

New Believers Discipleship

DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINES



Reformed
Baptist Church
of Kalamazoo

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Introduction

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6-7).

This course is designed to provide some structure for the discipleship of newer believers. The lessons will either cover some major doctrine of the Christian faith or give instruction about an important spiritual discipline.

How to Use This Study

This course is designed to have at least 2 people involved: a new believer and a believer who is further along in the faith. It is also designed to be read with a Bible. This is, first and foremost, a study of the Holy Scriptures. As you read the notes, you will come across many verse references in **bold**. Stop and read these verses from the Bible. Take the time to note how the verses connect with the point made in this study.

If possible, meet weekly to work through one lesson. Each lesson is designed to take about an hour to read through and discuss.

NOTE TO THE LEADER

Before you meet with the new believer that you are discipling, make sure to read over the lesson plan. Think about your own answers to the questions and be ready to discuss those. Preparation will take about a half hour per week.

When you meet with the new believer, read the lesson for that week, *and discuss it*. Ask questions to see if they understand what they are studying. Talk about how these truths have impacted your own heart. Take turns looking up the Scriptures. New believers have many spiritual questions, so be open to conversations about many different topics. Spend time in prayer when you get together. Also, as you progress into the study, remember to “check in” to see how the new believer is incorporating the spiritual disciplines into their life, and growing in the Lord. Provide some accountability and encouragement along the way.

You also need to recognize the limitations of this study guide. These lessons are not the only work you have. You need to spend time with the new believer. This guide will provide some structure for many meetings, but there is much more to discipleship than the transmission of information. New believers need to see what it looks like to follow Jesus. They need to hear you pray, watch you witness to others, see your family life, etc. They need fellowship. Modeling the Christian life is crucial to the work of discipleship and must not be neglected.

NOTE TO THE NEW BELIEVER

Enter into this study ready to be changed. The Bible often challenges our beliefs and practices. Following Jesus often means dying to ourselves. Be open to these things. Be willing to let God's word transform you. Be ready to repent if you find that something you are doing is wrong in God's sight. Be ready to obey if you learn that you are neglecting some important responsibility. Be willing to put into practice the things that you learn in this study.

Also, as you take this course, keep in mind that you may lead this study at some point in the future. Learn the content for your own soul. Learn the content so that you may, if the Lord wills, teach others as well.

LESSON 1

The Doctrine of Holy Scriptures

Introduction

In this lesson we will learn about the Bible. We will find out who wrote it, what makes it unique, and why we need it.

Teaching

POINT #1: THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD. TO PUT IT PLAINLY, THE BIBLE IS AUTHORED BY GOD.

The Bible has “dual authorship,” meaning it was written by men as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God is the Divine author behind the various human authors (**1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21**). In a powerful way, God directed the men who wrote the books of the Bible so that the words are exactly what He wanted them to be.

Since God authored the Bible, this one book is utterly unique among all the books in the world. The Bible teaches truths which other books cannot. R.C. Sproul put it this way:

One of the most important advantages the Bible gives us is that it provides information that is not available anywhere else...Only God can provide us with an eternal perspective and speak to us with absolute and final authority...There are matters contained in Holy Writ that “unveil” for us that which is not exposed to the natural course of human investigation...The Scriptures come to us as divine self-disclosure. Here the mind of God is laid bare on many matters. With a knowledge of the Scriptures, we do not have to rely on secondhand information or bare speculation to learn who God is and what He values. In the Bible, He reveals Himself. (*Knowing Scripture*, pgs. 23-25)

The Bible, repeatedly and in many ways, claims to be communication from God Himself. For example, God's messengers would often say the phrase, "Thus says the LORD" (**Exodus 5:1; Judges 6:7-8; 2 Kings 7:1; Isaiah 44:6; Ezekiel 3:27; Zechariah 1:4**). Grudem gave this explanation:

There are frequent claims in the Bible that all the words of Scripture are God's words... In the Old Testament, this is frequently seen in the introductory phrase, "Thus says the Lord," which appears hundreds of times. In the world of the Old Testament, this phrase would have been recognized as identical in form to the phrase, "Thus says king..." which was used to preface the edict of a king to his subjects, an edict that could not be challenged or questioned, but that simply had to be obeyed. Thus, when the prophets say, "Thus says the Lord," they are claiming to be messengers from the sovereign King of Israel, namely, God himself, and they are claiming that their words are the absolutely authoritative word of God. (*Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, pgs. 73-74*)

An interesting feature occurs when Biblical passages are quoted by other authors in the Bible. They will often cite a text where God was not directly speaking and attribute the words to God (**Matthew 19:4-5** quoting Genesis 2:24; **Acts 1:16, 20-21** quoting Psalm 69:25 and 109:8; **Acts 4:24-26** quoting Psalm 2:1-2; **Hebrews 1:6-9** quoting Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 104:4, and 45:6-7). They are able to make this connection because the entire Bible is considered to be the word of God. What Scripture says, God says (**Galatians 3:8** quoting Genesis 12:1-3; **Romans 9:17** quoting Exodus 9:16).

POINT #2: THE BIBLE IS A PERFECT BOOK.

God's character is such that He cannot speak falsely (**Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:1-2; Hebrews 6:17-18**). Because the Bible is the word of God, there are no errors, contradictions, or mistakes in it (**2 Samuel 7:28; Psalm 12:6; 19:7; Proverbs 30:5; John 17:17**). God has given us a book that we can fully trust, down to every last word (**Luke 24:25; Acts 24:14**).

POINT #3: THE BIBLE IS A NECESSARY BOOK.

We need the Bible in order to know the way of salvation and the will of God (**2 Timothy 3:14-17; Matthew 4:4**). We can learn some things about the Creator from the creation, but we cannot learn how to be made right with God. The creation does not tell us that God sent His only Son into the world for us. The creation cannot explain how the death and resurrection of Jesus pays for sin and gives us life. It does not tell us that we must repent and believe the gospel. The creation does not show us the way to heaven. All of these truths are found only in the Bible, which means the Bible is necessary for our salvation (**1 Peter 1:23**).

We also need the Bible to know how to live before God. In the Bible, God gives us His promises and commands. The Bible reveals the moral will of God. Because we have the Bible, we are not left to our own ideas or imaginations. We have a trustworthy guidebook through this life.

POINT #4: THE BIBLE IS A SUFFICIENT BOOK.

Everything that we need to know in order to be saved and in order to live in a way that is pleasing to God is found in the Holy Scriptures. All that we need to believe is revealed in the Bible. All that we need to do in order to obey God is revealed in the Bible. The Bible is not lacking something that needs to be supplemented (**Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Proverbs 30:5-6; Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19**). While creeds, confessions, traditions, and even studies like this one often prove to be helpful, the Bible alone is sufficient for faith and practice.

Discussion

1. What are some things that point to the supernatural character of the Bible? In other words, what are some convincing proofs that God is the ultimate author of the Bible?
2. Why is it dangerous to think of the Bible as a mixture of truth and error?

LESSON 2

The Discipline of Bible Intake

Introduction

A “spiritual discipline” is a practice or godly habit, revealed in the Bible, that promotes spiritual growth in the life of believers. In this lesson we will consider the spiritual discipline of Bible intake. We will think through the important practices of reading, memorizing, meditating on, and obeying the word of God.

Teaching

POINT #1: READING THE BIBLE

Believers need the word of God for their souls in the same way that we need food for our bodies (**Matthew 4:1-4**). The word of God nourishes the life that was given to us when we were saved. J.C. Ryle explained it like this:

Every living thing which God creates requires food. The life that God imparts needs sustaining and nourishing. It is true with animal and vegetable life—with birds, beasts, fishes, reptiles, insects, and plants. It is equally true with spiritual life. When the Holy Spirit raises a man from the death of sin and makes him a new creature in Christ Jesus, the new principle in that man’s heart requires food, and the only food which will sustain it is the Word of God. (*Practical Religion*, pg. 121)

The word of God is necessary for the *beginning* of the Christian life, and also its *continuance*. When neglected, it is like starvation to our spirit. Therefore, we must regularly consume the word of God by reading and listening to the Bible (**1 Timothy 4:13; Revelation 1:3**).

POINT #2: MEMORIZING THE BIBLE

An important part of Bible intake is committing passages to memory. This practice will equip you to resist temptation (**Psalm 119:9-11**). The idea is to take the words of Scripture and internalize them so that they become part of your thinking and motives (**Deuteronomy 11:18; Colossians 3:16**).

POINT #3: MEDITATING ON THE BIBLE

Another important part of Bible intake is meditating on Scripture (**Psalm 1:1-3; 119:15, 48, 97, 99, 148**). In other religions meditation includes things such as breathing techniques and chanting sounds over and over again. The goal is often to empty the mind and even alter one's consciousness. This is the exact opposite of Biblical meditation. In Christianity, meditation is about filling the mind. It is about intense and focused thinking. It does not refer to an escape into nothingness, but concentration on truth.

The word meditation means "to muse, to wonder, and to dwell on." It refers to thinking deeply about something. Used literally, it means "to murmur" or "to mumble." It is the idea that you whisper the words back to yourself over and over again, considering, and then reconsidering the truths of the passage. Through meditation we allow the words of Scripture to captivate our hearts and thus change our behavior, decisions, and actions.

Here are a couple of practical helps for meditating on a passage of Scripture. First, after choosing a verse, think it through a number of times by putting the emphasis on each individual word of the passage. Going through this process allows different ideas to jump off the text. Second, as you think through the text, ask questions such as "What does the text teach about God? What does it teach about my heart? Is it calling me to repent or obey in some way?"

Exercise: Look up **Psalm 119:11** again. Meditate on it using the advice just given. What truths do you see in this passage?

POINT #4: OBEYING THE BIBLE

The Bible is God's word, and it speaks to us with His authority. Therefore, the Bible is not just a book to be read and thought about; it must be obeyed (**Joshua 1:8; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Luke 11:28; James 1:22-25**).

The Bible is a living book (**Hebrews 4:12**). It exposes our flaws, and it transforms our character (**John 17:17**). As you continue to study the Bible, it will change your beliefs, desires, and actions. So, as you read the Bible, turn away from the sins that it uncovers in your life and instead obey God's commandments. Over time, you will find deep satisfaction in studying and doing God's will (**Psalm 119:14, 18, 20, 47, 72, 103, 111, 131, 162, 167**).

Discussion

1. How are you going to put this lesson into practice? Be specific. How are you going to engage in the spiritual discipline of Bible intake?
2. How can Bible memorization prove useful in real life?

LESSON 3

The Attributes of God

Introduction

God is a Being like no other! He is excellent in every way! His perfections are infinite! In this lesson we will explore some of God's attributes, His defining characteristics. Essentially, we are seeking to answer this question: What is God like? The underlined words in this lesson identify some of God's attributes.

As you work through this lesson, stop at the end of each paragraph. Take a moment to discuss some point of practical application or to express thanksgiving for God's character.

Teaching

God is eternal. God has no beginning or origin. He is rightly called "the Everlasting God" (Genesis 21:33; Isaiah 40:28). He exists apart from time (**2 Timothy 1:9**) and transcends time itself. In the beginning (Genesis 1:1), God was already there (John 17:5, 24). He has always existed, and since God is immortal (Romans 1:23) He will live forevermore (**Psalm 90:2**).

Closely related is another divine attribute: God is independent. Put differently, God is self-existent and self-sufficient. He has life in Himself (John 5:26). As the uncreated Creator, He made and sustains everything that exists (Hebrews 1:3), but He does not depend upon anything. God is distinct from everything in creation in this way: He has no needs (**Acts 17:24-25**).

God is immutable. In other words, His divine nature is incapable of alteration, modification, or adjustment (**Psalm 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8**). As humans, we grow, learn, and mature; then we become weak, forget, and die. We change all throughout our lives, but God is always the same. God cannot change from what He is into something lesser; neither can He change into something better. Because God is eternally perfect, He cannot be improved upon! God's immutability means that He will keep His word (Numbers 23:19) and carry out His plans (Psalm 33:10-11; Isaiah 14:26-27). The constancy of His character guarantees these things.

LESSON 3: THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

God is omnipresent. The prefix “omni” means “all.” God is spirit (John 4:24). God is not a material being. He does not have a body. He has no size, shape, or dimensions as if He could be measured. We can only be at one place at one time, but God is not bound by the limits of space. Although God is invisible to our eyes (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17), He is present everywhere all of the time (**1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:27-28**).

God is omniscient; in other words, He is all-knowing (**1 John 3:20**). God’s knowledge is exhaustive and meticulous (**Psalm 147:4-5; Matthew 10:29-30**). His knowledge covers every matter including Himself (1 Corinthians 2:11); the past, present, and future (**Isaiah 46:8-11**); and all of creation, including the details of our lives (**Hebrews 4:13; Psalm 139:1-6**). God even knows our hearts (**1 Samuel 16:7; Acts 15:8**)!

Closely related is another divine attribute: God is wise (**Job 12:13; Isaiah 55:9; Romans 16:27**). God understands, within Himself, the best way to accomplish the highest goals. He has no need to learn from others or seek their counsel (**Isaiah 40:13-14; Romans 11:33-34**). He has the skill and knowhow to carry out His perfect plan in the most excellent way.

God is omnipotent; in other words, He is all-powerful. Nothing is impossible for God (**Jeremiah 32:27**). God is in complete control of His creation (**Psalm 135:6**). God is sovereign; He is the supreme authority and He rules over everything. Although people resist His will, His plans will be successful (**Job 42:1-2; Isaiah 14:27; Acts 4:24-28**). God will accomplish His purpose with the world (**Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:11**).

God is holy (**Isaiah 6:1-3**). The word “holy” refers to something being “set apart” or “separate.” God is holy in two ways. *First*, He is distinct from everything in creation. He is superior, majestic, perfect. He is in a class all by Himself. There is no one like Him (**Exodus 15:11; 1 Samuel 2:2**). *Second*, God is holy in an ethical sense. Because His nature is morally pure, He is separate from all evil and sin (**Habakkuk 1:12-13; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5**). Because God is holy, He is utterly opposed to all evil. God is righteous and He will judge all sin – His perfect justice demands it. God will not compromise His holiness. Therefore, we can either face God’s wrath ourselves and be eternally condemned (**Romans 2:5**) or we can trust in Christ’s death as the punishment for our sin and be saved (**Romans 3:21-26**). Either way, all sin is judged by a holy God.

God is love (**1 John 4:7-10**). Love belongs to God’s very nature, His character, and His essence. God’s love is not a romantic love or even the reciprocal kind of love we might see in the world, such as love for family or friends. God’s love is a heavenly kind, a supernatural love, a love that is shown unconditionally even to the undeserving at great personal cost. Because of God’s infinite love, He sent His Son to redeem us (**John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8**).

God is gracious (**Exodus 33:19; Romans 3:23-24; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 5:10**). This means that God is willing to save people who, because of their sin, deserve to be condemned. Put another way, God does *not* save us because it is owed to us. Rather, salvation is a free gift that is given to those to whom God chooses to be gracious.

God is merciful (**Psalm 103:8-17; Titus 3:5**). This means that God shows compassion to those who are in misery and distress. God, in mercy, looks upon us in our fallen state and sees that we

are under the control of sin from which we cannot free ourselves. Although we do not deserve it, God has pity on us. He rescues and forgives us.

God is patient (**Exodus 34:6; Psalm 86:15; 2 Peter 3:8-10**). Since God is patient, He is able to delay His judgment. Because He is slow to anger, He does not *normally* avenge Himself immediately. This aspect of God's character opens up an astounding opportunity – it allows us time to repent and be saved before judgment falls. But His patience also has limits. If we do not repent, we will face divine justice.

God is faithful (**Deuteronomy 7:9; Lamentations 3:22-23; Hebrews 10:23; 1 John 1:9**). God's character may be relied upon fully. He will keep all His promises. He is a God of truth who is not even capable of lying (Titus 1:1-2; Hebrews 6:18). He will never fail or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He will keep us to the end (**1 Thessalonians 5:23-24**).

God is jealous (**Exodus 20:4-6; 34:14; James 4:4-5**). For God, jealousy is not an expression of insecurity or suspicion. It is a positive virtue - a divine perfection. It refers to His holy zeal in protecting the exclusive relationship which He has made with His people. He is a faithful God and He rightly expects us to remain faithful to Him, like those within a marriage (Ephesians 5:31-32). If we love the world (1 John 2:15) or worship a false god, it is like cheating on Him and it will provoke God to take action. Because of His fervent commitment to us, He will not ignore infidelity on our part. Therefore, we must be fully committed to Him, allowing no rivals. We must love Him with all our hearts.

