

Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Learn the answers to the eight most essentials questions of life

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

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Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Lesson 1: Who Is God?

There are certain questions in life that are absolutely essential to your existence. The purpose of this study is to provide you, no matter what your background is, with information that you absolutely need to know. This study is intended to lay a good foundation and to enable you to make the necessary decisions relating to your salvation. This study is not intended to discuss everything that could be said on each of these subjects. Rather, it is meant to be an overview study that provides you with basic information. Specifically, this study will focus on the eight questions I believe are essential questions.

As we begin this study, I want you to picture a ladder with 8 rungs, each rung serving as a help to reaching the next. At the top of the ladder is an understanding of life's most essential questions – an understanding that will help you make decisions to live your life in a way that is pleasing to God. This illustration accurately represents this series of lessons, as these lessons build on each other in order to help you come to this understanding of essential spiritual truths – establishing a necessary foundation to further build on in the future (as you continue to study God's Word and add to your understanding in each of these eight areas).

These questions are essential questions that you must have answered properly! So, whether you have been a Bible student for a very long time or you are just beginning to discover the teachings of God's word, you need to take some time to evaluate the answers to each of these questions. Then, you must evaluate if you have made the right applications of these answers in your life!

The first of these essential questions is: Who is God? In order to truly understand anything about life, we must first be able to understand something about the One who has created it! While it is essential to know about God, the Creator of the universe, it is not possible for us to fully comprehend who God is. God is far above our comprehension and wisdom. In fact, we would not know anything about God if He had not revealed Himself to us.

Yet, although we cannot know everything about God, we can know what He has revealed to us. And, He has revealed Himself to us in two ways. First, He has revealed Himself through His creation. Second, He has revealed Himself through His Word (the Bible). There is much that can and must be learned about who God is when we examine these two areas. However, we are limited as to what can be covered in this short lesson.

There is a clear need, then, for knowing that God exists and for knowing who God is. This is the most fundamental piece of information you need in order to live your life! So, in this lesson, we will seek to answer the question, "Who Is God?"

God Was, Is, And Always Will Be

As you begin to consider who God is, you must recognize that He is eternal (without beginning and without end). At every point in time, God has been, is, and will be in existence. Revelation 4:8 pictures some who made the following true statement about God: "...Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come."

God was

The Bible begins by asserting the existence of God. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Moses (the author of the book of Genesis) does not write to defend the existence of God. Rather, he simply asserts that God was already in existence prior to the creation of this world. In fact, God is eternal (notice Revelation 4:8 again).

Genesis 21:33 refers to God as the "Everlasting God." Psalm 90:2 simply states, "Before the mountains were born, before you gave

birth to the earth and the world, from eternity to eternity, you are God.” So, in the language of Revelation 4:8, God always *was*. That is, He did not have any beginning point. There was no time in the history of anything when God did *not* exist. Instead, He is “from eternity.”

God is

Since God is “from eternity to eternity,” God continues to exist today. In the language of Revelation 4:8, God *is*! So, you read about God being in existence throughout the Scriptures. There has never been a point in time when God ceased to be in existence.

And, the fact that God is “from eternity to eternity” assures us that God continues to exist at every point in our lives. As bad, evil, and godless as this world can seem at times, you must always be assured of the fact that God continues to exist. In fact, He promises those who are His people, “I will never leave you or abandon you” (Hebrews 13:5). The only way for this to be possible is for God to be in existence at every point in time. So, He really does live today!

God will always be

God, in His very nature, is eternal – having no beginning and having no end. Again, He is called the “Everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33) and He is said to be “from eternity to eternity” (Psalm 90:2). Although the concept of an “eternal” God is a difficult one for our human minds to grasp (since we measure everything we do by time), we must recognize that God is not bound by the constraints of time. In fact, He is the Creator of time!

Therefore, not only has God had no beginning, but God will continue to exist throughout all eternity! He will not die, cease to exist, be overthrown, or defeated. In fact, those who live a life of faithful obedience to Him will live for all of eternity with Him (as we’ll study in lesson 2)! In the language of Revelation 4:8, God *is to come*.

How can we know that there is a God?

I have made some pretty big claims if we cannot absolutely know that there is a God (after all, if there is no God, even the Bible has lost its authority and credibility). Certainly, there are many who claim that there is no God and have developed theories to try and explain the origins of this world. However,

we can know that there is a God because He has revealed Himself to His creation (including you and I)! He has revealed Himself to His creation in two ways (as I identified at the beginning of this lesson).

(1) God has revealed Himself through His creation. This is even a major piece of evidence given in the Bible for the existence of God. For instance, Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands.” Similarly, Romans 1:19-21 says, “since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse. For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened.”

Take some time to look around you and see the marvelous and complex design of the universe that is all around you. For instance, it is impossible for mankind to even be able to know how big the universe is. Just our single galaxy (the Milky Way) is estimated to be 100,000 light years in diameter – and there are an estimated 100 billion galaxies in the universe (and this likely just scratches the surface). In this unfathomably large universe, our own earth is perfectly designed to support life (whereas no other place is known to contain everything necessary to support life). And, the design of this earth is perfect in order to accomplish that goal. Even small alterations to this earth (i.e. the gravitational pull, the atmosphere, the distance to the sun, the tilt on its axis, etc.) would make life on this earth impossible.

Then, of all the life that can be observed on this earth, there is nothing greater than the human body. Every part functions marvelously to contribute to the design and allows humans to be superior to any other form of earthly life. From the skeleton, to the organs, to the muscles, to the cartilage, to the vessels and arteries, everything is perfectly designed. And, there are an estimated 30 trillion incredibly complex and perfectly designed cells in the human body – each designed to perform a specific function.

Yes, there is tremendous design all around us. There is design in the universe, in the earth, in the sea, in the plants, in the animals, and in mankind. Then, there is a question that each person must answer in order to come to a conclusion about life

and this universe. That question is: Could all of this design just happen? Could it spontaneously come into being? Could it evolve over millions and billions of years? Ultimately, could it have come from nothing?

Even scientific laws disprove the idea that this design could come from nothing and spontaneously happen (i.e. the first law of thermodynamics). But, what does your own reasoning conclude? For instance, suppose that you were walking along the beach and you found a computer buried in the sand. How would you suppose it got there? Would you believe that something so marvelous and complex as a computer was the product of millions or billions of years of evolutionary processes? Would you believe that over this long period of time, all of the right materials just happened to come together in that perfect spot to form a computer that is able to work perfectly, process information at rapid speeds, and execute complex tasks with ease?

Or, would you suppose that there must be someone who designed that computer? Would you conclude that a computer is too well-designed just to have come about by chance? Now, if it is unreasonable to conclude that a computer could ever spontaneously come into existence and function perfectly, why is it reasonable (according to so many people) to conclude that something as marvelous as the universe, the earth, and life on it could be the product of chance over a long period of time – ultimately originating from nothing?

Surely such scientific theories are also unreasonable! Every design manifests that there was a designer. Every painting reveals that there was a painter. Every poem reveals that there was a poet. Every building reveals that there was an architect. Every automobile reveals that there was an engineer. Every baby reveals that there were parents. Surely, everything in this universe (i.e. plants, trees, skies, seas, human life, etc.) reveals that there is a Designer who is behind it all! God's creation is too marvelous, complex, and orderly to have happened by chance! There was clearly a powerful and wise God in charge of it all!

(2) God has revealed Himself through His Word. The Bible tells us many things about God (some of which will be observed in this study). Through the Holy Scriptures, He tells us about Himself, His creation, His plan, etc. There is even

evidence for His existence by considering some facts about the Bible. Everything that we know about the Bible demonstrates that it is no ordinary book. It truly has stood the test of time and stands out far above the rest.

