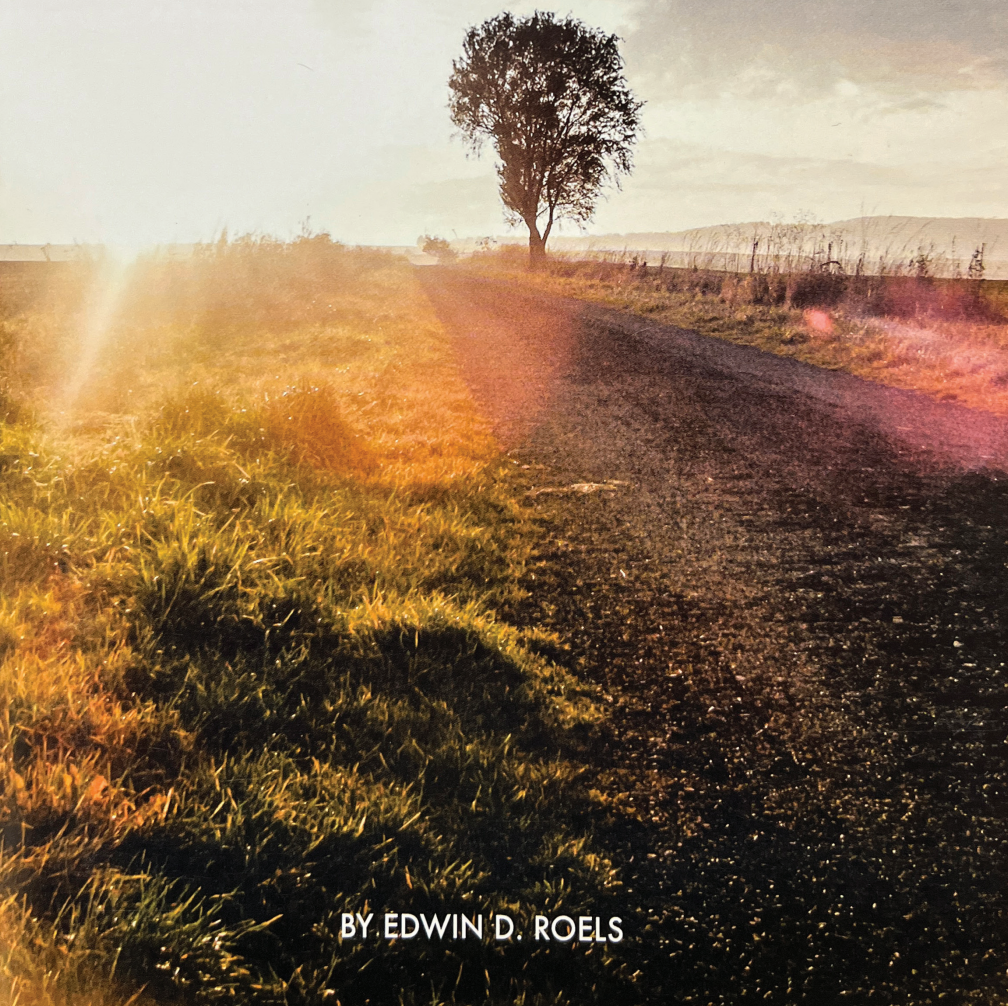


# Christian BASICS

TEACHERS' MANUAL



BY EDWIN D. ROELS



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## Foreword

This *Teachers' Manual* is intended for use by both students and teachers. Students will profit from reading the thoughts and ideas provided in the *Manual* while teachers will be able to use the *Manual* to guide the discussion of the questions presented in the *Christian Basics* course.

Mature students may frequently have different answers for some of the discussion questions. That is very understandable. Though the Bible is the final authority on matters of Christian life and doctrine, the Bible does not always give a direct or simple answer to all of our questions. No one, therefore, should claim that he or she alone has a full and correct answer to every question and a perfect understanding of everything presented in the Bible.

Discussing things with others will often help both students and teachers evaluate their own beliefs and also help them understand why fellow believers hold to different beliefs on certain matters. When we understand why fellow Christians believe as they do, we will often learn to accept them and love them as brothers and sisters in Christ, even if we disagree with some of their positions.

Thoughtful teachers will usually solicit the opinions of students before providing their own understanding of the Scriptures on a given subject. If students present an answer or make a comment which is clearly in conflict with the teachings of the Bible, the teacher should lovingly and patiently correct them. If students differ on what the Bible teaches on a controversial subject and have good reasons for their positions, the teacher should help students understand and evaluate the arguments presented for each position. Students should then decide for themselves which position they feel is most in harmony with the overall teaching of the Bible.

Both students and teachers should continually and humbly pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit as they study God's Word. The purpose of

discussing these questions is not to try to prove that you are “right,” but to help all of us understand the Scriptures more accurately so that we may live more faithfully to the glory and honor of our Lord.

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## LESSON 1

### THE BIBLE

1. **What difference would it make in your life if you did not have a Bible or did not know what the Bible teaches?**

For most of us, life would be very different. We would not know where we came from, where we are going, or how we should be living in order to honor and please God. We would not have the peace and joy that come from knowing Jesus. We would not have the comfort of knowing that God loves us, cares for us, forgives us, understands our weaknesses, and is preparing an eternal home for us in glory. We would not have the blessing of knowing how God wants us to live or what he wants us to do. We would basically be wandering in a broken world with few trustworthy guidelines for the present and very little hope for the future.

2. **Why is it important that we can trust what the Bible says?**

If we could not trust what the Bible says, we would continue to live in confusion and uncertainty. There would be no “authoritative” answer for any of our questions. We would always wonder whether our own thoughts and ideas are right or wrong. And we would have no sure way to judge or evaluate the thoughts and ideas of others. We would continue to live day after day wondering whether our thoughts and ideas were really true or simply the product of our own desires and imagination.

3. **In what ways does the Old Testament help us understand the New Testament?**

The Old Testament gives us the story of creation, the story of man’s fall into sin, God’s first promises of redemption, and the history of God’s people during the centuries before the coming of Jesus. The

Old Testament gives us a clear picture of mankind's sinful nature and his inability to earn or merit salvation and forgiveness by keeping the laws of God.

The Old Testament also gives us a very clear presentation of human weakness and God's greatness, man's unfaithfulness and God's faithfulness. Without the Old Testament, we could not fully understand the reason for our sinfulness and our inability to obtain salvation on our own. Nor could we fully understand the majesty, power, mercy, and grace of God.

Jesus fulfilled the wonderful promises God made to Adam at the dawn of human history and he also met all the demands and requirements God presented in the Old Testament hundreds of years before he was born. He was born into the family line of Old Testament figures such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Judah and David and fulfilled many of the prophecies presented in the Old Testament. He also was the true High Priest and the Eternal King which were foreshadowed in the Old Testament. It is impossible to fully understand who Jesus was, why he came, and what he did unless we also know at least some of the teachings of the Old Testament.

**4. Are the words of Jesus recorded in the Bible more important or trustworthy than other parts of the Bible?**

No. In some Bibles the words of Jesus are printed in red letters to set these words apart from others. In some ways that may be helpful. However, it's important to remember that the entire Bible has been inspired by the Holy Spirit and is therefore trustworthy.

At the same time, it's appropriate to recognize that some passages in the Bible are more significant than others in helping us learn the way of salvation and helping us learn how God wants us to live. For example, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and Paul's teachings in Romans 12 are much more helpful for teaching us God's will for our lives than passages that consist primarily of lists of names or numbers.

**5. What is meant by the phrase "progressive revelation"?**

"Progressive revelation" is the term used to describe the fact that God *gradually* gave people new information concerning himself and his



laws and his plan of salvation. The information which he gave at every point was true and trustworthy, but he continued to give additional information about himself, his will, his plans, and his purposes. For example, people in Old Testament times did not know that the God they served was a Triune God. Neither did they know that God would someday come to this earth in the form of a man (Jesus) who would die on the cross for the sins of the world. And they could not understand that someday both Jews and non-Jews would have an equal status before God as they were joined together in Jesus Christ. Because the Bible contains “progressive” revelation on many subjects, we should be very careful not to read an early passage in the Bible as God’s final and complete revelation on a given subject.

**6. The Bible is a very old book. Shouldn’t we look to “newer” books for better information about God and the world?**

The fact that the Bible is very old is actually something positive and not negative. In spite of the fact that the Bible has existed for so many years, it continues to be printed and translated and sold around the world in very large numbers. This by itself is an indication that the Bible is a most unusual book and worthy of careful study. Though there are some people who may reject it, it still is the most influential book in the world. It continues to be a source of comfort, challenge, inspiration, information and life-changing power. It does not claim to be a textbook on science or mathematics or other subjects of that kind, but it does teach eternal truths about God, salvation, and the way to eternal life.

We should be careful not to use the Bible as a “textbook” on subjects (such as science) which we can explore ourselves, but we should recognize that the Bible goes “beyond science” to reveal that God is the creator and sustainer of our incredible world filled with all its marvels and mysteries.

**7. What do you feel are some of the strongest reasons for believing what the Bible says?**

Students will probably emphasize different things here. Ultimately, the most important reason (whether expressed or not) will be that the Holy Spirit has impressed on their minds and hearts that the Bible is truly the Word of God.

**8. Is it helpful to have more than one translation of the Bible in your language?**

Students will probably have interesting responses to this question. Since no single translation is absolutely perfect, there are advantages in reading the Bible in different versions. Further, since languages often change somewhat over the years, an older version may contain words or expressions which are no longer used among the common people and will not be easily understood.

In addition, by reading a different version, students may be led to look at a passage in a new way which they had not thought of before. They may also find that a “strictly literal” translation does not always helpfully represent the original text. Since each language has “figures of speech” of one kind or another, a strictly literal translation could be misleading.

On the other hand, by having only one “version” of the Bible in a given language, everyone has the advantage of learning and memorizing and quoting exactly the same words. And that can be a very significant benefit!

**9. What is the best way to respond to people who claim that the Bible has been changed and corrupted over the years?**

Perhaps the best way to respond is to begin by asking them some questions. For example: (1) Why do you believe that the Bible has been changed or corrupted? (2) Who do you think made the changes? (3) Why did these people decide to make these changes? (4) When were the alleged changes made? (5) What happened to the “original” manuscripts of the Bible? (6) What proof do you have that the alleged changes were made? (7) If the originals no longer exist, how do you know that the Bible has been changed or corrupted?

It’s important to recognize and acknowledge that there are a fairly large number of differences in some of the thousands of Bible manuscripts in existence. Most of these differences, however, are very minor and of little significance. Besides, most scholars who have made it their primary work to study the ancient Bible manuscripts agree that we can be very confident that there is nothing in the original Bible manuscripts that has been lost—even though we do not have

the originals themselves. Without any legitimate doubt, the Bible is extremely accurate and completely trustworthy.

Some students may come from a church that accepts the Apocryphal books as part of the Bible. If students do not bring up that matter, it is probably best not to introduce it at this point. However, if they do bring it up, it should be helpful to present four brief, but important, reasons why the Apocryphal books are not included in the Bible used by most Protestants. (1) The Apocryphal books contain some teachings which are in not full harmony with the books of the Old and New Testament. (2) The Apocryphal books are part of the Old Testament but were never officially accepted by the Jews as part of their Bible. (3) Jesus himself never quoted from any of the Apocryphal books, though he did quote from other Old Testament Scriptures. (4) On a few occasions New Testament writers make a reference to a book outside the Old Testament, but these other books are not regarded as having the “divine authority” which the Old Testament books do. (See, for example, Jude 9, Jude 14, Acts 17:28, and Titus 1:12.)

#### **10. What are some of the most fruitful ways to study the Bible and learn what it teaches?**

Students will likely have a number of helpful suggestions here. Among the many things that may be mentioned are the following: We should read a portion of the Bible every day. We should try to find a time and a place to read the Bible where we will not be interrupted. We should ask the Holy Spirit (the author of the Bible) to help us understand what we read. We should, if possible, try to memorize something each time we read the Bible. We should read whole chapters and whole books of the Bible and not continually jump from one part of the Bible to another. We should seek to share with someone else what we have read or heard. We should read from different parts of the Bible from time to time (such as the Psalms, Proverbs, the Gospel accounts, the Epistles, etc.) and not spend all our time in reading just one part of the Bible.

We should also seek to read with “understanding” rather than simply spending time reading the Bible without understanding it. In this connection, we might read a Bible commentary (if available) to help us understand what we are reading. Or, if we do not have access to a commentary, we might choose to ask someone else to help us

understand what we have read. We should also make a definite effort to put into practice the truths we have read rather than simply reading them and then forgetting them. Many students also find it helpful to write down in their own words some of the truths they have learned through their reading of the day. Students may also share various other ways they have found to make their Bible reading more fruitful.



## LESSON 2

### WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT GOD

#### 1. What are some of the most important things the Bible teaches about God?

There are many things that students may list here. Among them are the following: There is only one true God. This one God is eternal, all-knowing, everywhere present, spiritual, invisible, all-powerful, wise, patient, compassionate, loving, just, holy, and unchanging in his being. He exists as three persons whom the Bible reveals as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three “persons” together form the Holy Trinity.

God created the world in the beginning as a perfect world which he himself said was “very good.” He created a man and a woman in his own image and put them in charge of the earth and all creatures on the earth. He continues to maintain and sustain the world but will eventually judge all people who have ever lived. In his mercy he will grant everlasting life to all those who have repented of their sin and put their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. In his justice, he will destroy those who refuse to repent and refuse to put their trust in God and his Son Jesus. He will then establish a new heaven and a new earth and will reign forever with his redeemed people who will live in perfect and never-ending joy and peace.

There obviously are also other important things which we should know and believe, but these items provide an introductory survey of the Bible’s teachings about God.

## **2. Can we fully understand everything the Bible teaches about God?**

No. Because God is eternal, infinite, and Triune (three in one), there are many things we cannot fully understand about God or his ways. We should not expect to be able to understand everything about God with our human limitations and finite existence any more than animals can fully understand us as human beings.

It is important, therefore, that we do not reject something which the Bible says just because we cannot understand it or do not like it. If we reject something which the Bible clearly teaches, we are making ourselves “judges” of the Bible rather than submitting our limited knowledge and understanding to the eternal truth of God’s holy Word. God’s truth stands eternal and supreme whether or not we can understand all if it.

## **3. Why is it significant that there is only one true God?**

If there were more “gods” than the one true God, each “god” would be extremely limited by the existence, power, and authority of the other “gods.” We would live in constant uncertainty concerning the power and authority of OUR “god” in relation to other gods. And we would probably often wonder if the gods were jealous of one another or in conflict with one another—as people are. If there actually were many gods, it would be impossible for us to love and serve each one with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Our loyalties would always be somewhat divided and we could never find the peace and confidence and joy we now have in knowing and serving the one and only true God.

Students who come from non-Christian backgrounds may be able to share their own experiences of what it was like to believe in the existence of many gods.

## **4. What would your life be like if there were no God?**

If there were no true God at all, we would have to depend completely on ourselves or other human beings for everything. There would be no way to find genuine forgiveness, no sure hope for the future, no divine power to bless, encourage, comfort and strengthen us, no divine power

to administer justice, and no one with divine love and compassion to be concerned about our present or future well-being.

The ultimate power on earth would be found in the persons with the greatest wealth, prestige or influence, and no one could contest their judgments, decisions, or actions. There might possibly be some earthly authorities or powers who would encourage people to act justly and compassionately, but their powers would be very limited and their influence would be very temporary. Relatively few powerful dictators in history have been genuinely kind and benevolent and none of them has stayed in power for more than (at most) a few decades. If there is no righteous and powerful Judge, the evils of this world would never be rectified, life would have little meaning, and mankind would have little enduring hope.

#### **5. What would your life be like if you did not know God personally?**

Regrettably, there are millions of people who do not know the true God. Some of these people live reasonably “comfortable” lives as they focus on their earthly activities and do not even try to deal with guilt, sin, or moral failure and do not believe in or bother with the possibility of life after death. As far as they are concerned, this life is all there is.