God is blessed (**1 Timothy 1:11; 6:15**). This means that God is, in and of Himself, completely satisfied, content, and fulfilled. He is a perfect being who experiences infinite delight and peace. He is the source of all joy and He bestows it richly upon His creation.

God is beautiful (**Psalm 27:4**). God possesses every excellent quality. In Him we see perfection. This attribute describes God as pleasing, desirable, and satisfactory. He is wonderful, and to behold Him is the greatest delight of mankind (Matthew 5:8; Hebrews 12:24; Revelation 22:4). His beauty will forever satisfy our deepest longings.

God is glorious (**Psalm 24:7-10; Ezekiel 1:4-28; 1 Corinthians 2:8**). God is majestic, magnificent, terrifying, and wonderful. He is covered in light (Psalm 104:1-2), radiating divine splendor. God possesses honor. His reputation is heavy, or great. He deserves obedience, respect, and fame. He possesses all might and power. To say that God is glorious is to acknowledge that He alone is the best and greatest of all beings. To God be glory forever and ever (Revelation 7:12)!

Discussion

1. How has this lesson helped you to know and understand God better?

LESSON 4

The Trinity

Introduction

The doctrine of the Trinity gives us insight into the inner life of God. His existence is not one of infinite solitude, eternal silence, or everlasting loneliness; instead, He is, *within Himself*, a relational Being. Because God is Three-in-One, He has always experienced infinite love, blessed fellowship, and eternal bliss. It is amazing to think that this kind of Being would welcome us to enter into His joy!

This doctrine puts on display the “otherness” of God. God is unique; He is the only one of His kind. His Triunity marks Him out as different and distinct from every other being or thing. Granted, people *attempt* to draw parallels. For example, some say that God is like water (which can be a liquid, a solid, or steam); others say that He is like an egg (composed of a shell, the white, and the yolk). But no matter which analogy is suggested, it will always fall short of the glory of God. There is no exact comparison to the Trinity because God’s existence is far beyond everything else.

As we study and contemplate this doctrine it should bring about a sense of humility. Our limited understanding will not be able to fully comprehend God. The finite cannot contain the infinite. We cannot cognitively master our Maker! But God has revealed, within the Scriptures, that He is a Triune being and this should inspire a sense of awe in our souls.

In this lesson we will explore the doctrine of the Trinity. We will define our terms, defend this teaching from the Bible, consider some historical errors, and explain why the doctrine of the Trinity matters.

Teaching

POINT #1: DEFINING THE TRINITY

Martin Luther said about the Trinity,

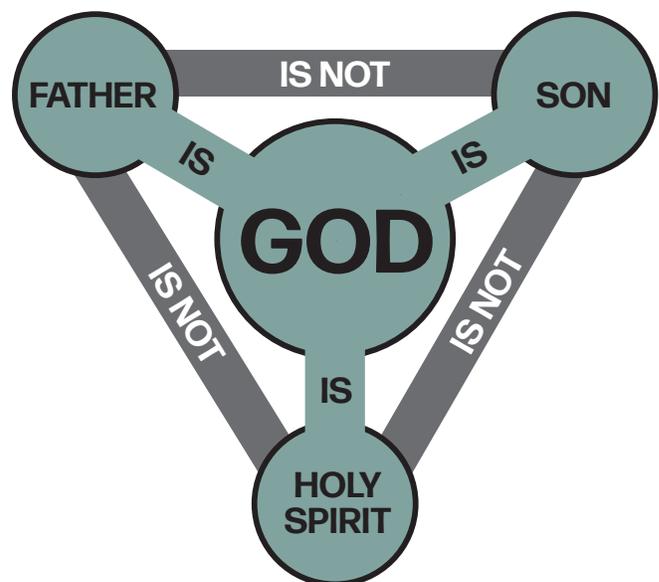
This article is far above the power of the human mind to grasp, or the tongue to express, that God, as the father of His children, will pardon us when we stammer and lisp as best we can, if only our faith be pure and right. By this term however, we would say that we believe the divine majesty to be three distinct persons of one divine essence (*quoted in The Handbook of Basic Bible Texts, pg. 37*).

When we say that God is a Trinity, we mean this: God is one being who eternally exists in three persons. Christianity is a monotheistic religion. We reject polytheism – the belief that there are multiple gods. We joyfully acknowledge that there is one and only one God. We furthermore acknowledge that the one God is revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures as Father, Son, and Spirit. These three persons are distinct centers of consciousness within the one God. They share equally, eternally, simultaneously, and fully in the one undivided divine nature.

POINT #2: THE BIBLICAL TEACHING OF THE TRINITY

Although the word “Trinity” is never used in the Bible, we know that God is a Triune Being from the following points:

1. The Bible teaches that there is only one God (**Deuteronomy 4:35; 1 Kings 8:60; Isaiah 45:5; 1 Corinthians 10:19–20; James 2:19**).
2. In the Bible the one God is revealed to us as Father (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:1; James 1:27), Son (**John 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1**), and Spirit (**Acts 5:3–4; 1 Corinthians 3:16**).
3. The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons who eternally and simultaneously exist as the one true God (**Matthew 3:16–17; Luke 23:44–46 with Hebrews 9:14**).



POINT #3: HISTORICAL ERRORS ABOUT THE TRINITY

In the history of the church, there have been those who were not satisfied to allow for the mystery of the Trinity. These men attempted to come up with a version of the Trinity that they could understand with their finite minds. Let's consider three of these errors.

The first is called *Modalism*. According to this false teaching, there is one God and three persons, but each person manifests one at a time, not simultaneously. The broad framework is this: God revealed Himself as Father in the Old Testament, then the Father became the Son in the incarnation, and then the Son became the Spirit and is with us in the present. This is a serious error. In light of the Scriptures, it must be rejected (**Luke 4:1, 14; 23:34, 46; John 17:1-5; Acts 2:33**). Modalism is wrong because all three persons of the Trinity exist eternally and simultaneously.

The second error is called *Arianism*. According to this false teaching, the Son was created by the Father and the Spirit in turn by the Son. Arians denied the eternity of the Son and the Spirit, and this is clearly wrong (**John 1:1-3; 17:5; Hebrews 9:14; 13:8**). Modern Arians, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, believe that the Spirit is merely God's active force in the world. They deny that He is even a person, but they are incorrect because the Spirit is explicitly spoken of as having personal attributes. He has intellect (1 Corinthians 2:11), emotions (Romans 15:30), and will (1 Corinthians 12:11). He can be tested (Acts 5:9), lied to (Acts 5:3), grieved (Ephesians 4:30; Isaiah 63:10), resisted (Acts 7:51), insulted (Hebrews 10:29), and blasphemed (Matthew 12:31). The Spirit is much more than the power of God; He is a person who shares equally, fully, and eternally in the divine nature along with the Father and the Son.

The third error is called *Tritheism*. According to this false teaching, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three different and distinct gods. The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God; therefore, this view must be rejected.

POINT #4: APPLYING THE TRINITY

The doctrine of the Trinity has many practical consequences.

1. This doctrine explains our very salvation (**Ephesians 1:3-14**)! In this passage we see that the plan of salvation includes each person of the Trinity. Verses 3-6 emphasize the Father's work of election. The Father designed the plan of redemption. Verses 7-12 emphasize the Son's work of dying for our sins. The Son accomplished the work of redemption. Verses 13-14 emphasize the Spirit's work of sealing those who were chosen by the Father and paid for by the Son. The Spirit applies the plan of redemption. Each person of the Trinity is involved in our redemption. We are saved by the Triune God!
2. The doctrine of the Trinity is directly related to our ability to properly worship God. It is interesting to note that many of the Trinitarian texts occur in liturgical settings (**Matthew 28:19** – baptism; **Romans 16:27** and **2 Corinthians 13:14** – benedictions; **Romans 15:30** – a call to prayer). God desires to be worshiped as He is – a Triune Being.

3. This doctrine will protect your soul against false teachers. This doctrine of the Trinity distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. A clear understanding of this one doctrine can protect us from so many errors.
4. This doctrine explains prayer (**Ephesians 2:18**). As Christians approach the Father in prayer, we do so with Christ as our High Priest and Mediator. Jesus grants us access to the Father. Additionally, the Spirit aids us in our approach by empowering us to make requests in keeping with His will (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 6:18; **Jude 1:20-21**). When we pray, we engage with God in His tri-unity. The Trinity has everything to do with our personal relationship with God.

We will consider the spiritual discipline of prayer in more detail in the next lesson.

Discussion

1. Briefly consider how the Christian doctrine of God differs from other religions such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons. What do they say about Jesus that is wrong, because they do not accept the Trinity?

LESSON 5

The Discipline of Prayer

Introduction

One of the amazing benefits of Christ's death is that we now have access to God (**Hebrews 10:19-22**). We have the right to come into His presence and offer our requests before the throne of grace (**Hebrews 4:14-16**). Prayer is not only an important responsibility (**Romans 12:12**); it is also a high and holy privilege. In this lesson we will study the spiritual discipline of prayer. We will consider reasons for prayer, the content of our prayers, helps and hindrances to prayer, and the practice of prayer.

Before we get to those points though, let's look at a teaching from Jesus that we will reference many times in this lesson (**Matthew 6:1-18**).

Teaching

POINT #1: THE REASONS FOR PRAYER

God already knows all of our needs (**Matthew 6:8**). Prayer does not give God any new information. So why should we pray to Him?

1. Prayer is a command (**Colossians 4:2**). We should pray because God requires it. That alone should motivate us, but there are other reasons to pray as well.
2. Prayer is one of the ways we show our trust in God. We are taught to pray with faith (**Mark 11:24; Matthew 21:22**). Through prayer we express our belief in Him and His power to act in the world, and this pleases God.
3. God wants us to be involved in His plan of redemption. God uses our prayers to accomplish His will on earth (**Matthew 6:10; Romans 10:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2**).
4. Prayer is a way to fellowship with God. We should pray to enjoy His presence (**Ephesians 3:14-19; James 4:8**).

POINT #2: THE CONTENT OF OUR PRAYERS

When we pray, what should we say? In other words, what subject matters should we bring before our God?

Many believers have found the ACTS model to be very helpful. It provides some structure to prayer and it ensures that a number of subject matters are covered. This is *not* the only way to pray, but it may prove beneficial as a guide.

1. **A**doration: It is good and right to worship God in prayer. We should proclaim His excellencies; we must honor Him by praising His character and works (**2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 29:10-13; Matthew 6:9!**)
2. **C**onfession: We must acknowledge our wrongdoing to God. It is important for us to confess our sins, to turn from them, and to seek God's forgiveness (**Psalm 32:5; Matthew 6:12; 1 John 1:9**).
3. **T**hanksgiving: We ought to express our gratitude to God for all the good things He has done for us. We should recognize His grace in our lives and verbalize our appreciation for His kindness (**Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**).
4. **S**upplication: Prayer, done with the right heart, expresses our neediness - our complete reliance upon God. When we pray, we should make requests and petitions of God for our many needs (**Psalm 4:1; 62:8; Matthew 6:11; Philippians 4:6-7; James 5:13**) and the needs of others (**Colossians 1:9-12; 4:3; 1 Timothy 2:1-2**).

POINT #3: HELPS AND HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

The Bible teaches that God takes our attitudes and actions into account when we pray. Our prayers can be more or less effective depending upon our motives, requests, and actions. So, what will help our prayers and what will hinder them?

1. God listens to the prayers of the righteous, but if we desire to sin and plan to carry it out, God will not respond to our prayers (**Psalm 66:16-20; James 5:16-18; 1 Peter 3:12; 4:7**). Beware of hypocrisy in prayer.
2. We can have confidence that God will answer our prayers when we ask according to His will (**1 John 5:14-15**). God's character and promises should give shape to our prayers.
3. When we pray, we should pray with faith (**James 1:5-8**). Unbelief or doubt is a great hindrance to prayer. God is trustworthy!
4. When we seek God's forgiveness in prayer, we must also be willing to forgive others (**Matthew 6:12-15; Mark 11:25**). An unforgiving spirit is another great hindrance to prayer.
5. We must avoid pride and showiness in prayer and instead be humble and reverent (**Matthew 6:5-6; Luke 20:45-47; James 4:6; Hebrews 5:7**).

6. Although God may answer a request made only once, He often waits. This teaches us to persevere in prayer while trusting Him with the outcome (**Luke 18:1-8**). Do not become discouraged with God in prayer. Trust His timing.

POINT #4: THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

Under this point we will consider the real-life exercise of this critical spiritual discipline.

1. There are two kinds of prayers that you ought to engage in every day: concentrated prayer and continual prayer. Be intentional about setting time apart in order to devote yourself to prayer (**Psalms 55:16-17; 88:13; Acts 3:1**). In addition, you should have a sense of always being with God and communicating with Him all throughout your day-to-day life (**Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**). Do not choose one over the other. Learn to put both of these daily prayers into practice.
2. In addition to daily prayer, Jesus provided us with an example of setting extended periods of time apart for prayer (**Mark 1:35-36; Matthew 14:22-23; Luke 5:15-16; 6:12**). Jesus was intentional about being alone with God. He focused His mind and heart on communion with His father. On occasion, He gave long time periods to praying; we should imitate our Lord in this way.
3. The Bible also speaks to another kind of intensified prayer in which food (and sometimes water) is abstained from for a time (**Joel 2:12-13; Ezra 8:21-23; Jonah 3:5-9; Matthew 6:16-18; 1 Corinthians 7:5**). Fasting provides more time for prayer because you do not need to prepare and eat food. Fasting humbles us and makes us sense our weakness as creatures. It is appropriate to fast and pray in times of great need, when you need to turn from some sin, or when seeking a renewal in your relationship with the Lord.

POINT #5: WHEN GOD SAYS, "NO."

Let's close this lesson by discussing one more issue related to prayer. Prayer does not make God our servant. Prayer does not force God to act contrary to His plan or will. So, how should we respond when our prayers are not answered as we desire?

When God does not answer our prayers as we want, we should continue to trust in His perfect will (**2 Samuel 12:15-23; Luke 22:41-42; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10**).

Discussion

1. What has been your experience with prayer?

LESSON 6

The Eternal Plan of God

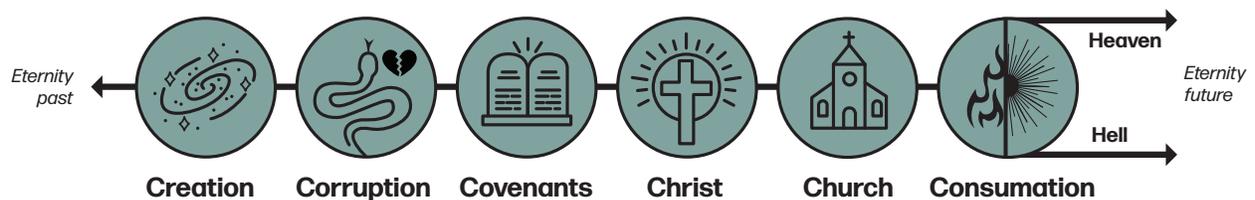
Introduction

Before God created the world, He had a plan for what would happen in the course of time (**Ephesians 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:8-10**). This plan involves each person of the Trinity (**Ephesians 1:3-14**). The Father chose us. The Son died for us (**Acts 2:23; 4:27-28**). And the Spirit sealed us, which ensures our final salvation.

God's plan is progressively revealed in the Bible through a series of promises, predictions, and covenants. In this lesson we will consider the overarching plan of redemption - the basic storyline of Scripture. Therefore, this lesson will *introduce* matters which we will study *in greater detail* in future lessons.

The following diagram will be our guide for this lesson:

The Eternal Plan of God



Teaching

POINT #1: CREATION

The very first words of the Bible call us to believe that God exists, that He made everything, and that we owe our lives to Him (**Genesis 1:1**). All of creation displays the power and glory of God (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19–20; Revelation 4:1). The creation includes both a physical/visible world and also a spiritual/invisible world, which greatly impacts our daily lives (**Colossians 1:16**). This is the environment in which God's eternal plan unfolds.

