 3:1-7. He was speaking to the saved wife married to an unsaved husband. His teachings are as follows:

- ☞ The woman must submit herself to her husband and recognize his leadership of the family (Ephesians 5:22). This is another reason why women should be careful who they choose to marry, as that person is to become the "head."
- ☞ She must conduct herself in a holy and respectful manner with a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:4). Loud preaching and refusing to be a proper "help-meet" will never win the husband.
- ☞ She must endeavor to win her husband more by her behavior than her words. 1 Peter 3:2 says, *"While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear."* The word "conversation" here could have been translated from the original text meaning "conduct" (*Slimline Reference Edition of the Holy Bible – KJV*). Peter was actually telling wives to act correctly and their husbands would notice that God was in control of their lives.
- ☞ A woman in this situation should always live by the Word of God. It should be her comforter and advisor. Her prayer should be asking the Lord Jesus to give her patience and strength to enable her to stand the test. She should always be cautious not to return evil for evil, but to repay evil with good. The "golden rule" would apply here very well: *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"* (Matthew 7:12).
- ☞ Be careful not to challenge your husband, as this will only bring his wrath on you. Let him know about your church activities, and always take care of his needs before leaving to go to church. If you do not, you will cause him to resent the church and its activities. Remember he has been appointed by God as the "head" of your family, and your arguments to the contrary cannot change this fact (Ephesians 5:22-24).

What if my unsaved loved one is my wife? God's Word does not deal extensively with this situation, simply because the man is supposed to be the "head" of the home. If he loves his wife properly, she should follow him into a search for knowledge of the deeper things of God. She should also love him enough to submit to his leadership.

However, this is not a license for men to marry outside of the church of God. Men should avoid looking for a partner among unbelievers, or those who have not obeyed the gospel. Your obedience to God's Word and way is the only guarantee you have of His promises at work in your life and marriage.

Let your attitude, behavior, talk, and walk show the world that you are a mature Christian who is practicing the Word of God. Hide God's Word in your heart daily so you will be able to live according to the principles laid down by God for His children. This will only be possible with much prayer, fasting, and a steadfast belief that God means what He says. Obedience to God's Word will bring the promised result of a happy and rewarding marriage.

*"Successful marriage is always a triangle:
A Man, A Woman. . . and God!" – Cecil Myers*

Lesson Seventeen

The Family – God's Way

Memory Verse: *"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19).*

Introduction

From the first time God made a covenant with man, it has been His priority that fathers lead their children to follow Him.

His law, given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, had at the heart, a plan for families: fathers were to be constantly training their children in God's ways. They did not just tell them about God – they showed them. It was not just an occasional talk or visit to church. It was a continuous thing, designed by God as a constant reminder of how He intended to pass along His covenant and our faith in Him.

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

This was God's specific plan for making sure the children of Israel never forgot who delivered them from Egypt. He meant for the fathers to always tell the children, and to live according to God's law so they would see God's plan in action.

However, it did not happen that way. The fathers did not obey God's law. They did not continue to tell their children, and the result was the same as it is today: their children forgot who God was, and did not follow Him.

After the death of Joshua, the Bible says this: *"And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).*

Why did this new generation not know the Lord and the things He had done for them? Because their parents had not taught them. There were no written history books, nor even any Bibles to read to find information

about what had taken place in Egypt. There was only the experience of those who had been there, who had actually walked in the wilderness and seen the hand of God as He gave the land of Canaan to them. They did not share this with their children, and obviously the children did not have their own experience with God. Whose job is it to teach the children?

Husbands Are the Head of the Family

As much as men love to declare themselves the “stronger” vessel, they are not very quick to accept their God-given responsibility in the home. In most cultures and societies of the world, men are the strong-silent type, working hard to provide for the necessities of life, but seen very little in the home. They are too busy to spend time with the family, because they must provide the means for doctor bills, food, education, and a place to live. This is not God’s complete plan. We have taken the Scripture that teaches the father to care for his family (1 Timothy 5:8) to mean that he should concern himself only with the physical aspects of his family’s need.