It is true that some people who do not believe in God do have a sincere concern about others and seek to help them make the most of their earthly life. However, there are multitudes of people who focus on getting everything they can for themselves without being at all concerned about others. But whether people are kind or selfish, they miss the greatest blessings possible for us on this earth if they do not personally know the love and mercy and grace of God.

Some of those who are studying these lessons may be willing to share what their own lives were like before they became believers in the one true God.

#### **6. Why is it wrong to make idols or images of God?**

God has emphatically and repeatedly commanded us in the Bible not to make images or idols of himself. There is no way in which any image or idol can even begin to represent the eternal, almighty, infinite, compassionate Creator and Judge of our world. Every image

or idol, no matter how creative or artistic or expensive it might be, would “belittle” and misrepresent God, the eternal Spirit.

Besides, if someone would be able to make a “beautiful and attractive” idol of some kind, many people would soon be worshiping the idol rather than the God which the idol supposedly represented. Throughout history people have been led astray by their idols and images. God has never been glorified or honored by any human effort to represent him with a physical image. As Jesus himself said: “*God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:24).

**7. What are some of the things people can learn about God if they do not have a Bible or someone to teach them?**

God has revealed himself in history through his work of creation, through miracles, through changing the lives of those who trusted in him, and through his divine intervention at various points throughout history.

Psalms 19:1-4 teaches us: “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*”

Romans 1:19-20 teaches us: “*What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*” (See also Romans 1:21-23.)

Acts 14:16-17 teaches us: “*In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*”

See also: Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Psalms 4:1-3, 50:6, 89:5-8, 97:6, 104:1-31, 147:16-18, 148:6-13; Isaiah 6:3; 40:21-26; Daniel 2:21, 46-47.

It’s true, of course, that many people see the wonder and power of God in creation and in history but do not acknowledge him or praise him. However, as Romans 1:19 reminds us: Those who do so are without excuse.



**8. What can we learn about God from the Bible that we cannot learn in any other way?**

The Bible teaches us many spiritual truths that cannot be taught through nature or natural events. It teaches us about the love and righteousness and holiness of God as well as other attributes of God. It teaches us about right and wrong, obedience and disobedience, punishment, justice, forgiveness, compassion, hope, heaven and hell. It also teaches us about Jesus, the way of salvation through Christ alone, and the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

From the Bible we also learn about the kind of life that honors God and the kind of life that displeases or dishonors him. In the Bible we read stories that encourage us, warn us, inform us, and enable us to better understand the ways of God in this world and in the lives of his people.

Students may also indicate other things they have learned from the Bible which they could never learn from nature or history or in any other way—things about holiness, mercy, prayer, personal sacrifice, dedication, the family, marriage, government, giving, witnessing, and other dimensions of daily life.

**9. If you had only 20 minutes to teach someone about God, what are some of the things you would talk about?**

In some ways this might not be considered a “fair” question, since the answer will depend to a significant extent on a person’s age, background, education, interests, and circumstances. However, there are certain basic or fundamental truths about God which are so important that every person, young or old, well-educated or uneducated, rich or poor, weak or strong, should know about.

Students should focus primarily on fundamental truths that the Bible teaches about God without focusing too much on those things which may be difficult to understand. Included would be such things as the fact that there is only one true God who is perfectly holy and just, the creator of the world, the divine and righteous judge of every person, and a God of mercy, forgiveness, and love. Everyone should also know that God sent his only begotten Son into the world to give his life as an atonement for our sin and to give us the joy and hope of eternal life with him in glory. Some helpful Scripture verses would include such

passages as John 4:24, 1 Timothy 6:15-16, Exodus 34:6-7 and John 3:16. Students will select other passages and other teachings as well.

The primary purpose of asking this question is to encourage students to learn and remember some basic truths which they can present to any person at any time without hesitation and with strong Biblical support.

**10. What are some of the truths about God which are most important to you personally ?**

There obviously is no “correct” answer to this question. However, it will likely elicit interesting and meaningful responses from students who have different backgrounds, different interests, and different experiences. Students should be able to learn from the responses of others while also providing encouragement and instruction to each other.



## LESSON 3

### WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF OUR WORLD

**1. What difference would it make in your life if you did not believe that God created the world?**

Though answers will likely differ from one student to another there will probably be some things that will be mentioned by many of them. If God didn't create the world, all of us would be here simply by chance. We would have no real hope for the future and would definitely have no certainty of having eternal life. We would probably focus on meeting our own needs or desires and have little interest in helping to meet the needs of others. We might also throw off some restraints which presently keep us from doing things which we believe would bring dishonor to the name of God.

We would likely not gather with others to worship God and would probably spend little or no time reading and studying the Bible. Some students might work hard to preserve the world and its resources, since that is all there is, while others might have less concern for the natural world and would have little concern about trying to preserve it. A few people, however, might say that nothing would change, since they would still want to be the best person they could be—with or without God.

**2. How important is it for us to know how old the earth is?**

Some Christians believe that the Bible clearly teaches that the earth is only a few thousand years old. Others are convinced that the world is at least millions of years old—or, at least, much older than a few thousand years. And both groups are totally convinced of the correctness of their position and will argue strongly to defend it.

Does it make any difference which position is correct? For many people it makes a lot of difference. For others it makes no difference at all. They emphasize that the Bible teaches us that “in the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth”—but does not tell us when that happened or how long it took.

For centuries many people, both Christians and non-Christians, taught that the earth is the center of the universe. They also believed that the earth is flat and taught that the sun revolves around the earth. Some of those who taught these things based their arguments—at least partly—on the teachings of the Bible. Few people today, however, believe or teach these things any longer. And few people seem to be disturbed about the fact that the sun only “appears” to rise and set—even though the Bible uses language which seems to indicate that it actually does rise and set.

Though the Bible is the final authority on matters of doctrine and Christian living, it’s very important that we not insist that the Bible should be regarded as the “final authority” on every other subject as well. It’s also important that we do not insist that the Bible teaches something which it really does not intend to teach.

It’s also important, however, to recognize that non-Christians have also changed their position or teaching on a number of things over the years. We should be very careful, therefore, not to accept everything taught by so-called “scholars,” especially when their teachings or writings conflict with the clear teachings of the Bible.

### **3. How important is it to know HOW God created the world and HOW LONG it took to create it?**

Many Christians strongly believe that God created the world in six ordinary days of twenty-four hours each. They are convinced that Genesis 1 and Exodus 20:11 allow no other interpretation. They also believe that any “evolution” that did take place (such as micro-evolution involved in the formation of new species) took place after the original creation described in Genesis 1.

Other Christians believe that God brought our world into existence through a long, gradual process. Though the process may have been very slow, they believe that God was in complete control of all that took place.

It's very important to remember that the fundamental question here is not WHO created the world but HOW he created it. Some believe that God simply "spoke" the world into existence over a period of six days. Others believe that the work of creation was spread over a very long period of time. However, all Christians agree that "This is our Father's world" and all of them recognize that God was the One who brought our complex and beautiful world into existence. He is the One we must recognize and honor as the creator and sustainer of our world and he is also the One who will determine the world's future.

It may be helpful here to list some of the "Biblical" reasons why some Christians believe that Genesis 1 does not present a literal and full account of the creation of the world. You may accept or reject any or all these reasons, but it is at least helpful to be aware of them.

- (a) The creation account in Genesis 1 is significantly different from the account in Genesis 2. Some argue, therefore, that it is quite possible that neither chapter 1 nor chapter 2 intends to give us details regarding the time or the method of the creation of the world.
- (b) Genesis 1 gives us the impression that God simply "spoke" and suddenly all kinds of creative activity took place. Other passages in the Bible, however, indicate that God's arm or hand or fingers were involved in creating the world. (See, for example, Psalm 8:3, 6; Psalm 19:1; Psalm 102:25; Isaiah 45:12; Zechariah 12:1 and Hebrews 1:10. See also Job 37-40.) Some people therefore argue that both the Genesis account and the other passages are "poetic" presentations of the work of creation and do not intend to give us details of the method God used to bring the world into existence.
- (c) Genesis 1:11-13 indicates that the earth brought forth vegetation. Genesis 1:24-25 indicates that the earth also brought forth the animal world. We all recognize that plants and trees grow out of the ground. However, we also know that animals are produced by a totally different process. Does Genesis 1:24-25 intend to teach that the land "produces" both vegetation and animals in the same way? Some believers did seem to teach that in the past, and some may still do so today, but most do not.

- (d) Genesis 1:14-19 describes the creation of the sun and moon in some detail but provides only a very brief reference to the creation of the rest of the starry world. We realize today that the earth with its sun and moon forms only a very tiny fraction of the entire world.
- (e) Genesis 1:26-27 refers to the creation of Adam and Eve on the 6th day after the creation of the animal world on that day. However, Genesis 2:19-22 indicates that Eve was apparently created some time later after Adam became painfully aware that he did not have a “partner” as the animals did.
- (f) Genesis 1:1-2 seems to describe the “original” creation of God as a world that was dark and formless and empty. Many regard that as an unusual beginning for the creation of a perfect earth! Moreover, since there is no indication how much time existed between verse 2 and verse 3 in Genesis 1, some believe that verse 2 may possibly describe an “earlier world” which might have been destroyed and then “re-created” in some way.

Some suggest that this “earlier earth” might have been inhabited by angels (or other beings) who were created by God but then later fell into disobedience and sin which led to the destruction of their world. There is certainly no proof that Genesis 1 refers to this, but we know that the angelic world was created before the human world was and Satan and his followers did fall into sin before Adam and Eve did. Though these were very significant events which had a great impact on life on earth, Genesis 1 does not record them.

Some believers therefore emphasize that there are good Biblical reasons to believe that Genesis 1 was not intended to give us a full description of all God’s creative works in the beginning.

- (g) The account of creation in Genesis 1 has a “poetic” structure. Since poetry in the Bible (such as that found in Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) is often not interpreted literally, some people argue that Genesis 1 should not necessarily be interpreted literally either.

These are some of the “Biblical” reasons why some believers teach that the account of Genesis 1:2-31 is not intended to represent a complete or literal account of God’s work of creation in the beginning.

As noted earlier, you may reject some or all of these arguments, but it is helpful to be aware of them when making judgments about the beliefs of others concerning their understanding of the creation story described in Genesis 1.

**4. Since God told Adam and Eve to rule over the earth and all he had made, what are some of the implications of that for our lives today?**

It is important for Christians to promote those activities which make the best possible use of the earth’s resources. We should not disregard or take lightly any activities which unnecessarily “spoil” the earth or waste any of its resources. Neither should we carelessly pollute the atmosphere or our streams, lakes, and rivers. We should also protect the animal world from careless and thoughtless destruction. Christians should not thoughtlessly use the earth’s resources in order to promote their own economic well-being if others may be hurt in some way by what they are doing. God is not glorified when we treat his world in a way which does not honor him as the Creator and sustainer of the universe he has made. Though the earth will someday be destroyed by fire according to God’s eternal plan (2 Peter 3:10-12), this does not give us the right to treat God’s creation without appropriate care and concern.

**5. What are some of the practical implications of the fact that God created man AND woman in his image?**

In some parts of the world women are still regarded as “second class citizens.” They are considered to be less important and less valuable than men and are treated accordingly. They do not have the same rights or privileges that men have and often do not have equal standing with men in a court of law. In marriage they may be considered important only for giving birth to children—especially male children. Their husbands may have other wives or mistresses if they so choose and any wife may be considered “disposable” when their husbands tire of them.

All of these things, however, are totally wrong and in conflict with the Bible's teaching that men and women are both image bearers of God and should be treated accordingly. Women should be treated with respect and honor and should be given equal privileges in society and before the law. Though the Bible teaches that men should have a leadership position in marriage, this does not mean that women are to be considered of less value or less importance than men.

Students will likely be able to present many examples where the treatment of women in their culture or society or home needs to be changed. (This subject will be discussed also in Lesson Nine.)

## 6. In what way did Adam and Eve “die” when they sinned against God?

When Adam and Eve sinned, their bodies became subject to physical death and they lost the relationship of love and trust between themselves and God which they had once enjoyed. Unless something miraculous would happen in their lives, their bodies would eventually die and they would live apart from God forever. Their hearts were no longer in tune with God and their goals and desires were no longer God-centered. They were destined to live in a world that was “cursed” by God—a life of pain, suffering, and toilsome labor where physical death became the destiny of all living creatures.

That does not mean that there would never be any joy or pleasure for them on earth, but they were separated from the beautiful, holy, and pure life which they had enjoyed before they sinned. Ephesians 2:1-3 describes their situation (and the situation of all people who are apart from Christ) in the following words: *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”* Romans 5:10 describes unbelievers as “enemies” of God and Colossians 1:21 refers to them as people who are “alienated” from God.

It's important to remember, however, that God in his mercy continues to shower many blessings upon both believers and unbelievers, on those



who are just and those who are unjust (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:15-17). Many people are still able to enjoy times of pleasure and plenty, even though they are not worthy of these blessings and do not thank God for them. However, earthly life is often filled with sorrow and sickness, frustration and disappointment, and eventually everyone will stand before God in judgment. And then, for those who are not “in Christ,” the time of joy and gladness will be completely gone forever.

**7. Since God is gracious and forgiving, why should we be concerned about obeying him?**

God is truly loving and gracious and is willing to forgive us when we sincerely repent of doing wrong. However, he is also a holy God who commands us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. If we live carelessly or seek first of all to fulfill our own desires rather than loving and serving God, we obviously do not love God the way we should. All sin grieves God and dishonors him.

If we don't remember that or if we fail to live in the light of that truth, we are putting ourselves ahead of God. If we sin carelessly and thoughtlessly, we also lose the effectiveness of any witness we may try to give to others concerning God and his salvation. As has often been stated, “Actions speak louder than words.” If we talk to others about the power and majesty and greatness of God but do not love and serve him with all our heart, our words will have very little effect and the Lord will certainly not be honored or praised.

Also, we should never forget that we must someday give an account to God of all that we think, say, or do. Those who seek to live holy and honorable lives will graciously be rewarded by a loving and merciful God. Those who profess Christ but do not live holy and honorable lives will lose the rewards they might have received.

**8. In what way did Adam's sin affect us?**

According to Romans 5:12-18, Adam was the head of the entire human race and our “representative.” So, when Adam sinned, everyone sinned in him. All people who ever lived (except Jesus) were “in” Adam and all are affected by what he did.

Romans 5:12 says: *“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”*

And in Romans 5:19 we read: *“By the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.”*

Because Adam was the father of us all, we are all born with a sinful human nature (Psalm 51:5) and are therefore considered *“dead in our trespasses”* (Ephesians 2:5). Because of Adam’s sin, the entire world of nature was also negatively affected (Genesis 3:17-19), so we all now live in a world that is under the “curse” of God. There are still many good and beautiful and pleasant things in our world, but it is far from what it was in the beginning.

### **9. In what way was Adam like Jesus?**

Adam was the representative of every human being just as Jesus was the representative of all who trust in him and believe in him. Jesus did what none of us could ever do for ourselves. He paid the penalty for our sins with the promise that all who trust and believe in him will have the gift of eternal life!

Romans 5:15-19 teaches us: *“For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many . . . For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”*

### **10. What do you think the Bible means when it says in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that Satan is the “god of this world”?**

God continues to rule over the entire world and has given all power and authority in heaven and on earth to his eternal Son, Jesus Christ. According to Ephesians 1:21-22, Jesus reigns *“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.”* See also Matthew 28:18 where Jesus is quoted as saying, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*

However, when Satan tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God, Satan gained a position of great authority and power in this world. Satan is a powerful opponent of both God and man and continues to tempt people to follow himself rather than Jesus. See, for example, 1 Peter 5:8: *“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* Because Satan has this power, he is called “the god of this world.” It is very important to remember, however, that Satan is not the “god” over those who belong to Jesus.