POINT #2: CORRUPTION

God made the world very good but through the rebellion of Adam sin entered the world and our hearts (**Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–6**). Those past events in the Garden of Eden have a direct impact on us today. Adam's sin condemned and corrupted us. We are born into the world as sinners (**Romans 5:19**). Therefore, like Adam, we too have rebelled against God and broken His laws. We live in a world that is under the curse of sin and we, along with the creation, stand in need of redemption (**Genesis 3:17–19; Romans 8:18–21**).

Thankfully, right after Adam's rebellion, God promised to send a Savior who would crush the head of the serpent and bring restoration (**Genesis 3:14–15**)! *The rest of the Bible records the unfolding of this first gospel promise.*

POINT #3: COVENANTS

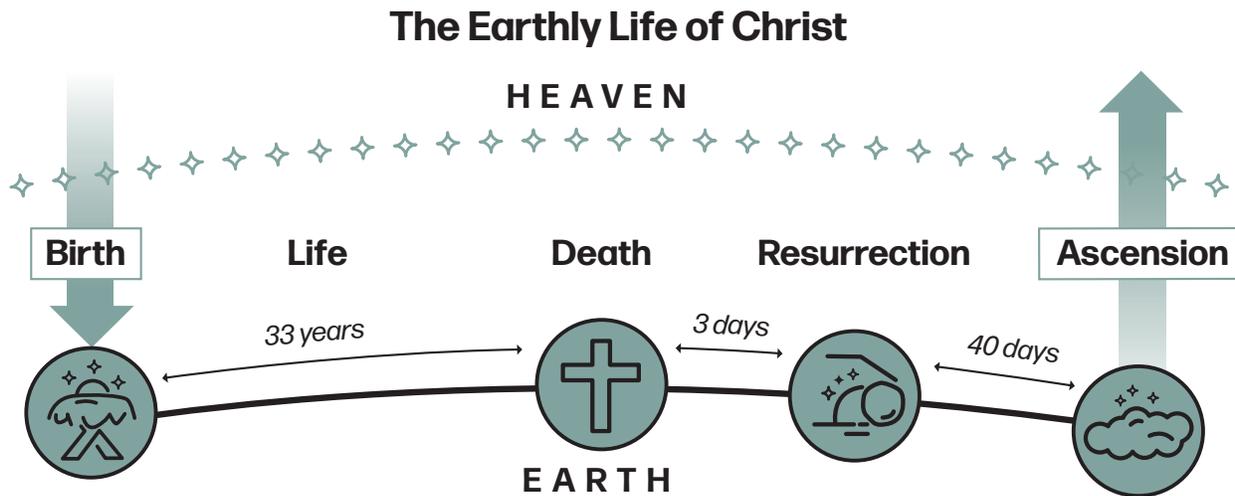
Under this point, we will consider the time period after Adam's fall up to Jesus' first coming. We'll organize this by considering, in chronological order, the major covenants that God made:

- In the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9:8–17), God promises to never again destroy the entire earth *by water*. The creation would be kept from world-wide destruction until the eternal plan was accomplished (**2 Peter 3:1–13**).
- In the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–19), God established a people through whom the promised Savior of Genesis 3:15 would come. Through Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed (**Galatians 3:8, 16**).
- The Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19:1–Deuteronomy 34:12) provided legal regulations for the nation of Israel. The Law revealed guilt so that we would see our need for the Savior (**Romans 3:20**). It also prefigured Christ through its various ceremonies (**Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 10:1**).
- In the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:1–16; Psalm 89:34–37), God promised that one of David's sons would rule in His everlasting Kingdom. This narrows down the lineage of the promised Messiah from Genesis 3:15. He would descend from David (**Matthew 1:1; Romans 1:1–4**).

- The revelation of God’s eternal plan reaches its highpoint in the New Covenant (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Hebrews 8-10). All of the other covenants prepared the way for and find their fulfillment in the New Covenant, established by the blood of Christ. God’s salvation - which was promised and anticipated - is finally realized in the New Covenant!

POINT #4: CHRIST

The eternal plan of God centers on Jesus. Under this point we will briefly consider who He is and what He accomplished for our salvation. Let’s work our way through another chart which covers the earthly life of Christ:



The birth of Jesus is not really His beginning point. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the eternal God in the flesh (**Matthew 1:18-25**). He always existed, but after being conceived by the power of the Spirit in Mary’s womb, He was now both truly God *and truly man*. The Creator became a part of His own creation in order to save us.

Jesus lived a perfect life in that He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). He always obeyed God (John 8:29; Philippians 2:5-8). This qualified Him to be the spotless sacrifice which God accepted on our behalf (Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19).

Eventually, Jesus was put to death (John 19:1-37). The Bible records the crucifixion and also explains its significance (**Romans 5:6-9; 1 Peter 3:18**). Jesus died for sinners. He paid the penalty for our wrongs so that we could be made right with God through faith in Him!

The resurrection of Jesus came three days later (Luke 24:1-12; 1 Corinthians 15:1-6). In the beginning, Satan devised and executed a wicked plan. He entered the garden and brought temptation. Adam fell into sin and thus began the reign of death in this world. But after the resurrection, once Jesus was alive again, the promise of Genesis 3:15 was beginning to be fulfilled. Jesus destroyed the power of death by His resurrection and displayed His victory over the spiritual forces of darkness (**1 John 3:8**). Satan brought sin and death into the world. Jesus secured righteousness and eternal life for everyone who believes!

Finally, Jesus ascended back up into heaven (Acts 1:6-11). He was seated on the throne at the right hand of God as the exalted Lord (Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12). From there He rules over heaven and earth. The ascension confirms His identity as the Messiah and proves that His sacrifice was accepted by God.

POINT #5: CHURCH

Although Jesus has ascended into heaven, He is still very active in the world today. From that heavenly throne, He empowers and equips His people to accomplish His ongoing purpose. He strengthens us so that we can take the message of the gospel to nations (**Matthew 28:19-20**). It is now the mission of the church to participate in the eternal plan of God by telling others the good news!

POINT #6: CONSUMMATION

On a day fixed by God, but unknown to us (Acts 17:31; Matthew 24:36-44), Jesus will return a second time to judge all of mankind (**Matthew 25:31-46**; Acts 10:42; 2 Corinthians 5:10). God will lift the curse and usher in a new creation cleansed from effects of sin (**Revelation 21:1-4**). God's people will be perfected (1 John 3:2). The creation will be restored. And we will dwell with God in eternal joy forevermore (**Psalms 16:11; Matthew 25:21**).

Discussion

1. Why is it important for us to know about God's eternal plan?

LESSON 7

The Creation and Fall of Mankind

Introduction

When we considered the eternal plan of God, a number of matters were introduced which needed to be further explored. In this lesson we are going to expand upon God's work of creation and our rebellion against Him.

Teaching

POINT #1: GOD THE CREATOR

The opening words of the Bible assume that God has no beginning, no origin story, and no genealogy (**Genesis 1:1**). He is the self-existent and everlasting One. He is not derived from something or someone else. He is before all things. Everything else in all of creation exists because of Him (**Acts 17:24-25**).

God created the world for His glory (**Psalms 19:1-2; Revelation 4:11**) and our delight (**Ecclesiastes 5:18-20; Acts 14:15b-17; 1 Timothy 6:17**). The creation glorifies God in that it reveals aspects of His character (Jeremiah 10:12; 32:17; Matthew 6:25-34; **Romans 1:19-20**).

God created the world *and He also sustains it* (**Hebrews 1:3**). God governs the world He made. He controls the universe and directs the course of history so that it accomplishes His plan (Ephesians 1:11). God rules over heaven and earth (**Daniel 4:34-35**), the nations (**Job 12:23**), and all of nature (**Psalms 135:6-7**). God is even sovereign over small things that appear to be random (**Proverbs 16:33**). God's reign over all is a source of great comfort for believers (**Romans 8:28**).

POINT #2: MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

The opening chapters of Genesis record the creation of mankind twice. In the first account, the Bible teaches that God created humans in His image (**Genesis 1:26-31**). This means that in some

ways we *resemble* our Creator. We do not, of course, resemble Him in every way. There are enormous differences between the creature and the Creator; nevertheless, out of everything God made, we are the most analogous to Him. God made us like Himself so that we could relate to Him in a meaningful way.

As divine image bearers we are also meant to *represent* God. Kings in the ancient world would often place images of themselves throughout their nation to represent their authority (R.S. Hess, "Adam" in *The Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, pg. 18). In the same way, God made us in His image and granted us dominion over the earth.

In the second account, we get a more detailed description of how God created the first man (**Genesis 2:4-7**). God took on the role of a potter and formed Adam. God shaped him from the ground and then animated him by giving him His own breath. The picture is that God shared His very *life* with humanity. In response, we are to live for Him.

From the rest of the Bible, we learn that God created us as multifaceted beings. We consist of two parts: a physical body and an invisible soul/spirit (**Romans 8:16; Ephesians 3:16; 1 Peter 1:8-9**). Both aspects of our being are important to God. We are to glorify God with our bodies (Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and in our spirits (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 2:11). This reality helps us understand the afterlife because the soul continues to exist when the body dies (**Ecclesiastes 12:7; Acts 7:59; 2 Corinthians 5:8**).

POINT #3: ADAM'S FALL AND OURS (GENESIS 3:1-24)

Adam, as God's representative, had the responsibility to prevent Satan from establishing a kingdom of darkness on the earth. Adam should have exercised his dominion and crushed the head of the serpent, but he failed. Adam allowed evil to take a foothold in this world and, as a result, the whole creation has been corrupted, including us.

When Adam sinned, human nature itself was corrupted (**Ecclesiastes 7:29**). Ever since the fall, we have been born into a state of sin (**Psalms 51:5; Ephesians 2:1-3**). Put another way, sin has thoroughly corrupted our whole being, including our bodies (Genesis 3:17-19), our minds (**Romans 1:18-21; 1 Corinthians 2:14**), our hearts (**Ecclesiastes 9:3; John 3:19**), and our wills (**John 6:60-65**). We desperately need God to intervene and rescue us!

Paul taught that Adam's fall into sin is our fall as well (**Romans 5:12-21**). By God's intention there is a parallel between Adam and Jesus. Each one represents other people. Each one acted on behalf of others.

ADAM	CHRIST
Adam brought death.	Jesus gives life.
Adam brought condemnation.	Jesus brought justification.
Adam made us sinners.	Jesus makes us righteous.

Adam was the representative head of the human race. God counts the rebellion of Adam as ours. His sin was credited to us as if we had personally committed it. Adam sinned in our place. His disobedience corrupted us and condemned us to death.

This seems unfair *until we perceive God's wise design*. If one man's disobedience can condemn us, then One Man's obedience can save us. If Adam can ruin us, then Jesus can restore us! Jesus represents every person who trusts in Him.

This was God's plan:

1. He would count the sin of Adam against us.
2. He would count our sins against Jesus and punish Him in our place (**2 Corinthians 5:21**).
3. When we put our faith in Christ, God counts Jesus' righteousness as ours, and we are justified in His sight!

Martin Lloyd-Jones put it this way:

Look at yourself in Adam; though you had done nothing, you were declared a sinner. Look at yourself in Christ; and see that, though you had done nothing, you are declared righteous. That is the parallel (quoted by Stott in *Romans*, pgs. 156-157).

Now the image of God which was marred by the fall can be restored. When we believe the gospel, we enter into a process of being conformed to the image of Christ (**Romans 8:29; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10**). This process which began at the moment of our conversion will be completed when Jesus returns (**1 John 3:2**).

Discussion

1. If we truly believe that God governs and directs all of creation, how should that impact our day-to-day life?
2. What are some of the practical implications of being made in God's image?

LESSON 8

Loving God with All Your Heart

Introduction

In some of the previous lessons we considered God's attributes or His perfections. We explored His inner life as a Triune Being. We studied His eternal plan of redemption. We furthermore saw that God created us in His own image. We were made to reflect and represent Him, but we sinned in Adam. Nevertheless, because of God's great love, He sent His only Son Jesus to save us!

It seems appropriate, then, to reflect on how we ought to *respond* to God. In this lesson we are going to meditate on the first and greatest commandment. We will unpack what it means to love God by considering these related biblical themes: enjoying God, fearing God, and glorifying God.

Teaching

Jesus taught us that loving God is the weightiest of all the commandments. Loving God is of first importance. This command is repeated throughout Scripture in various forms. We are warned against neglecting it and, conversely, we are told to be diligent in applying it. It is often connected with obedience to God's word (**Deuteronomy 6:4-6; 10:12-13; 11:1; 13:1-4; Joshua 22:5; 23:11; Psalm 31:23; Matthew 6:24; 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; John 14:15-24, 1 John 5:3**).

Our love for God must not be half-hearted or divided. It must be exclusively directed toward Him with no rivals. We should love God with an all-consuming zeal. In other words, love for God should flow from every faculty of our being:

- You are to love God with all of your *heart*. The heart is the center and source of your whole inner life. Our plans, feelings, words, and choices all flow from the heart. Direct your heart towards God!

- You are to love God with all of your *soul*. The Bible uses this word to refer to the non-material part of your being, and more generally to describe a person's "life" or "self." Your soul is the essence and sum of who you are. To love God with all your soul is to love Him with everything you are.
- You are to love God with all of your *mind*. In your mind you make judgments and decisions. It is there that you discern right from wrong and choose to act in one way or another. To love God with all the mind is to make every thought, belief, and choice pleasing in God's sight.
- You are to love God with all of your *strength*. The idea is this: you are to love God with all of your power, might, and ability. Put your energy into loving God. Give Him your all!

We should express our love for God in the following ways:

POINT #1: ENJOYING GOD

Sin is deceptive. It promises pleasure, but it actually steals it. Sin always keeps us grasping for something more - something better. Sin makes this life empty and it leads to eternal misery. Sin is ultimately *unenjoyable*.

God, on the other hand, is infinitely blessed. He is the source of all life, beauty, enjoyment, and pleasure. We were made to find our ultimate joy in knowing and worshiping God. We begin to experience this once we are saved and our joy will only be amplified in the age to come (**Psalm 16:11; 27:4; 63:1-3; 73:25-26; Philippians 4:4; 1 Peter 1:6-9; Jude 1:24-25**).

POINT #2: FEARING GOD (PSALM 33:6-9; 96:4-5; JONAH 1:9)

The whole universe testifies that God is a being of infinite power and majesty. He controls the events of our life, He appoints the day of our death, and He determines our eternal destiny. The thought of our Creator commands our awe, reverence, worship, and obedience (**Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Matthew 10:28; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:28-29**). As believers in Christ, we do *not* fear eternal condemnation from God (**Romans 8:1; 1 John 4:17-18**). Our sins have been paid for and our salvation is secure; nevertheless, we must always be mindful of God's discipline in our lives, for our good (Hebrews 12:5-11).

POINT #3: GLORIFYING GOD (PSALM 115:1; ISAIAH 43:6-7; MATTHEW 5:16; 1 CORINTHIANS 6:20; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:15; PHILIPPIAN 2:9-11; 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1; HEBREWS 13:20-21; REVELATION 4:11; 5:11-13)

Since we were created and redeemed for God's glory it is both wrong and unsatisfying to live a self-centered life. When we seek our own pleasure, we end up losing it because we were not made to live with ourselves at the center of the universe. We must learn to find our pleasure in living for His pleasure! It is His will that we must carry out, not our own. We must decrease, that He might increase. Make it your life's purpose to see God honored, praised, and worshiped. From a heart of love and thanksgiving pour out your life for God. He is worthy!

Discussion

1. How can we avoid having a hardened heart towards God?
2. How can we fear and love God at the same time? In other words, how are these compatible in our relationship with God?

LESSON 9

The Spirit World

Introduction

When we considered the eternal plan of God, we noted that the creation includes both a physical world and also a spiritual world (**Colossians 1:16**). Soon after that we considered the creation of the earth and humanity. *In this lesson* we will study God's invisible creation – the angels.

Teaching

The word “angel” means “messenger.” Angels are powerful spirit beings (**2 Peter 2:11; Hebrews 1:13-14**). Angels do *not* have material bodies, but they are capable of temporarily taking on human form (Genesis 19:1-5) and interacting with the physical world (**Matthew 28:2**).

The Bible makes a distinction between those angels who remained faithful to God and those who rebelled. The former are called “holy angels” (Mark 8:39). The latter are called “demons” or “unclean spirits” (James 2:19; Mark 1:27). Satan is their leader (**Luke 11:15**).