God Ordained – The family is the most basic unit in society. Someone has to lead. God chose the man to be the leader, and He called him the “head.” *“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body”* (Ephesians 5:23).

“God has given us the authority to guide, guard, and govern – direct, protect, and correct. In the home, the man is to be prophet, priest, and king – he is to nourish, cherish, and admonish.” – T. F. Tenney

God as Example – As head, the man is not to suppress and oppress. His example is Christ, so the husband has no excuse for not knowing how he should treat his wife and family. *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it...So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself”* (Ephesians 5:25, 28). The fifth chapter of Ephesians gives a clear picture of the type of love a husband is supposed to have for his wife. A real “head” (husband) will never be guilty of treating his wife in a way that would hurt or demean her. She too has a definite place in God’s plan for the family.

Wives Submit to Their Husbands

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). This submission is not talking about a type of slavery, or suppression by a man. God has a distinct purpose for the woman in relation to her home and family.

“...as unto the Lord” – A wife’s submissiveness to her husband is seen by God as an actual part of her obedience to Jesus (*The Full Life Study Bible*, p. 1857, note on Ephesians 5:22).

“I have never seen a problem with a submissive wife when she is loved by her husband in the same way Christ loves the church.” – Dr. Leman Strauss

Responsibilities include love for:

- ☞ Husbands – Paul wrote to Titus with instructions for the aged women: *“That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands...”* (Titus 2:4). This love includes their attitudes toward their family. *Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary* gives the definitions of these attitudes:
 - Chaste – innocent of immoral sexual activity
 - Discreet – able to keep silent about matters where prudence requires it
 - Keepers at home – taking care of the needs at home
 - Good – morally excellent, virtuous, well behaved, dutiful, kind
 - Obedient to their own husbands – willing to submit to their chosen “head”

Why were these attitudes important? Titus 2:5 says: *“...that the word of God be not blasphemed.”* The Old Testament has many references to this “blasphemy,” and both Isaiah (Isaiah 52:5) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:20) wrote of it and reprimanded the children of Israel for their actions.

The most graphic illustration of this is found in 2 Samuel 12. Here David is confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sin with Bathsheba, and his murder of her husband. Nathan told David that he had *“despised* (made of

little account) *the commandment of the Lord*" (2 Samuel 12:9). This had given the nations round about a reason to talk. They now had ammunition whereby they could accuse the king of God's chosen people of practicing some of their sins.

"No amount of success in the ministry can compensate for failure in the home." – T. F. Tenney

David broke at least two of the Ten Commandments (murder and adultery – Exodus 20:13-14), with no regard to any of the consequences. Bathsheba lost her husband and child as a result of her failure to love her husband and live by the correct attitudes of a godly wife. Both David and Bathsheba paid a terrible price for their sin.

God said He would bring three different things on David in punishment: *"I will raise up evil against thee; I will take thy wives before thine eyes; I will do this thing before all Israel; Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die"* (2 Samuel 12:11,14).

Until his death, David was an example of God's judgment on a spiritual leader and father who had greatly sinned. *"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife"* (2 Samuel 12:10).

"Guide older women into lives of reverence so they end up as neither gossips nor drunks, but models of goodness. By looking at them, the younger women will know how to love their husbands and children, be virtuous and pure, keep a good house, be good wives. We don't want anyone looking down on God's Message because of their behavior"
(Titus 2:3-5, *The Message*).

☞ Children – *"...to love their children"* (Titus 2:4). It has always been the duty and joy of mothers to love their children. This love is best shown in her work with the father to train her children properly in the things of God (Proverbs 1:8-9; 1 Timothy 5:10). Ezekiel makes it a bit plainer when he speaks to the nation of Israel and says: *"Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter"* (Ezekiel 16:44). The sins committed in Israel by the mothers would be repeated in the lives of their daughters. What a message to us to be very careful with the way we live before our children.

Children Obey Their Parents

This commandment from the Lord lets us know what the children are supposed to do. Their task is obedience. However, it makes a big difference what their parents are asking them to do. It is supposed to be God's Word, will, and way. Sadly, many times parents do not ask children to obey God or His Word. Children get to follow their own selfish desires, and all members of the family are unhappy and in distress. But look what God has promised to children who follow His plan: *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth"* (Ephesians 6:1-3).