For instance, although the Bible is not a book about science, medicine, geography, or any such thing, every time it touches upon one of those subjects, it does so with perfect accuracy. In fact, the Bible makes claims that mankind did not “discover” until much later. How, then, can you possibly explain the claims of the Bible – except that God was behind the words that were written in it? Consider just one example.

In Leviticus 17:11, God declared, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood.” Yet, as recently as the 1700's, people believed that it was a good idea and it was common medical practice to bleed those who were sick. They believed that the toxins were in the blood and blood-letting (bleeding people) would make them well. In fact, it is commonly believed that George Washington was bled to death by those who were trying to make him well. Yet, the Bible taught the now recognizable truth that the life is in the blood – many years earlier!

Or, consider that one thing people cannot do is predict the future with complete certainty. Although it is not uncommon for individuals to make predictions that do ultimately come true, it is impossible for mankind alone to make such predictive statements that always come true hundreds – if not thousands – of times, with 100% accuracy! Yet, the Bible does exactly that.

Although there are many examples of prophecy in the Bible, just consider the prophecies made about Jesus. Bible scholars have estimated that there are over 300 prophecies that were made and fulfilled about Jesus. Then, consider that these prophecies were made hundreds of years before they were fulfilled. These prophecies include that Jesus was to be born of a virgin (see Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:18, 22), that Jesus was to be born in the city of Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1), that Jesus would be crucified (see Isaiah 53:12 and Matthew 27:38), that Jesus' side would be pierced (see Zechariah 12:10 and John 19:34), and even that Jesus would descend from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David (see Matthew 1). Again, we could consider hundreds of prophecies (about many different subjects) that are contained in the Bible.

And, they all have been 100% accurate. How, then, could mankind perfectly predict all these events – without ever being wrong? The simple answer is that he cannot and that he did not! Instead, God is the only one who could possibly accomplish this.

There is much more that could be said in proving the existence of God. However, one does not have to be informed of all the scientific proofs and theories related to the question in order to know that God exists. You can come to this conclusion by simply observing what He has created and through His Word!

Three Beings possess the nature of being God

As you consider the God who is eternal, you need to recognize that the Bible teaches there are three separate Beings who each possess the nature of being God. This is often referred to as the “Godhead” or “Trinity.” These three are: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each one possesses the attributes of being God, but, each one has a different role/function. While God is manifested in 3 Persons, there is only one God in that they are all united (i.e. same purpose, same characteristics, etc.).

For instance, consider how the following passages show these three being linked together, yet they are separate Beings. For example, Matthew 3:16-17 says, “When Jesus [God, the Son] was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God [God, the Holy Spirit] descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice [God, the Father] from heaven said: ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.’” Matthew 28:19-20 says, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Other passages also identify each of these three as being God and link the attributes of being God to each one. For instance, concerning the Son, John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then, in Acts 5:3 says that a certain man lied to the Holy Spirit. But, Acts 5:4 then says that he lied to God.” And, just like there are certain characteristics possessed by all those who are part of

humankind, there are certain characteristics that are possessed by each of these three. Namely, only these three possess the characteristics of being eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present.

Some Characteristics Of God

Now, having observed the fact that God is eternal, let’s take a few moments to focus on some of God’s characteristics in order to gain a better understanding of who He is. Throughout this series of lessons, we’ll be focused on how we can serve and glorify this God. However, our efforts must begin with a proper understanding of who God is (as there are many false ideas about God that exist – even among those who profess to be “Christians”). We must recognize that we cannot change who God says He is for something we want Him to be!

He is all-powerful

God is omnipotent (all-powerful). Revelation 19:6 calls God “the Almighty.” There is nothing that is outside of His power to do or control. This is one of the characteristics that is unique to who God. No one except God has completely limitless power to do anything that He desires to do. Thankfully, as we will see later, God only uses His power to accomplish what is good (since He is also “holy”).

God’s all-powerful nature is manifested through His creation. Remember, Romans 1:20 said that God’s “eternal [limitless] power and divine nature [nature of being God]” have been “clearly seen since the creation of the world.” For instance, just consider the power involved in saying, “Let there be light” (as God did in Genesis 1:3) – and light springing into existence!

He is all-knowing

God is omniscient (all-knowing). There is nothing outside of God’s ability to know. Isaiah 46:9-10 says that God is able to tell how something will end whenever it just begins – and foretell future events long before they ever happen! Surely, no one except an all-knowing God could possibly say what is going to happen with 100% accuracy. Yet, He has done so many times in the pages of the Bible –

making prophecies years (sometimes even hundreds of years) before they ever happened.

Furthermore, consider Romans 11:33-36 to demonstrate how the wisdom and knowledge of God are always true and far above mankind: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.”

He is ever-present

God is omnipresent (ever-present). There is nothing God does not see. There is no place where we can hide ourselves from God’s sight. This is another one of the characteristics unique to God. He sees every place at all times! Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, observing the wicked and the good.”

Psalms 139:1-12 also demonstrates the point that you cannot hide from God and escape His presence (in a poetic way): “Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away. You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, Lord. You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me. This wondrous knowledge is beyond me. It is lofty; I am unable to reach it. Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits, even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light around me will be night’ – even the darkness is not dark to you. The night shines like the day; darkness and light are alike to you.”

He is holy

God is holy. In Revelation 4:6-8, there is a great picture of four living creatures around the throne of God (who are magnificently described). Around the throne, they never stop proclaiming the holiness of God (verse 8), saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come.”

The holiness of God means that He is completely separated from everything that is evil. 1 John 1:5 says that “God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him.” Habakkuk 1:13 says that God’s eyes “are too pure to look on evil” (favorably) and that God “cannot tolerate wrongdoing.” So, when people sin (as we’ll talk about in lesson four), they separate themselves from this holy God (according to Isaiah 59:1-2). For, since God is a holy God, He expects us to be holy (entirely separated from evil). 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

He is loving

God is loving. As we’ll discuss in lesson four, whenever people sin, they are doomed for everlasting destruction. As a result of this sin, people cannot do anything to save themselves. But, thank God that He loved mankind enough to send His Son to die to save us from our sin! John 3:16 says, “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” God loves each person and does not want anyone to be punished. Rather, He wants everyone to know the truth and be saved.

1 Timothy 2:4 describes God by saying, “who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” This salvation from sin would have been impossible without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Therefore, God “proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). This is the greatest kind of love anyone has ever shown us or ever could show us – saving us from the eternal punishment we deserved for sinning against God and giving us the opportunity to have everlasting life in Heaven!

He is gracious and merciful

God is gracious and merciful. God’s love is demonstrated through the grace and mercy He has given everyone the opportunity to receive. Titus 2:11 says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” Ephesians 2:4-7 says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, so that in the

coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

Notice that God’s grace and mercy are not hidden or such scarce resources that only a few people have access to them. Instead, God’s grace has appeared so as to make salvation available for “all people” and God is “rich in mercy” because of “his great love that he had for us” and has displayed “the immeasurable riches of his grace.” But, what does it mean for God to be gracious and merciful? God’s grace is seen in that He gives us an opportunity to have eternal life in Heaven. So, it is God giving us something we do not deserve. Then, God’s mercy is seen in the fact that He gives us the opportunity to avoid eternal punishment in Hell. So, it is God *not* giving us what we *do* deserve.