POINT #1: HOLY ANGELS IN THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION

Angels are involved in God's eternal plan at many significant points. They sang when the earth was created (Job 38:6-7). They stood guard to the tree of life (**Genesis 3:24**). They ministered to the patriarchs (Genesis 18:1-3). They were involved in the giving of the Law (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2). They ministered to the prophets (Daniel 9:20-23; 1 Kings 19:5-8). They foretold the birth of the Messiah (**Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:26-33**) and then announced His arrival (**Luke 2:8-15**). An angel told Joseph to hide Jesus from Herod in Egypt (Matthew 2:13-21) and this message protected the Messiah from a premature death – a death that would not have achieved God's saving purpose (Hebrews 5:8-9). Angels ministered to Christ after the forty days of temptation (Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:12-13).

An angel also “strengthened Him” in the Garden of Gethsemane (**Luke 22:41-43**). By this angelic visitation, Jesus was strengthened so that He might face the trials, the mocking, the beatings, and finally the cross itself. An angel strengthened Him so that He might actually make the sacrifice. In this sense, the angels played an important role in our salvation.

An angel appeared after the Lord was raised and rolled the stone away so people could see that the tomb was empty. (**Matthew 28:1-8**). The message of the resurrection was first shared by an angel and then entrusted to humans. Angels were also present at the ascension, telling the disciples that Jesus would return in the same way that He left (**Acts 1:10-11**).

Angels were active as the gospel went out to the world, directing men to hear the gospel (Acts 8:26-40; 10:3-48). An angel rescued Peter from imprisonment and certain death (**Acts 12:6-11**). Angels ensured that the mission of the early church did not fail. Because of their ministry, the church has grown and the gospel has gone out to the world. In this way, they are instrumental in our salvation.

The work of angels in the plan of redemption is not yet finished. They will accompany Christ when He returns (**Matthew 25:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7**). The angels will separate the wicked from the righteous (**Matthew 13:36-43**). They will observe the judgment of each person (**Luke 12:8-9; Revelation 3:5**). Angels are involved in the plan of redemption from the beginning to the end and we should be thankful to God for their service!

POINT #2: SATAN AND DEMONS IN THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION

After God created the angels, many rebelled against Him. Satan then brought his rebellion to Earth by tempting our first parents (**Genesis 3:1-19**). After God pronounced a curse against the Devil in Genesis 3:15, Satan tried to prevent the arrival of the One who would crush his head (**Revelation 12:1-6**). In light of that passage, we understand that all throughout the OT, Satan worked to avoid God’s judgment by trying to eliminate the line through which the Messiah would eventually come (Genesis 4:8 with 1 John 3:12; Exodus 1:8-9, 15-17, and 22; 1 Samuel 18:10-11; 2 Kings 11:1-2; Esther 3:13). Satan failed to wipe out Christ’s line, so he attempted to kill Christ when He was born (Matthew 2:1-16).

Satan also exercised control over nations by having them worship false gods, which are actually demons (**1 Corinthians 10:20**). He tempted Israel to enter into their worship as well (**Deuteronomy 32:16-17; Psalm 106:35-39**).

As soon as Jesus was baptized and began His public ministry, Satan tempted Him (**Luke 4:1-13**). Jesus countered and attacked the kingdom of darkness by casting out demons and setting people free from Satan’s power (**Matthew 12:28-29**). The devil continued to tempt Jesus (**Mark 8:33**) and tried to stop Him from carrying out God’s plan (**John 13:2; Luke 22:3**). Nevertheless, Jesus defeated the devil through the cross (**John 12:31-33; Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8**). Satan once held dominion over all the nations so that they were enslaved in darkness for thousands of years, but now that reign is broken. The gospel will go out to the whole world, people will be set free, and they will be brought into the Kingdom of God.

The Church has now entered into this cosmic conflict. We preach the gospel, so that people may be set free from Satan's power (**Acts 26:15-18**). Satan tries to keep them blind (**Luke 8:11-12; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4**) and he attacks those who follow Jesus (**1 Peter 5:8-9**), but God has provided us with all that we need to resist him (**James 4:7**; Ephesians 6:10-19).

When Jesus returns, Satan will be judged and cast into eternal fire (**Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10**). Because of our union with Christ, we will share in His victory over Satan (**Romans 16:20**).

POINT #3: APPLYING THE SPIRIT WORLD

Behind the world we can observe with our senses, there is another world. Let's consider how the spirit world may be applied in a number of *down-to-earth* kind of ways:

- Angels set an example of obedience to God's will (**Psalm 103:20; Matthew 6:10**).
- Angels provide a model of reverent worship (**Isaiah 6:1-3; Revelation 4:8 5:11-12**). In fact, when we understand that our corporate worship on earth is a joining of their worship that is already taking place in heaven, it should make us appreciate that sacred activity all the more (**Hebrews 12:22-23**!).
- The reality of angelic visitors teaches us to be hospitable to strangers (**Hebrews 13:2**).
- By contrasting angels with Christ, we see His greater glory (**Hebrews 1:3-14**).
- The study of angels should help us to appreciate our own salvation. The angels who sinned cannot be saved. Christ's blood was not shed for their sins (**Hebrews 2:16-17 and 2 Peter 2:4**). God's response to the angelic apostasy proves that He is not obligated to save His creatures after they turn on Him. By way of contrast, think of what God has done for us. He could have let every single human be condemned. This would have been fair, just, and in keeping with His previous judgment against previous sinners. But He chose to do something different with us. He sent Jesus who "for a little while was made lower than the angels" (Hebrews 2:9) in order to die for our sins. Angels receive absolute justice; we receive grace. This striking contrast should result in a deep sense of appreciation for the mercy we have received.

In the next lesson we will explore another point of practical application. We will consider how to resist the enemy of our souls and engage in spiritual warfare.

Discussion

1. Can you think of other ways to apply this teaching on the spirit world?

LESSON 10

Spiritual Warfare

Introduction

In the previous lesson, we traced the activity of both angels and demons through the storyline of redemption. The Bible reveals that we are in the midst of a cosmic war that is waging in the invisible realm all around us. *In this lesson*, we will explore the Scriptures in order to understand how to engage in spiritual warfare.

Teaching

The Apostle Paul gave extensive teaching on this important topic (**Ephesians 6:10-20**). From this passage we can form an outline for our study. We will consider the source of our strength (verse 10), the schemes of the devil (verse 11), and the armor of God (verses 14-18).

POINT #1: THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH

Although it may seem counterintuitive, we need to recognize our own weakness and frailty if we will be victorious over Satan. We do not have the internal resources to meet him in battle and win. We must remember that Satan is an ancient, powerful angelic being. He is superior to us in both intellect and strength. If we depend upon our own wisdom and power, he will outmaneuver us, deceive us, and cause us harm.

This is why we are told “to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.” Jesus came “to destroy the works of the Devil” (1 John 3:8). Jesus took on flesh and was crucified so that “through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). We fight under the One who has already destroyed and disarmed our enemy. Jesus, as our Great High Priest, has interceded for us, praying that we would be kept “from the evil one” (John

17:15). Because of His protection, the evil one does not touch us (1 John 5:18). Therefore, we are not fighting in our own strength with the possibility of losing our souls; we fight with the Lord's power and the ultimate victory is certain!

POINT #2: THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL

In order to resist the devil (James 4:7), we must remain watchful (**1 Peter 5:8**) and understand his strategies (**2 Corinthians 2:11**). When we know his tactics, then we can successfully withstand him. Consider carefully what the devil and the demons can do in the world:

- They can bring about the destruction of property and even cause the death of animals and people (**Job 1:6-22**; Mark 5:1-13; **John 8:44**).
- They can inflict people with sickness and disease (Job 2:1-10; Luke 13:10-17; Acts 10:38). They can cause people to be mute and deaf (Mark 9:25), to have seizures (Matthew 17:14-18), and to harm themselves in many ways (Matthew 17:15; **Mark 5:1-5**).
- They can enter people and exercise some level of control over their actions (**Luke 22:3**; John 13:27). They can inhabit a person, leave them, and then return with even more demons (Matthew 13:43-45).
- They can receive false worship (**Leviticus 17:7**; **Deuteronomy 32:17**; **Psalms 106:37**; **1 Corinthians 10:20**; **Revelation 9:20**).
- They can obstruct answers to prayer (Daniel 10:11-14).
- They can tempt people to sin (**1 Chronicles 21:1-3**; **Matthew 4:1-3**; **1 Corinthians 7:5**).
- The devil can insert his people among the people of God, making them to appear like us, for our harm (**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**).
- They can remove the word of God from people's hearts so that they may not believe and be saved (**Luke 8:12**).
- They can also cause people to have knowledge which they otherwise would not possess (**Luke 4:33-36**; **Acts 16:16-18**) and give them supernatural strength (Mark 5:1-5; **Acts 19:13-17**).
- They can incite people to oppose the spread of the gospel (**Acts 13:8-10**).
- They can use deceit and cunning to cause people to be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (**2 Corinthians 11:2-3**).
- They can plant false leaders and teachers in the church, disguised as genuine believers (**2 Corinthians 11:13-15**).
- They can harass Christians (**2 Corinthians 12:7**).

- They can hinder believers from meeting with believers for edification (**1 Thessalonians 2:17-18**).
- They can perform false signs and wonders (**2 Thessalonians 2:9**).
- They can cause those within the visible church to stray (**1 Timothy 5:13-15**).
- They can spread lies and cause deception (**John 8:44; Acts 5:3; Revelation 12:9**). They can create false doctrine (**1 Timothy 4:1-4**), which is then spread by false teachers (**1 John 4:1-6**).
- They can plant evil thoughts (**Matthew 16:23; John 13:2; James 3:14-15**).
- They can set traps for people (**1 Timothy 3:7; 2 Timothy 2:24-26**). For example, they try to make Christians unforgiving (**2 Corinthians 2:10-11**).
- They can bring about other hardships, such as imprisonment (**Revelation 2:10**) or persecution (**1 Peter 5:8-11**).

POINT #3: THE ARMOR OF GOD

Finally, we must understand the weapons of spiritual warfare and use them accordingly (**Romans 13:12; 2 Corinthians 6:7; 10:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:8**). Consider again the pieces of armor listed in **Ephesians 6:14-18**.

- The *belt of truth* equips us to reject Satan's lies.
- The *breastplate of righteousness* grants protection. Walking in obedience prevents Satan from gaining a foothold in our lives (**Ephesians 4:26-27**).
- The *shoes* are connected with the gospel of peace. The connection between feet, the good news, and peace is an echo of **Isaiah 52:7**. Proclaiming the gospel is spiritual warfare. You tell those who are enslaved by the devil that there is a way to be set free.
- The *shield of faith* can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. Reliance upon God will make the devil's attacks ineffective (**James 4:7**).
- The *helmet of salvation* is given to protect the battlefield of the mind. We must always remember, even when tempted with doubt, guilt, and despair, that we belong to Christ. He has saved us!
- The *sword of the Spirit* is the word of God. Knowing passages of Scripture will equip you to face intense times of temptation (**Matthew 4:1-11**).
- *Praying* at all times in the Spirit will empower you. Walking in the light of God's presence will equip you to face Satan's dark schemes (**1 John 4:4**).

Discussion

1. The list above gives some concrete examples of Satan's strategies. Now that you understand some of his schemes, how will you fight against them?

LESSON 11

Predictions of Jesus

Introduction

When we studied the eternal plan of God, we briefly considered the time period from Adam's fall up to the first coming of Christ by looking at the major covenants that God made. In this lesson we will revisit that same time period to see some other ways that the Old Testament prepared the way for the arrival of Jesus.

Teaching

POINT #1: THE LINEAGE OF JESUS

As you study the Bible, it becomes clear that the Messiah had to come from a specific family line. God promised certain individuals that His plan of redemption would come through their offspring. The Bible, therefore, follows the history of these families leading up to the arrival of the Messiah.

Let's start at the beginning, right after Satan tempted Adam (**Genesis 3:14-15**). God planned to bring judgment upon Satan *through a human being*. A man would crush the serpent's head. Satan was determined to stop the plan of God, because he wanted to prevent the arrival of the Messiah.

When Adam and Eve had children, the godly line came under attack (**Genesis 4:1-8**). Satan thought that eliminating Abel would stop the coming of the Messiah, but Eve had another child and so the line of the Messiah was preserved (**Genesis 4:25-26**).

Not long after this, mankind became corrupt (**Genesis 6:5-8**). In response, God wiped out all of humanity through a flood, everyone except for Noah and his family. Humanity was preserved, which meant that God's plan was still on track.

Later the promise was passed on to Abraham (**Genesis 12:3**). This narrows down the lineage of the Messiah promised in Genesis 3:15. Satan would now try to destroy the children of Abraham to stop the arrival of the Messiah (**Revelation 12:1-6**).

Let's move ahead to the time when Israel is enslaved in Egypt (**Exodus 1:8-9, 15-17, and 22**). Through Pharaoh, *Satan* attempted to wipe out all of the male children. His hope was to kill that one child who was chosen by God to be the Messiah, but the nation was preserved through Moses.

In the course of time, Israel came into the Promised Land and eventually became a monarchy. God promised King David that one of his sons would rule in His everlasting Kingdom (**2 Samuel 7:12-136; Psalm 89:34-37**). This narrows down the lineage of the promised Messiah from Genesis 3:15 and 12:3. The Messiah would descend from David (**Matthew 1:1; Romans 1:1-4**). Satan then targeted David through the wrath of Saul (**1 Samuel 18:10-11**).

Although David escaped, Satan would now direct his attention to wiping out David's family line (**2 Kings 11:1-2**). Here it appears that Satan succeeded in wiping out the Messiah's line, but we find that *one* child, an heir to the throne, was hidden and kept alive. Through the preservation of this young boy, the plan of God was able to move forward.

Later again, Satan tried to wipe out every Jew (**Esther 3:13**). Through Esther, the people were preserved. The hope of the coming Messiah stood firm.

Satan repeatedly attempted to prevent the coming of the Messiah by killing off His line, but God preserved His people according to His promise. So, Satan attempted to kill the Messiah when He finally arrived (**Matthew 2:1-16**). God, of course, protected Him so that Jesus could live a perfect life and then offer Himself *willingly* on our behalf.

In this way – by following the history of these specific people in the Messiah's family line – the whole Old Testament prepared the way for the arrival of Jesus.

POINT #2: PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS

Another way that the Old Testament prepared for the coming of Christ was to give predictions about Him. God foretold many specific things about the Messiah so we could identify Him when He fulfilled these ancient prophecies. God, through these predictions, graciously gave us a way to recognize the Messiah when He came. Many scholars believe that there are around 300 prophecies in the Old Testament. We will examine just a few of those now.

TOPIC	OLD TESTAMENT PREDICTION	NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT
Jesus' supernatural conception	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:22-23
Jesus' birthplace	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1
Jesus' prophetic office	Deuteronomy 18:15-19	Acts 3:22-26
Jesus' priestly office	Psalms 110:4	Hebrews 5:1-10
Jesus' kingly office	Psalms 2:1-12	Acts 4:23-28
Jesus' death	Psalms 22:14-16; Isaiah 53:1-12; Zechariah 12:10	John 19:28-37
Jesus' resurrection	Psalms 16:9-10	Acts 2:22-32
Jesus' ascension	Psalms 110:1	Acts 5:31

POINT #3: TYPES OF JESUS

God built into Old Testament history specific persons, events, offices, and ceremonies in order to prefigure Jesus. God arranged history in such a way that certain aspects of it would foreshadow the person and work of Jesus. These parallels between the Old Testament and Jesus are not coincidental but are in place by divine design. These foreshadowings and parallels are called “types” in the Bible.