☞ *"...That it may be well with thee..."* Here, God is promising that we will be well taken care of.

☞ *"...and thou mayest live long on the earth."* We are promised long life for the honor we give our parents.

When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He included this part because it was a special blessing. But there was a string attached. They were not only to obey, they were to teach these laws and promises to their children, thus forming the unbroken chain of a continuing pattern of walking in God's way (Deuteronomy 4:9).

The "Buck" Stops Here!

This American expression means that the one at the top gets the credit or blame, depending on the result. As the head of the family, fathers must answer for the outcome of the lives of their children.

God has *always* had a plan for every part of our lives. He will not force us to follow it, but He will keep His Word. He will send His just punishment on those who do not obey His Word and way. This places a tremendous responsibility on the father. Children may *listen* to what you say, but they will *become* what you are.

When Abraham told Sarah to say she was his sister, did he ever dream that one day Isaac would commit the same sin with his wife, Rebekah? This seed of deceit sown in Isaac's life was reproduced in the life of Jacob. What a price Jacob paid for his deceit! First his father-in-law deceived him about the wife of his choice, and then his sons continued the same pattern begun many years before in their great grandfather, Abraham. Joseph was also Jacob's son, but somehow Joseph learned a lesson about reaping what you sow. He refused to follow in the pattern of deceit. As a result, he was blessed abundantly and used by God in a mighty way.

Fathers, be careful of the seeds you sow in the lives of your children. God has given you a place, and no matter what you think, or how much pressure is placed on you by this world, you are still the "head" of the home. All fathers will give an account for their actions toward their children; a reckoning day will come. Remember David? God forgave him, but oh, what a harvest of sorrow he did reap! The next chapter after the prophet Nathan gave David God's pronouncement of judgment on his house, his family troubles began. 2 Samuel 13 tells the sad story of incest and murder among David's children.

Let us choose to follow God's plan for our family: a godly father leading the way; a submissive and God-fearing mother supporting him in love; and well-behaved, obedient children who are taught the ways of the Lord following behind.

"Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in His ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee"
(Psalm 100:1-2).

Lesson Eighteen

Practical Tips for Family Life

Memory Verse: *"My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother"*
(Proverbs 5:20).

Introduction

We have already understood that God has a specific plan for all His creation, including men, women, and children. He did not create any of us with the idea that we would be poor, downtrodden people with no hope or purpose. He even planned to give us many wonderful gifts (Matthew 7:9-11). Why is it that human nature tends to believe that God has hidden the best things from us because He does not want us to know His best and greatest? This was the lie the serpent used to deceive Eve. Man has been falling for the same lie for centuries.

God wants to bless us. He wants us to know joy, peace, happiness, prosperity, and all the good things He has created. But He cannot bless us when we continue to make our own path instead of following His "Path to Righteousness." What are some of the "good gifts" He wants to give us in our families?

A Successful and Happy Marriage

The happiness of any marriage depends on the love and commitment between husband and wife.

Love for God and His Word comes first – it is the road map to determine the whole relationship (1 John 2:3-6).

Love for the other person comes next – we should be more concerned with the needs and desires of our partner than our own (Ephesians 5:23).

Following the perfect example – Paul, in his writings to the church at Ephesus, gives this clear picture: husbands love, wives submit, and both care for the other more than themselves, just as Christ gave Himself for the church (Ephesians 22:33).

Encourage one another – a Christian husband should be very careful to help his wife fulfill her God-given role - both in and out of the home – in the community and church. A submissive wife will not be a troublemaker or

gossip, but will support and bless the work her husband is trying to do for the kingdom of God (Ecclesiastes 9:9; Proverbs 5:18).