Besides, even though Satan’s power is great, it is also very limited. He can do nothing to God’s people without the “permission” of the real ruler of the universe, our Lord Jesus Christ. See, for example, Luke 22:31 where Satan had to ask Jesus for permission to tempt Simon Peter. Also see the story of Job where Satan could do nothing against Job or his family without God’s permission (Job 1:6 through Job 2:10).

See also the comforting and encouraging words of 1 John 4:4 and 4:15-16: *“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. . . . Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.”*

We should never underestimate the power of Satan, but we should not overestimate it either.



## LESSON 4

### WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

#### 1. What did God promise in Genesis 3:15? Do you think Adam and Eve understood what God promised them?

God promised that he would put enmity between the woman (Eve and her offspring) and the serpent (Satan) and his “offspring” or followers. There would be continual strife and animosity between Satan and his allies and all the descendants of Eve throughout human history. However, Eve’s descendants would not live forever in separation from God and his blessing. Satan would not be victorious forever. One specific person, a descendant of Eve, would someday crush the head of the serpent, destroying his power. This person was Jesus Christ, God’s eternal Son. Jesus would someday make provision for Adam and Eve’s descendants to again live happily and joyfully with the God whom they had disobeyed.

However, though Satan would be crushed (defeated, destroyed), he would also cause much harm to the woman’s descendants and would bring pain and suffering and even death to Jesus himself. The “heel” of the woman’s seed would be “struck” by Satan, but Jesus and His followers would be eternally victorious.

Adam and Eve could certainly not have understood all of this. The full meaning and significance of the promise of Genesis 3:15 would not be understood at any time before the coming of Jesus. However, the promise was there to give hope to everyone who trusted the Word of God in spite of all kinds of trials and fears and uncertainties in their lives.

See other passages in the Bible which teach some of the same truths found in Genesis 3:15.

Revelation 12:1-17 gives a special picture of the birth of Jesus and the tremendous conflict that followed. Verse 17 reads: *“Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”* The following chapters in the book of Revelation clearly indicate that Jesus and those who believe in him will be eternally victorious.

Romans 16:20: *“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”*

Hebrews 2:14: *“Since therefore the children [human beings] share in flesh and blood, he himself (Jesus) likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”*

1 John 3:8: *“The devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”*

## **2. What do John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:16-17 teach about Jesus?**

John 1:1-3 teaches that Jesus Christ was truly God in the flesh. Jesus is called the WORD of God who was *with* God and *was* God. Jesus was the creator of our world. Nothing was made without him. Colossians 1:16-17 also teaches that all things were made *for* him as well as *by* him. He is *“before all things”* and he is the One in whom the entire world *“holds together.”*

These verses are among the clearest statements in the Bible that Jesus was truly God. Though Jesus himself was visible with a human body, he is called the *“image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation”* (Colossians 1:15). The description of Jesus as the *“firstborn over all creation”* refers to his position of authority, prestige, and honor over the entire created world.

Some cults teach that John 1:1 teaches that Jesus was *“a god”* rather than GOD in the flesh. However, the original Greek of this passage does not support this teaching. Moreover, if Jesus was simply *“a god”* who is to be worshiped and honored alongside of the one true God,

then the Bible would repeatedly contradict itself, since it teaches us in many places that there is only one true God who is worthy of worship and praise.

John 1:14 teaches: *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* And in John 1:18 we read: *“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”*

Other passages confirm this same truth about the deity of Christ. For example, in Titus 2:13 we read: *“Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”* 2 Peter 1:1 speaks of *“the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”* Paul teaches in Philippians 2:6 that Jesus was *“in the form of God.”* Revelation 1:17 describes Jesus as *“the first and the last”* and Revelation 21:6 and 22:13 refer to him as *“the Alpha and the Omega”* (see Revelation 1:8). Isaiah 9:6 refers to the coming Messiah (Jesus) as *“Mighty God.”* These exact same words are used in Isaiah 10:21 to refer to the only true God.

### **3. What does the Bible tell us about the birth of Jesus and the family of Jesus?**

Jesus was born to a young virgin named Mary in the city of Bethlehem in the land of Israel. God sent an angel to Mary and told her that she, though a virgin, would give birth to a baby boy. The angel told Mary that the child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit of God without any involvement on the part of a man.

After the angel came to Mary and told her about the coming birth of her child, he went to a man named Joseph who was engaged to Mary. Joseph was a humble and God-fearing carpenter in the city of Nazareth where both he and Mary lived. The angel told Joseph that Mary had become pregnant through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Joseph was shocked by the announcement and planned to “divorce” Mary quietly to protect both Mary and the baby. However, the angel told Joseph that he should marry Mary but that they should not live together as husband and wife until after the baby was born. Joseph and Mary accepted the message of the angel and did what he told them.

Because both Joseph and Mary were in the line of King David, they had to go the city of David called Bethlehem to enroll and pay taxes. Bethlehem was about 70 miles away from Nazareth. Mary and Joseph made the long journey with the pregnant Mary riding on a donkey. When the young couple came to Bethlehem, they found that there were so many visitors in town that there was no place for them to stay. An innkeeper offered a stable for a resting place for them and it was here in this very humble place that Jesus was born.

Mary and Joseph later had to flee to the land of Egypt with their baby boy to escape the wrath of King Herod who tried to kill Jesus. Herod was very jealous of Jesus and saw him as a potential threat to his throne. After King Herod died, Mary and Joseph and Jesus returned to Israel and went to the city of Nazareth where Jesus lived until he was about 30 years old. See Matthew 1 and 2 and Luke 1-3 for additional information about the birth, family and ancestry of Jesus.

Sometime after Jesus was born, Mary gave birth to a number of sons and daughters with whom Jesus grew up when he was young. (See Matthew 13:55-56.) Roman Catholics believe that Mary stayed a virgin for her entire life, so they teach that the persons referred to as Jesus' "brothers" and "sisters" were really his cousins or possibly children of Joseph by an earlier marriage. The Bible itself, however, does not teach this.

The birth of Jesus was clearly foretold in various passages of the Old Testament. Isaiah 7:14 foretells that the coming "Messiah" would be born to a virgin. Micah 5:2 foretells that the Messiah (or Christ) would be born in Bethlehem. Both Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus was born in the family line of King David. Matthew 1 focuses on the family history of Joseph who was regarded as the "legal" father of Jesus while Luke 3 apparently gives us the family history of Mary.

#### **4. What does Philippians 2:5-7 teach us about Jesus?**

This passage teaches that the person we know in history as Jesus of Nazareth actually lived in heaven as the Son of God before he came to earth. However, he voluntarily gave up his glory and many of his privileges and appeared on this earth in the form of a human baby. He came to earth as a servant so that he might redeem human beings from punishment and enable all those who believed in him to inherit eternal life.

When Jesus was on earth, therefore, he was truly a human person just like all other humans except for the important fact that he was completely without sin of any kind. At the same time, he was also the eternal Son of God who frequently exhibited divine knowledge, wisdom, and power. Sometimes his life clearly demonstrated his humanity. For example, he became tired, hungry, and thirsty and experienced suffering, pain, rejection, sorrow, and misunderstanding. At other times he demonstrated that he was also divine as he healed the sick, raised the dead, multiplied food for the multitudes, showed that he knew what people were thinking, and forgave sinners.

In the Gospel accounts, therefore, we find passages which clearly show that Jesus did “empty” himself of some of his divine prerogatives — just as *Philippians 2:5-7* teaches. As we read other stories in the Gospels, however, we recognize that Jesus, though human, was also divine. We should never forget either Jesus’ humanity or his divinity.

#### **5. What does *Philippians 2:10-11* teach us about Jesus?**

This passage teaches that someday Jesus will be honored by all people who have ever lived. They will bow down before him and recognize and acknowledge who he is and what he did. Everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. This will be a fantastic time when all those who ignored him or opposed him or doubted him or denied him or defamed him will openly and publicly acknowledge that Jesus is truly the Lord of lords and the King of kings.

This does not mean that everyone will be saved. Many will not be. However, Jesus will finally receive the recognition and honor due him as the Son of God and the Son of Man—true God and true man—who is worthy of glory and honor and praise forever.

#### **6. What does *Isaiah 7:14* teach about the coming Savior?**

Isaiah, who lived about 700 years before the birth of Christ, foretold that the coming Savior would be born of a virgin and would be called Immanuel, which means “God with us.” Though many people living in the time of Isaiah may not have understood the full significance of Isaiah’s prediction, *Matthew 1:22-23* explicitly indicates that Jesus’ birth was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy.



Since Matthew wrote first of all to the Jewish people, he emphasized how the birth of Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of one of their best known prophets (Isaiah). Luke also indicates that Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant with her child (Luke 1:26-35). In Luke's account we have the clear statement that he would be called "the Son of the Most High."

**7. Why did so many people oppose and reject Jesus when he did so many good and wonderful things?**

The ones who most strongly opposed Jesus were usually people with some kind of religious authority. The Sadducees opposed Jesus since he accepted the entire Old Testament as the Word of God and they didn't. They may also have seen Jesus as someone who was upsetting the Roman authorities with whom they (the Sadducees) often had a good relationship.

The Pharisees often opposed Jesus because many of them were self-righteous and felt that they did not need Jesus for anything. (See, for example, Luke 18:11-12.) They also saw Jesus as someone who frequently broke the law (as they understood it) and, in their minds, he was therefore leading people astray. (See, for example, Matthew 9:11, 12:2, 24, 15:1-2 and many others.)

The Pharisees also were alarmed and jealous that Jesus was becoming increasingly popular (John 4:1, John 7:32). They felt that Jesus was standing in the way of their own personal goals for power and authority. They were also disturbed because of the things Jesus taught about money, since the Pharisees "*were lovers of money*" (Luke 16:14). Jesus therefore strongly warned the people against the teachings and practices of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matthew 16:6, 11, 12). Because of their hypocrisy and self-righteousness, Jesus frequently spoke against them, thus arousing them to even greater enmity and hatred. (See, for example, Jesus' exceedingly strong statements about the Pharisees in Matthew 23:1-36.)

Some of the "common people" disbelieved in Jesus (John 5:38, 6:36, 10:26, 12:37), partly because of the influence of the religious leaders. However, many others eagerly followed Jesus and believed in him. They listened to what he taught, rejoiced in his miracles, and followed him from one place to another. (See, for example, Matthew 4:25, 7:25, 8:1, 13:2, 19:2, 21:9; Mark 2:12, 6:2, 10:1; Luke 5:15, 8:42, 11:29,

14:25; John 2:22-23, 4:39, 4:53, 7:31,32, 10:42, 12:42, 16:27). People did not always follow Jesus for the right reasons, but many of them were deeply impressed with what he said and did and followed him wherever he went.

Eventually, it was the Jewish religious leaders who convinced the Roman authorities that Jesus should be put to death. (See John 7:32; Matthew 26:57, 59.)

## **8. Why do many people reject or oppose Jesus today?**

There are many different reasons why people oppose or reject Jesus. Some people know very little about him and what they claim to know is often not accurate. Other people think that the claims Jesus made concerning himself were far too strong. He not only claimed to be the Son of God but he also claimed to be the Savior of the world. Jesus also stressed that no one can come to the Father except through himself. That seems to some people to be very arrogant and self-centered and far too restrictive.

Some believe that the Bible is not trustworthy or true. Others believe that the teachings of Jesus are not as good as the things they were taught in their childhood by their parents or “spiritual leaders.” Still others do not like (or agree with) Jesus’ teachings about sin and the need of everyone to repent and confess their sins to a holy and righteous God.

Many others teach that Jesus was far too strict. They are very displeased with his condemnation of many of the vices which they very much enjoy. And many others feel absolutely no need for a Savior at all, since they consider their own lives to be “good enough” to earn for themselves a place in heaven.

Many people, of course, have never read the Bible and look upon it as something of an “antique” which has little relevance for people who live in the 21st century. They do not like the Bible’s teaching about creation or its emphasis on man’s selfishness and basic sinfulness. So, since they don’t have a sense of need, they do not look for a way to meet their need. If there really is a “God,” they are quite sure that they don’t have any reason to fear him or his judgment. They are quite confident they can do all that might be necessary to “please” God without the help of anyone else.

Students may present various other reasons why people do not believe in Jesus as the only way to salvation or why they do not believe that they even need salvation. Some students may be able to give the reasons why they themselves did not believe in Jesus for much of their life. Their thoughts and observations can be very helpful to others as they seek to bring the message of Christ to an unbelieving world.

## **9. Why did Jesus have to die?**

Jesus did not die because of anything he had done or failed to do. He lived a perfect life with absolutely no sin or failure of any kind. Precisely because he was sinless himself, he did not have to atone for any of his own sins AND he was able to die in our place as a perfect substitute for us.

Hebrews 4:15 reads: *“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*

2 Corinthians 5:21 teaches: *“For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

And in Hebrews 2:14-17 we read: *“Since therefore the children [human beings] share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. . . . He had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”*

## **10. If you had only 20 minutes to talk to someone about Jesus, what are some of the things you would tell them?**

Students will probably emphasize different things here. Some of them will emphasize those truths about Jesus which were particularly significant in their own conversion. Others might emphasize some important truths which they feel are sometimes neglected. Still others might emphasize truths about Jesus which are often misunderstood or misrepresented. There obviously is no “correct” answer to this question.

In general, however, it is important for students to include most of the following teachings—as time and circumstances permit. Jesus is the eternal and uncreated Son of God. He came to earth as a baby born to a Jewish virgin named Mary who became pregnant through a special act of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had no earthly father but he was brought up in the home of a carpenter named Joseph who married Mary after she became pregnant. Jesus lived for about 33 years in the land of Israel where he taught large numbers of people, performed many wonderful miracles, lived a perfect, sinless life, and eventually died on a cross at the hands of Roman soldiers.

Though Jesus was declared to be perfectly innocent by a Roman official, the jealous religious leaders of the Jewish people persuaded the Roman governor to hand Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified. Though Jesus himself was without sin, he willingly and voluntarily died on the cross as a substitute to pay the penalty for the sins of all those who put their faith and trust in him.

On the third day after he was crucified, Jesus rose again from the dead. He lived on earth for 40 more days, teaching his disciples, demonstrating to many people that he had conquered death, and then returned in glory to his Father in heaven where he now reigns over the entire world. Someday Jesus will come back to earth again to judge all people and to reign forever in glory with all those who loved and trusted and served him.



## LESSON 5

# WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT SALVATION

### 1. What does it mean to be saved?

To be saved means that our sins have been forgiven and that we have become children of God. As saved persons we have received the gift of eternal life and have the certainty that we will live forever with Jesus in glory.

In general, we refer to salvation as something that takes place only once in a person's life. One cannot be saved today and lost tomorrow and then be saved over and over again. We may still sin after we are saved and we may also lose the blessedness and joy of our salvation, but sin by itself does not take away our position as saved children of our heavenly Father. By sincerely confessing our sins and humbly asking him for forgiveness, we can again be restored to a joyful relationship with God.

We obviously should never take our sins lightly or act as if they don't matter very much. However, we should not let our sins and weaknesses destroy our confidence that we truly belong to Christ in spite of our weaknesses. Recall the words of David in Psalm 51 after he was guilty of the sins of adultery and murder: *“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit”* Psalm 51:7-12.

## **2. What must we do to be saved?**

We must sincerely confess our sins, demonstrate true repentance for what we have done or failed to do, and put our complete trust in Jesus and his sacrifice to atone for all our sins.

It is very important to remember that salvation is a “gift” and is not something we earn or merit. By confessing our sins and putting our trust in Jesus, we acknowledge that there is nothing we can do by ourselves to atone for our sins or make ourselves right with God. We do not simply promise that we will change our conduct and start walking on a new path and then assume that God will be satisfied with our good intentions or sincere promises. Rather, when we humbly confess our sins and place our trust in Jesus, we “throw ourselves on his mercy” with the acknowledgement that there is absolutely nothing we can do to win the favor of God or earn the gift of salvation.

Salvation is therefore always and completely a work of God’s grace and not the result of human effort. It may be significant when a person sincerely says: “I’ll do better from now on,” but that is much different from recognizing that we can never get right with God through our own efforts.