The typology introduced in the OT works like literary foreshadowing, but it is more than a literary device. Types are not arbitrary correspondences invented by the biblical authors but genuine accounts of what really took place. The biblical authors were drawing attention to people, events, and institutions where the divine author caused actual resemblance. To examine biblical typology is to examine the orchestration of the sovereign God. (James Hamilton Jr., *What is Biblical Theology?* pg. 78)

As an example, consider the sacrificial system. The animal sacrifices were *prophetic pictures* of the cross of Jesus. In these sacrifices so many truths were presented: substitution, the innocent killed for the guilty, the removal of sin, and restoration to God. The Old Testament sacrifices were a shadow (**Hebrews 10:1**). The cross of Christ is the substance – the realization and fulfillment of the Old Testament picture (**John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:17-19**). These parallels, and many others, were ordained by God:

LESSON 11: PREDICTIONS OF JESUS

- Adam was a type of Christ (**Romans 5:12-21**). Both men are representatives whose actions directly impact those they represent. Adam, by his sin, condemned the human race. Jesus, by His obedience unto death, saves all who trust in Him!
- The tabernacle is a type of Jesus. God dwelt among the people in that tent in the Old Testament (Exodus 25:8). He dwelt among us in the person of Jesus in the New Testament (**John 1:14**).
- The bronze serpent in the wilderness is a type of Christ's crucifixion (**Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-15**).
- Jonah's stay in the fish is a type of Jesus' death and burial (**Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:38-40**).
- The feast of first fruits is a type of Jesus' resurrection from the dead (**Leviticus 23:10; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23**).

The Bible is a book about Jesus from beginning to end (**Luke 24:27; John 5:39-40**).

Discussion

1. Why is it important to understand that the Old Testament spoke about Jesus?

LESSON 12

The Person of Jesus

Introduction

A careful consideration of the person of Christ should cause us to stand in wonder and awe. Studying our Savior – meditating on who He is – should draw our hearts to Him. Let's acknowledge, with a deep sense of humility, that the person of Jesus is far beyond our understanding. Here we come to a *profound* mystery: The Almighty Creator became a part of His own creation. The eternal, invisible, omnipresent, immortal, all-powerful God came into this world as a man.

Teaching

POINT #1: THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

In order to understand the true identity of Jesus, we must look back before time began. The starting point for the study of the person of Jesus is not His birth, but eternity past. He existed before He was born (**John 8:48-59; 16:28; 17:5; Colossians 1:13-17; Jude 5; Revelation 22:13**). To be more precise, Jesus has always existed because He is the eternal God (**Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1**)

POINT #2: THE INCARNATION

The Bible teaches that the second person of the Trinity took on flesh by means of a supernatural conception (**Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-35**). In the womb of the virgin Mary, God and man were brought together in one person.

The doctrinal importance of the virgin birth is seen in at least three areas.

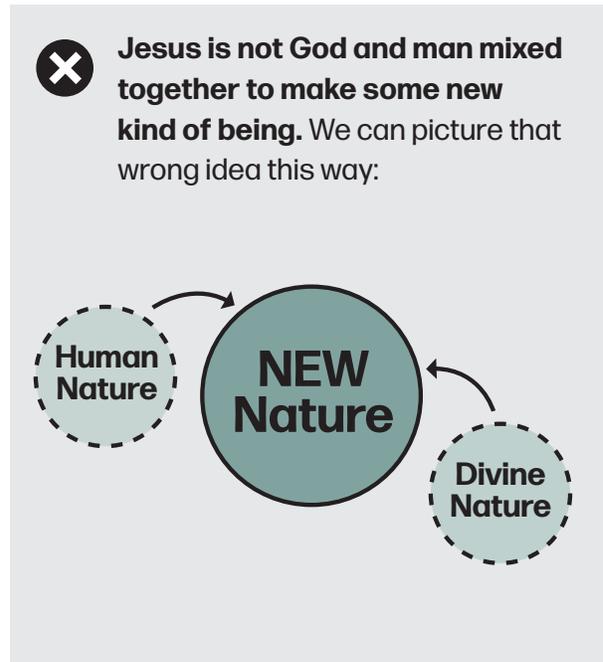
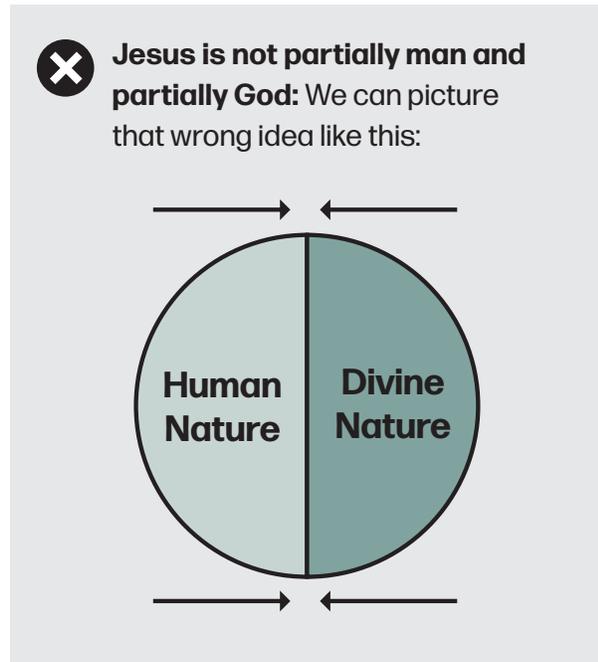
1. It shows that salvation ultimately must come from the Lord.... The virgin birth of Christ is an unmistakable reminder that salvation can never come through human effort, but must be the work of God himself. Our salvation only comes about through the supernatural work of God, and that was evident at the very beginning of Jesus' [earthly] life when "God sent forth his Son, born of woman..."
2. The virgin birth made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person. This was the means God used to send his Son (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4) into the world as a man....
3. The virgin birth also makes possible Christ's true humanity without inherited sin.... [T]he fact that Jesus did not have a human father means that the line of descent from Adam is partially interrupted. Jesus did not descend from Adam in exactly the same way in which every other human being has descended from Adam. And this helps us to understand why the legal guilt and moral corruption that belongs to all other human beings did not belong to Christ... (Luke 1:35). Because the Spirit brought about the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary, the child was to be called "holy." (*Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology*, pgs. 530-531)

Jesus' true humanity can be seen in that He developed into adulthood (**Luke 2:40, 52**); experienced human limitations (**John 4:6; Matthew 4:2**); and was tempted, although He never sinned (**Luke 4:13; Hebrews 4:15**). Finally, He suffered and died (**John 19:30**). In the words of Acts 3:15, they "killed the author of life." As Paul put it, they "crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8).

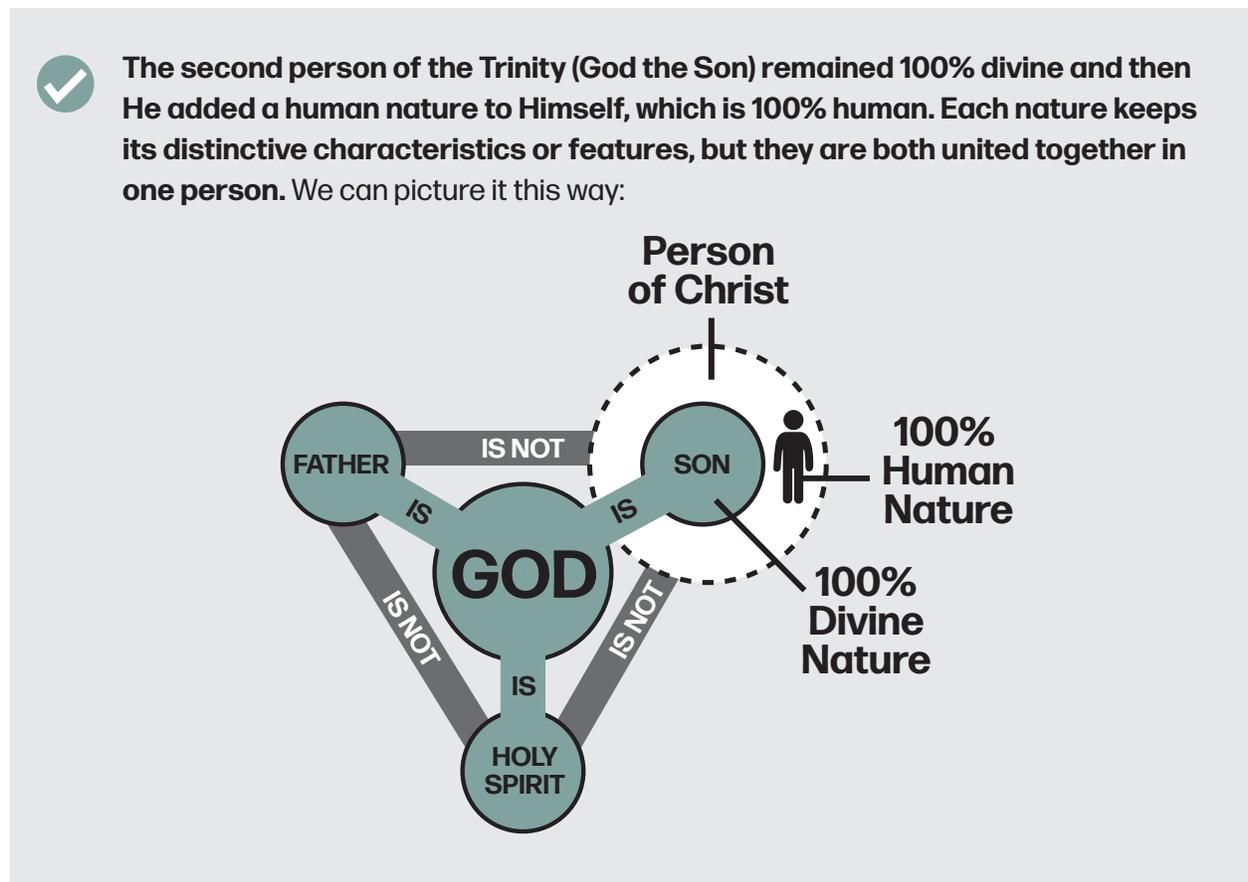
To summarize, we can say this about the person of Jesus: He is both God and man in one person (**Colossians 2:9**). Let's not be confused then about the identity of Jesus. He is a good man, but He is also infinitely more than that. He is a prophet, but He is also so much more than a prophet. He is the fulfillment of prophecy and the greatest self-revelation of God to humanity (Matthew 17:1-5; **John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1-2**). Jesus is worthy of worship (**Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:52; John 9:38**) because of who He is, namely God in the flesh (**John 1:1-3, 14**).

God is eternal, infinite, all present and all powerful. Man is limited, finite, and weak? How did the incarnation work?

It did not work in either of these ways:



Instead, it can be more accurately represented this way:



Since each nature maintains its own characteristics, we can say things like:

- Jesus is both eternal (Colossians 1:17) and He was about 30 years old (Luke 3:23).
- Jesus is all-powerful (Hebrews 1:3), yet He could become weak and even die.

POINT #3: THE PERSON OF CHRIST AND OUR SALVATION

It was necessary, for our salvation, that Jesus be both human and divine. Let's think this through.

Jesus had to be a true man to represent mankind before God (**Romans 5:18-19**). Jesus rescued us from the disobedience of the first man (Adam) by His obedience on our behalf. Jesus, furthermore, had to be a true man to be able to die. God is incapable of death (1 Timothy 1:17). Therefore, He had to take on a human nature in order to become mortal and die for our sins (**Hebrews 2:16-17**).

Jesus also had to be fully God for our salvation. Because of the supernatural conception of Jesus - because He was both God and man in one person - Jesus was without sin (**1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5**). The Holy Spirit sanctified His human nature at the moment it was created in Mary's womb. Jesus then successfully resisted temptation throughout His whole life.

Here's why this matters: God will only accept the sacrifice of one that is pure and undefiled. Just as the animals offered in the Old Testament had to be without spot or blemish, so Jesus had to be without sin to be an acceptable sacrifice. This was true of Jesus because of the incarnation. Put another way, His supernatural conception did more than make it possible for Him to die on the cross; it qualified Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins (**Luke 1:34-35; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18**). God himself has come down from heaven to save us!

Discussion

1. Why is it so important that we understand exactly who Jesus is?

LESSON 13

The Death of Jesus

Introduction

In this lesson we come to a matter of first importance (**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**). The crucifixion of our Lord is a most solemn event that is filled with glory. Through the cross we see both the holiness and love of God on open display. Holiness, because a severe price had to be paid in order for sin to be dealt with. Love, because God was willing to offer His only Son for our salvation.

In a previous lesson, we saw that the Old Testament foretold the death of Jesus in two ways. First, it gave prophetic descriptions of His death in advance (Genesis 3:15; **Psalm 22:1-18**; Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Second, it gave types or prophetic foreshadowings of His cross (Exodus 12:21-23 with 1 Corinthians 5:7; Jonah 1:17 with Matthew 12:40). In this lesson we will concentrate on the *fulfillment* of these prophecies and types.

Teaching

POINT #1: THE DEATH OF JESUS RECORDED

All four Gospels record the crucifixion of our Lord. This historical event is documented in great detail from a number of perspectives so that we may thoroughly study it (**Matthew 26:32-66; Mark 15:21-47; Luke 23:44-47; John 19:16-30**).

POINT #2: THE DEATH OF JESUS EXPLAINED

The Old Testament anticipated the cross, the Gospels each provide an account of Jesus' execution, and the rest of the New Testament unpacks the significance of His death. It connects the dots from His death to our salvation.

The Bible uses a number of terms to explain and interpret what Jesus accomplished by His death. We will consider the following:

- Sacrifice (**Hebrews 9:26**). This word recalls the OT sacrifices. At these sacrifices, an animal would be offered *in place* of the person who committed some offense. The animal would give its life as a *substitute* for the person who committed the sin. The animal died *instead of* the person who was guilty. In the same way, Jesus paid the penalty that we deserved by dying in our place, as our Substitute. *His sacrifice takes away our sin* (**John 1:29**).
- Propitiation (**Romans 3:25–26; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10**). Because of our sin, God was angry with us. As a righteous Judge He must condemn and punish our wrongs. He will not—in fact, He cannot—ignore our many violations of His rules. This is the dilemma: How can a holy God forgive guilty people? The answer is found in the word “propitiation.” God poured out His holy wrath on Jesus. Jesus endured the fierce anger of God for us so that God could show us favor. The pain of the cross was more than physical agony and death; it also included divine abandonment and experiencing the righteous wrath of God for all of the sins of all of God’s people. Jesus bore the curse of our disobedience when He was hung on a tree (**Galatians 3:13**). Sacrifice speaks of a payment for sin. Propitiation refers to the removal of wrath. *The crucifixion of Jesus appeased God’s anger and made Him favorable towards us.*
- Reconciliation (**Romans 5:10–11; Colossians 1:21–22**). Our sin had separated us from God. We were His enemies. We rebelled against God. But because of the death of Jesus, God is able to *forgive* us of our sins and bring us near to Himself. The death of Jesus restores sinners to God so that we are no longer His enemies. Now, because of our faith in the death of Jesus, we are His family. We are reconciled to God. *The death of Jesus secures our forgiveness and brings us into a close relationship with God* (**1 Peter 3:18**).
- Redemption & Ransom (**Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13–14; 1 Peter 1:18–19**). Because of Adam’s fall into sin, we are all born as slaves of sin. This means that we need to be set free or delivered. “Redemption” refers to paying the price for a slave’s freedom. “Ransom” refers to paying the price for a hostage. Jesus’ death was the price required to obtain our freedom—freedom from both the penalty and power of sin! Jesus, as the perfect man, paid the price that God required from mankind. With that debt fully paid, God is able to set us free (**1 Timothy 2:5–6**). Now we can live holy lives. His death paid the price that bought our freedom.
- Victory (**Hebrews 2:14–15; 1 John 3:8**). Satan has a kingdom in this world but through the death of Christ, people can escape from it. Satan tried to destroy the whole human race and hold us in fear, but he has failed. We know, because Jesus died and rose again, that Satan will not win. Death will not hold us forever. Instead, the Devil will be destroyed and Jesus will rule forever! *The death of Jesus defeated the powers of evil.*

Thankfully, the story of our Lord does not end with Him crucified, killed, and buried. His bones are not in a tomb somewhere outside of Jerusalem. Three days after His execution He was raised back to life. We will study that important event, Lord willing, in the next lesson.

Discussion

1. In your own words, what did Jesus accomplish through His death? What did the cross do?

LESSON 14

The Resurrection of Jesus

Introduction

When Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost, he said the following about Jesus' resurrection: "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24). This text teaches a glorious impossibility - it was not possible for Jesus to be held by the power of death! Death could not maintain its grip on the Son of God.

Normally, we would say that escape from death is not possible. Death is final. There is no return from that realm. Resurrection is the impossibility. Acts 2:24 turns that idea on its head. The real impossibility is that the Messiah could be held by the power of the grave! There was no possible way that His death could be permanent! He had to rise!