- He should praise her good points and not criticize her in front of others.
- He should let her know he enjoys her cooking and appearance.
- She should endeavor to keep his clothes clean and neat so he presents a fine picture to the public.
- She should be careful with meal preparation, both the times he will require feeding, and also the most economical way to provide for such. She should not be a waster of his hard-earned money (Proverbs 31:14-15).
- Each partner should be careful to show respect and love to the other, both in and out of the home (1 Peter 3:7). Any problems they have should be discussed in private – not in front of the children.
- Paul wrote to his “son” Timothy, admonishing him in proper conduct. His indictment toward men who did not take care of their families was quite severe: *“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel”* (1 Timothy 5:8). Husbands need to take a careful look at this Scripture, as it is not talking only about food, clothing, and shelter. Paul had been speaking to Timothy about the attitude and spirit of some of the brethren. He was speaking about the care of the whole person, not just the physical. Fathers/husbands, do not just give money and forget about the rest. Your job is much more demanding. The way you care for your family includes the time you spend training them in the things and ways of God.
- Keep the family circle tightly closed. You should never share the intimate details of family life with anyone, not even your parents. You do not need a third party to listen to your problems and make a decision about what you should do. They cannot possibly understand all the details that make up your daily lives. Satan uses the intimacy of sharing with others to cause severe breaks in relationships between men and women who were supposed to have complete confidence and trust in each other.
- There is a wise saying: *“The family that prays together stays together!”* Prayer is one of the best ways you can possibly find to bind your family unit together in love. It is difficult to have contention with someone who you pray with daily. God knows how to keep us loving and kind to others. Why not follow His plan?

“No man has a right to talk to his children about God until he has first talked to God about his children.” – T. F. Tenney

The Blessing of Children

God’s Word makes it clear that children are a blessing and heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3; Genesis 33:5; 48:4). This blessing and heritage can become a curse and hurt if we forsake the ways of the Lord. Joshua reminded the children of Israel:

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

In this same chapter, he spoke of what happens when God’s ways are abandoned. *“If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good”* (Joshua 24:20). Just because God blesses us with children does not mean that we are free to do with them as we wish. Yes, we choose our path, but we also choose our consequences. What are some things we should be careful about with our children?

Before pregnancy – The wife/mother should be concerned and careful about her state of health before, during, and after pregnancy. This concern will actually have a bearing on the health of her children. If the mother is careful about her health, this habit will make it easier to look after her children. Personal and general cleanliness are the foundations for good health habits.

During pregnancy – The wife/mother should use every available resource of medical attention during pregnancy.

- The pregnant wife should make periodic visits to the clinic or hospital where she plans to deliver. This will help ensure a safe delivery and healthy baby.

- Any necessary supplies used by the doctor or midwife should be gathered as early as possible.
- It is also during this time that she should begin preparing the supplies she will need for her child. She should not wait until she is ready to deliver, since it is less costly to look, plan, and prepare before the time arrives.
- During this period, she should do her best to work and save some things, as she will need a time of rest and recovery before returning to her normal activities. She should do her best to save some of the following:
 - Money
 - Fuel
 - Firewood
 - Non-perishable food items, such as corn, rice, dried cassava, pepper, salt, and any others that the family is accustomed to using

This pre-planning will be a great help when the baby arrives.

After delivery – A mother must be careful to keep her child immunized to prevent childhood diseases. She should listen to the advice given to avoid malnutrition and sickness in her children. Clinics and maternity homes usually have good advice about the things available that will help with feeding and prevention of disease for the whole family. She should take note of this advice and make them habits in her home.

- Caring for the baby is important, especially keeping the napkins clean and dry.
- Washing will become a daily chore, so be sure there is plenty of soap and water available. Simple cleanliness can prevent such life-threatening diseases as cholera, diarrhea, and food poisoning – all killers of small children.
- Breastfeeding is the best method of nourishment – it is the God-given choice. It is also the healthiest. However, if you do not have proper milk for some reason, be sure your baby is well-nourished from a bottle.
- You should begin training your baby in the things of the Lord immediately after birth. Children may not be able to repeat what they hear at this age. However, they will absorb the words, songs, and spirit of love that comes from Bible stories, songs, and Scripture that they hear.
- Be careful not to neglect the father after children come.
 - Do your best to make him a part of your quiet times of loving and feeding the children.
 - Have the father pray and read Bible stories while the mother holds the small child.
 - Give the father a special place of honor where he holds the child and bonds with it.
 - Any time the father is holding the child, prepare something special for him to eat.
 - Use your imagination, but include Dad.