He is impartial

God is impartial. One day, we will all be judged by God (2 Corinthians 5:10). As you anticipate this day, you can know that God’s judgment will be entirely righteous! He will not condemn you to Hell because He does not like you or because he likes someone else better. Nor will He be bribed or unjustly swayed by anything or anyone. Instead, everyone will be fairly judged on the basis of how they have lived their lives in comparison to His word, as revealed in the Bible (as we’ll consider in lesson three).

For instance, Romans 2:5 speaks of “God’s righteous judgment.” Then, Romans 2:6-11 goes on to explain: “He will repay each one according to his works: eternal life to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality; but wrath and anger to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth while obeying unrighteousness. There will be affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does what is good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For there is no favoritism with God.”

He is jealous

God is jealous. In giving the Old Law, God commanded Israel not to serve or worship other gods. Exodus 20:5 says, “Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God....” God has always demanded to come first. It is unacceptable for anyone

to serve and worship anybody or anything else rather than the one true and living God!

Clearly, God demands your allegiance. He will not accept second place in your life – nor should He have to accept second place! Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24). So, an idol can be anything or anyone you try to serve or worship – and that steals the allegiance you should give to God. It can be a statue. It can be money. It can be a job. It can be a certain possession. It can be a family member. It can be yourself. It can be an addiction. Therefore, if you are giving the allegiance that belongs to God to anything or anyone else, know that God is jealous.

He is good and severe

God is good and severe. Perhaps all you have heard about God is that He is a loving, gracious, and merciful God. Some say that a loving God could never condemn anyone to the fires of Hell (which we’ll discuss in lesson two). Now, He certainly is loving, gracious, and merciful (as we discussed earlier). He wants to save everyone. Yet, He is not these things alone!

Hebrews 10:31 also says that it is “a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” if we are living in a disobedient way. He is also called a “consuming fire” in Hebrews 12:29. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 says that God will “give relief” to those who are afflicted due to their faithfulness to Christ and take “vengeance with flaming fire” on those who “don’t know God and on those who don’t obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” These, He says, will “pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord’s presence and from his glorious strength.” So, Romans 11:22 simply tells us to consider both of these characteristics of God: “Therefore, consider God’s kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen but God’s kindness toward you – if you remain in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.” So, both goodness (as seen in His love, grace, and mercy) and severity (as seen in His vengeance) are characteristics of God. He wants everyone to be saved eternally and does not want to punish anyone. Yet, He will punish those who reject Him for all of eternity, while saving those who obey Him!

He is faithful

God is faithful. 1 Corinthians 1:9 says, “God is faithful; you were called by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide a way out so that you may be able to bear it.” Furthermore, Titus 1:2 informs us that God “cannot lie.”

Therefore, we can fully trust in God! He is trustworthy. He will never deceive or mislead us! We can trust Him enough to give our entire lives over to His service, knowing that He will reward those who do so. Even when we cannot see the promises He has made, we can be sure that He will deliver them to those who are faithful to Him.

He is patient

God is patient. Though some were questioning why Christ had not yet returned, the apostle Peter assured the Christians he wrote to in the letter of 2 Peter that Christ would return (2 Peter 3:10). He informed them that God has not yet sent Christ a second time (to end the world) because God is patient toward those who are in sin. 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.”

God could send His Son to destroy the world the moment that we sin – and we would forever be lost in our sins. However, He chooses to wait, enduring the wrongs we do to Him when we sin. He does this because He desires that we will repent of our sins, obey Him, and be saved! So, He is being patient toward us because He desires for us to be saved. Yet, He has also told us that His patience with us is not endless. The very next verse says that there will be a day on which He will send Christ and end this world (2 Peter 3:10).

He is unchanging

God is unchanging. The Bible writer James says that God “does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). Hebrews 13:8 also says that Jesus Christ remains the same: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Although people change, God remains the same!

The consistency of God should be a great comfort to us. For, the God we can serve today is the same God we have been studying about. His nature has not changed. He continues to be holy, merciful, loving, gracious, severe, faithful, patient, etc. And, He will be exactly the same tomorrow and for every day – even into eternity! Additionally, the word God has spoken to us in the pages of the Bible “endures forever” (1 Peter 1:25). This consistency allows us to find stability in a world full of change and to fully trust in and obey Him concerning the promises He has made.

Conclusion

This is the God of the universe – the one true and living God! Fulfilling your true purpose in life depends on you having an accurate understanding of who this great and awesome God is! So, what should you take from this study? (1) A firm conviction that there really is an eternal God (who has revealed Himself to you through creation and through His word) and that three Beings possess the nature of being God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). (2) A basic understanding of some of God’s characteristics – that He is all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, holy, loving, gracious and merciful, impartial, jealous, good and severe, faithful, patient, and unchanging. While we could discuss more, I hope that this lesson has helped you to understand who God is!

Study Questions

Why is it essential to know the answer to this question?

1. God Was, Is, And Always Will Be

What does the Bible teach concerning God’s existence in the past?

What does the Bible teach concerning God's existence today?

What does it mean for God to be jealous?

What does the Bible teach concerning God's existence in the future?

What does it mean for God to be good and severe?

How can you know that there is a God?

What does it mean for God to be faithful?

What three Beings possess the nature of being God?

What does it mean for God to be patient?

2. Some Characteristics Of God

What does it mean for God to be all-powerful?

What does it mean for God to be unchanging?

What does it mean for God to be all-knowing?

What does it mean for God to be ever-present?

What does it mean for God to be holy?

What does it mean for God to be loving?

What does it mean for God to be gracious and merciful?

What does it mean for God to be impartial?

Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Lesson 2: Where Are We Going And Why Are We Here?

You have probably considered the true meaning of life and what happens after death at some point. Perhaps you have considered your own ideas about these questions. Perhaps you asked your parents about this. Perhaps you have talked with your friends about it. Perhaps you have even searched for books or other information on the subject. But, have you ever considered what God has to say about the true meaning of life and what happens after death?

As we consider this series of life's most essential questions, we must ask, "Where are we going and why are we here?" The Bible gives us a clear, definitive answer for this question. Actually, there are two intimately related questions in this question. First, the question of, "Where are we going?" Second, the question, "Why are we here?"

Actually, the Bible is the only way we can know the true answer to these questions. Although people can observe that everyone dies physically, it is impossible to observe what (if anything) happens on the other side of death. Only the Bible (as God's word) can accurately provide information on this subject. Therefore, since the Bible is the only source containing these answers, it is the only book that can accurately describe the true purpose of our earthly existence.

Both of these questions get to fundamental aspects of our existence on the earth. Therefore, this question is an *essential* question because it applies to everyone who has ever lived (or will ever live) and

will dramatically impact the way in which we choose to live our lives on the earth (if we accept the truth on the subject)! So, in this second lesson, we will seek the answer to the question, "Where are we going and why are we here?"

The Soul Of Man

Before we look directly into the two questions involved in our study, we need to establish that there is something unique about mankind's existence. While we can see the physical element of our existence, we have to recognize that there is something more. This other part of our existence is called a "soul" and is the spiritual element to our existence.

Mankind has a soul that survives physical death

The special thing about this soul is that it survives physical death. In fact, it is when the soul departs from the body that physical death occurs. James 2:26 says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, "and the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

So, as we will see a bit later in this study, we will all experience this time of physical death. When this happens, the spirit/soul departs from the body. While physical death marks the end of our physical lives (as the body will return to the dust of the earth), we will continue to exist in the spiritual realm (as our souls will continue to live on).

Created in the image of God

Mankind has a soul because we have been created in the image of God. The book of Genesis describes the creation of mankind in the following way. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.' So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female" (Genesis 1:26-27).