THE RESURRECTION WAS INEVITABLE FOR THESE 3 REASONS:

1. The Old Testament predicted His resurrection and these prophecies had to be fulfilled (**Psalm 16:8-11; Isaiah 53:4-11**). The word of God is powerful and effective. Once God speaks, things are set in motion so that what He has said comes to pass. The power of the word of God, given centuries before, necessitated the resurrection of Jesus.
2. Jesus has authority over death (**John 10:17-18**). Jesus was not an unsuspecting helpless victim of a violent crime; He was willing to die for His people in keeping with the eternal plan of redemption. Anyone can lay down their lives willingly. Only He could resume His own life by an act of His will! Although He allowed Himself to be subject to death, death is, in actuality, subject to Him. Therefore, death could not hold Him for one moment longer than He permitted.
3. Jesus paid in full the penalty for sin. The Bible teaches that the punishment for sin is death (**Romans 6:23**). This connection, between sin and death, helps us make sense of Jesus' death and resurrection. When Jesus suffered and died, the wrath of God against our sin was fully exhausted. Once God's demands were met, death had no right to hold Him. The debt had been paid, and He was free to go. It was therefore impossible for the grave to hold Him!

In this lesson, we will look at the resurrection of Jesus from two angles. We will consider the significance of the resurrection for Jesus Himself. Then, we will consider the significance of Jesus' resurrection for His people. In other words, we will connect the dots from *His* resurrection to *our* salvation.

Teaching

Let's set the context by revisiting some of the historical reports of the resurrection (**Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-29**).

With that context in place, let's now turn our attention to what happened to Jesus when He was raised from the dead.

His physical body was transformed. Jesus was not a ghost, but a flesh-and-bone person after the resurrection (**Luke 24:36-43**). He was physically raised, but He was also different than before. His physical body was glorified so that He was no longer subject to temptation or death (**Romans 6:9-10**). He has, by His resurrection, already fully entered into the glory of the age to come. He entered into that state, in His human body, which we will enter into at the resurrection of the righteous.

He was also proven to be the Christ. Before Jesus was crucified, He was found guilty in a human court. The death of Jesus made it appear that He was under the penalty of sin, just like any other human. Through the resurrection, God overturned that guilty verdict. The higher court of heaven declared Him to be "not guilty" by the resurrection. The resurrection is God-given proof that Jesus is the sinless Messiah, just as predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures (**Acts 2:22-36; Romans 1:1-4**).

Now we will focus our attention on what Jesus accomplished for us by His resurrection. We'll explore the connection between His resurrection and our salvation.

Believers benefit from Christ's resurrection because we are united to Him (**Ephesians 2:4-6**). His obedience is ours. His death is ours. *His resurrection is our resurrection as well.* Because we are raised *with Christ*, we experience these benefits:

POINT #1: BECAUSE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION, WE ARE REGENERATED (1 PETER 1:3).

When the Spirit of God causes a person to be born again, the life that He grants to the sinner is the very life of the resurrected Christ. We participate in His resurrection power. We begin to experience eternal life – the life of the age to come – here and now. In rebirth God does *not* simply reset us back to the kind of life that Adam had before he fell. No, it is so much better than that! We have a share in the life of the risen and glorified Christ. The life that Adam had could be forfeited and end in death. The life that we are given in the new birth overcomes sin and death!

POINT #2: BECAUSE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION, WE ARE JUSTIFIED.

Put another way, because Jesus rose from the dead, we can be made right with God (**Romans 4:25**). In order for God to declare us to be free from the guilt of our sins and acceptable in His sight, it was necessary for Jesus to both die *and* be raised.

Think about it this way: What would it mean if Jesus had *not* been raised? Paul answered that question (*1 Corinthians 15:12-20*). If Jesus was never raised back to life, then the message of the gospel is not true. He was a false Messiah. The resurrection is proof that God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus. If Jesus was not raised, then our sins have never been paid for. If Jesus did not come out of the tomb on the third day, then death has not been defeated. How could He secure eternal life beyond the grave for us, if He couldn't even overcome death Himself?

But, since He has risen from the dead, our salvation has been secured! Because of the resurrection we know exactly *who* to trust in order to be declared righteous in God's court! The resurrection is necessary for our justification (**Romans 10:9**).

POINT #3: BECAUSE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION, WE ARE PROGRESSIVELY SANCTIFIED (ROMANS 6:1-14).

Because we are joined to Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, we have died to our old life and we begin to experience a new life – a life characterized by righteousness. We are not the same as we were before His resurrection power transformed us. Our participation in His resurrection changes our relationship to sin. We are no longer dominated by it because the power of sin is broken. The resurrection of Jesus gives us new power to live holy lives in this fallen world.

POINT #4: BECAUSE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION, WE WILL BE PHYSICALLY RAISED FROM THE DEAD (2 CORINTHIANS 4:14).

We can face death itself with confidence! It should cause us no fear. We can be *certain* that we will be raised and enjoy eternal life forever because the resurrection of Jesus guarantees our future resurrection (**1 Corinthians 15:20-23**). Paul compared the resurrection to a great harvest. Jesus was the “first fruits” of those who have died. The “first fruits” are the very beginning of the harvest. They show that the field is almost ready to be reaped, and that the harvest has, in fact, begun. Soon the rest of the harvest will follow – that's us. *Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection because the final resurrection began when He was raised.* The end-time resurrection started when Jesus came out of the tomb. Now we are only waiting for the harvest to be completed. On that day, we will bear His likeness (**Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-3**). The resurrection will complete our sanctification. We will finally, *by means of physical resurrection from the dead*, be fully conformed to His image.

In summary, this is what Jesus accomplished for us by His resurrection: The resurrection of our Lord gives us new life at the moment of our regeneration, it is necessary for our justification, it empowers us to overcome sin in this world, and it fills us with confidence because His resurrection guarantees our future resurrection!

Discussion

1. What is the compelling evidence for the resurrection of Christ? Put differently, why should we have complete confidence that Jesus has indeed risen from the dead?

LESSON 15

The Ascension of Jesus

Introduction

After Jesus rose from the dead, He showed Himself alive to many people for a period of forty days (Luke 24:13-49; **Acts 1:3**; **1 Corinthians 15:3-7**). After His resurrection was confirmed by literally hundreds of witnesses, He ascended back where He came from - He went up into Heaven. In this lesson we will consider the significance of this important event.

Teaching

POINT #1: THE ASCENSION PREDICTED

The Old Testament foretold the ascension (**Psalm 110:1**). David did not ascend into heaven to rule at the right hand of God. Instead, he was predicting what would happen to his future Son, the Messiah. His throne would be heavenly; His Kingdom everlasting (**Daniel 7:13-14**). From that position of authority, He would rule over all the earth until all of His enemies were placed under His feet.

Jesus also taught about the ascension before it happened. Let's consider three of those instances from John's gospel:

- **John 6:57-62.** At this point in Jesus' ministry, many of His disciples were put off by His teaching and some no longer followed Him. They could not believe that He was sent from heaven to give life to men. Jesus, in turn, asked them a question about His ascension. Jesus offered His future ascension as proof that He came from there in the first place. The ascension vindicates His claim to be able to give life to the world.
- **John 14:1-3.** Jesus had to leave the disciples and return to heaven so that it would be prepared for us. Jesus also promised His disciples that He would return after His ascension.

He would leave, but not forever. One day He will come back and then all of the saints will be gathered together to Him. The ascension, then, guarantees that we will spend eternity with Jesus.

- **John 16:5-7.** Before His ascension, Jesus explains one important reason that He must return to Heaven. It is from that exalted position that He will send the Spirit and pour Him out. The Spirit will indwell God's people and Christ's power will be displayed through us.

POINT #2: THE ASCENSION RECORDED

Luke records the event for us twice (**Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:6-11**). Carefully consider this quote from Robert Peterson:

The first thing to note with these two accounts is that they are narration of the same event with differing levels of detail and different... purposes.... But given that these two texts record the same event, why the double account?

To answer this question, we must consider the purpose of Luke's two-volume work, which we call the Gospel of Luke and The Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 1:1-2, Luke explains, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up." In his Gospel, Luke set out to present an orderly account of the earthly ministry of the Lord, and because of this we can understand the ascension as the end of that story...

But there are hints that the story does not end there. When Jesus speaks to the disciples, He commands them to wait in Jerusalem "until you are clothed with power from on high" (49) and tells them that they will be witnesses to the nations. So, at the close of Luke, the disciples, as well as the readers, are left in a position of wondering how these things will come about.

Luke answers this question as he continues the story in his second book. Some have said that if in Luke we have what Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1:1), then in Acts we have what Jesus continued to do and teach as the early church was formed and spread... Acts does not shift the focus from the work of God through Jesus to the work of the church, but instead tells of the work of God through Jesus as He grows his kingdom.... Luke starts his second book by narrating the ascension again, but this time not as the end but the beginning of the story. The placement of the ascension as the beginning of Acts shows that it is foundational to all that follows....

Therefore, the dual ascension accounts in Luke and Acts help us to understand that the ascension is the great linchpin in Christ's saving work. For at the ascension, Christ's earthly ministry, His humiliation, comes to an end and the heavenly ministry, His exaltation, begins....

There is one final thing in this account that is pertinent to understanding the ascension: in the ascension Christ does not abandon His human nature. As the apostles stand there gawking after seeing their Lord and teacher ascend into the heavens, two angels appear. These messengers call out to the disciples, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Again, this demonstrates that the ascension is not the end of Christ’s work but another step towards the final realization of salvation at the second coming; but it also shows that Christ ascended body and all....

This means that right now, there is a man, a full flesh-and-body man still marked with the wounds of His crucifixion, sitting at the right hand of the Father as Lord and King over all the earth. Jesus does not shuck off His human nature, but ascends as both God and man into the very presence of the Father as a representative of humanity. (*Salvation Accomplished by the Son*, pgs. 160-163)

POINT #3: THE ASCENSION FURTHER EXPLAINED

The NT interprets the significance of this event for us in a number of places. For example, Luke tells us that when Jesus ascended, He was exalted (**Acts 2:32-36; 5:30-31**). Now, as the exalted God-Man, Jesus exercises universal dominion (Mark 14:62; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1). With this authority at His disposal, He graciously sends the Spirit and He also grants repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

The book of Hebrews gives special attention to the theme of the ascension as well. It shows that Jesus ascended *as our High Priest*. It shows how His sacrifice and His priesthood fulfills, supersedes, and is greater than any of the provisions in the Law (**Hebrews 4:14; 7:26; 8:1-5; 9:24-26**). In the Old Covenant the priest would first *kill* the animal and then he would bring its blood into the Holy Place. The animal was *sacrificed*, then its blood was *presented*. *At the cross*, Jesus made the sacrifice by giving Himself. *At the ascension*, He came into the Holy Place. He was the sacrifice *both offered and presented*. In the old covenant this ritual was repeated yearly because sin was never fully dealt with by the law. *When Christ ascended, He took His seat at the right hand of God, showing that sin was fully and finally paid for by His death*.

The book of Hebrews furthermore presents Jesus as our forerunner in the ascension (**Hebrews 6:19-20**). A forerunner goes ahead, *knowing that others will follow in his path*. The idea is amazing. God came down to man in order to bring man up to God! Jesus is the trailblazer into Heaven. Those who trust in Jesus and truly follow Him *will* follow Him right into the presence of God.

Let’s summarize our findings. *Because of the ascension*, I have been granted repentance and faith. As the sovereign of heaven, He freely gives these gifts to people on earth. His ascension is *directly* related to my conversion. *Because of the ascension*, I know that Jesus is the Son of God. That event validates my faith. If God accepted Him in heaven and placed Him on the throne there, then I am right to accept Him as my Lord. *Because of the ascension*, I know that my sins are

forgiven. My high priest died for my sins, rose from the dead, went through the curtain into the *heavenly* Holy Place where He presented Himself, and then He sat down. The ascension proves that my sins are fully and finally dealt with. *Because of the ascension*, I have the Spirit within me. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to empower me to continue to carry out *His* work on earth. The Spirit also transforms my character day by day, making me more like Jesus. Finally, *because of the ascension*, I have hope. Jesus has gone into heaven as my forerunner. I know that if I follow Him, I too will dwell in God's presence forever.

Discussion

1. In your own words, how would you explain the relationship between Jesus' ascension and your salvation? How are the two connected?

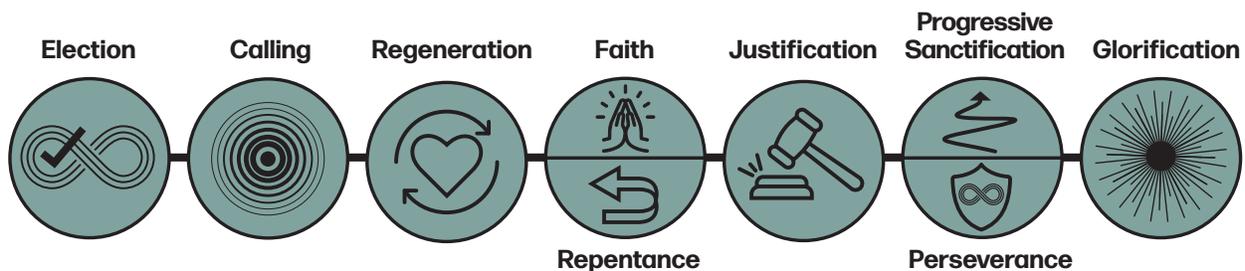
LESSON 16

The Doctrine of Salvation

Introduction

In some of the previous lessons we considered the person and the work of Jesus Christ. We saw that He was both God and man – that He died, rose again, and ascended into heaven for our salvation. In this lesson we will consider the topic of salvation more broadly by looking at the order of salvation, starting in eternity past.

Order of Salvation



Teaching

POINT #1: ELECTION

Divine election refers to God sovereignly choosing specific individuals for salvation (**Romans 8:28-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13**). The Bible often emphasizes the timing and basis of election. Put another way, the Scriptures explain the when and why of election.

Election took place *before* people were created (**Ephesians 1:4-6; Revelation 13:7-8**). God chose us before we chose Him.

God elected people not because of our works, but because of His own purpose and grace (**Romans 9:10-24; 11:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 2 Timothy 1:9**). We are not chosen by God because He saw our faith (or some other meritorious action) in advance, and then in response chose us. Quite the opposite. Election in eternity past results in faith during our lifetime (**Acts 13:48; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13**).

POINT #2: CALLING

In the course of time, the gospel is proclaimed to sinners. In this way, God “calls” people to respond to His gracious offer of salvation (**2 Thessalonians 2:14**). In some cases, the gospel is rejected (**Matthew 22:14**). In other cases, the call of the gospel is effective (**Acts 2:39; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31**). In this latter group, the call of God empowers the listener to respond in faith and repentance.

POINT #3: REGENERATION

Regeneration is the supernatural work of God alone (**John 1:10-13**) in which He grants the sinner new life (John 3:1-8). The gospel is the means God uses to bring us to life (**1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18**). Regeneration refers to participating in the resurrection life of Christ (**Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:3**) and being recreated by the power of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). Regeneration renews the human heart (**Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Titus 3:5**). The fruit of regeneration is belief in the gospel (**1 John 5:1**) and a powerfully changed life (**1 John 2:29; 3:9-10, 14; 4:7-8; 5:4, 18**).

When the gospel is proclaimed, we have a responsibility to respond to it appropriately. In order to be saved, we must repent and believe (**Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21**).

POINT #4: REPENTANCE

Repentance refers to turning away from sin to God (**Acts 3:18-21; 1 Thessalonians 1:9**). Repentance means breaking off from evil practices (**Proverbs 28:13; Acts 3:26**) and obeying God instead. Repentance is a complete reorientation of your life towards God, but it is not a matter of mere outward conformity. Repentance is a matter of the heart (**Joel 2:12-13**). It includes genuine sorrow over sin (**Jeremiah 8:6; 2 Corinthians 7:10**) leading to a lifestyle of grateful obedience (**Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:19-20**).