School age children – Just because your children enter nursery school at ages 2 ½ to three years does not mean you are finished with the responsibility of training them in the things of God. You must keep a watchful eye for their progress as they interact with other children, and are exposed to methods and practices of family life other than their own.

- Find out about their progress at school.
- Make time to play with them, sing songs and tell Bible stories.
- Listen to your children's account of their activities and ideas.
- Teach them to say simple prayers with the understanding that you talk to God the same way you talk to Mommy and Daddy.
- Make sure their uniforms are clean and neat daily.
- Do your best to supply their school needs. You may even include them in this process. When older family members (grandparents, aunts, uncles) give gifts to your children, help them learn to use their resources to buy their needed items.
- Food is important at this growing stage in a child's life. Do not just give them money to spend, but prepare nutritious and healthy meals for them at home. Make sure that any money given is used well, as children always like to buy sweets.
- Take time to organize their free periods. It is a good idea to begin the responsibility of small, simple chores around the house during this time. Children need to understand they are part of the family in more ways than receiving.
- Know the type of playmates or friends they have. Peers play an important part in every child's life.

- Let your children know they are important. Every effort they make is valuable.

Discipline of Children – most parents do not enjoy this, but it is an essential part of family life. One of my favorite African proverbs says:

“A young tree can be easily bent. But if you try to bend an old tree, you will break it.”

This supports the understanding from God’s Word that discipline must begin early in every child trained to follow God’s way (Proverbs 22:6). The Bible gives many guidelines about discipline of children. Wise parents study and follow this advice carefully.

- Who disciplines? It is a serious mistake to tell a child, “When your father comes, he will punish you for what you have done.” If your children deserve correction for some wrong thing they have done, you must correct them in love. This gives them the message that both mother and father agree they cannot do bad things and get away with it. You love them and want them to be good Christians and law-abiding citizens. Tell them Bible stories that support this understanding; Jesus is not happy with those who do wrong (sin).
- Children have to be trained to love, honor, and respect authority. This is best shown in their attitude towards their father. It should include older adults of all stations, including schoolmasters, policemen, government officials, and especially their pastor. This is a vital point, since your child usually adopts your attitude towards such authority types. Do you speak well or evil of these people?
- Children need to understand that your love for them is only as strong as your desire to help them know the law of God and the land. You do not want them to commit crimes against their nation or their God and say, “But Mommy and Daddy never told me it was wrong!”
- Never discipline your child in anger. Always have a spirit of love and concern for their well-being and happiness. Pray with them after discipline times, and make sure they understand why they have been punished (Proverbs 13:24; Hebrews 12:6-7).

Conclusion

In every aspect of family life, Love is the key. Husbands, *love* your wives. Wives, submit to your husbands because you *love* them. Children, obey your parents in *love*. Discipline happens because of *love*. Without *love*, there can be no ideal family unit.

A time of family devotions is a vital. Deuteronomy 6 gives a clear understanding of the necessity of time spent with our family leading them in the laws and promises of God. When we set a good example, and our children see our love of God, it becomes a natural thing for them to work toward the same goal – *to please God*.

“Our greatest influence is our example.” – T. F. Tenney

Example is always the best teacher and it will draw followers. Set the correct example for your family, and God will surely bless and reward you according to all His good gifts and plan. Let us lead the way for our families as we follow Christ down His *“Path to Righteousness.”*

*“But as for me and my house. . .
we will serve the Lord!”
(Joshua 24:15)*

Lesson Nineteen

Keeping On Keeping On

Memory Verse: *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Mark 13:13).*

Introduction

The definition of *endure* is “to tolerate, suffer, or survive.” The key word here is “survive.” Survival speaks to us of some trouble, difficulty, or disaster. One does not speak about surviving a party. This word is used when speaking of floods, earthquakes, or accidents where people come out alive, and able to continue.