Of all the things God created on this earth, only mankind is said to have been created “in the image of God.” But, what does being created in the image of God help us understand about our nature? Certainly, the Scriptures teach that this is not a physical resemblance. For, God does not have a physical body. Rather, “God is spirit” (John 4:24). This means that mankind has also been given a spirit (or, soul).

Passages demonstrating this truth

A number of other passages also help us to see that mankind has a soul. And, it is essential to recognize that this soul survives physical death. That is, the soul continues to live on. Consider a few passages briefly.

In Luke 16:22-23, two individuals (identified as a rich man and Lazarus) are each shown to have a continued existence after they experienced physical death. “One day the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torment in Hades, he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off, with Lazarus at his side.” We’ll talk more about their continued existence later in this study.

Luke 20:37-38 says, “Moses even indicated in the passage about the burning bush that the dead are raised, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead but of the living, because all are living to him.” Jesus was talking about the occasion God spoke to Moses from the burning bush (see Exodus 3). And, whenever God claimed to *be* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the necessary implication is that they continued to live. This is because God is not the God of the dead, but of the living – “because all are living to him.” Therefore, even though these three men had been physically dead for many years, God indicated that they all still continued to exist!

Listen to the statement Jesus made to the thief who expressed remorse and belief in Jesus while he was dying on the cross next to Jesus in Luke 23:43. Jesus told him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Now, they were both going to die physically. Yet, Jesus said they would continue to exist in a place called “paradise” that day. Surely, there must have been more to their existence than just their physical lives!

Paul also plainly tells of an existence apart from the body in 2 Corinthians 5:1-8. He speaks of a temporary physical existence by calling it his “tent” (since a tent is only a temporary place to live). Then, he speaks of having a “building from God, an eternal dwelling in the heavens, not made with hands.” Just as a building is meant to be a permanent structure, Paul speaks of another kind of dwelling that comes after the “tent” is destroyed. So, for now, we live in this physical body (or, tent). But, we will continue to live on and put on a spiritual body that will last throughout eternity. For those who serve God, Paul said that it would even be preferable to “be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (verse 8). Although we will learn about the place God has prepared for those who obey Him later in this lesson, recognize that there is clearly a continued existence after physical death.

So, the Bible clearly demonstrates (through these and other passages) that mankind has been created with a soul that survives physical death. Again, Ecclesiastes 12:7 simply states that “the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” That is, when the physical body experiences death, it will turn back to dust (just as it was created from the dust of the ground, see Genesis 2:7). But, the spiritual existence will continue on. This fact will have a great impact on our discussion of these questions!

Where Are We Going?

Having seen that we have all been created with souls that will continue to exist past our physical deaths, we now need to consider *where* we will exist and what will happen to us there. In addition, learning these truths will help us discover our true purpose in life. For, we all have choices to make on this earth that will impact where we will live and what we will experience after death. Surely, this ought to have a great impact on how we choose to live on the earth.

Many different people living on earth

Before we get an answer to this question, I want you to consider some other questions. Why are there so many people living on earth? Is there a

reason there are billions of people who currently live on the face of this earth?

Then, why is each one of these billions of people different in some way from all the others? Certainly, there are not two people identical on this earth. Each individual has different qualities, characteristics, skills, weaknesses, etc. Why aren't we all exactly alike?

Do we all have the same purpose in life – or do we all have different purposes? Do individuals living in one country have a different purpose than individuals living in another country? Does your purpose in life differ depending on your age or abilities? Does your purpose in life differ from another depending on whether you are wealthy or poor?

While there are billions of people living on this earth (and billions more who have lived previously) and while we are all different in so many ways, there are some similarities. And, as we will see in this lesson, it is through these similarities that we will find the true purpose in life!

What are our similarities? First, we have already seen that we each have been given a soul that survives this earth. Second, we will all die, be judged, and spend eternity somewhere – either in Heaven or in Hell. All of this works to demonstrate that we all have the same purpose in living on this earth (which we'll talk about more a little later in this study)!

Death

We will all die someday. That is, we each have an appointment with death. Hebrews 9:27 says, "And just as it is appointed for people to die once – and after this, judgment." Just as an appointment indicates that you have something to do or somewhere to be at a specific time, having an appointment with death indicates that we will all certainly experience physical death. The only difference between a normal appointment and this appointment is that we do not know our appointment times with death. Yet, no matter who you are (i.e. no matter how old or young you may be, how healthy you may seem to be, how important you may be to other people, how much money you may have, etc.), you will die!

Additionally, James put the duration of our lives into perspective by comparing them to a vapor that appears for only a short time before it vanishes

away. He also emphasizes that we do not know how long our lives will last. He writes, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring – what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes. Instead, you should say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil." (James 4:13-16).

As you embrace the reality that you will die (just as everyone will die), you should consider exactly what happens. Of course, all the functions of your physical body that worked to sustain your life stop (i.e. your heart stops beating, your brain stop functioning, your organs stop working, etc.). Then, the Bible describes physical death as being the time your physical body and soul separate. Again, James 2:26 (in making a point about the connection between faith and works) says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." Also, Ecclesiastes 12:7 said that your physical body will return to the dust of the ground, but your soul will return to God. The Bible clearly teaches that you will experience physical death – as your soul will depart from your physical body. Then, we must continue to study the Bible to see what will happen to your soul after your physical death.

Hades

Those who die before Jesus comes back will go to Hades. Hades is the realm of the dead. It is the place where those who have died in the past are today. And, there are two sections (or, compartments) in Hades that are described in Luke 16:23-26 (the passage describing the rich man and Lazarus I referenced earlier).

"And being in torment in Hades, he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off, with Lazarus at his side. 'Father Abraham!' he called out, 'Have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame!' 'Son,' Abraham said, 'remember that during your life you received your good things, just as Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, while you are in agony. Besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to pass

over from here to you cannot; neither can those from there cross over to us.”

First, there is a section of comfort. This is referred to as Abraham’s side (or, bosom) and is called “paradise” by Jesus (Luke 23:43). This is where Lazarus went after he died, according to the text – and is where Jesus and the penitent thief on the cross went when they died (compare Luke 23:43 and Acts 2:31). This is a peaceful place that is free from everything that is evil and from every kind of suffering.

Second, there is a section of torment. This is the place the rich man went after he died. The rich man was tormented so much in this place because of the flame that he desired to have a drop of water given to him to cool his tongue and provide a moment’s relief from his agony. But, not even this relief was granted.

In between these two sections of Hades is a great chasm that is fixed so that those in one section cannot pass to the other. Their fate is already sealed at this point – and they experience the outcome of how they had lived their lives. The Bible clearly teaches the law of sowing and reaping (see Galatians 6:7-8). So, those who live for themselves and sin while they are on the earth will experience torment whenever their lives end. But, those who live for God while they are on the earth will experience paradise whenever their lives end.

So, the Bible teaches that, if you die before the return of Jesus Christ, you will go to one of these two sections of Hades – either Paradise or torment. You will experience a continued conscious, spiritual existence while you wait for the final Judgment. And, what you experience in this place will depend on whether you lived for God or not. Then, whenever Jesus Christ returns, you will be brought out of this place and experience what we will be considering next.

The coming of Christ

Christ is coming again. In John 14:3, Jesus said, “If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.” Jesus also said that nobody on this earth knows when His coming will be. In Matthew 24:36, He said, “Now concerning that day and hour no one knows – neither the angels of heaven nor the Son – except the Father alone.” In Matthew 24:42-44, Jesus said, “Therefore be alert, since you

don’t know what day your Lord is coming. But know this: If the homeowner had known what time the thief was coming, he would have stayed alert and not let his house be broken into. This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” Again, in Matthew 25:13, He said, “Therefore be alert, because you don’t know either the day or the hour.”