The apostle Paul carefully obeyed all God’s Old Testament laws when he was younger, describing himself in Philippians 3:6 as someone who was “faultless” in regard to legal righteousness. However, in regard to salvation Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:4-5: *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”*

And then a few verses later he wrote: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* Ephesians 2:8-9.

## **3. Can a person be saved without knowing it? Can a person think he is saved without really being saved?**

The answer to both questions is YES. A person who is saved definitely should know that he is saved without doubt or hesitation. However,

there are people who are genuinely sorry for their sins and who sincerely trust in Jesus for salvation who still sometimes doubt that they are truly saved.

This is particularly true when people focus on their own weaknesses and failures rather than focusing on the perfect life and atoning sacrifice of Jesus. They may feel that they simply are not good enough to be a child of God and they deeply regret that they still wrestle with significant sins in their lives.

All believers should deeply regret any sin in their lives, but they should not focus so much on their sins that they forget the many promises in the Bible that God will truly forgive all those who sincerely repent of their sins and trust him to forgive them all.

Isaiah 1:18 teaches: *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”* And 1 John 1:9 teaches: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

It is also possible for people to believe that they are “saved” when they are not. Regrettably, there are many people like that. These people often take sin very lightly and therefore believe that they have nothing to worry about. They often overestimate their own “holiness” and underestimate their own sinfulness. They do not put their trust in Jesus alone, since they feel they don’t need a Savior. They often have a sense of “self-righteousness” and believe that they are much better than most other people. And even if they do recognize that they are not as “good” as they should be, many feel that God is a very kind and gracious being who really doesn’t take sin very seriously. In his sight (they argue), no one is so bad that he should suffer any significant punishment for whatever sins he might happen to have.

These people are in a far worse situation than those who truly believe in Jesus but regret that they are not living the kind of holy life they would like to live. Those who are not sure of their salvation sometimes “underestimate” the mercy and kindness and grace of God, while those who don’t feel a need for a Savior tend to overestimate their own goodness and minimize God’s holiness and righteousness.

At one time the apostle Paul also had much confidence in his own righteousness. However, when he came to know Jesus and put his faith in him, he realized that in God's sight he was not righteous at all (Philippians 3:4-9).

#### 4. What is meant by “substitutionary atonement?”

This phrase refers to the teaching that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. That is, Jesus was our substitute when he died on the cross. We could never pay the penalty for our sins, so we needed a perfect Savior who was willing to die in our place. Since Jesus had no sins to atone for, he could pay the penalty we deserve . . . and still live!

The words “*substitutionary atonement*” are not found in most Bible translations. However, the idea of substitutionary atonement is found in every translation. Included among the relevant Scripture passages are the following.

In 1 John 4:10 we read: *“This is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”* Romans 6:23 teaches, *“The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* And Romans 5:10 states: *“While we were [God’s] enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”* (See also Romans 3:22-26 and Hebrews 9:28.)

*“He [Jesus] was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* Isaiah 53:5-6

*“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”* Galatians 3:13

*“He [Jesus] committed no sin . . . He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree [cross], that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”* 1 Peter 2:23,24

*“Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”* 1 Peter 3:18

*“He [Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”* Hebrews 7:25



*“Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”*  
*Romans 8:3*

We can therefore live all the days of our life on earth in gratitude, joy, and obedience for what Jesus has done for us as our perfect “substitute.”

**5. If we do not believe in Jesus, is there some other way we can be saved?**

NO. Jesus is the only way to salvation. There is no other.

Jesus himself said: *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* *John 14:6* Jesus also said, *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”* *John 6:35*

On another occasion Jesus said: *“I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers. . . I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved. . . . I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . I know my own and my own know me . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* *John 10:7-15*

Throughout history there has never been any one else like Jesus. Only Jesus was perfect and totally free from sin (1 John 3:5; Hebrews 4:15). Only Jesus had the love and holiness and ability to give his life to pay for the sins of others. And only Jesus had the power to rise again from the dead. Jesus said: *“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”* *John 10:17-18*

Very young children, of course, do not fully understand who Jesus was or what he did. But they still can love him and trust him and believe that he died for them. Even many older people have little knowledge or understanding of Jesus but they do believe in him and trust him to be their Savior. Jesus himself said that we must become like little children (in humility, faith and trust) in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. (See Matthew 11:25, 18:3, 19:14.)

It is Jesus who saves us—not our own efforts or knowledge or kindness. Anyone who is saved, at any time or any place, will be saved only

because of what Jesus did when he died for the sins of those who put their trust in him. Jesus and Jesus alone is the perfect Savior—whether our knowledge of him is great or small.

## **6. What does it mean to be “spiritually dead”?**

A spiritually dead person is someone who is not saved. He has not been born again. Christ does not live in him. He has only the old “sin nature” with which everyone is born. Many people who are spiritually dead are self-centered, immoral, proud, foolish, and disobedient. However, not all spiritually dead people are “bad” people in the sense that they are always violating the law, hurting others, or treating them disrespectfully.

Some spiritually dead people may actually be kind, friendly, helpful and pleasant to live with. However, they do not serve others out of love for God, they do not trust in Jesus, they do not seek to live according to the teachings of God’s Word, they do not put Christ first in their lives, they do not acknowledge or confess their sins before God, and they do not seek to live to the praise and honor of God. By human standards some of them would be considered “good” and worthy of praise. But they do not have the love or the life of Christ in their hearts and they do not seek to live to the glory of God.

In Revelation 3:1 the author writes about some nominal believers this way: *“You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”*

In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul wrote to those who had recently become Christians: *“You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air [Satan], the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”*

These words may seem harsh and unreasonable and even unfair, but according to the Bible, every person who is not born again is “spiritually dead.”

**7. What does it mean to be born again? Can we somehow earn the privilege of being born again? Can a person be born again more than once?**

Being born again involves the miraculous, spiritual, and somewhat “mysterious” work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life. When a person is born again, it is as if the “seed” of new spiritual life is planted in the center of his life. He has a conviction of sin which drives him to genuine repentance, a sincere faith in the atoning work of Jesus, a new purpose for living, a heartfelt desire to do what God wants him to do, a deep love for Jesus, and a genuine love for others. Being born again also brings a heart of joy, a spirit of thanksgiving, and a new attitude of praise and gratitude in a person’s life.

This new life is a gift of God which cannot be earned or merited by anything we say or do. And just as we can be born physically only once, we can be “born again” only once.

The following passages all refer to this new birth.

Jesus said: *“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* John 3:5-6

*“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”* 2 Corinthians 5:17

*“[You] were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* Ephesians 4:22-24

*“You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”* Colossians 3:9-10

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope . . . to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.”* 1 Peter 1:3-4

People who are born again are made new spiritually and have a sincere desire to serve God in every area of their lives. But they are not yet

perfect in this life. They still sin and fall short of being all they want to be or hope to be. As long as they are on this earth, they still have to wrestle with failure and temptation. However, even if they do fail at times, they do not lose their status as children of God. In spite of their failures, they are destined for an eternity of joy and peace and love in his presence.

There are five significant theological terms which are used to refer to various dimensions of our salvation. They are regeneration, conversion, justification, sanctification, and glorification.

*REGENERATION* refers to being born again.

*CONVERSION* describes the initial radical change in our lives when we turn away from living a sinful life that dishonors and displeases God to a life that honors and pleases him.

*JUSTIFICATION* describes our standing before the judgment seat of God as people who are *declared* by God himself to be “Not Guilty.” Even though we may still need to be “cleansed” over and over again, we as believers in Jesus are declared “justified” or “not guilty” because Jesus paid the penalty for all of our sins—past, present, and future.

*SANCTIFICATION* describes the *process* of becoming more holy in our lives through the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Sanctification is a life-long process which is never fully completed until the day of our death.

*GLORIFICATION* describes the joy and blessing which we experience as born again believers (Romans 8:30) and refers especially to the *future glory* which we will experience when we will be with Christ forever in the world to come. We will have perfect new bodies and will forever be without sin or sickness or sadness of any kind. We will also experience joy and love and peace far beyond anything we have ever experienced before.

## 8. What is meant by eternal life?

The phrase “eternal life” does not always refer to exactly the same thing. “Eternal life” sometimes refers to a life that never ends. In that sense, “eternal life” is the same as “everlasting life.” However, “eternal life” may also refer to a new *quality of* life, a life in Christ that is far superior to life without Christ. The emphasis here would then be

on the kind of life that a believer experiences rather than on the fact that this life never ends.

Consider the following passages.

*“This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” John 17:3*

Jesus said: *“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” John 5:24*

*“There is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.” Luke 18:29-30*

*“These [the unrighteous] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:46*

*“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” 1 John 3:15*

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16*

## **9. Why is baptism important? Can a person be saved without being baptized? Can a person be baptized without being saved?**

Baptism is important because Jesus commanded believers to be baptized (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is also important because it is a sign and a seal that a person belongs to Jesus Christ, that his sins are washed away, and that he indicates his desire and intention to live for Christ in every area of his life. It is a great blessing for a person to live in this life knowing that he has received the God-appointed sign that his sins are truly washed away and that he belongs for time and eternity to his Savior Jesus Christ.

Can people be saved without being baptized? Yes. Some people are truly saved but for one reason or another choose not be baptized (at least, not for a while). Perhaps they put off baptism because they are afraid of the reactions of family or friends or government authorities if they are baptized. Others may consider that baptism is not really important or required since they emphasize the “baptism of the Holy

Spirit.” Still others may live in a place or situation where there is no one to baptize them.

Can people be baptized without being saved? Yes. Regrettably, many people are baptized simply out of tradition or the expectations of family or friends. These people, though baptized, do not have a true saving relationship with Jesus Christ. They may be saved at a later point in their lives but they are not saved simply because they are baptized.

There are many churches that practice the baptism of infants as well as the baptism of mature believers (of every age). Those who practice infant baptism do so for different reasons. Some believe that children are “saved” through baptism itself. Others baptize infants only if they are children of believing parents. They emphasize that children of believers in the Old Testament received the sign of circumcision according to the explicit command of God. This sign indicated that the children belonged to God and thus received a sign which indicated the removal of sin and impurity. In their understanding, children of believers today should receive baptism as the New Testament sign of this spiritual blessing.

It is interesting to note in this connection that three of the stories of baptism in the New Testament involved the baptism of entire families: Acts 16:15, Acts 16:31-33, and 1 Corinthians 1:16. Many believe that there likely were at least some very young children or even infants who were included in these families.

Consider the following Scripture passages.

*“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Mark 16:16*

Jesus said: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19*

Peter said: *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” Acts 2:38*

*“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Galatians 3:27*

See also the many examples of baptism in the early church: Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12,13,16, 38; Acts 9:18; Acts 10:48; Acts 16:15, 33; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:5; Acts 22:16.

In 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 the apostle Paul indicated that he himself baptized very few believers. He was obviously not opposed to baptism, but he did not want people to focus on himself rather than on Jesus Christ. Paul wanted new believers to recognize that Jesus is the Savior who died for them and that apostles and evangelists and preachers were just servants who proclaimed the message of salvation.

#### **10. Is it possible to be absolutely sure of our salvation?**

Yes. Some may question this, since they know of people who at one time “seemed” to be saved but later left the faith and went back to another religion or to no religion at all. Others recognize that they themselves are not always confident that they are saved because their faith is weak at times and their lives do not always demonstrate that Christ lives within them. However, our assurance of salvation does not rest on anything that *we* have done or can do. Rather, it rests completely on what CHRIST has done for us and our sincere belief in what the Bible teaches about him. Anyone who truly believe the promises of God and humbly and sincerely confesses Jesus as our Lord and Savior may have the confidence that he or she is truly a child of God.

It is also very important, however, to make sure that our lives do reflect what we claim to believe. If we claim to be saved but do not demonstrate that Christ truly lives in us, we should sincerely examine ourselves and our profession of faith. Not only should we seek to stay away from all known sin but we should also deliberately choose to pursue only those things which are truly pleasing to our Lord.

Consider the follow Scripture passages.

*“These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*  
John 20:31

*“We know that we are from God . . . and we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.”*  
1 John 5:19-20

*“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”* Romans 8:16

**11. Is it possible to “feel” sure of our salvation even though we are not truly saved?**

Yes! There probably are many people who think they are saved but really aren't. They may put their trust in the fact that they were once baptized, are members of a local church, attend the church regularly, read the Bible faithfully and pray fairly often. However, all these activities, good as they are, may simply hide the fact that a person has never truly been born again. It is very important, therefore, for us to examine our own hearts and lives to make sure that our confidence is never based on our own activities but rather on the finished work of Jesus on the cross and his saving work in our own hearts and lives.

If our faith is weak at times and we are not living as we should, we should earnestly pray to the Lord for spiritual renewal, for greater love for him, and for a sincere desire to serve him in all that we do. We should also make sure that our confidence of salvation is built on the solid foundation of Jesus' saving work rather than on any activities of our own.





## LESSON 6

# WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 1. Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God just as the Father is God and the Son is God. Believers refer to the Holy Spirit as the third “person” of the Holy Trinity. When we speak of three “persons” (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), however, the word “persons” does not refer to three *independent* beings who exist totally separate from each other. There is only one true God. Neither the Father nor the Son nor the Holy Spirit existed before the others and none has more power or honor than another.

However, within the divine Trinity, different “activities” are often associated with one or another of the three “persons.” For example, the Father sent the Son into the world. The Son came to earth and took on human form. The Holy Spirit gave life to the baby Jesus in the womb of Mary and also gives new spiritual birth to people and sanctifies them. It is impossible for us to fully understand that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the one eternal God, but we humbly accept what the Bible teaches us about him.

### 2. Since the Bible never uses the word “Trinity,” why do Christians use that word when referring to God?

The word “Trinity” essentially means “three (tri) in one (unity).” The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that there is only one true God. However, it also clearly teaches that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. The word “Trinity” in this context therefore refers to the “unity” of the three persons referred to in the Bible as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

People have often tried to find in the world of nature some analogies or parallels to this profound concept of “three-in-one.” However, all analogies are insufficient to describe the unique oneness of God. Though many books have been written about God and many sermons have been preached about him, we will always have to acknowledge that as human beings it is impossible for us to fully understand everything God has revealed to us about himself in the Bible. At the same time, we may confidently say and believe that there is only one true God who exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**3. What difference would it make if we believed that the Holy Spirit was simply some kind of divine “influence” rather than a divine “Person?”**

First of all, we would be denying many of the things that the Bible teaches us about the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit of God was not truly personal, we would not be able to have fellowship with him, pray to him, or ask him for guidance, comfort, courage, wisdom, and strength. Further, if the Holy Spirit is only an influence of some kind, it would be rather meaningless for us to baptize believers in the name of the Father and the Son and an influence. Also, Paul’s final greetings in 2 Corinthians 13:14 would be very strange, since it refers to the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is definitely a very strong “influence” in our lives, but he is able to influence our lives in so many positive ways precisely because he is both divine and personal.

**4. According to the Bible, what are some of the things that the Holy Spirit does?**

The Bible states that the Holy Spirit speaks, teaches, loves, comforts, enlightens, understands, communicates, leads, guides, unites believers, gives spiritual gifts to believers, and is grieved when we sin. The Holy Spirit was an agent of creation in the beginning and continues to create new spiritual life in the hearts of believers. He prays for us, cares about us, knows our needs, responds to our prayers, gives us spiritual gifts, comforts us, and works in our hearts and lives to make us more like Christ. The Holy Spirit also empowered Jesus for his ministry on earth.

There are very many passages in the Bible that tell us about the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in both Old Testament and New

Testament times. Among them are the following: Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30; Matthew 1:18, 20; 3:13-17; John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:5-11; Acts 2:1-6; Romans 8:1-11, 26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 12:1-13; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:3-4.

**5. How can we receive the fullness of the Spirit's blessings in our lives?**

We receive the Holy Spirit as a gift of grace and not because of our personal goodness or spiritual activities. However, we may (and should) pray for the Holy Spirit to continue to work in our lives, keep us from sin, help us to resist and overcome temptation, lead us to repentance, strengthen our faith, increase our understanding, and enable us to be more like Christ.