The same is true with our spiritual walk: we endure when we survive the rough places, trials, and temptations we encounter as we travel the road of life. As with a race, it is not the one who begins, but the one who completes the journey, who receives a reward.

In his book, *The Success Journey*, Dr. John Maxwell tells the true story of a special race. The year was 1968, and the place was the Olympic Games in Mexico City. The marathon race is a grueling competition, and the runner from Ethiopia won amid cheers and shouts of victory. Several hours later, a light drizzle of rain began to fall, and the fans decided it was time to go home. They thought all the runners had come in. Just as they began to leave, the sirens of the police escort were heard in the distance. Could it be? Someone was still running. They strained their eyes to identify the lone man who came limping painfully across the finish line – at least two hours after the race was won. He was the runner from Tanzania. Upon investigation, it was learned this young man had sustained a serious injury and had been running with his leg bandaged. He was obviously in much pain, and the reporters could not figure out why he had bothered to continue running when the trophy had already been given. They asked him, “Why did you keep running when you were injured?” His reply is a testimony to us all: “My country did not send me to the Olympics to start; they sent me to *finish* the race.”

Our God did not bless us with His Spirit for us to give up but He intended for us to *finish* the race.

Endurance – Through Difficulties

God’s Word promises many blessings for our faithful endurance. However, it does not promise no pain or suffering, until we get to heaven. Jesus, our perfect example knew what it meant to “endure.” *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:2-3).* Jesus was giving us an example to follow, so we would know what He expected.

The Old Testament has many examples for us to look at and gain encouragement.

Jonathan – the son of King Saul: This young man is mentioned just a few times in the Bible, but each one proves his faithfulness and loyalty to the things of God. It was through no fault of his that the kingdom was lost. His father became proud and sinned against God in sacrificing a burnt offering to the Lord. This was the duty of the priest – the man of God – not the king. God refused to hear Saul’s prayers because of this sin. Even then, Saul did not repent, but was only concerned with a show of his religion rather than obedience to the commandment of God (1 Samuel 13:8-14).

The Philistines had gathered themselves together against the army of Israel, and they were a great host. The Lord is always greater than our enemies. He is always looking for someone who will inquire of His voice. Jonathan was such a man. He saw the desperate situation they were in, but was more concerned with fighting the battle than with the difficulty. He told his armor bearer to follow him, believing God would help them defeat the enemies of His people. The passage they had to follow to reach the Philistine camp was between two sharp outcroppings of rock – a difficult way indeed. But this did not stop them. 1 Samuel 14:6 says: *“And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.”*

When they reached the place where they could see the army of the enemy, they stopped to inquire of the Lord, and decide how they would go about this thing. Jonathan told his armor bearer, *“Let us reveal ourselves to them and if they say ‘wait, we will come to you’ then we shall stand still. But, if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up because then the Lord has delivered them into our hands. This shall be the sign to us.”* Guess what? The most difficult way was God’s way.

God went with them and gave the victory. Jonathan and his armor bearer slew about twenty men (two against twenty is a tough fight) and then the Bible tells us that the Lord sent an earthquake. The Philistine army began to flee. God does not need numbers to win the victory – He needs someone who will put their trust in Him and *keep on keeping on!*

Daniel – a slave in Babylon: The story of Daniel is a familiar one, but we need to remember when this story began. Daniel, still a teenager, was captured and taken from his home in Jerusalem to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. His dependence and faith in God were evident from the beginning of his captivity. Daniel refused to eat the king’s meat (meat offered to idols), but was wise enough to suggest an alternative plan that would not cause the king’s other servant to get into trouble (Daniel 1:8-17). Daniel showed his concern for others very early in his story.

Throughout his long career in the court of many kings of Babylon, Daniel kept the faith. It was certainly not easy. He suffered and went through many trials, but his *endurance* kept him faithful to the end.

The New Testament Teaches Endurance Also

There are many examples of endurance through hardship in the New Testament, especially after the birth of the church in the book of Acts. As one of the first missionaries, Paul is a prime example of a life of hardship, with a victorious, faithful end. Here is what he says about his life journey:

“Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren: In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:24-28).