What will happen at the time when Christ returns? Consider three main points. First, the dead will rise. In John 5:28-29, Jesus said, “Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of condemnation.” So, those who are in Hades (both in comfort and torment) will be brought out. Revelation 20:13 pictures the great Judgment scene (that will follow the coming of Christ) and informs us, “Then the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them; each one was judged according to their works.”

Second, everyone will be judged. We’ll focus on the Judgment in just a moment – and talk about what the Bible tells us about this major event. For now, just recognize that the Judgment will take place after Jesus returns (as John 5:28-29 and Revelation 20:13 said).

Third, the earth will be destroyed. Whenever Jesus returns, this earth will no longer be needed for anything. So, the earth and everything in it will be destroyed by fire. Listen to 2 Peter 3:10-12. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness as you wait for the day of God and hasten its coming. Because of that day, the heavens will be dissolved with fire and the elements will melt with heat.”

The Bible teaches that you will take part in the return of Jesus Christ and this great resurrection! Although you do not know when, you must recognize that Christ is coming. And, you must live your life preparing for this day. For, when He comes, every earthly thing will be destroyed and you will be judged for how you have lived your earthly life.

The Judgment

Everybody who has lived on this earth will stand before Jesus Christ and be judged when He comes again. This includes you! This Judgment will compare how people have lived their earthly lives by the law God has revealed in the pages of His word (the Bible). And, since Jesus is God and knows everything (as we discussed in lesson 1), we can be certain that He will not make any mistake during this Judgment.

Listen to how Jesus pictured the Judgment Day in Matthew 25:31-33. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left.” Then, verse 34 says that He will tell those on His right hand, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” But, verse 41 says that He will tell those on His left hand, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!”

So, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” Ecclesiastes 12:14 adds, “For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.” Nothing you do while you live on this earth will escape God’s attention. He sees every good and every evil thing you do (Proverbs 15:3). And, you will be judged for it all.

The standard He will use to determine whether you have lived a good or evil life is the law God has given in the pages of the Bible. For you (and everyone who is living today), the law given in the pages of the New Testament will be the standard. Jesus said, “The one who rejects me and doesn’t receive my sayings has this as his judge: The word I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (John 12:48). And, when the Judgment Day is pictured in Revelation 20:11-15, verse 12 says, “I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written

in the books.” These “books” are the books of the Bible that contain the words of God.

The Bible teaches that you will be judged according to the things you have done while you have lived on earth, whether they were good or whether they were evil! You will not escape this Judgment. And, you will not be able to hide anything you have done from the one who will judge you.

Eternity

The soul God has given to mankind will continue to exist forever. As we saw from Matthew 25, there are only two options as to where each person will spend eternity. Based on the judgment you receive (as previously described), you will either spend eternity in Heaven or in Hell.

Let’s take a moment to consider what eternity in Heaven will be like. It is described as eternal life (Matthew 25:46). This is a beautiful place that is a true paradise, pictured in Revelation 21:1-22:5. It is a place where there will be no pain, sorrow, or death (Revelation 21:4). It is a place where there will be no evil. Revelation 21:27 says (concerning Heaven), “Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those written in the Lamb’s book of life.” And, it is a place where you will forever be with God. In John 14:3, Jesus promised, “If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.”

Let’s also take a moment to consider what eternity in Hell will be like. It is described as eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46). It is a place represented by fire and darkness. Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars – their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” Matthew 25:30 pictures this place as a place of “outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Mark 9:47-48 says, “And if your eye causes you to fall away, gouge it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” And, it is a place where you will be eternally separated from God. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 says that those who do not know or obey God will experience God’s “vengeance with flaming fire” and “will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord’s

presence and from his glorious strength.” So, Hell will be a truly godless place that is full of complete agony.

The Bible teaches that you will certainly spend your eternity in one of these two places. You could spend eternity in Heaven, where you will experience all of the joys we have described and be with God forever. Or, you could spend eternity in Hell, where you will experience the suffering we have described and be separated from God forever.

As you consider your two options as to where you will spend eternity, you must seriously evaluate which one of the two you want to live in. Clearly, there is a connection between how you live your earthly life and where you will spend eternity – and no one who really understands what Heaven and Hell will be like wants to miss out on Heaven and go to Hell. So, it is important to make up your mind right now that you will do whatever God says you must in order to go to Heaven!

Why Are We Here?

Since these things describe where we are all going, it is necessary for us to now consider the question, “Why are we here?” The answer to this second question is dependent on the things we have already established – that we have been created with a spiritual existence (a soul that survives physical death) and the things that will happen at and after death. For, our purpose in living on this earth cannot be just about the getting and experiencing earthly things.

Many suggested answers

People answer this question in many different ways today. In doing so, they make living life on this earth about things that will not last. But, we should all learn from Israel’s King Solomon. Whenever he wrote the Bible book of Ecclesiastes, he reported on his search for true meaning and happiness in life. He was a wealthy king who seemed to have it all. He tried wealth. He tried worldly sources of pleasure. He tried earthly wisdom and knowledge. He tried relationships. He tasted the best this world had to offer while he lived. But, he concluded that it was all futile (meaningless) because he was going to die and

everything he had worked to accumulate and achieve would be left behind.

Listen to what he said in Ecclesiastes 1:2-4. “‘Absolute futility,’ says the Teacher. ‘Absolute futility. Everything is futile.’ What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun? A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.”

He continued in Ecclesiastes 2:9-11, “So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me. All that my eyes desired, I did not deny them. I did not refuse myself any pleasure, for I took pleasure in all my struggles. This was my reward for all my struggles. When I considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun.”

A man who seemed to have everything there was to have and experience on this earth during the time he lived, saw the absolute worthlessness of it all. He knew that he would soon die and lose everything he had worked for. So, like Solomon, let’s consider a few of the false answers this question receives and understand why they do not actually offer the true explanation of our purpose in living on this earth.

(1) Gain wealth. Although wealth can be used to accomplish many good things, your wealth will not do you any good whenever you die. 1 Timothy 6:7 simply states, “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out.” So, the best that earthly wealth can do is a few temporary good works. Yet, your wealth will clearly be of no benefit to you beyond this earthly life. Is *this* what life is all about?

(2) Be happy. Happiness is also a good thing. But, true happiness will only be found through living a life that is pleasing to God. While some turn to drugs, sex, physical possessions, and other earthly things for happiness, the happiness that is promoted by the Bible is *not* found through physical things. When your life ends, none of the physical sources of happiness will be there to provide any benefit, comfort, or pleasure for you. In fact, Hebrews 11:24-26 calls the pleasures involved in living for earthly things “fleeting pleasures.” Is *this* what life is all about?

(3) Experience the most that you can possibly experience. Some suggest that your purpose in life is to see the most sights, experience the greatest earthly

pleasures, experience the best that this life has to offer, etc. However, when your life ends, none of these things will be there for you. Is *this* what life is all about?

(4) Family. Family is a wonderful, God-given blessing for you to have during your lifetime. But, your family members are also dying (and some may have died already). Does your life lose some of its purpose whenever a family member dies? Is *this* what life is all about?

(5) Friends. Good friends are also great blessings. Still, your friends are dying (and, perhaps, have died). Does your life lose some of its purpose whenever a friend dies? Is *this* what life is all about?