POINT #5: FAITH

Faith refers to belief or trust in Jesus Christ for salvation (**John 3:16; 20:30-31**). Faith is the *means or instrument* by which we *receive* the gift of salvation (**Ephesian 2:8-9**). Faith is often contrasted with works (**Romans 4:4-5; Galatians 2:16**). Works are about what we can do –

about relying on *our* ability. Works are about earning and merit, but faith looks outside of us to what God has done in Christ. Faith does not contribute anything. Faith is a receptor. It offers nothing to God; it only receives *from* God and depends *upon* God. Faith is the way we receive salvation because faith gives all the glory to God!

The Bible teaches that there is a kind of faith which does not save (**Luke 8:13**; Acts 8:9–24; **James 2:19**). So, what are the marks of a saving faith?

Saving faith includes these three elements:

1. Knowledge. In order to believe the gospel and be saved, you must know the content of the gospel. What you believe matters. Belief in the wrong things cannot save you. In order to trust in Christ, you must first learn who He is and what He has done (**Romans 10:14**).
2. Assent. Saving faith is more than knowing the gospel. It includes *agreement* with it. A person can hear the gospel, understand it, and yet not accept it as true. A person must acknowledge that the things recorded in the Bible are real in order to be saved.
3. Trust. Saving faith is even more than agreeing that the events of the gospel occurred in history. The demons have this kind of belief. Saving faith involves a personal *trust* in Jesus to save you. Saving faith *depends* upon Jesus. Saving faith *commits* to Jesus and receives Him as both Savior and Lord!

Furthermore, saving faith is always verified and proven by a changed life – by good works. These works are not the grounds of our salvation. They do not merit salvation. They do not come before, but rather after salvation. And yet they are necessary because they show the validity and reality of our salvation. As **James 2:26** says, “Faith apart from works is dead.”

POINT #6: JUSTIFICATION

Justification is a legal act of God in which He declares a sinner to be righteous in His sight (**Romans 3:21–26**). A great exchange takes place. Our sins were counted against Jesus and He died for them on the cross. Because of that our guilt is removed, we are forgiven and no longer condemned. Furthermore, the perfect obedience of Jesus is counted as ours when we believe in Him (**Romans 5:6–9**; **2 Corinthians 5:21**). Jesus takes our sins; we receive His righteousness! In justification God renders a verdict. We are righteous in His courtroom even though we still struggle against temptation and sin. Why? Because justification is a declaration of our standing before God *in light of the work of Christ*, not our law keeping. The Bible emphasizes that we are not justified by our works, but by grace through faith in Christ (**Romans 4:1–8**; **5:1**; **Galatians 2:16**; **Titus 3:4–7**).

POINT #7: PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

Progressive sanctification follows regeneration and justification. In regeneration, God granted us new life. In justification, God granted us a new standing before Him. In sanctification, *God*

grants us growth in godliness. Progressive sanctification refers to *the process* of becoming more holy in character and conduct (**2 Corinthians 7:1; Titus 2:11-14**). We will cover this point in more detail in the next lesson.

POINT #8: PERSEVERANCE

We who were chosen by the Father, bought by the Son, and regenerated by the Spirit are eternally saved and cannot be lost. We are preserved by the power of God (**John 6:38-40; 10:27-30; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9; 1 Peter 1:3-5**). Therefore, we must (**John 8:31-32; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 3:14**) and will persevere in faith to the end (**Jeremiah 32:40; Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; Jude 1:24-25**).

POINT #9: GLORIFICATION

Glorification refers to the future transformation that will take place among all of God's people when Jesus returns and we are raised from the dead (**John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:35-56**). We will be completely cleansed from all the effects of sin and fully conformed, in both body and spirit, to the image of our risen Savior (**Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2-3**).

Discussion

1. How should the truth of divine election impact our lives?
2. What evidence have you seen in your own life that you have been regenerated?
3. How would you describe the security of your salvation before God?

LESSON 17

Progressive Sanctification

Introduction

In the previous lessons progressive sanctification was introduced. We saw it refers to the process of becoming more holy in both character and conduct. In this lesson we will consider the topic of progressive sanctification in greater detail.

Teaching

POINT #1: SANCTIFICATION HAS 3 STAGES.

Stage 1 is “definitive sanctification” (**Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 10:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2; Jude 1**). At the moment of conversion, we *are* sanctified, that is, we are set apart by God. Now we *are* holy. We are “saints” or, more literally, “holy ones.” When we are saved, our relationship to sin changes radically. Although we are still indwelt by sin, we are nevertheless set free from its dominating power and we are dedicated to live the rest of our lives for God (**Romans 6:1-14**).

Stage 2 is “progressive sanctification.” We are to increasingly become in practice what we already are in our status and position before God. We *are* consecrated to God, so we must now *live* for Him. (**Romans 6:19, 22; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 10:14; Titus 2:11-14; 2 Timothy 2:21**). Jerry Bridges, in *Transforming Grace*, put it this way:

Scripture speaks of both a holiness we already possess in Christ before God and a holiness in which we are to grow more and more.... The holiness we have in Christ is purely objective, outside of ourselves. It is the perfect holiness of Christ imputed to us

because of our union with Him.... Progressive sanctification is subjective and experiential and is the work of the Spirit within us imparting to us the life and power of Christ, enabling us to respond in obedience to Him. (pg. 102)

This particular stage of sanctification is the focus of this lesson.

Stage 3 is “final sanctification” (**Hebrews 12:23; 1 Corinthians 15:49; Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; 5:23-24; 1 John 3:2**). When we die, we will be done with temptation and our spirits will be perfected, never to sin again. When Jesus returns, we will be raised from the dead, our bodies will be made like His, and we will be fully conformed to His image!

POINT #2: PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION IS BOTH A DIVINE AND HUMAN ACTIVITY.

Unlike regeneration, which is entirely a work of God, progressive sanctification is accomplished as we cooperate with God. Bridges explained it this way:

So progressive sanctification very much involves our participation. But it is an activity that must be carried out in dependence upon the Holy Spirit... [W]e work as He enables us to work. His work lies behind all of our works and makes our work possible... He is not dependent upon us to do His work. But we are dependent upon Him to do our work; we cannot do anything apart from Him. (pg. 115)

God gives us a new heart with new desires (**Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Corinthians 3:3**). He grants us the Spirit who empowers us to walk in newness of life (**Ezekiel 36:26-27; Galatians 5:16-25**). The Spirit then begins to change us from the inside so that we increasingly take on the character of Christ. God will also use external means to sanctify us, including suffering to test our faith (**Romans 5:1-5; James 1:2-4**) and discipline when we sin against Him (**Hebrews 12:5-11**).

We are to rely upon the strength that God supplies (Romans 8:13) and actively pursue holiness. Put another way, by the grace of God we are to put forth effort - to exert ourselves - in seeking to become more godly (**Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 2:12-13; 3:13-14; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 12:1, 12-14; James 1:22; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 2 Peter 1:3-11; 1 Timothy 4:7-10; 6:9-12; 1 John 3:3**).

POINT #3: PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION INVOLVES THE WHOLE PERSON.

In other words, sanctification impacts every aspect of our being. Becoming more holy in our *mind* involves growing in our understanding of God’s character and ways. Over the course of time, we will increasingly agree more with God and less with the world (**Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:10; Philippians 1:9**). Becoming more holy in our emotions and desires involves

a weakening of our old desires and strengthening of godly attitudes, emotions, and longings. Sanctification is not just about changing the way we behave; it includes the transformation of our inner man. God's Spirit is renewing us, removing the filth of sin from within, and increasingly conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ (**Galatians 5:22; Philipians 2:13; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 2:15**). Becoming more holy in *body* means that we will not allow sin to reign in our bodies (**Romans 6:12**). It involves, for example, abstaining from sexual sin and instead glorifying God with our bodies (**1 Corinthians 6:13, 19–20**). Becoming more holy in *spirit* involves an abandoning of all forms of idolatry and increasingly giving ourselves to loving, obeying, worshiping, and glorifying God from the heart (**2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:23**).

POINT #4: PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION IS BOTH NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE.

In other words, progressive sanctification involves death *and* life, putting off *and* putting on, rejecting the desires of the flesh *and* living according to the Spirit. (**Galatians 5:16–25; Ephesians 4:20–5:21; Colossians 3:5–14**). If we are going to faithfully follow Jesus, then we must *also* deny ourselves (**Mark 8:34–38**). John Stott explained it well:

The double duty of Christians – negative and positive – is the consistent, reiterated teaching of Scripture. Thus, we are to deny ourselves and to follow Christ. We are to put off what belongs to the old life and put on what belongs to the new life. We are to put to death what is earthly and set our minds on heavenly things. We are to crucify the flesh and to walk in the Spirit. It is the ruthless rejection of the one in combination with the relentless pursuit of the other which Scripture enjoins upon us as the secret of holiness. (*The Message of 2 Timothy*, pg. 75)

POINT #5: PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION IS BOTH PERSONAL AND CORPORATE.

We are responsible as individuals to pursue growth in holiness. There are, in fact, certain activities that we can engage in, which God commonly uses to bring about our growth in holiness. These include Scripture intake (**John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; James 1:22–25**), prayer (**Mark 14:38**), and confession of sin (**1 John 1:9**).

But progressive sanctification is also corporate activity. In other words, it is something that occurs in the context of the Christian community (**Galatians 6:1–2; Hebrews 3:12–13; 10:24–25; James 5:19–20; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 John 1:7**). Many people think of the pursuit of holiness as something that is done alone and apart from others. They think of sanctification as something they accomplish single-handedly, as if securing holiness were just a matter of *private* Bible reading and prayer (Proverbs 18:1). But the truth is that we need other believers to help us grow in holiness. We need their examples (1 Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 13:17), encouragement, gifts, and correction to help us grow and become more like Jesus.

Discussion

1. What steps are you already taking in order to be more sanctified?
2. Now that you have gone through this lesson, have you been made aware of other steps you should take in order to grow spiritually?

LESSON 18

The Discipline of Evangelism

Introduction

In some of the previous lessons we considered what Christ did to secure our salvation. We also studied the doctrine of salvation from election in eternity past to glorification in the future. In this lesson we will meditate on the spiritual discipline of evangelism – proclaiming the message of salvation to others.

Teaching

In the gospels, Jesus prepared His disciples to take His message to others. Jesus told them in advance that they would do this work (**Matthew 4:19; Luke 5:10**). Jesus taught them that the gospel message would go out from Jerusalem to the nations (**Matthew 24:14; Luke 24:47**). Then, after Jesus died and rose from the dead, He called His disciples to take the gospel to the whole world (**Matthew 28:16–20**). Since Jesus promised to be with us to the end of the age, this command still applies to us today. Granted, some people are especially gifted in making the gospel plain and leading people to receive it by faith (**Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11**), but *all believers* are called to the work of evangelism (**1 Peter 2:9; 3:13–17**).

The book of Acts shows that the disciples acted on this calling. Acts begins with Jesus addressing His disciples right before His ascension (**Acts 1:1–9**). He told them that the gospel would spread from Jerusalem to Samaria to the end of the earth once they were empowered by the Spirit. One of the reasons that God gives us His Holy Spirit is to equip us to proclaim the good news to others.

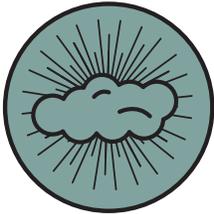
The book of Acts records the first 30 years of the spread of the gospel. It was – and still is – unstoppable (**Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20**)! Then the book of Acts ends abruptly (Acts 28:30–31), by

divine design, calling the following generations to finish the work. It is now our privilege and responsibility to continue to proclaim the gospel until Jesus returns.

In order to faithfully proclaim the good news to others we must first know the content of the gospel ourselves. The biblical writings and sermons of the apostles show us the main points of the gospel (**Acts 3:18-19; 13:38-39; Romans 1:16-20; 3:21-26; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5**). The gospel is the message of how the Holy Creator is able to justify sinners by faith in Jesus who died to pay for sin and rose to give us life.

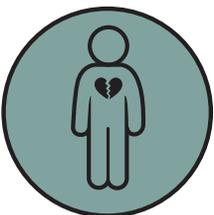
When you tell others the gospel, it is very helpful to remember these 4 categories: God, man, Jesus, and response. Let's revisit these main points.

A Summary of the Gospel



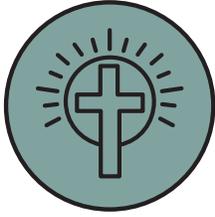
GOD

The gospel is a message from God and about God. The Bible teaches that there is only one God and He is our Creator (**Genesis 1:1; Romans 1:19-20**). Since He is our Maker, He has ultimate authority over our lives. He requires us to worship Him only, to love Him wholeheartedly, and to obey His commandments (**Exodus 20:3-6; Deuteronomy 6:4-6; 1 John 5:3**). The problem that we all face is this: we haven't done that (**Romans 3:23**). Because God is utterly holy and perfectly just, our sins will be judged (**Deuteronomy 32:4; Romans 2:16; Acts 17:31**). We deserve to die, and to be separated from God forever, because we have rebelled against the One who gave us life (**Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15**). Nevertheless, because He is also a God of great love (**1 John 4:8**), He has provided a way, without compromising His justice, to save sinners (**Romans 3:21-26**).



MAN

The gospel is a message to us and about us. The Bible reveals the truth about human nature. It explains what has gone wrong in the world and in our hearts. We have rejected God's authority and broken His rules; we are guilty. When the first man (Adam) rebelled, human nature was corrupted (**Genesis 3:1-24; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Romans 5:19**). Now, all people are born into a state of sin (**Psalms 51:5; Ephesians 2:1-3**). We are utterly powerless to save ourselves. We cannot make up for our wrongdoing (**Galatians 2:16**). We desperately need God to intervene and rescue us!



JESUS

The gospel is a message about Jesus Christ. It reveals God's solution for our sin. Because of His great love, God sent His Son (**John 3:16; Romans 5:8**), just as He promised in the Old Testament (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Psalm 110:4; Psalm 2:1-12; Psalm 22:14-16; Isaiah 53:1-12; Zechariah 12:10; Psalm 16:9-11). Jesus is God come in the flesh (**Matthew 1:23**). He came to rescue us by living a sinless life and dying on our behalf as a substitute to pay the penalty for our sins (**John 19:16-37; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18**). He then rose from the dead, securing eternal life for all who trust in Him (**Matthew 28:1-10; John 14:19**). He ascended into heaven where He now reigns. He will soon return for both salvation and judgment (**1 Thessalonians 1:9-10**). Because of Jesus we can avoid the wrath to come and instead be reconciled to God. That's good news!



RESPONSE

The gospel is a message which demands a response. Through the gospel God calls upon people to repent, believe, and be saved (**Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 10:9-10**). Repentance refers to both an initial act and a continual lifestyle of forsaking sin to obey God. Belief refers to knowing and agreeing with the gospel. Saving faith trusts and depends upon Jesus, not works (**Ephesians 2:8-9**), for salvation. True faith *commits* to Jesus and receives Him as Savior and Lord!

In addition to knowing the content of the gospel, take into account the example of Paul. Consider *how* he shared the gospel (**Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 19:8**). He presented compelling arguments that Jesus was the Christ. Paul attempted to win his audience over to the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:19-23). He did not just present raw historical facts and leave it at that. He tried to convince them. He addressed questions and objections as he proclaimed the gospel. We need to do these same things as we tell others the good news in our day.

Furthermore, make sure to cultivate a sense of care for the souls of people (**Romans 10:1**). Remind yourself that the work of evangelism is necessary for the salvation of sinners (**Romans 10:13-15**). Ask others to pray that you would have both boldness and clarity (**Acts 4:23-29; Ephesians 6:18-20; Colossians 4:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2**).

Discussion

1. What questions or objections have you run into when sharing your faith? How will you answer those kinds of questions and objections in the future?

LESSON 19

The Doctrine of the Church

Introduction

When God saves an individual, that person becomes a part of a larger community. This redeemed community is often called “the church” in the New Testament. In this lesson we will consider the church by exploring some descriptions of the church, spiritual leadership within the church, and some important rituals given to the church by Jesus.

Teaching

POINT #1: METAPHORS OF THE CHURCH

The Bible provides us with a number of illustrations to help us understand the significance of the church. Let’s consider some of these metaphors.

- The Body of Christ (**Romans 12:4-7; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:24**). This analogy emphasizes both the unity of the church and the diversity of each particular member. Each person is vitally connected to the others. Every member is uniquely gifted to help others. Since Jesus is the Head, He directs and guides the whole body.
- The Bride of Christ (**2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7; 22:17**). This metaphor emphasizes the relationship between Christ and His church. Christ loved the church and freely gave Himself up for her on the cross. In loving response to Christ, the church is to keep herself pure and unspotted for her bridegroom. This metaphor speaks of the church’s beauty and worth in the eyes of Christ and of our great responsibility to live righteously for Him, which means that we must be submissive to His will.