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

After all these things, Paul still had the testimony of endurance: *“For now I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).*

Strength for Endurance Comes From God

Another Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, spoke of the ability to endure hardship.

“Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:28-31).

God knows the way that we take. He understands that it is not easy. But He has promised to be *with us*; even in us, and we can make it! *“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isaiah 43:2).*

How is He in us? *“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).*

Conclusion

God has given us everything we need to finish the race:

- His Word to guide us,
- His Spirit within us, and
- A hope of heaven waiting for us.

“You’re going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food – catchy opinions that tickle their fancy. They’ll turn their backs on truth and chase mirages.

But you – keep your eye on what you’re doing:

accept the hard times along with the good:

keep the Message alive:

do a thorough job as God’s servant.

You take over.

I’m about to die.

My life an offering on God’s altar.

This is the only race worth running. I’ve run hard right to the finish, believed all the way.

All that’s left now is the shouting – God’s applause!

Depend on it. He’s an honest judge.

He’ll do right, not only by me, but by everyone eager for his coming”

(2 Timothy 4:3-8, The Message).

Lesson Twenty

Jesus Is Coming Again

Memory Verse: *“In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3).*

Introduction

A careful study of God’s Word reveals that apart from Jesus’ first appearing as a baby in a manger, there are four other times when He promised to come. Just to make these clear, let us study each one:

- ☞ In John 14:18, Jesus promised to come back to the disciples and give them comfort. This was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).
- ☞ John 14:2-3 speaks of another “second” coming, when Jesus promised to take His disciples unto Himself in a beautiful home He has gone to prepare.
- ☞ In Revelation 19:11-19, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords comes with all the armies of heaven to smite the nations.
- ☞ In Revelation 20:11-15, God once again comes to judge everyone who has lived on earth.

This lesson is about the second time Jesus will come to earth in a bodily form (John 14:2-3).

Jesus Speaks of His Second Coming

Jesus first began to speak of this special time when His disciples were asking questions because they had understood that following Him had a price. Jesus promised them another comforter (John 15:26-27). Then they wanted to know about this coming again to take them home with Him. They even asked for signs to help them recognize that the end of their suffering was near. They went to Jesus in a private place, away from the crowds, and asked for more understanding. Matthew 24 speaks of things to look for as preludes to His Second Coming.

- ☞ **“Take heed that no man deceive you. . .”** Jesus promised that many false Christs would arise, claiming to be a Messiah of some sort. We must be careful to stay in God’s Word to know for sure we are following His truths (Matthew 24:4-5).
- ☞ **“. . . Wars and rumors of wars. . .”** You can hardly pick up a newspaper without seeing that another war has begun somewhere in the world. All around us men are fighting each other for land or some other material wealth. There is talk of “ethnic cleansing,” civil war, and many other terrible troubles among people of the world (Matthew 24:6-7).
- ☞ **“. . . And there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. . .”** We are experiencing many different weather patterns in our world today. There is heat where it is normally cold, and cool weather where it is normally hot. Droughts, floods, and even serious earthquakes are occurring in many different locations around the world. *“All these are the beginning of sorrows”* (Matthew 24:7-8).
- ☞ **“And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many”** (Matthew 24:11). There has never been a time in history when more people were being deceived and led astray from the one true God. Many are falling away because of iniquity, but that is not a reason to quit; it is a reason to hold on harder than ever before. Those who endure are the only ones who will make it (Matthew 24:13).
- ☞ **“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come”** (Matthew 24:14). This is one of the only signs of the end time that has not been totally fulfilled. We are still working daily to share the gospel with *“whosoever will,”* and the task is great. But Jesus never asked us to do anything that was impossible – we just have to trust Him and keep on working.
- ☞ **“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only”** (Matthew 24:36). The purpose of our study is not to tell you when Jesus is coming again, but to make you aware of the signs He has given to let us know His coming is getting closer every day. We need to be looking up, for He could come at any time.
- ☞ **Compare the days of the end to the days of Noah** – What was going on while Noah and his sons were building the ark? (Matthew 24:37-39).
 - **“Eating and drinking”** – more restaurants, bars, and places to consume food than ever before in the history of the world.
 - **“Marrying and giving in marriage”** – more people getting married, divorcing, and then remarrying to their heart’s content.
 - **“Knew not until the flood came and took them all away”** – they did not listen to the preaching of Noah, nor realized what was taking place until it was too late to do anything about it.
- ☞ **How will it happen?** – Jesus said that it would take us by surprise. Two would be working together, and one would be taken while the other was left behind (Matthew 24:40-42). His main point was to let us know that His coming will be a surprise. We need to be ready at all times because we never know when He will appear (Matthew 24:44).