Do these things properly describe your purpose in life? Or, is there some other reason that you live? Is there some greater purpose for your life? If there is no other purpose in life, then your life is empty/meaningless – just like King Solomon concluded! Your life would simply be focused on living a few self-serving years! How sad this reality would be! And, this reality would be even sadder for those who die young, for those who die in the womb, or for anyone else who never really gets to experience any of these things! However, let me eagerly assert that you are here for a particular purpose – a magnificent purpose! A purpose that, if you do your part, will result in tremendous blessings!

Our magnificent purpose

Our magnificent purpose is to devote ourselves entirely to God so that we will bring glory to Him! As Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, he repeatedly demonstrated how worthless earthly pursuits are – because they all end at death (if not before). However, he recognized that there really is a magnificent purpose for living on this earth. He identified this purpose in the final two verses of the book.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, “When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity. For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.” So, let’s consider this two-fold purpose for living, since we will all be judged by God one day.

First, you must Fear God. This is a deep, reverential respect for God that is coupled with being afraid of disobeying Him (knowing the

consequences for doing so). In this deep respect for God, you must recognize that your life is not about yourself. Instead, your life is about bringing glory and honor to God. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 shows us that our physical bodies and lives are not to be wasted on selfish pursuits. Instead, our bodies belong to God and we should “glorify God” with our bodies! So, we must respect God so much (recognizing who He is, as we discussed in lesson one) that we want to please and bring glory and honor to Him in everything we do in our lives!

Second, you must keep His commandments. Keeping God’s commandments (recorded in the pages of the Bible, as we will see from lesson three) is the only way to truly show your deep respect for God and to glorify Him in your life. God has given us all free will so that we can either *choose* to obey Him or disobey Him. Therefore, we are free to pursue our own selfish interests, or we are free to pursue righteousness by the grace of God! Sadly, most people choose to pursue their own selfish interests. Jesus demonstrated this when He said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Yet, those who truly love God will keep His commandments and will not consider His commandments burdensome (1 John 5:3)!

So, are you living your life according to this magnificent purpose? Or, are you living your life according to some other purpose? Only those who live according to the way God instructs through His Word will spend eternity in Heaven. All others will spend eternity in Hell.

Conclusion

In recognition of where you are going, you should determine to live according to this magnificent purpose! Please seriously consider the “facts of life” as we have been discussing and your true purpose in life! So, what should you take from this study? (1) That you (and all people) have been created with a soul that survives physical death. (2) That you will experience the things that we have discussed – death, Hades (if you die before the return of Christ), the second coming of Jesus Christ, the

Judgment, and eternity. (3) That you should devote your life to bringing glory to God by fearing Him and obeying His commandments. While we could discuss more, I hope this lesson has helped you understand where we are all going and why we are here!

Study Questions

Why is it essential to know the answer to this question?

1. The Soul Of Man

Does mankind have a soul that survives physical death?

What does it mean for mankind to have been created in the image of God?

Briefly explain the following passages which demonstrate the truth that mankind has a soul that survives physical death.

1. Luke 16:22-23 –
2. Luke 20:37-38 –
3. Luke 23:43 –
4. 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 –

2. Where Are We Going?

Does everyone on earth have a different purpose? What are some similarities between those who live on earth? What is the significance of these similarities?

What does the Bible teach about death?

What does the Bible teach about Hades?

What does the Bible teach about the coming of Christ?

What does the Bible teach about the Judgment?

What does the Bible teach about eternity?

3. Why Are We Here?

List and discuss some commonly *suggested* answers to this question:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What is mankind's magnificent purpose in life? Discuss each one of the following points.

1. Fear God –
2. Keep His commandments –

Are you living your life according to this magnificent purpose?

Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Lesson 3: What Is The Bible?

You see a copy of the Bible many of the places you go: Hospitals, hotels, doctors' offices, the family room of your friends/relatives, etc. There are many programs and applications for your computer and phone designed for it. There is a section in many bookstores devoted to it. You may even own one or more of them. In fact, it is widely believed to be the most published and distributed book of all time! But, what exactly is the book that is called the "Bible"?

As we seek the answers to life's most essential questions, we must seek the right answer to the question: "What is the Bible?" Is the Bible different from all of the other millions of books that have been written? If so, why is it different from all of those other books? Is the Bible a book that is important to you? Is it important to your neighbor? Is it important to your family members, co-workers, and friends? Is it relevant to your purpose in life (which we discussed in our last study)? If so, how?

Through the first two lessons of this study, I have already made many references to this book. I have claimed that it teaches the things we have been studying. Still, it is essential to understand why the things taught in the Bible are so important to understand and obey. For, if the Bible is like every other book on this earth, then there is nothing all that special about it.

However, as we seriously consider some facts about the Bible, we can quickly discover that there really is something special about it that makes it different from every other book. In fact, the Bible is more than just a *special* and *important* book. It is an *essential* book because it is fully authoritative to tell people what is absolutely right and wrong.

Therefore, in this third lesson, we will seek the answer to the question, "What is the Bible?"

Some Basic Facts About The Bible

Let's begin by just observing the Bible for a few moments and considering some basics. In case you have not spent very much (or any) time with the Bible before, let me take just a few moments to introduce you to this wonderful book. Consider how it is organized and its theme.

"Bible"

The word "Bible" is used today in reference to a specific collection of 66 books that many consider to be authoritative. These 66 books were written by approximately 40 different human authors. Yet, it is claimed that they wrote under Divine inspiration (a claim we will examine later in this study).

Since the Bible has been written, each book has been subdivided into chapters and verses, making it easier to find specific passages. Therefore, you will commonly see references that look like this: Acts 2:38. The name (in this case, "Acts") identifies which of the 66 books is under consideration (note that sometimes the books will be abbreviated). The number in front of the colon (:) identifies the chapter (in this case, chapter two). The number(s) after the colon identifies the verse(s) (38, in this example). When multiple verse are referenced, there will be a hyphen or comma between the verses. For example, if you see Acts 2:38-41, it is a reference to the book of Acts, chapter two, verses 38 *through* 41. And, if you see Acts 2:38, 41, it is a reference to the book of Acts, chapter two, verse 38 and verse 41.

The 66 books of the Bible are divided into two major sections: The Old Testament and the New Testament. First, the Old Testament contains 39 individual books (ranging from Genesis to Malachi). This represents a period of time prior to the Christian age – a period covering the beginning of the world through about 400 years prior to the birth of Jesus Christ. There are books of law (known as the Law of Moses), history, poetry, and prophecy.

However, it is important to recognize that we do *not* live under the Old Testament law today. This law has been taken away and replaced with the Law of Christ (which you can read about in the pages of the New Testament). Colossians 2:14 makes it very clear that the Old Law was taken away through Jesus Christ's death on the cross (which we'll discuss in lesson five): "He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross." So, the message that is contained in the first 39 books of the Bible do not represent a binding law for us today. However, the message of those first 39 books is useful for our learning – and ought to serve as a great encouragement and help to us as we seek to glorify God in our lives (read Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; and Hebrews 11:1-12:4).

Second, the New Testament contains 27 individual books (ranging from Matthew to Revelation). These books discuss the life of Jesus Christ, the beginning and history of the church of Christ, letters that were written to churches and Christians, and the prophetic book of Revelation. These books contain the Law of Christ – the law that we live under today.

These books contain the fulfillment of hundreds of Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Savior, the establishment of Christ's church, and the giving of the new covenant. In fact, as you read the message of these 27 books, it is essential that you realize you are studying the new covenant – and understand that you are obligated to keep its instructions! This new covenant is a great blessing to live under – as there is forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ under it! Consider the promise God made concerning this new covenant in Hebrews 8:12: "For I will forgive their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins."