- The Flock of God (**John 10:1-18; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 2:25**). The church members are the sheep. Jesus Christ is the Shepherd of the flock. He leads us and feeds us with His word. He also protects us from the attacks of Satan so that we are kept safe for eternal life.
- The Household of God (**1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 2:19**). This description teaches us how we ought to relate to each other. We are to love and respect each other because we are family (**1 Timothy 5:1-2**).
- The Temple of God (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 5:16; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5**). This metaphor emphasizes the presence of God among us and calls us to holiness. It teaches that we are a community made for the worship of God.

POINT #2: CHURCH GOVERNMENT

One of the benefits to being a part of a local church is spiritual leadership. You will have men who are watching over the state of your soul (**Hebrews 13:17**). By God's wise design, the leadership of the church consists of a plurality of men (**Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1**) who must meet specific qualifications (**1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9**). In other words, they must be godly men.

The elders (commonly called "pastors" in the modern church) govern the church under the authority of God's word (**Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17**). They care for the people of the church like a shepherd watching over sheep (**Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Peter 5:1-4**). In practical terms, this means that they will feed you with the word of God and pray for you regularly (**Acts 6:4; 1 Timothy 4:13-16**). They will protect you from false teachers (**Acts 20:28-30; 2 Timothy 4:1-5**). They will provide godly examples to follow (**1 Peter 5:3; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8**). They will care for you in times of need (**James 5:14**). And should you wander from the Lord, they will seek you out to rescue you (Matthew 12:11-12; 18:12).

The deacons assist the elders by keeping the elders from being overburdened with the many practical problems that arise in the church. Their ministry allows the elders to remain focused on praying, studying, and teaching (**Acts 6:1-7**). Their work is critical to the health and unity of the church.

POINT #3: THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

An ordinance is a symbolic rite given by Jesus to the church which commemorates His work of redemption. There are two ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Table. These ordinances are *directly* related to church membership. They externally mark out the redeemed community. Only those who profess belief in the gospel are to be baptized. Through baptism people show themselves to be a part of the people of God and they are added to the church (**Acts 2:41**). Furthermore, only those who are a part of the body of Christ are to be allowed at the Lord's Table because of the symbolism involved in that ordinance (**1 Corinthians 10:14-22**). Baptism speaks to *entering* the church. The Table speaks to *continuing* with the people of God. Let's consider both ordinances in more detail.

The word “baptism” simply means immersion. In the context of this Christian rite, it refers to submerging a person who has professed belief in Christ under water in the Triune name of God. In the NT, this ritual was carried out almost immediately after a person came to believe the gospel. Baptism conveys many important realities. It pictures cleaning from sin (**Acts 22:16**) and symbolizes union with Jesus in His death and resurrection (**Romans 6:1-4**). Baptism also shows our union with the church (**Ephesians 4:1-6**). Through baptism we give ourselves to God, and He also puts His name on us and marks us out as one of His people (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

The Lord’s Table is a meal for the church (**Luke 22:14-20**). This meal has two elements: the first is the bread, representing the broken body of Christ, and the second is the cup, representing Christ’s blood poured out for our forgiveness. Like baptism, this ordinance conveys many important realities which we recognize as we look backward, forward, inward, and outward. We look *backward* as we remember the death of our Lord. This meal brings the historical and theological realities of the atonement near to our hearts and minds. It reminds us that we are forgiven by God! We also look *forward* to the time when Christ returns and we are reunited with Him in feasting and celebration (**Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26**). We also look *inward* as we examine our own hearts (**1 Corinthians 11:27-32**). Through eating and drinking we renew our belief, repentance, and submission to the Lord. And we furthermore look *outward* to the other believers participating in the meal with us. The reality of Christian unity is symbolized by the loaf (1 Corinthians 10:14-17). The Table is designed to renew our relationship with God *and with each other*. As the church, we are a people bound together by the gospel. Therefore, the reality of forgiveness and restoration must display itself in our personal relationships with one another.

These ordinances are an important part of Christian worship, which we will visit in the next lesson.

Discussion

1. What has been your experience with the church?

LESSON 20

The Discipline of Corporate Worship

Introduction

In the previous lesson we considered the doctrine of the church. *In this lesson* we will consider the church on a more practical level. We will study the importance of *participating* in the life of the church. We will do this by considering both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of church life.

Teaching

POINT #1: CORPORATE WORSHIP

We were saved to bring honor to God's name, not just as individuals, but as a community (**1 Peter 2:9**). One of the primary ways that we, as the church, glorify God is by gathering together (**1 Corinthians 14:25; Hebrews 10:25**) for corporate worship (**Ephesians 5:15-19**). Offering worship to God is one the best uses of our time because corporate worship is a high biblical priority for the life of the church. Worship is something that we do in this life that we will also enjoy forever in the life to come. Consider this:

Nothing you do on a consistent basis is more like the activity of heaven than worshipping God with His people. In congregational worship we express our unity with all true Christians of all time everywhere...

The...worship in heaven, both that which is currently in process and that which will continue throughout eternity, is congregational worship. Thus our congregational worship is more like heaven than individual worship... If you want heaven to be your eternal home, don't you want to frequently experience that which is the "nearest resemblance of heaven" on earth? (Donald Whiney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*, pg. 83)

Worship matters to God (**John 4:23-24**), so it must also be a matter of great importance to us. God cares how we worship. He is concerned about what we do when we worship. He forbids us from worshiping other gods (**Exodus 20:1-6; 34:12-15; Deuteronomy 6:13-15; 12:30-32; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 10:20-22; 1 John 5:21**) and from worshiping Him using images (**Exodus 32:7-9 Deuteronomy 4:14-19**). He requires us to follow His word when we worship (**Leviticus 10:1-3; 2 Samuel 6:1-7; 2 Chronicles 26:16-21; 1 Corinthians 11:20-22**) and He wants us to worship with the right heart attitude (**Isaiah 1:11-15; Amos 5:21-24**).

In the New Covenant the following elements should be a part of public worship:

- The reading and preaching of Scripture (**Acts 2:40-42; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:1-2**). When the word of God is read, explained, and applied, it should demolish all high thoughts of self and instead exalt God!
- Prayer (**1 Timothy 2:8**). When we pray, we speak to God about His perfections and His works. We delight in God's character. We thank Him for His kind providence and our redemption. Prayer is saturated with praise. We also confess our sins and, in this way, express our continued trust in Christ's blood to cleanse us from our sins. Even in our simple requests we honor God, showing that He is the source of every good thing that we receive.
- The observance of the ordinances. We considered baptism and the Lord's Table in the previous lesson. Both activities point us to the gospel. As we participate in these rituals, we acknowledge that only Jesus is able to save us.
- Song (**Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15**). When we sing to God, we join the praise that is already occurring in Heaven (**Isaiah 6:1-2; Revelation 4:8, 10-11; 5:8-12; 14:2-3; 15:2-3**). We add our song to the songs of the saints and angels already around the throne of God. When we sing to God, we glorify Him on earth as He is glorified in heaven above; we honor God in time as He will be honored for eternity!

POINT #2: BUILDING UP THE BODY

Every member of the church is to be actively involved in helping other members mature in their faith (**Ephesians 4:11-16**). Your growth is dependent upon another person's willingness to minister to you; additionally, another person's growth is dependent upon your willingness to serve them. Sanctification is not *just* about private devotions and personally striving after holiness. Sanctification happens as we participate in the life of the church. Robert Thune and Will Walker in their book *The Gospel-Centered Community*, wrote this:

Did you ever notice how patient you are—as long as no one is getting on your nerves? Or how loving you are—as long as you are surrounded by people easy to love? Or how humble you are—as long as you're respected and admired by others? Every one of us is a saint in isolation! It's in community that our real weaknesses, flaws, and sins are exposed. That's why community is essential—not optional—for transformation...

You see, God is preparing a “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). His goal is a renewed creation, where redeemed humans dwell in perfect harmony with each other and with their Creator. God is out to prepare his people for this glorious future by transforming them now, a process the Bible calls sanctification. The agent of sanctification is the Spirit. The tool of sanctification is the gospel. And the context of sanctification is community.

Community is the laboratory in which we learn to rely on God’s grace and experience the gospel’s transforming power.... God is using the people in our lives to form us, shape us, to sanctify us. The Holy Spirit uses our struggles and failures in community to reveal our sin and show our need for heart and life change that Jesus’ death and resurrection make possible. (pgs. 18-19, and 26)

We cannot thrive in the Christian life on our own. We are not spiritually self-sufficient. *We need* other Christians to be involved in our lives, so that we can mature in the faith (Proverbs 18:1; 27:17). So, let’s consider how to build up other believers. Let’s think through some activities we can engage in that will strengthen our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We can build others up by exercising our spiritual gifts (**Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11**). A spiritual gift is an ability given to every believer by the Holy Spirit to build up the church. When a spiritual gift is exercised it gives grace to others. In other words, other believers benefit from it and it causes them to grow in faith, love, and holiness.

We can build each other up through devotion to fellowship (**Acts 2:42**). Put another way, we can enjoy spiritual friendships in the church that cannot be enjoyed in the world. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can relate to one another in ways that will bring about growth in Christ. Consider the many “one another commands in the NT (**John 13:34; Romans 12:10, 16; 15:7, 14; 16:16; 1 Corinthians 12:25; Galatians 5:13; 6:2; Ephesians 4:2; 32; Philippians 2:3-4; Colossians 3:13, 16; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24; 1 Peter 4:9; 5:5; James 5:16**). If we strive to live with one another as the Scriptures teach, it will bring about sanctification.

We can build each other up by holding one another accountable (**Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-2**). Sometimes we need other believers to point out our sin and to help us turn from it. Because sin dishonors God, defiles the community, and brings harm into our lives, we need other Christians to care enough to confront us and restore us when we are caught in some sin (**James 5:19-20**).

Discussion

1. Why does God forbid us from using images to worship Him?
2. How have other believers helped you grow in your faith?
3. How have you used your spiritual gift(s) to benefit others?
4. What are some of the spiritual dangers of trying to live the Christian life apart from other believers?

LESSON 21

The Doctrine of the Future

Introduction

Back in chapter 6, when we considered the eternal plan of God, we were introduced to the idea of the consummation of all things. In this lesson, we will consider the future in greater detail. We will begin this study on a personal note, seeking to understand what happens to us when we die. From there we will move out to the future of the entire cosmos.

Teaching

POINT #1: DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE

Adam's rebellion brought death into the world. Death is a part of the curse - the punishment for sin (**Genesis 2:15-17; 3:17-19; Romans 5:12**).

When a people die, their souls are separated from their bodies, until the resurrection (**Genesis 35:18; Ecclesiastes 12:7; James 2:26**). Although the body returns to dust, the human soul remains conscious after death. We continue to exist after we die. Physical death is a change in the mode of our existence, from an embodied to disembodied state.

The Bible teaches that the righteous and the wicked are *separated* in the afterlife. In other words, the souls of believers and unbelievers go to different places in the hereafter (**Luke 16:19-26**). Therefore, when people die their fate is sealed (**Hebrews 9:27**). There are no second chances. For those who die in their sins (**John 8:23-24**), the opportunity for salvation has come to a decisive end. They are confined to hell (**Matthew 7:13-14; Mark 9:42-48**). But the souls of the righteous are made perfect (**Hebrews 12:23**). They dwell with God and are confirmed in a

perpetual state of holiness. For the person who trusts in Christ, then, the punishment of death has been turned into a point of blessing. It brings our sin to an end and it is the gateway into God's presence (**Psalm 16:11; 73:23-26; Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23**).

POINT #2: THE RETURN OF CHRIST

Jesus' second coming will be personal, visible, and glorious. We can learn much about His *return* from the way He *left* (**Acts 1:10-11**). There are comparisons that can be made between the ascension and the return of Christ. Both are real events involving the actual presence of Jesus; the return of Christ is not a metaphor (**1 Thessalonians 4:16-18**). Both events are visible, but here we find a contrast. Whereas the ascension was a private viewing, the second coming will be seen on a world-wide scale (**Revelation 1:7**). Both events also include the glory cloud (**Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 16:27**). We are not able to predict the date when the return of Christ will happen, but we know that it will occur and so we must always be ready (**Matthew 24:36-44**).

POINT #3: THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

Christians believe in bodily resurrection. Jesus' physical body was no longer in the tomb because He was raised from the dead. So too with us.

The separation of the soul from the body is *not* a permanent state for the dead. It is a temporary state that comes to an end when Jesus returns. All people will be raised and reunited with their physical bodies at the second coming (**John 5:28-29**).

For the believer, the resurrection completes the process of being conformed to the image of Christ. Put differently, by the resurrection the image of God which was marred by the fall will be fully renewed (**Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2**). We will be transformed by God's power (**1 Corinthians 15:35-58**).

POINT #4: JUDGMENT DAY

When Jesus returns, He will come to judge (**John 5:22-29; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:16; 2 Timothy 4:1**). Consider this carefully. At the point of death people go to either heaven or hell, and their eternal destiny is already known. Therefore, the final judgment is not about investigating evidence to determine each person's future. On this day Jesus will demonstrate His power and authority. He will rescue His people and condemn His enemies (**1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Hebrews 9:28; Jude 14-15**). When Jesus came the first time He was condemned in human courts and killed; when He comes the second time, He will sit in judgment over all of humanity and finally receive the honor that He deserves.

Everyone – believers and unbelievers alike – will face God's judgment (**Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10**). He will take into account each person's motives (**1 Corinthians 4:5**), words (**Matthew 12:36-37**) and deeds (**Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15**). This raises two important questions.

First, since our sins will be revisited at the final judgment, should we be afraid? Consider this from Anthony Hoekema's book *The Bible and the Future*:

It is sometimes said that the sins of believers, which God has pardoned, blotted out, and cast into the sea of forgetfulness, will not be mentioned on the Day of Judgment. If it is true however, that there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, and that the judgment will concern our deeds, words, and thoughts, surely the sins of believers will also be revealed on that day.... The failures and shortcomings of such believers, therefore, will enter into the picture on the Day of Judgment. But-and this is the important point-the sins and shortcomings of believers will be revealed in the judgment as *forgiven sins*, whose guilt has been totally covered by the blood of Jesus. Therefore... believers have nothing to fear from the judgment-though the realization that they will have to give an account of everything they have done, said, and thought should be for them a constant incentive to diligent fighting against sin... Christian service, and consecrated living. (pgs. 258-259)

Second, since we are saved by grace through faith and not by works, why are we judged by our deeds on Judgment Day? The Bible teaches that saving faith will show itself in works (James 2:14-26). Here's the reason we are judged by our works on the last day: what we do proves whether or not we really *trusted* in Christ. Your works will bear evidence to your belief or unbelief.

POINT #5: ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

After the Day of Judgment unbelievers will suffer unending torment. This teaching is very unpopular in our day. Some people try to soften the doctrine by teaching that the souls of the wicked will eventually be annihilated and erased from existence. Others try to empty the Lake of Fire by teaching that in the end, everyone will get a second chance and be saved. Others simply deny the doctrine. Nevertheless, eternal punishment is the plain teaching of Holy Scripture (**Matthew 25:41-46; 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10**).

POINT #6: THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

After the day of Judgment, believers will dwell forever in the New Creation. There, we will live in a renewed creation free from the curse and sin (**Romans 8:18-21**). Heaven and Earth will be brought together. What Adam lost in the Garden of Eden, Jesus will restore and we will be with Him forever (**2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-4**). There, we will see God (**Job 19:25-27; Matthew 5:8; Revelation 22:3-4**). Seeing Him will be the most significant aspect of our life within the New Creation. Gazing on His beauty will satisfy us forever. God is the reward!

Discussion

1. How should our understanding of *the future* impact our lives *in the present* (Matthew 6:19-21; 16:24-26; Romans 12:19; 1 Corinthians 6:13-20; Colossians 3:4-6; 1 Peter 1:6-7, 13, 17-19; 2 Peter 3:11-12; 1 John 2:15-17; 3:2-3)
2. Why hasn't Jesus come back yet (2 Peter 3:1-10)?



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