If we choose to resist the work of the Spirit in our lives through deliberate disobedience or indifference or selfish living, we will not enjoy the special gifts of the Spirit or experience his life-changing power. God often responds to our earnest prayers by giving us special spiritual blessings, so we should continue to pray that we will be filled with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit so that we may continually live in a way that honors and glorifies him.

**6. What are some of the special gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to believers?**

1 Corinthians 12 gives us a list of many of the special gifts of the Spirit. Some people are given special wisdom to know and understand the Scriptures and to discern the will of God. They may also have wisdom to know how to respond to a specific need or to a difficult or challenging situation. Some are given a special knowledge of another person's needs, concerns, and problems and even their thoughts. They may also have knowledge of a situation far removed from where they are at the moment and know how best to respond to that situation.

Some are given the gift of exceptional faith to deal with a special need or concern. Others are given the ability to perform healing miracles and, in some cases, even to raise the dead. Others are able to work miracles of one kind or another, foretell the future, or discern the truth or falsehood of what others are saying or teaching. Some are able to speak (at least temporarily) in languages which they have not studied or learned. Others are able to interpret things which others are saying

in a language they have not learned. Some also are given the gifts of compassion, love, patience and generosity, though these are not specifically mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12.

Believers who place a strong emphasis on these special gifts are sometimes referred to as Pentecostals, since the Holy Spirit came upon the church on the day of Pentecost in power and with special gifts of various kinds. One does not have to be a member of a Pentecostal church, however, in order to receive these gifts or to believe that the Holy Spirit still gives very special gifts and powers to believers today.

**7. Do all Christians have the same spiritual gifts? Will the Holy Spirit give us whatever special gifts we ask for?**

The answer to both questions is NO. The Holy Spirit does not give the same gifts to everyone. In 1 Corinthians 12:11, Paul writes that the Spirit gives gifts to each one “*as he determines*” and not as *we* request. He re-emphasizes that again in verses 27-30 of this chapter where he indicates that not all are teachers, not all work miracles, not all have gifts of healing, and not all speak in tongues or interpret them. At the same time, he urges his readers to “*eagerly desire the greater gifts.*”

It is interesting, however, that Paul does not indicate which of these gifts might be “greater.” Earlier in the chapter (in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26), he emphasizes that the church needs all the gifts and that we should not disparage any of the gifts, even though they might seem to be “less important.” Believers should be very careful not to esteem certain gifts above others in such a way that people exalt some believers over others because of the specific gift(s) they have received.

**8. Galatians 5:22-23 refers to the “fruit” of the Spirit. Do all faithful believers bear the same fruit?**

In Galatians 5:22-23 we read: “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*” Paul mentions these specific things as important examples of the “fruit” produced by the Holy Spirit in the lives of Jesus’ followers. However, this should not be considered a complete or exhaustive list. For example, one could also mention such other “fruit” produced by the Spirit as holiness, generosity, thoughtfulness, and perseverance.

Regrettably, not all believers exhibit all the fruit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. Some, for example, may demonstrate much love

and kindness in their lives, though they may not always be patient or joyful. Others may be patient and joyful but still have some significant moral weaknesses in their lives. The reason for this lack of fruit in our lives is because of our sinful nature and our willful pursuit of certain things which do not please God. Regrettably, no one is perfect and no one is totally free from sin in his life. However, if there is little or no spiritual “fruit” in a person’s life, there is good reason to question whether Christ truly lives in that person’s heart.

**9. Ephesians 4:3 and 4:12-13 refer to the unity of the Spirit. Is the church of Christ united today? If it is, how does that unity manifest itself? If it is not, how should we pursue the unity that these passages refer to?**

All born-again believers, no matter whether they are Jews or Gentiles, men or women, young or old, educated or uneducated, are united together as one in Christ Jesus. Christ is the sole Head of this church and all believers are equally members of it. They have the same spiritual life, enjoy the same blessings of salvation, and receive the same promises from God. In that sense the church of Christ is definitely united.

Christians manifest this unity in Christ in various ways. One very significant way is by confessing the same basic truths—such as those in the Apostles Creed and other historic Christian creeds. Also, all sincere Christians recognize and acknowledge that they have been saved through their faith in Jesus who gave his life for them. They also share a heartfelt conviction that they will spend eternity with each other in joy and glory in the presence of their Lord and Savior.

Further, Christians of different denominations worship together on special occasions and also join with other believers in working together to minister to the poor and needy in the name of Christ. They also share in such activities as Scripture translation, distribution of the Scriptures, and in promoting the Bible’s teachings regarding moral or social issues. Examples of this are found in the efforts to promote pro-life activities or to promote Biblical teachings on marriage, drug use, sexuality and other moral issues.

However, the church is regrettably and obviously very divided into a great number of denominations throughout the world. Starting a new denomination is often very easy. Many times a person with special gifts of speaking, fund raising or persuasion will begin his “own”

church and gain a number of followers who appreciate this person's gifts or abilities. As a result, the number of "denominations" in the world is distressingly large. In many instances, members of different denominations agree on many basic issues, but they disagree on certain practices or beliefs or organizational matters. When that happens, it makes it more difficult to convince non-believers that the church is truly united as one in Christ.

To promote the kind of unity Ephesians refers to, Christians should pray for one another, encourage each other, work together in sharing the Gospel in various meaningful ways, support non-denominational organizations that promote Bible translation and Bible distribution, join together in helping to meet the needs of the poor and others in the name of Christ, and unite with others in promoting Biblical teachings on social and moral issues where they are in agreement. And, without giving up their own understanding of the Scriptures, they should seek to understand the views of others so that they can deal with them patiently, lovingly, and fairly.

**10. What are some of the practical implications of the fact that the Holy Spirit lives within us?**

Students will probably suggest a variety of meaningful things here based on their own understanding of the Scriptures or on their own personal experience. Among the things which may be mentioned here are the following: The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives should provide us with courage, comfort, wisdom, confidence, spiritual boldness and a strong desire to witness to others about Jesus. The indwelling Holy Spirit will also help us to remember that we should always use our bodies, our minds, and our personal resources in ways which please and honor our Lord.

Through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit we will also be able to grow in grace, resist and overcome temptation, be sensitive to the needs of others, and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. We do not have to face life's trials, problems, challenges, or difficulties in our own strength, but we can depend on the One who dwells within us who is all-knowing and all-powerful. What a tremendous blessing it is to be filled with the Spirit as we presently live our lives on this earth and as we prepare for and anticipate our eternal life with Christ in glory.

## LESSON 7

### WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN

#### 1. Since we are saved by grace and not by our works, what difference does it make how we live?

- (a) If we are truly saved, we will want to live in a way that honors and glorifies our Savior. If we are careless about the way we live, we clearly demonstrate that Christ does not really live within us. And if Christ does not live within us, we are not truly saved.
- (b) God has saved us not only for our own benefit but also so that we may live for his glory and be a blessing to others. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that God has “prepared” good works for us to do, and in gratitude, humility, and thankfulness we will sincerely want to do these works.
- (c) If we are not living in a way that honors God and blesses others, our lives will have a negative impact rather than a positive one.
- (d) There will be a judgment day in which God will call us to give an account for all that we have done. Those who have sincerely sought to please him will be richly rewarded for the things they have done in the name and in the power of the Lord. Those who have not honored and served the Lord will find that their works were totally worthless in God’s sight.

Read: Matthew 12:36; 25:31-46; Romans 14:12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:1; Hebrews 13:16; 1 Peter 1:17; 4:5.

**2. If we do not give up everything for Jesus (Mark 8:34-35), does that mean we are not really Christians?**

Not necessarily. In some places, Christians do give up everything or almost everything for the sake of Jesus because they live in an area where Christians are persecuted for their faith. Other believers live in areas and under circumstances where the practice of their faith actually results in greater material benefits. People trust them to be honest, hard-working, dependable, and competent and reward them for their integrity. These believers seem to give up very little for the sake of Jesus. Are these people less honorable, less faithful, and less “Christian” than other believers whose lives are so very difficult? Not necessarily.

The key to answering this question would seem to be the willingness of people to give up anything and everything that would stand in the way of living as a believer who honors Christ in everything. All believers should evaluate their lives to make sure that they are using their gifts and abilities and possessions in the service of Christ without focusing too much on material things or personal benefits.

We should all be careful not to judge others too quickly without knowing their hearts and motives. Having riches is not wrong for a Christian, but the “love of money” is clearly a source of many evils in our world. See 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Matthew 6:19-20; Luke 12:33; Philippians 3:8; Ecclesiastes 2:26; James 2:5.

Students will probably have some very helpful and important observations here, based partly on the Scriptures and partly on their own personal experience or the experience of other Christians.

**3. If others cannot see in our daily walk that we are truly followers of Christ, does that mean that we probably are not true Christians—no matter what we say or believe?**

In most situations true believers will demonstrate their faith by the way they live. If they don’t, there is probably something wrong in their lives. There may be times, of course, when believers are very careful about what they say and do since they know others are watching them in order to find reasons for “punishing” them or “persecuting” them. These believers do not deny their faith or live a careless or thoughtless



life. They simply do not have the freedom that Christians in other places have to speak about Jesus or the Bible or their faith.

All believers should also remember, however, that there may be some people who are looking at them to see whether their Christian faith really does make a meaningful difference in their lives. If it doesn't, the non-believers who are watching them may not want to have anything to do with Christianity. However, if believers quietly and consistently demonstrate love, genuine concern for others, patience, holiness, thoughtfulness, consistency, and other positive virtues, people who are carefully watching them may want to learn more about their faith and the God they worship. We should never be ashamed of our faith, but we should also be wise as we seek to live out our faith in a way that most honors and pleases God and also blesses others.

Read the following passages from the New Testament. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:23-26; John 15:27; Acts 1:8,5:20, 22:15; 2 Timothy 1:8; Titus 2:15; 1 Peter 4:16.

Many students may have had valuable and significant experiences regarding living as a Christian under difficult or challenging circumstances. Their testimonies can be a great blessing to others.

#### **4. What does Paul teach about love in 1 Corinthians 13?**

Though the Bible discusses Christian love in various places, 1 Corinthians 13 is widely recognized as the most important teaching in the entire Bible on this subject. This chapter can be profitably read aloud and discussed with many specific illustrations that students have personally experienced or which they have heard about.

Among other specific questions which might be discussed here are the following:

- (1) Do most Christians exhibit the kind of love described in this chapter?
- (2) How does a person “acquire” this kind of love? Is this something we have to “work at” or do we simply pray and ask God for it?
- (3) Can we learn from others how to acquire and exhibit Christian love?

- (4) What should we do if we are members of a church which is definitely not known for its Christian love?
- (5) Should Christians show the kind of love discussed in this chapter only to other Christians . . . or should they show love also to those who are not Christians and may even hate or oppress them?

**5. What is meant by “worldliness”? Is it possible to be a “worldly Christian”?**

Worldliness may be described as thinking and living according to the standards, goals and desires of people who do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. If that description is correct, then it really is not possible to be a “worldly Christian.” It is regrettably true, however, that some believers seem to live as “close” to the world as they can without losing their faith. And most believers seem to be tempted at least once in a while to enjoy “worldly pleasures” instead of doing what is most pleasing to God and most beneficial for their personal and spiritual lives. Sincere Christians should always seek to live as close to Christ as they can, learning and doing what is most pleasing to him and seeking to honor him in all the choices they make.

Read the following passages which teach us important things about worldliness: Matthew 16:26; Luke 21:34; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 2:2; Colossians 3:2; Titus 2:12; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17.

Though believers should not be “worldly” in a negative sense, Christians should definitely be concerned about demonstrating the Lordship of Jesus in every area of their lives. They should not focus only on so-called “spiritual things,” but they should also seek to show the importance of their Christian faith in the world of business, government, work, recreation, leisure, industry, the arts and every other area of human activity. Christians should seek to “transform” the world in positive ways without being contaminated by those practices and activities that dishonor the One who is truly “Lord of all.”

**6. Will the Lord continue to forgive us even if we commit the same sins over and over again?**

Thankfully, Yes! God’s mercy and grace are far greater than our failures and sins. See Psalm 103:2-3, 8-14, 17; Isaiah 1:18; Micah 7:18-19; Matthew 6:14; Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:9.

However, we should never take our sins lightly or think that it doesn't matter very much whether we keep sinning or not. God is grieved by our sins (Genesis 6:6; Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30) and our sins also diminish the effectiveness of our witness and reduce the joy of our salvation. If there are certain sins or weaknesses that continually gain a victory over us, we should not only pray earnestly to the Lord for deliverance, but we should also seek the assistance of mature Christians to help us gain a victory over those weaknesses. Many believers find that it is very helpful to have one or more mature Christians to whom they are regularly accountable for how they are living—particularly in those areas where they are spiritually and morally weak.

## **7. What does 1 Peter 3:8-9 teach us about living a Christian life?**

Peter urges us to live in harmony with other believers and to love them as brothers in Christ. We should be sensitive to the needs of others, and compassionate and humble as we deal with them. We should also be careful not to repay evil for evil but to bless those who curse us or insult us or treat us unkindly. Living as God wants us to live will not only bring a blessing to others but will also result in blessing for ourselves.

It is certainly easier to write these things, however, than to practice them. Peter, at one stage in his life, didn't follow these teachings himself. When he was in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before Jesus went to the cross, he impetuously took out his sword and cut off the ear of one of the men who had come to arrest Jesus. (And he may have tried to do more than just cut off his ear!)

All of us have to make a very special effort to be patient and compassionate and humble as we deal with others. Peter wisely points to Jesus rather than himself when looking for a good example. In 1 Peter 2:20-23 we read: *“If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. . . .When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”*

1 Peter 2:12 teaches us: *“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”*

## 8. What are some of the things the Bible teaches about money and possessions?

God knows that we all need certain things—such as food, water, clothing and shelter—in order to live a normal life (Matthew 6:31-32). In his kindness, he provides rain from heaven, crops in their season, food and water and many other things to fill our hearts with joy (Acts 14:17).

In addition, God often makes it possible for some people to acquire possessions far beyond what they need for daily living. Already in the Old Testament, for example, many of God's faithful followers were blessed with great wealth: Abraham (Genesis 13:2), Isaac (Genesis 26:13-14), Jacob (Genesis 30:43), Job (Job 1:3), David (1 Chronicles 29:28), and Solomon (2 Chronicles 1:15).

The problem is not *having* great possessions but how we look upon our possessions and how we use them. Some people feel that their personal worth or value is determined primarily by the money or possessions they have. Others take their blessings for granted and fail to give God thanks for them. Still others feel that they may spend their money exactly as they please since they have worked hard for what they have.

The Bible therefore clearly and frequently warns against the dangers of putting too much emphasis on material possessions. It also warns against greed, covetousness, selfishness, and pride. See the texts in the Lesson (Psalm 62:10; Matthew 6:31-33; 19:23; Luke 12:15; 16:14; 1 Timothy 6:10 and Hebrews 13:5). See also such passages as Deuteronomy 8:10-14 and 8:17-18; Psalm 39:6; Psalm 52:7; Ecclesiastes 5:10; Luke 12:19-20; James 4:17 and many others.

The Bible teaches us that ALL things ultimately belong to God and that we are simply temporary stewards of the possessions we have. In Old Testament times, God's people were commanded to give at least one-tenth of all their possessions to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21; Malachi 3:10) and they were often required to give more. In the New Testament believers are not explicitly commanded to give one tenth of their earnings to the Lord, but they are clearly taught that they should give generously, thoughtfully, and freely. Believers may certainly enjoy the blessings God gives them, but they should

also recognize that everything they have comes from the Lord and is to be used in ways that most please and honor him while also blessing others in his name.