Others Speak of His Second Coming

Paul, in his epistles, spoke to different churches of this “Second Coming” of our Saviour.

To the Church at Thessalonica – because of intense persecution by some Jews who lived in Thessalonica, Paul was forced to leave this newly founded church before he had taught them as much as they needed. He wrote this letter to give them some encouraging words and more sound doctrine.

- ☞ 1 Thessalonians 4 begins with instructions about how to please the Lord, but then Paul begins to explain to them about those who die before Jesus comes again. *“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words”* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- ☞ Then Paul begins to speak of certain things that would be happening when this “trump of God” sounds:
 - This day would come as a “thief in the night.” Paul agrees that no one knows when this event will take place.

- People would be crying for “peace and safety.” The whole world is crying for peace, and there are more “peace talks” than ever before, while more war and destruction is taking place around the world.
- ☞ Paul’s final admonition is that the church “watch.” *“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober”* (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Paul was telling his new converts to be spiritually prepared so they would escape God’s wrath. We must be spiritually awake, morally alert, and careful to stay in God’s Word.

To the Church at Corinth – Paul was teaching the Corinthian saints about the resurrection of Jesus and the hope this gives us as believers in Him. *“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”* (1 Corinthians 15:19).

He went on to tell them exactly how they would receive a glorified body at the resurrection that would be a part of Christ’s second coming.

“Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

Paul gave us several interesting clues in these passages:

- ☞ All believers will not be dead, but they will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51).
- ☞ It will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52).
- ☞ There will be a trumpet blast heralding the grand event (1 Corinthians 15:52).
- ☞ The corruptible (those whose bodies have decayed) will put on incorruption – they will have a new body (1 Corinthians 15:53).
- ☞ This mortal will take on immortality – those still alive will take on a new body that will never die (1 Corinthians 15:54).
- ☞ Death will no more be victorious over those who have received their victory through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55).

The Purpose of His Second Coming

God has always had a plan for the saving of His people. In the Old Testament He made it clear that sin had separated Him from His creation, but He had a plan for redemption. Nevertheless, He must still punish those who refuse to accept that plan and follow in His “Path to Righteousness.”

He spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament:

- ☞ Isaiah 13:9-11 – *“Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and He shall destroy the sinners thereon out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in His going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity, and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.”*
- ☞ Zephaniah 1:14-18 – *“The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy; for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.”*

He spoke through New Testament writers:

- ☞ John the Revelator asked this question in Revelation 6:17: *“For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”*
- ☞ Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3: *“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”*

- ☞ Paul wrote again in that same chapter of 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 of our hope in Jesus: “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”

When Is He Coming?

There are varied opinions as to whether Jesus will come the second time before, during, or after He allows His wrath to fall on the earth. However, we have already given enough Scriptures to support this understanding:

- ☞ “No man knows the day nor the hour” (Matthew 24:36).
 ☞ “Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44).
 ☞ “. . .like a thief in the night”(1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Why do we need to know when? So we can play around until the hour has arrived? So that we can do as we please, and then when the time comes, be ready? No, we do not actually need to know the exact time. We need to live every minute of every day in the expectant hope that He is coming again. He is coming back to take us home with Him, and “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

“The early believers were not looking for something to happen, they were looking for someone to come! Looking for the train to arrive is one thing, but looking for someone we love to come on that train is another matter.” – Vance Havner

***Jesus is coming soon!
 Will you be walking in His
 Path of Righteousness?***

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*“He leadeth me in the
paths of righteousness
for His name’s sake”
(Psalm 23:3).*