The theme of the Bible

Like other books, the Bible has a central theme. This theme of the Bible is "salvation"! The entire story of the Bible revolves around this central theme. In the beginning of the Bible story, God creates man and woman and places them in the garden of Eden (a paradise on earth). However, as they sin and are cast out of the garden, the story shifts to the need for a Savior. The remainder of the Old Testament shows God's dealings with His people (the Israelites) and tells about a Savior who is coming

through their ancestry. "Christ is coming" is the message of the Old Testament. In the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the message shifts to "Christ is here" – as Jesus Christ is born into the world and lives on earth. After His death, burial, and resurrection, Christ ascends into Heaven. The message from that point forward (Acts 1 through the remainder of the New Testament) is "Christ is coming again to judge the world and take His people to Heaven with Him" – giving instructions about following Jesus Christ and being saved from sin so people can go to Heaven.

The Bible contains this wonderful story of hope and love. It is no wonder that John 3:16 may be the most familiar verse in the entire Bible! It says, "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." Now, through the Savior who has lived and given His life as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, we can live with Him in Heaven one day – if we believe and obey Him!

The Bible Contains The Revelation Of God's Will To Mankind

The Bible is different from every other book that has ever been written. Every other book has a human origin. But, the Bible has originated with God!

No ordinary book

Everything we know about the Bible indicates that it is no ordinary book! Consider that the Bible was written by approximately 40 different human authors, over a period of approximately 1,500 years, in three different languages, on multiple continents, and has been greatly preserved from the first day of writing until now. Yet, the Bible only has one message and no errors or contradictions! What other book could accomplish such an incredible feat?

No other book is comparable to it! Consider that the words we read when we study the Bible are words that were written from around 2,000 years ago (the words in the New Testament) to about 3,500 years ago (when Moses wrote the first five books of

the Bible). Therefore, everything that we know about the Bible shows it was not the product of humans, but of God (though God used those 40 or so men to write His message)! Still, only God could accomplish what the words written in the Bible have accomplished!

Just think about it for a few moments. Let's suppose that you decided to start writing a book today with a designated theme. You wrote a little bit during your lifetime and then you died. Later, someone else picked up where you left off. And, this continued off and on for 1,500 years, going through 40 different authors, using different languages, on different continents. Do you suppose there would be any contradictions and errors? Do you suppose that, as people read it over the course of hundreds and thousands of years that it would ever say something that was demonstratively false? Do you suppose your original theme would have been lost? Yet, the fact that there are no contradictions and errors in the Bible (though they have often been alleged), that it never says anything that can be proven wrong, and that the book has been greatly preserved all demonstrate that it has a Divine origin!

It contains the words of God

God has communicated with people in different ways throughout history. He has spoken directly to some people – as He did with Adam, Noah, and the Jewish fathers. He has revealed His will through visions and dreams – as He did with Joseph, Peter, and others. Jesus taught people directly whenever He lived on earth. The apostles and prophets were directly inspired by the Holy Spirit (who revealed God's message to them) and they told others what God had said. However, God does *not* communicate with us in these same ways today. But, He *does* communicate with us today.

Today, He speaks to us today through His written word – the Bible! 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reveals that the Scriptures contain the words of God: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The inspiration of the Scriptures by God means that they were literally breathed-out by Him. So, please appreciate the fact that whenever you read the Bible, you are *not* just reading a good story, the advice of men or women for living a better life, or merely a book of suggestions. Instead, you are reading the

very words of the almighty and all-wise God who created all things!

How the Bible was written

Again, 2 Timothy 3:16 says that "All Scripture is inspired by God." The words that are written in the Bible are not the words of just any person who witnessed the events that are described in its pages. Rather, God inspired these men to write. 2 Peter 1:20-21 says, "Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

So, the work of inspiring these 40 or so people to write the words contained in the Bible belonged to the Holy Spirit. Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:3-5: "The mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have briefly written above. By reading this you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. This was not made known to people in other generations as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."

What is Paul saying in this passage? The message of the gospel (which had once been a mystery) has now been revealed – as the Holy Spirit revealed it to the apostles and prophets (like Paul). So, when we read the God-inspired messages of Paul, the other apostles, and the prophets, we can understand the message of God concerning our eternal salvations!

The Holy Spirit was uniquely qualified to do this work of revealing the will of God. 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 explains why. "Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except his spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." So, the Holy Spirit knows what is in God's mind. Therefore, when we read the words He revealed to the apostles and prophets who wrote the Bible, we can also know what is in God's mind (see 1 Corinthians 2:16)!

The word of God is complete

The revelation of God's will to mankind is complete. There will not be a new message from God that reveals what is in His mind. His word is not evolving or changing. Instead, the faith that is

revealed in the pages of the New Testament has been “delivered to the saints once for all” (Jude 1:3). Galatians 1:6-9 also warns against people who preach a different gospel: “I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!”

Since the revelation of God’s will to mankind is complete and perfect, people must not add to God’s word or take away from it. Revelation 22:18-19 plainly warns concerning this! “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and the holy city, which are written about in this book.”

The Bible is from God, containing His words, and it will endure forever! 1 Peter 1:24-25 says, “For ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like a flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this word is the gospel that was proclaimed to you.”

The Bible Provides Us With All We Need For Living Righteous Lives

The Bible’s message is from God. Now, as you recognize this fact, you need to consider what God wants you to know. Surely, He is not just giving you meaningless information. Instead, the Bible’s message is actually about telling you (and everyone who hears its message) what is needed for living a righteous life (one that is right in God’s sight).

It tells us about Christ’s life, death, burial, and resurrection

The message of the New Testament is called the “gospel” of Jesus Christ. The word “gospel” simply means “good news.” So, the message of the New Testament revolves around the “good news” God gives to us through Jesus Christ – especially pertaining to Jesus’ life, death, burial, and resurrection.

It is only through Jesus Christ that we are capable of any kind of righteous life after we have sinned. We will focus on the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in much greater detail in lesson five of this series – where we will discuss what Jesus has done and why these things are so important. For now, simply realize that without understanding, believing, and accepting what God has done for you through Jesus Christ, you could never have eternal life with God in Heaven! And, the only place you can get all the right information about Jesus Christ is the Bible!

It tells us all we need to know in order to become Christians

The gospel is God’s power unto salvation. Romans 1:16-17 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” It is within the pages of the Bible (specifically in the New Testament) that we can read about the things God commands us to do in order to be saved from our sins (which we’ll discuss in lesson six).

You see, this gospel must be obeyed if people want to be forgiven of their sins and live eternally with God in Heaven. Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus Christ is the “source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.” And, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 warns of the punishment that will be brought against those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ: “and to give relief to you who are afflicted, along with us. This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels, when he takes vengeance with flaming fire on those who don’t know God and on those who don’t obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength."

It tells us all that we need to live faithful Christian lives

Consider 2 Timothy 3:16-17 again: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

The Bible provides us with all the instruction we need in order to live the kind of lives that are pleasing to God – in every aspect of our lives. The Bible teaches us how we can develop our individual character and habits in a way that is pleasing to God. The Bible teaches us how we can have good marriages and serve Him through our marriages. The Bible provides the necessary instruction for pleasing God as mothers and fathers. The Bible teaches us how we can please Him as children. The Bible teaches us how to properly function as members of local churches and as citizens of nations. The Bible helps us be the kind of employers and employees He desires us to be. The Bible guides us through our personal struggles and temptations. There is no aspect of our lives that is not covered within the pages of God's word (the Bible)! It really does completely equip us for every good work!