When people give generously, freely and joyfully to others (especially to fellow believers, Galatians 6:10), not only are others blessed, but God is also glorified. See such passages as 2 Corinthians 8:1-23 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

Since our spiritual blessings in Christ are much greater than the blessings of believers in Old Testament times, our giving should also be greater (when possible). According to 2 Corinthians 9:7, God loves a cheerful giver. Believers, therefore, should use their resources wisely, joyfully and generously and never be satisfied with giving as little as they can.

Among passages to be read and studied in this connection are the following: Leviticus 25:35; Deuteronomy 15:4, 7; 16:17; 1 Chronicles 29:9; Proverbs 3:9; 11:25; 21:13; 28:27; Isaiah 58:10; Matthew 5:42; 6:3; Luke 6:38; 12:23; Acts 11:29; 1 Corinthians 4:2; and 1 Peter 4:10.

**9. Why should we witness to others about our faith? What should we do in situations where friends or family members absolutely do not want to hear about Jesus?**

We should witness to others about our faith because Jesus wants us to and even commands us to do so (Matthew 24:14; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 22:15; Romans 10:14; Titus 2:15). But we should also witness because we want to and because non-believers need to hear about Jesus if they will ever be saved (Romans 10:14).

If we do not have a desire to share our faith with others, that may indicate (1) that we do not highly value our faith or (2) that we believe it is not important for others to hear about Jesus or (3) that we believe our testimony will have little or no positive results, or (4) that we are afraid of the reactions of those with whom we share our faith. But nothing should keep us from witnessing to others, if we truly love the Lord and trust him for courage and strength to tell others about him.

We should also recognize, however, that there may be specific times or situations when it is not wise or desirable to talk to others about Jesus. For example, a new convert should be wise in choosing the best time

and situation in which to witness to family members, friends, or others who might be shocked, grieved or angry when they learn that a trusted friend or loved one has left the cherished faith of the family.

When we are uncertain about the best time and way to witness to someone about Jesus, we should pray earnestly that God will open up the right opportunity for us to share our faith when our testimony is most likely to have a positive rather than a negative impact. When giving our testimony, we should not focus primarily on negative things about other faiths or about persons who hold those faiths. Rather, we should humbly and clearly testify about the things which God has done for us and the joy we have found in loving and serving him.

Peter reminds us that we should always be *“prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you”* (1 Peter 3:15). But, as Peter writes, we should do this *“with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame”* (1 Peter 3: 15-16).

Many students may have some practical experience in this area which could be of much help to fellow students. As a teacher, be sure to give them the opportunity to share some of their experiences with others.

**10. How would you respond to someone who believes that Christianity takes all the fun and joy out of life?**

Students will likely have a variety of responses to this question. Some may acknowledge that they miss some of the good and fun times they had with friends before they were converted. Some may also acknowledge that they lost good jobs because their conscience no longer permitted them to do some of the things they were required to do in their work situations. Others might acknowledge that they lost the loving relationship which they used to have with their families and friends. Still others might indicate that since they became believers they spend more time in studying the Bible and helping others and therefore don't have as much time as they used to have to pursue some of the fun things they enjoyed doing.

However, those who have genuinely experienced the love and grace of God in new and wonderful ways will be able to testify that what they have given up does not begin to compare with the things they have

gained. Many of them will be able to tell how they found genuine joy, inner peace, contentment and a firm hope for the future which they never had before. Because they have been born anew by the Holy Spirit and have been washed clean in the blood of Christ, they are new persons who have something more wonderful and more valuable than anything they have given up.

In New Testament times, some believers who were persecuted because of their faith counted it a privilege to suffer for the One who gave his life for their salvation (Acts 5:41; see also Acts 4:23-31.) The apostle Paul considered all the “valuable” things of his previous life to be “rubbish” compared with the new life he found in Jesus (Philippians 3:8). When people truly find new joy and peace in serving Christ, others will soon notice that, so it should not be too difficult for them to demonstrate (even without words) that their new life provides far more genuine joy and delight than anything they experienced in their life without Christ.

It is also important, however, for believers to be honest and realistic in their testimonies. Paul clearly suffered much more after he became a Christian than he ever did before he became a Christian, and he did not minimize the hardships or difficulties he experienced (2 Corinthians 11:16-29). However, in spite of these significant hardships, Paul was able to live a life of joy, peace, thanksgiving, and praise (Philippians 4:8-9, 11-13). See also Acts 5:41; Hebrews 10:34; and 1 Peter 1:8.



## LESSON 8

### WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT PRAYER

#### 1. What is prayer?

In its simplest form, prayer is communicating with God. That communication usually finds expression in spoken words or conscious thoughts. However, at times people also communicate with God through tears of confession, unspoken longings, unexpressed desires, or other ways of directing their hearts and minds to the Lord. In this lesson the focus is on communication with God through spoken words or unspoken thoughts.

#### 2. Does a person have to be a born again believer in order to pray to God? Does a person have to be born again in order to have his prayers answered?

The answer to both questions is NO. God is very gracious and invites every sincere person to share his deepest feelings and longings with him in prayer. Not only is God willing to hear and listen to the prayers of those who sincerely and humbly seek him, he also answers them, even if their faith is very weak.

Students will probably be able to give examples of God's answers to the prayers of people who are not (yet) believers but who sincerely cry out to God—even when they are not even sure that God exists. God does not promise to answer the prayers of everyone in the way they desire, but his ears are open to all who earnestly seek him and cry out to him.

Consider the following passages: Deuteronomy 4:20; 1 Kings 8:46-50; Psalm 65:2; Psalm 78:34; Isaiah 14:1-5; 55:1, 6-7; Joel 2:13; Malachi 3:7-8; Luke 11:10; Luke 15:20.



### **3. Is it desirable to have “set times” for prayer or is it better to pray only when we “feel like” praying?**

It is very desirable to have set times for prayer each day, since this will almost certainly strengthen our prayer life. If we don't have “set times” for praying, it is easy to neglect praying because of busyness, laziness, interruptions, tiredness or forgetfulness. Most of those who are known for their strong prayer life do have set times for prayer. In addition, they also pray whenever they are aware of any special need or blessing—whether in their own life or in the lives of others.

An effective prayer life does not come “automatically” when we become Christians. Many people, even very sincere people, let their prayer life slip to the point where they are no longer intense and passionate about prayer and spend less and less time praying. And as they pray less often or less fervently, they lose their sweet communion with the Lord, they see fewer answers to their prayers, and they become less effective in their Christian life and witness.

Jesus himself prayed frequently and fervently. Paul was also a man of prayer. And in the Old Testament, Daniel was known for his faithful prayers and the wonderful answers he received as a result of his faithfulness. See, for example, Daniel 6:10; Luke 5:16; Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18.

### **4. How can we strengthen our prayer life?**

Students may be willing to share some of the ways in which they were able to strengthen their own prayer lives. If they do not have specific things to offer in this regard, the following suggestions may be helpful.

It is desirable to maintain some kind of schedule for regular, daily prayers. Included will be prayers in the morning after rising, prayers in the evening before retiring, and prayers at meal times. It is also helpful to develop and maintain a list of things for which to pray. This list should be readily accessible, if possible, so that you can write things down whenever you think of them—and before you forget them.

It is also helpful to maintain a record of prayers that have been answered in a special way. Looking back over your list of answered prayers will give you additional incentive to pray about other significant things

that come to your attention. Also, when you see on your prayer list things that have not yet been answered in some definite way, you will be reminded to pray for them again. It is also helpful to write down the date when you first prayed for a specific need or situation and, when appropriate, the time when the prayer was answered.

It can also be very beneficial to have set times for praying with others. By doing so, you can encourage one another while also being made aware of other special needs and concerns for which to pray.

Some people are also blessed and encouraged to pray by reading stories or articles or books on prayer. It's a great blessing to read the stories of great prayer warriors in the past (or present) who are exceptionally faithful and effective in their prayer life. It can also be instructive and helpful at times to read the prayers which have been offered by others. Sometimes it may become somewhat "routine" to pray all the time for the same things in the same way. By reading (or hearing) the prayers of others, you may be able to add a certain richness and effectiveness and diversity to your own prayers.

##### **5. What are some reasons why God might not answer our prayers in the way we would like?**

The Lesson notes provide a number of reasons why God doesn't always answer our prayers in the way we desire. Included are such things as disobedience, secret or unconfessed sins, indifference, selfishness, pride, a lack of concern for others, a desire to have things that are not good for us, our intention to use what God gives us for purposes that do not honor or please him, or praying for something which is contrary to the will of God.

We should not always conclude, however, that the reason some of our prayers are not answered in the way we desire is because of sin in our lives or because of wrong motives. At times God withholds things we desire because he knows what is best for us and he knows that his will for us is much better than anything we ourselves might desire or ask for.

Read some of the following passages to gain a clearer and fuller understanding regarding what we call "unanswered" prayers: Deuteronomy 1:45; 1 Samuel 14:37; 1 Samuel 28:6; Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 1:28; 21:13; Zechariah 7:13; James 1:6-7; James 4:3. See

also Exodus 33:20; Deuteronomy 3:26; 2 Samuel 12:16; Ezekiel 20:3; 2 Corinthians 12:8.

## **6. Is there any value in fasting along with our praying?**

Yes! Appropriate fasting can help us pray more sincerely and enable us to focus more consistently on the things we are praying about. When we fast, we may be able to get our minds off earthly things, focus on God’s mercy and grace, and take our praying more seriously.

Fasting is not helpful, however, if it causes us to become less focused on our praying because of the weakness of our bodies or minds. Fasting is also inappropriate if we believe we can merit or earn something by our fasting. Fasting by itself does not merit anything! God’s answers to our prayers are always by grace—whether we fast or whether we don’t.

Fasting is relatively common in some Christian circles while almost totally absent in others. Both those who fast often and those who rarely or never fast should thoughtfully evaluate the reason why they do what they do. Perhaps students may have insight into all of this by evaluating their own tradition of fasting or not fasting. And those who presently do not fast might seriously ask why they do not do so and thoughtfully consider the possibility of doing so in the future.

## **7. What kinds of prayers seem to be offered most often: Prayers of Confession, Praise, Thanksgiving, or Request? How can we develop a good “balance” in our prayer life?**

There may not be a definite answer to this question, but it seems that many people consider prayer to be primarily “asking for something.” Though some people do add prayers of confession, praise and thanksgiving to both their private and public prayers, prayers of petition or request often seem to dominate. Perhaps this is somewhat understandable, but it is unfortunate if prayer is understood to be primarily a matter of presenting our requests before God.

It is also important to make sure that our prayer “requests” do not focus primarily on material blessings for ourselves—especially if those requests go well beyond the things we really need. In the Lord’s Prayer there is a request for “daily” bread, but most of the petitions focus on other things. For example, the opening “petitions” ask that

God’s name be hallowed, that his kingdom come, and that his will be done. Another request is for forgiveness of sins and for the grace to be able to resist and overcome temptation.

Perhaps one of the best ways to make sure that we don’t focus too much on material things is by deliberately and thoughtfully including specific elements of praise and thanksgiving in our prayers. It may even be helpful to write out some things about which we should be praying, so that we do not neglect them.

Students may have some significant suggestions of their own on how we can best maintain an appropriate “balance” of petition, thanksgiving, confession, and praise in our prayers.

## **8. What are the benefits of praying alone? What are the benefits of praying with others?**

Praying alone should help us focus our thoughts on the fact that we are talking directly with God himself. Also, when praying alone, we will most likely include some of our very personal needs, our struggle with certain sins, and our thankfulness for the special blessings we have personally received or enjoyed—things we might not wish to verbalize when we are praying with others. And, while praying alone, we can pour out our hearts to the Lord without being concerned about the reactions of others to our tears, passion or exuberance.

Praying with others can also be very beneficial, since others may pray about important matters which we have forgotten or do not know about. Others may also help us focus on God and the things of his kingdom at a time when pressing personal concerns make it difficult for us to do so. And we can profit from the spiritual gifts and talents of people who seem to have the special gift of praying in a way that many others cannot do. It can also be very encouraging for us to be joined together with other members of the family of God as we bring our praise and thanksgiving to the One who is the source of all our blessings.

Again, students may be able to share some significant thoughts and ideas which will help each of us develop a more fruitful and meaningful prayer life.

**9. Is it desirable for us to share with others God’s answers to our prayers? Should we also share with others the times when God does not seem to answer our prayers?**

The answer to both questions is YES. Others will often be encouraged when they hear how God has answered the prayers of fellow believers. It will not only lead them to give thanks to God for his answers to the prayers of others, but it will also help them to anticipate God’s answers to their own prayers.

But if believers will be encouraged to pray when they hear about God’s answers to the prayers of others, will they not be discouraged when they hear about prayers that were not “answered”? Not necessarily. If people hear only about answered prayers, they might begin to wonder why some of their own prayers have not been answered. But if they hear that other people continue to pray fervently and faithfully even when some of their prayers are not (yet) answered, they may be encouraged to continue praying themselves in the confidence that the Lord has good reasons not to answer some prayers in the way they had anticipated or desired.

**10. Is the Lord’s Prayer more important or more sacred than other prayers?**

No. The Lord’s Prayer is obviously of very great importance since it was taught by Jesus himself. However, many Christians believe that this prayer was intended to be a “model” prayer for us to follow without necessarily limiting our words to the brief prayer which Jesus taught.

Jesus himself spent many hours in prayer when he was by himself, so it is very unlikely that he wanted us to pray this prayer over and over again without adding many thoughts and petitions of our own. Even so, it is very desirable for all believers to learn and pray this prayer which is the only specific prayer that Jesus taught his disciples.

## LESSON 9

# WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

1. **Is it better for parents to choose marriage partners for their children or is it better for the marriage partners to make this decision themselves? If the Bible does not answer this question, how can we determine what is best?**

People will probably answer this question primarily on the basis of their own personal experience. For example, in places where parents traditionally choose marriage partners for their children, people will likely be inclined to find that this is definitely the better way. When people are brought up in an area where men and women choose their own marriage partners, they will likely think that this is the better way.

Does the Bible give us any clear teachings regarding this matter? Not specifically. However, in the early part of the Bible it seems that at least some parents played a very strong role in finding marriage partners for their children. Abraham, for example, sent his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24) and Isaac and his wife played a strong role in finding a wife for their son Jacob (Genesis 27:46 and Genesis 28 and 29). Judges 14:1-4 tells us something about the role of parents in the marriage of Samson. Other passages also indicate that parents “gave” a daughter to someone in marriage, and the groom (or his parents) was expected to give an appropriate gift to the father for the “gift” of his daughter. (See Genesis 34:11-12; Genesis 29:18-20; 34:12; and Exodus 22:16-17.)

In the New Testament Paul writes that older women should teach the younger women to love their husbands (Titus 2:4). This may indicate

that the marriages he refers to were “arranged” marriages rather than “love” marriages. However, none of these passages contains a clear directive from God as to whether or not marriages should always be “arranged” by the parents. For the most part, both in Bible times and in history, marriages were arranged in different ways at different times and in different places. There would therefore appear to be no specific arrangement which is the only one pleasing to God or the only one which is likely to produce a long and happy marriage.

It is usually very desirable, however, that Christian parents approve of a marriage. Parents have had many more life experiences than young people do and they are able to recognize potential problems or pitfalls which younger people may not see. It is also generally helpful for a bride and groom to have similar backgrounds, though this is not absolutely essential. It is very important, however, for the marriage partners to share a common faith.

For Christians, marrying a fellow believer is not only important but also commanded. (See 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14.) It is also very helpful (if possible) for a bride and groom, before marriage, to have some meaningful counseling from people who are able to provide helpful guidance and direction. As most married people realize, it is not enough that a bride and groom have strong feelings for each other. Life has many dimensions and challenges, and potential husbands and wives should be made aware of these before they make a permanent commitment to live with each other as long as they both shall live. (See Paul’s observations in 1 Corinthians 7:28 and 7:32-35.)

**2. In Matthew 19:4-6 we read that “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.” Does this mean that young couples should not live with their parents after they are married?**

Not necessarily. There are times and circumstances (such as a housing shortage or health problems or economic concerns) which make it necessary for young married couples to live with their parents for a while. There may also be other situations where local customs expect young people to live with their parents for a period of time after they are married.

However, Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 19 would appear to indicate that a man and wife have stronger obligations to each other than to

their parents. (See also Genesis 2:24 in this connection.) The newly married man should, as soon as possible, become the “head” of a new household and no longer occupy a secondary place in his home. The wife also should give her primary allegiance to her husband rather than to her parents. However, both husband and wife should seek to maintain a cordial and loving relationship with their parents, respecting them for who they are, and showing appropriate gratitude for all that they did for them during the years before their marriage.

**3. What are some reasons why it might be wise or desirable for a young man or woman to decide not to get married?**

There are various good reasons why a young person might choose not to marry. Consider what Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 7. Marriage can bring burdens and distractions as well as joys and blessings, and the distractions might well interfere with a person’s strong desire and commitment to serve the Lord in some special way. Paul himself chose to remain single for that very reason.

Further, since there are many marriages that result in unhappiness or even divorce, a young person who is content to live a single life might understandably feel that he/she will live more happily without marriage. Others simply cannot find anyone they feel would make a suitable spouse. For them, it would not be worth the risk of living unhappily with someone for the rest of their life. There are also those who simply enjoy the freedom of living, working, traveling, and enjoying their hobbies and special interests without running the “risk” of marrying someone who would be a burden rather than a blessing. And there are still others who have significant health concerns which might make marriage very challenging for one of the partners.

All of these reasons would seem to be legitimate if a person is able without too much difficulty to live a celibate life as Paul indicated in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9.

**4. One of the purposes of marriage is to produce children. Are there any good reasons why Christians should or may choose not to have children?**

In Bible times children were usually regarded as a precious gift from God. (See, for example, Genesis 30:19-20, Psalm 127:3-5 and 128:3-4. Not being able to bear children was usually considered a great



disgrace, a huge disappointment, and possibly even a punishment from God. (See Genesis 30:1-2, 22 and 1 Samuel 1:10-11.) Are there situations, then, when God is pleased with a couple's decision *not* to have children?

When married couples prayerfully decide not to have children so that they can serve the Lord more effectively, most believers would seem to have no major problem with that decision. When couples choose not to have children because of the very difficult circumstances in which they live—such as very challenging economic problems, severe persecution of believers in their area, genuine health concerns or other pressing needs, many Christians would not challenge their decision. However, when couples choose not to have children simply so that they can spend more time and money on their own pleasures, some Christians would definitely question their decision. Ultimately, every decision that is made in regard to having children must be made prayerfully, humbly, and sincerely. Each of us must seek to serve the Lord to the very best of our ability without quickly judging the decisions of others.

**5. The Bible teaches that husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church. What should a Christian wife do if her husband does not love her or treat her with kindness, helpfulness and respect?**

Regrettably, the situation described here is very common. This may be especially true in areas where women have historically been treated as “second class citizens” or when a Christian woman has a non-Christian husband. However, it is also true in some Christian homes.

The solution to this problem is not simple. In Christian homes, the husband should be patiently but strongly reminded what the Bible says about the divinely appointed roles of husbands in a marriage. Pastoral or other professional counseling may be both needed and helpful. Happily married couples could possibly meet with those in troubled marriages. Much prayer should be offered by those who know about a difficult marriage situation and are concerned about it.

Women who are blessed with a good and happy marriage should thoughtfully, lovingly, and prayerfully provide support for wives whose husbands are unloving, unkind, or not very thoughtful. Wives

with unloving husbands can also be given helpful literature to read on how faithful wives should deal with their domestic problems. In very many cases, however, the problem is never fully overcome. This is particularly true in cultures where women are generally treated poorly. In those cultures, husbands often do not consider their behavior to be inappropriate and they are not easily persuaded that it is. Students may have some helpful suggestions on this matter based on their own experience or on the experiences of others.

**6. Should Christian wives obey their husbands if their husbands tell them to do something that is contrary to the teachings of the Bible?**

Surprisingly, there are some leaders who answer this question with a strong YES. They claim that husbands who tell their wives to do something wrong are responsible for the subsequent behavior of their wives, and the wives who faithfully do what their husbands tell them to do are themselves not guilty, no matter what they do.

However, that is not true. Husbands do have some authority in the home, but they do not have a higher authority than God does. Wives (as well as the rest of us) must always obey God rather than man. (See Acts 4:19 and 5:29.)

Christian wives who live with husbands who demand complete obedience require much prayer support and encouragement from other believers. Professional counseling may be helpful, but husbands who are inconsiderate, unbelieving, and overly demanding will usually be changed only by the power and mercy of a gracious God.

**7. Is divorce ever permissible for believers? Is re-marriage permissible for those who have been divorced on unbiblical grounds?**

God hates divorce (Malachi 2:13-16), though in Old Testament times he sometimes permitted people to divorce their spouses because of the hardness of their hearts. (See Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 19:1-8.)

In the New Testament, however, Jesus made it very clear that the only permissible ground for divorce is marital unfaithfulness on the part of one of the partners (Matthew 19:9). Most evangelicals understand “unfaithfulness” here to refer specifically to adultery. However, since the Greek word used here for “unfaithfulness” is not the same as the

word for “adultery,” some believe that “unfaithfulness” may possibly refer to other forms of unfaithfulness as well. From the very beginning, however, God intended that marriage would be permanent . . . and he still does!

If a person is divorced on grounds other than adultery of the spouse, that person should remain single or be reconciled to the spouse (1 Corinthians 7:11-12). However, if a person is divorced on the grounds of marital unfaithfulness, the spouse is free to marry and is not considered an adulterer (Matthew 19:9).

**8. Homosexuality is becoming increasingly common in the world and even in the church. Should the church today accept a homosexual lifestyle as acceptable to God? If not, how should the church deal with homosexual persons who claim to be followers of Christ?**

Though homosexuality is becoming widely accepted in many societies, the Bible never condones a homosexual lifestyle for either men or women. The church, therefore, should not act as if homosexuality is now acceptable to God. It isn't. At the same time, we should recognize that for some people a homosexual lifestyle seems more “natural” than a heterosexual lifestyle. And, if people are convinced that something is “natural” rather than “chosen,” they may feel that they are no longer responsible for their conduct. However, that does not make their conduct right or acceptable in the sight of God.

Those who are involved in a homosexual lifestyle should be treated with sincere and loving concern rather than simply being condemned for something which they feel is beyond their personal control. At times, professional help might be recommended for those who very much want to pursue a lifestyle that is pleasing to the Lord. At the same time they should be shown from the Bible (if they are willing to listen) that what seems “natural” is often sinful and wrong in the sight of God. They, like the rest of us, may often have to be reminded that what is right or wrong in God's sight is not determined by our natural feelings or tendencies but by what God himself teaches us in his Word.

**9. Some believers in the Old Testament (such as Abraham, Jacob, and David) had more than one wife and God did not seem to condemn them for that. Are there situations today where the church should regard polygamy as acceptable to God?**

Polygamy is generally not a major issue in most western cultures. However, it is still a major concern in some other cultures. Given the fact that Old Testament leaders often had more than one wife, it would seem fairly easy for believers in some cultures to justify their own polygamous practices. However, God created only one wife for Adam in the beginning and this seemed to be the divine pattern for marriage in the future. The pattern of having only one spouse is also the approved pattern for leaders in the New Testament. (See, for example, 1 Timothy 3:2 and 1 Timothy 3:12.)

A significant problem arises, however, when a man with several wives becomes a Christian and for the first time realizes what God's intention is for marriage. If the polygamist divorced all his wives but one, he would be involved in divorcing "innocent" wives. In addition, the divorced wives might have an extremely difficult time providing for themselves and any children they might already have. They might also be looked down upon by others in the community and have very little opportunity to support themselves.

In those situations, missionaries and other mature believers sometimes decide that the best thing they can do is to promote a monogamous lifestyle in the community and make sure that no new believers take more than one wife for themselves. They also appoint as leaders only those who have one spouse. At the same time, realizing that divorced wives would have an extremely difficult time in their culture, they permit polygamous men to continue to live with the wives they already have if they so choose. This may not be an ideal solution to the problem, but it does seek to meet the needs of people in "broken" situations in a loving and caring way.

**10. What are some of the most important things that parents today can and should do for their children?**

The answer to this question will depend at least partly on the situation where people are living. Students may therefore have various suggestions which will be particularly relevant for their own situation.

However, there are some things which should be relevant in every culture or situation. Among them are the following: Parents should set an example for their children in every area of life. They should be people of integrity, perseverance, diligence, patience, love for family and others. They should also put Christ first in their lives, be faithful to their marriage partners and show them honor and respect.

Parents should be faithful in worship, prayer, and the study of the Scriptures. They should seek to return good for evil, show kindness to those who may not treat them kindly, be sensitive to the needs of the poor, help those who are in need, and earnestly seek to stay away from anything and everything that would be displeasing to the Lord or hurtful to others.

Godly parents will also spend quality time with their children, be sensitive to their needs and concerns, deal patiently with their weaknesses, encourage them as much as possible, discipline them in love, and pray faithfully for each child individually. They should also put much more emphasis on the treasures of heaven than on the accumulation of earthly goods. A good motto for all parents can be found in the Scriptures where Joshua boldly proclaimed: “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).



## LESSON 10

# WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT SUFFERING, TRIALS AND PERSECUTION

### 1. Do you believe that 2 Timothy 3:12 is true for every believer?

In some parts of the world most Christians would immediately answer YES. In other parts of the world, many Christians would probably say NO. In their own lives they experience little or no obvious persecution and may even be “rewarded” in some ways because of their honesty, diligence, faithfulness to their spouses, friendliness, and other virtues.

In general, however, living openly and consistently for Christ will eventually arouse enmity or opposition of one kind or another. Christians may be mocked because they do not participate in certain activities or attend certain places of entertainment. They may be ridiculed for their refusal to go along with “the crowd” in some of the group activities at school or at work. They may also be considered “Bible fanatics” if they talk to other people about the Bible or read the Bible during their lunch hour or free time. They may be called derogatory names because of their clean language, refusal to drink alcoholic beverages or gamble.

Some Christians are considered to be “radicals” because they attend church faithfully and observe a special day of the week as a day that is “holy unto the Lord.” Others are considered “fanatics” because they give generously to their church or mission organizations or participate in “marches” to promote pro-life activities or other Christian causes.

Christians who never face any kind of “persecution” or opposition may simply be living in a strong Christian environment. In general, however, it is usually true, as Paul wrote, that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” in one way or another.

**2. Can you give any personal examples of being persecuted because you are a Christian?**

Obviously, the answers students give to this question will vary from one person to another. It should be interesting, however, to see how students understand what persecution is. It should also be interesting and helpful to learn how each person has handled whatever persecution he or she may have experienced.

**3. Wouldn't it be much better for us (believers) if we never experienced any suffering or trials or persecution in our lives?**

It might be “easier” for us in some ways, but it would not necessarily be “better.” Persecution often strengthens our faith and helps us to examine our lives to see what is really most important in life. Persecution can also be a blessing when it causes us to realize that others look upon us as sincere followers of Jesus. Many people have found true joy when they are counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake.

Persecution may also increase our boldness to witness to others. And when we persevere in spite of our trials, we will often bring glory and praise to God who sustains us. Though we should not deliberately seek to be persecuted, when we are persecuted because of our sincerity and faithfulness, it will often help us to grow in the Lord, to become more faithful Christians, and to be stronger and more effective witnesses.

Sufferings and trials also help us to realize that we daily live by the mercy and grace of God. Sometimes, when we are healthy, prosperous, and strong, we seem to think that we can provide everything we need on our own. When we are humbled by affliction or weakness or sickness, we are led again to the realization that God is the One who ultimately provides for our daily bread and for everything else we need. He is our Protector and Provider and many times we need to be reminded of that!

See, for example, Acts 4:29-32; Acts 5:41-42; Romans 8:16-18; Philippians 3:7-11; 4:11-13; 1 Peter 5:8-11.

**4. Why would anyone think he is offering a service to God by killing Christians? (See John 16:2.)**

Satan blinds the eyes and hardens the hearts of many who sincerely believe that they are pleasing and serving God when they kill Christians. (See 2 Corinthians 11:14.) They believe that Christians dishonor God

by teaching that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. They are confident that Christians lead people *away* from God rather than *to* God and should therefore be killed.

Even Paul felt that way about Christians before his conversion and therefore hounded and persecuted believers to death (Acts 7:55-8:1; 9:1; and 22:19-20). Jesus himself was crucified because the Jewish leaders accused him of blasphemy when he taught that he was the Son of God (Matthew 26:63-66).

**5. Do you think that those who suffer persecution in this life for Christ's sake will receive greater glory and greater reward in heaven? If so, what do you think this "glory" or reward will be like?**

The Bible does teach that those who suffer persecution for Christ's sake will receive some kind of special "reward" in the life to come. Read, for example, Matthew 5:11 and Luke 6:22-23. However, the Bible does not explain specifically what this glory or reward will be like. All believers will share in the glory and joy of being with Jesus for eternity, and this joy and glory will be far greater than anything any of us have ever experienced on earth. It's somewhat difficult to explain, therefore, how one person might have greater joy or glory than another.

There may be some persons in heaven who will have special authority or "recognition" of one kind or another, but there will be no jealousy, pride, boasting or envy of any kind. It's sufficient for us to know that the Bible has promised that the "reward" will be there even if we cannot fully understand at this point what it will be like. Our greatest joy will not be our personal "position" or honor but the blessing and privilege of spending eternity with Jesus in a world of perfect peace and delight.

Read some of the following passages and discuss what you think they may mean. 1 Corinthians 3:8; 2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 10:34; 11:26; 2 John 8; Revelation 14:13; Revelation 20:4; 22:12.

**6. Believers often experience trials or suffering that are not directly related to persecution. Do you think these "trials and suffering" lead to spiritual blessing? Will they possibly also result in greater rewards in heaven? If so, do you think the "reward" will depend on how we respond to the trials we experience in this life?**

The Bible may not give a specific answer to our questions about future rewards in heaven, but the Bible does clearly indicate that earthly



afflictions often result in spiritual growth while we are on earth. (See, for example, Psalm 119:67, 71.) In general, anything we experience or any suffering we endure in a way that honors Christ will bring praise to him and may possibly also result in some kind of special reward for us in heaven.

However, trials and sufferings do not automatically lead to spiritual maturity and will not always lead to heavenly rewards. Trials and problems sometimes lead to little more than complaining, ingratitude, bad attitudes, and a very negative lifestyle. Those who respond to trials with negative attitudes should not expect to find any special reward simply because their earthly life was challenging and difficult.

The apostle Paul again serves as a model for us in his own personal response to the many hardships he endured as a believer. (See 2 Corinthians 11:24-30; 12:7-10 and Philippians 3:8; 4:6-7; 4:10-13; 4:19.) See also Hebrews 11:32-40 where we read of many Old Testament heroes who often were “made strong out of weakness” (Hebrews 11:34) but did not always receive “what was promised” (Hebrews 11:39).

Our primary emphasis in all of our experiences, however, should not be on our own possible rewards in the future. Rather, our primary focus should be on Christ and how we can bring glory and honor and praise to him—both in this life and also in the life to come.

Read and discuss some of the following passages: Job 5:17; Psalm 116:10; Psalm 119:67, 71, 75; Malachi 3:3; John 15:2; 2 Corinthians 4:16-17; Hebrews 12:5 and 11; 1 Peter 1:7; and Revelation 7:14.

**7. Can you think of any specific examples in your own life or in the life of someone you know in which trials and persecution resulted in “spiritual blessings” already in this life?**

Students may be able to refer to a variety of “special” experiences which resulted in spiritual benefits either for the persons who were involved or for others who heard about them. Some of the stories may be inspiring and dramatic, while others may be more “ordinary” and unspectacular. Even the so-called ordinary experiences, however, can be very significant in helping people realize that God can use the “little” things in our lives to help us grow as believers and also bring honor to Christ

## **8. How should we respond to persons who treat us unfairly simply because we are Christians?**

The first thing we should do is to commit this difficult and challenging situation to the Lord in earnest prayer. We definitely should not react in a hostile and negative way or try to find some way to return evil for evil.

If it is possible for us to discuss our faith openly and calmly with someone who is treating us unfairly, we should humbly and prayerfully take advantage of that opportunity. Many times, however, that will not be possible. Sometimes it might be possible to discuss our situation with another person who can help us find an amicable solution to our problem. If so, it would be appropriate to pursue that option if we can do so without causing unnecessary harm to ourselves or to others who might be involved.

In the spirit of Christ, we should seek to return good for evil as we pray for the person who is deliberately mistreating us. It's important to remember, however, that we, like Jesus, may not be well-received by others, no matter what we do.

Whether our sincere and kind response is effective or not, we should commend the entire matter to the Lord and patiently and prayerfully wait for his leading and guidance. (See Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; 25:21; Matthew 5:38-48; Luke 6:27, 35; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9, 17.)

Both students and teachers may have some very interesting and encouraging stories to share on this subject.

## **9. How is your prayer life affected when you pray for healing or freedom from trials and persecution but God does not heal you or keep you from being persecuted?**

This is a very challenging question and will probably evoke a variety of responses. In general, students should recognize that throughout history many believers who prayed sincerely were not healed, and many Christians who prayed fervently were not spared from persecution or death. Both the Bible itself and the history of the church demonstrate that. Believers should also recognize, however, that God promises that he will never leave or forsake his people (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Psalm 118:5-7; Hebrews 13:6-7) and he will bring to glory

those who die either from sickness or from persecution or in any other way (Revelation 14:13).

Since the ultimate goal in our lives is that God may be glorified through us, we should continue to trust in the Lord while also continuing to pray. God's purposes are sometimes accomplished most powerfully by those who remain faithful even when they are not healed or delivered. Hebrews 11:13-17 and 32-40 record many victories that believers experienced but they also refer to many people who suffered greatly and did not receive a "victory" in this present life. See also Hebrews 10:36. Also, remember that Jesus himself prayed very earnestly for a way to avoid his death on the cross, but God conquered sin through Jesus' death rather than sparing him from death (Matthew 26:39 and 42; Hebrews 2:10).

God's ultimate purposes will surely be accomplished, though faithful followers of Jesus may have to suffer much from sickness, trials, poverty, or persecution while they are on earth. But through it all God will be glorified and in one way or another all those who trust in him will ultimately share in his glory forever (Hebrews 13:13-14).

- 10. In what way(s) would you be different if you were never sick or injured or in pain? Do you think you would be more fruitful, more joyful, and a better "witness" if everything in life went the way you wanted? Give the reasons for your answer.**

This is a question that must be answered individually by each person, so each student should be given ample opportunity to think seriously about this question. Answers will likely vary significantly, but each student will likely have something worthwhile and helpful to share with others.



## LESSON 11

# WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT THE FUTURE

### 1. Do you look forward to the Second Coming of Jesus?

Students' answers to this question may depend on such things as their current life circumstances, whether or not they have loved ones or friends who are not yet believers, their desire to serve the Lord for a much longer time with the talents and training and abilities they have, their understanding of some teachings regarding the Second Coming of Christ, or other personal interests or concerns.

Most believers, however, do look forward to the coming of Jesus since they realize that this will be the beginning of unprecedented joy and peace for all those who are in Christ.

### 2. Will believers get a glorious new body immediately after they die? If so, will this body be different from the body they will receive at the time of the resurrection?

Many believers seem to have the impression that a Christian who dies will immediately receive a glorious new body like Christ's resurrection body. The Bible, however, does not teach that. Believers will not receive the body described in 1 Corinthians 15:35-49 and Philippians 3:20-21 until Christ returns and the dead in Christ shall arise.

Until that time, believers exist in the presence of Christ in glory, but the Bible does not tell us what kind of "body" believers will have during the time between death and their resurrection. Some believe that 2 Corinthians 5:1-2 may possibly refer to that body, but this passage does not describe what that body will be like. The book of Revelation does refer to believers during the time between their death

and the time of resurrection, but much of the language in this book is figurative rather than literal. (See, for example, the “picture” of Christ presented in Revelation 1:12-17.)

We also read in Revelation 6:9-11 about the souls of martyrs who had been killed for Christ’s sake. These souls, described as being “under the altar,” were given “white robes” to wear. (There is no reference in this passage to any kind of “bodies” which believers have at that point.) For those of us who live on earth in our physical bodies, it is difficult to understand how “souls” can be seen or how they can wear robes. Most readers, therefore, understand this language to be figurative rather than literal.

Though it is difficult (or impossible) for us to say with certainty just what kind of “bodies” believers will have during the interim period between death and resurrection, the Bible does clearly teach that believers will not receive their immortal, glorious, spiritual bodies until the time of the final resurrection.

### **3. Will everyone receive a “new body” of some kind at the time of the resurrection?**

Yes. Since everyone will arise from the dead at the time of Christ’s return, everyone will receive a new post-resurrection body. The new bodies of believers will be glorious, immortal, and spiritual (Philippians 3:20-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:35-54), while the new bodies of unbelievers will be subject to suffering and pain and will in no way be glorious (Matthew 25:41, 46 and Mark 9:42-48). However, since the Bible does not describe the post-resurrection bodies of unbelievers in any detail, it would seem best not to speculate too much on what those bodies will be like. There is much we will not fully understand until the time when Christ returns.

### **4. What do you think it means that believers will receive a “spiritual” body when Jesus returns?**

Before his resurrection, the body of Jesus was lying lifeless and immobile in the tomb. After he arose, his body was no longer there. In some miraculous way the body of Jesus had been transformed by the power of God into a glorious new body. It was still physical in the sense that it could be seen and identified as the body of Jesus, but there were some wonderful new dimensions to that body. It was

not “restricted” or “limited” in the way our present bodies are. Jesus could appear and then disappear at will. He was no longer subject to tiredness, hunger, thirst, disease, suffering or death. He was still able to enjoy some of the things which we presently enjoy as physical beings (such as eating), but he was essentially a “spiritual” being who was not limited or mortal or in any way affected by sin or by any of the results of sin.

So, though in some ways the resurrection body of Jesus was a “physical body,” it was also much more than that. And so it will be with our own “spiritual” bodies after our resurrection. Those bodies will still have physical characteristics of some kind, but we will not be “limited” by all the things which presently limit us on earth. Our resurrection bodies will never suffer from sickness or disease or weakness or death, and they will be far more wonderful than anything we have ever known on earth.

**5. Are we able to determine *exactly* when Jesus will return? Are we able to determine the *approximate* time when he will return?**

Already in New Testament times, there were people who were very confident that Jesus would return in their lifetime. (See, for example, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4.) One of the reasons for that is that many believers around the world look eagerly and with great expectation to the day of his coming. Another reason is that some of the “signs” given in the Bible concerning the return of Christ can be interpreted in such a way that, in any age, they seem to “indicate” that Christ will return very soon.

However, though people have often made specific predictions concerning the time of Christ’s return, they obviously have always been wrong. The Bible simply does not tell us exactly when Jesus will come back. (See Matthew 24:3-8; 24:36; Luke 12:40; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Revelation 16:15.)

At the same time, we should recognize that the Bible does give us a number of “signs” that will point to the coming of Christ. Some of those signs are an increase in wars, rumors of wars, natural disasters, persecutions, a phenomenal increase in “knowledge” and information, an increase in false teachings, and a great increase in wickedness (Matthew 24:4-12, Daniel 12:4). These signs are certainly all present

today, but they have also been present in one form or another in other generations as well. Some believers therefore focus on what they consider to be a unique sign—the establishment of Israel in 1948 as an independent nation after centuries in which the Jewish people did not have a homeland of their own. They also emphasize the unusually significant role that the tiny nation of Israel continues to play in our contemporary world.

Many others emphasize one other exceptional sign which points clearly to the return of Christ. This sign is recorded in Matthew 24:14 where we read: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

It’s obvious that the Gospel has not yet reached the “whole world” in any meaningful way. However, the message of Jesus Christ is reaching far more people today than it ever has before. With modern technology (such as radio, television, the Internet, computers, satellite transmissions, and audio Scriptures) information can be spread much more quickly, much more widely, and often less expensively than ever before. Believers are using this new technology to translate the Bible into many new languages, distribute the Bible in many new places, and make it available in many new forms.

Today the Gospel message is available in written or audio or visual forms to reach people who were considered almost “unreachable” in previous generations. This unprecedented “explosion” of Gospel proclamation does not enable us to pinpoint the exact time when Christ will return, but at the very least it gives us many good reasons to believe that Jesus might return relatively soon.

Among the many passages that are relevant here are: Daniel 12:1-4; Matthew 24:3-44; Mark 13:3-37; Luke 21:5-36; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Peter 3:8-12; Revelation 16:15 and 22:20.

## **6. How should we as Christians live as we wait for Jesus to return to earth?**

We should be humble, wise, holy, faithful, loving and thoughtful. We should also eagerly be looking forward to the return of Christ while making the best possible use of our time, energy, resources, and all

that the Lord has entrusted to us. We should stay away from anything and everything that would dishonor Christ, lead others astray, or cause us to become too deeply involved in the things of this world while neglecting the things of the Kingdom of our Lord.

Students will likely be able to suggest many things which are relevant for their own lives. Sincere believers may possibly disagree on certain specifics, but all of us should continue to live faithfully, wisely and expectantly as we eagerly look forward to the coming of Jesus. (See 2 Peter 3:10-18; Philippians 1:9-11; Titus 2:11-14.)

**7. Christians have different views of the “millennium” (the thousand year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20). What are some of those differences? How important are those differences? What is your own view of the millennium?**

There are basically three different views of the millennium called a-millennialism, pre-millennialism, and post-millennialism.

Those who hold to the a-millennial position teach that the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 should not be taken any more literally than many other things in the book of Revelation. For example, in Revelation 20 Satan is referred to as a dragon and a serpent that is bound with a chain even though he is a spirit being which cannot be bound with material things. Satan is thrown into a pit, though spirit beings are normally not “thrown.” The pit into which he is thrown has no bottom, and the pit is locked and sealed. All of these things, as well as the “thousand years,” are considered to be symbolic and are therefore not taken literally. (The “a” in a-millennialism means “no” literal millennium.)

According to the a-millennial interpretation, Satan is bound or limited after Christ’s resurrection and ascension in such a way that he is now limited in what he is able to do. Though Satan is very powerful, the Good News of the Gospel will be preached in the whole world and Satan will not be able to stop it. There will come a brief time shortly before the return of Christ when Satan will again have exceptional power and will strongly oppose the church. But, as Jesus taught in Matthew 16:18, Satan and the powers of evil will not be able to prevail against it. When Jesus returns Satan will be utterly defeated and thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).



Pre-millennialists teach that the thousand year period, as well as the binding of Satan in a bottomless pit, are to be understood literally. In their view, Jesus will return to earth before (“pre”) the thousand years referred to in Revelation 20. The millennium will be a period of great peace throughout the world and a time when righteousness will rule over the entire earth with Jesus himself serving as king over the world from his throne in Jerusalem. At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released from the pit and will again have the power to deceive multitudes of people who will band together to oppose Jesus and his people. However, Satan will be defeated and destroyed. Jesus will then reign forever with his people in glory while Satan and his followers will exist forever in the place of punishment prepared for them. There are various versions of the pre-millennial position, but the explanation presented here is a basic component of each of them.

Post-millennialists teach that before Jesus returns to earth the church will grow tremendously throughout the world and Satan will not be able to stop it. In fact, the growth of the church will be so great that the teachings of Jesus and his kingdom will in some measure dominate most of the world. This period of phenomenal growth is referred to figuratively as the “millennium.” Jesus will return to earth after (“post”) the millennium. When he returns, all people who have died will be resurrected. There will then be a final judgment of all people who have ever lived, resulting in eternal glory for the saved and eternal loss for those who are not saved.

The differences among these positions are definitely significant, but almost all Christians agree on most or all of the following teachings: Jesus will return to earth, all those who have died will be resurrected, all those who ever lived will be judged, Christ and his people will live forever in indescribable glory, and those who are not saved will be banished forever from the joy and glory of the saved.

If students choose to discuss these differences at greater length, it is important that they not emphasize the differences so strongly that they fail to recognize and remember the things on which they agree!

**8. How do you understand the “final judgment” that the Bible refers to? Will people not know until the “Judgment Day” whether or not they are saved?**

The Bible refers to a future judgment in various passages such as Matthew 24:50-51, 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:11-15; Romans 2:1-11. See also 2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 11:20-22; Acts 17:31; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Peter 2:9, 3:7; 1 John 4:17; and Jude 15.

As born again believers, we definitely do not have to wait until the judgment day to find out whether or not we are saved. When we sincerely repent of our sins and put our trust in Jesus to save us, we can know with certainty that we have eternal life. The Bible makes that clear in many passages. John 5:24, for example, records the words of Jesus, “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

That does not mean, however, that everyone who *claims* to be a believer has truly been saved. In many instances, a person’s life will reveal whether or not he is truly a child of God. As John 5:28-29 states: on the day of resurrection “all who are in the tombs will hear his [Jesus’] voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

Some people who thought they were saved will find on Judgment Day that they were never truly born again. In God’s sight their actions revealed the absence of true saving faith in their lives and they will suffer an eternal loss (Matthew 25:41-46).

Some people who are truly saved will discover on Judgment Day that their lives were in no way productive for the kingdom of God. Because of their sincere faith in Christ, they received the gift of salvation, but their lives did not bear any lasting fruit. As a result, their earthly “works” will be burned up and they will find that nothing they did in their lives was worthy of any kind of “reward” from the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

Many others, however, who humbly and faithfully lived for Christ will receive from him wonderful rewards for their faithfulness, sacrifice,

and loving service. Even these rewards, however, will be gifts of grace, since everything we accomplish for the Lord are the result of his own gracious work in our hearts and lives (Ephesians 2:8-10).

## **9. Will unbelievers have a “second chance” to believe in Jesus after He returns?**

Some people suggest that non-believers will have an opportunity to put their faith in Christ after they die. Others teach that those who are living on earth at the time of Christ’s return will have a “second opportunity” to commit their lives to him. But neither Revelation 20 nor any other passage in the Bible explicitly teaches that unbelievers will be given a “second chance” to believe in Jesus.

Hebrews 9:27 states very clearly: *“It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”* Matthew 25:41-46 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 also appear to make it very clear that a person’s final destiny is determined by his decisions before he dies—not afterward.

Many people seem to hope that they will have a “second chance” to make a “decision” for Christ after they die, but the Bible teaches very clearly that *“now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation”* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

## **10. What do you think life will be like in the new heaven and the new earth?**

This is a question which every person will have to answer for himself. In Revelation 21 there are some references to streets of gold, foundations of precious stones and gates of pearl. In Revelation 22 we read some fascinating things about the River of Life which flows from the throne of God. We also read about this throne of God and of the Lamb and our reigning with our Savior for ever and ever.

However, neither Revelation 21 nor 22 tells us very much about daily living in our new home. Besides, many people believe that the statements in Revelation may be more figurative than literal. We may be sure, however, that in our eternal home there will be no more suffering, no more sorrow, and no more pain. Disappointments and frustrations will no longer exist. No pure desire will be unmet. No longing will be unfulfilled. There will be no separation from loved ones. No more death. No failures. No sin. And no more night.

On the positive side, we are confident that our future life with Jesus will be far more glorious and wonderful than anything we have ever experienced on earth. We anticipate unending joy and fellowship with our Lord and Savior, activities of one meaningful kind or another that will always provide satisfaction and pleasure, new discoveries which we cannot presently imagine, fellowship with other believers from around the world, and times of glory and blessing that will be richer and deeper than anything we have ever known on earth.

Perhaps the Bible doesn't give us more details about our future life since the glory of living in the new heaven and new earth will be so far beyond anything we can presently imagine that no ordinary words can describe it!