The Bible Will Be The Criteria Used To Judge Us

The Bible is from God and tells us everything we need to know in order to be right with God. But, why is that even important? The fact is that the Bible will be the criteria (or, standard) God will use to judge us all, determining whether we will spend eternity in Heaven or in Hell.

We will be judged

God does not force us to obey Him. Each person has been created with free will to choose either to obey God or to disobey God. That said, there *are* severe consequences if we do not follow Him.

As we discussed in lesson two, God will judge the world through Jesus Christ on the Day He has chosen. 2 Corinthians 5:10 teaches that we will

all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged according to the things we have done while we have lived on earth – whether they were good or bad. Those who are right with God will spend eternity in Heaven. And, those who are not right with God will spend eternity in Hell.

But, what is the standard that will determine whether the things we have done were "good" or "bad," "right" or "wrong"? Will He simply make up criteria to judge us by on that Day? Of course not! Remember (from lesson one) that God is an impartial and fair Judge (go back and review Romans 2:5-11). Therefore, we know that the standard used for judgment will also be fair. In fact, as we will see, He has given us the answers to the "test of life" (in the Bible)! But, we must study and apply these answers to our lives so that we will pass the "test"!

God has said that His word is the standard

God has told us that His word will be the standard He will use to judge us on the Day Jesus Christ returns. Therefore, our lives will be compared to the things He has said within the pages of the Bible. How do we know this to be true? Listen to a couple passages that plainly demonstrate that the words God has revealed in the books of the Bible will be the standard for Judgment.

Listen to Jesus in John 12:48. He said, "The one who rejects me and doesn't receive my sayings has this as his judge: The word I have spoken will judge him on the last day." Then, in the Judgment Day scene pictured in Revelation 20:11-15, listen to verse 12. "I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books."

So, all of the words that are contained within the Bible (since they are all from God) will be the criteria for judgment. Those who lived and died under the Old Testament law (prior to Jesus' new law taking effect) will be judged by that law. However, since we live under the new law of Jesus Christ, we will all be judged by the words contained within the New Testament.

But, it is important to understand that we will not *only* be judged by the words Christ spoke while He lived on this earth. Rather, we will be judged according to all the things that are written in the pages of the New Testament. For instance, the

apostle Paul made it perfectly clear that the things he wrote were “the Lord’s command” (1 Corinthians 14:37) and “the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). In fact, Jesus told His apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit to them and teach them more than what He had taught while He lived on this earth (see John 16:12-15). Therefore, the entire New Testament is the standard to determine what is “right” and “wrong,” “good” and “bad,” today!

The danger of rejecting His word while we live

Again, remember Jesus’ words in John 12:48. If you reject the words of God, you reject the words that will judge you on the Last Day! So, it *does* matter whether you are obedient to the things that are written in the Bible! For, those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will experience eternal punishment!

We each have a choice *today*: Will we obey God’s word or will we disobey God’s word? Again, God does not force us to obey Him. Yet, it is my sincere hope that you will recognize the seriousness of living your life according to the words written in the Bible, and I plead with you that you will search for Bible authority in everything you do in your life! Will you dedicate yourself to live according to book, chapter, and verse? Will you join those who are attempting to live their lives entirely according to the standard of God’s word? Remember: Severe consequences will be given to those who reject the teachings of God’s word and a great reward will be given to those who obey God’s word!

Establishing Bible Authority

Since the Bible contains the message from God that will determine where we spend eternity, we all need to make sure that we are living according to its teaching! Only things that are approved by the Bible (i.e. things that have Bible authority) are right with God. Those things that are not approved by the Bible (i.e. do not have Bible authority) are not right with God. So, we need to take some time to consider how we establish Bible authority for a thing in order to know it is right.

The Bible is the only sufficient guide in religion

The Bible tells us how to please God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). But, let me now add that it is *only* the message of the Bible that will fully equip us for every good work! Only it is the criteria God will use to judge us. Human doctrines, human opinions, human traditions (even religious traditions), family members, friends, peers, majority opinion, etc. are all insufficient standards to guide our lives by! Nothing and no one besides the word of God (specifically the New Testament) will be our standard of Judgment!

So, Colossians 3:17 instructs us to do all things in the name of Jesus Christ: “And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” To do everything “in the name of the Lord Jesus” means to do everything by His authority. Since God has spoken to us through Jesus in the words written in the New Testament, we find authority from Jesus through the New Testament.

The words written in the New Testament books of the Bible provide the perfect blueprint for how God wants us to live our lives. So, our responsibility is summarized by 2 Timothy 1:13: “Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” Don’t try to change, add to, or subtract from the perfect pattern/blueprint Jesus Christ has given for our lives in the New Testament. Instead, determine that you will cling to this pattern in every area of your life.

How to establish Bible authority

Since it is so important to have Bible authority for everything we do in our lives, let’s consider some basics about how to establish Bible authority. There are three ways through which we can establish Bible authority and know God is pleased with something. And, please note that these are the same three ways we can know anything to be true. We either must be told by someone who knows, be shown a right example, or draw a necessary conclusion from other things we know to be true.

(1) Through a direct command or statement from God in the New Testament Scriptures. For instance, baptism is commanded in Acts 2:38: “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,

and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” So, we have Bible authority (established by a direct command) and know that it is right to be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins – and we must do so if we want to please God!

(2) Through an approved example in the New Testament Scriptures. For instance, Acts 8:38-39 shows an approved example of baptism: “So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing.” While there are Bible examples of many things (i.e. murder, idolatry, greed, etc.), only examples that show God’s approval are authoritative. So, we have Bible authority (established by an approved example) and know that it is right to be baptized.

(3) Through a forced conclusion from the New Testament Scriptures. This is a conclusion that is *necessary* (not a guess or something that is speculated; but, one that is unmistakable). For instance, Acts 8:38-39 forces us to the conclusion that baptism involved full immersion in water, not a sprinkling or pouring. For, the passage (as we have just read) tells us that both the one being baptized and the one doing the baptizing went down into the water for the baptism – and both came up out of the water. The unmistakable conclusion is that this baptism was an immersion in water – as no other practice would have required both people to go down into the water and come up out of the water! So, we have Bible authority (established by a forced conclusion) and know that it is right to be baptized by immersion in water.

Bible authority is established in these three ways. Although I have used all three to show the action of baptism is approved by God, we only need one of these things to have God’s approval. And, Bible authority is not established in any other way. Bible authority is not established because I *want* the Bible to teach a particular thing. Bible authority is not established because I always *thought* the Bible taught a particular thing. Bible authority is not established because I have always *done things* a particular way. Instead, Bible authority is only established if there is a direct command/statement, an approved example, or a forced conclusion in the New Testament Scriptures.

Generic and specific authority

Now that we understand how to establish Bible authority, let’s consider the two types of authority that can be established. These are generic and specific authority. Whenever you establish Bible authority, it is important to consider which kind of authority has been given.

(1) Generic authority. Generic authority is authority that is given for a thing without specifying how it is to be accomplished. For example, a parent might instruct a child to “go to the grocery store and buy something for dinner.” Authority is established to go to the store and buy something for dinner by a direct command. However, the authority is *generic* because how to go and what to buy were not specified. Therefore, the child could go to the store by walking, riding a bicycle, or by some other means. He could choose to buy chicken, ham, bacon, eggs, or something else for dinner. This would all be acceptable because generic authority was given.

A New Testament example of this principle is found in Mark 16:15. Jesus commanded His apostles, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” Authority is given (established by direct command) to go and preach the gospel. However, the authority was *generic* because how to go was not specified. The apostles could go by walking, riding on an animal, by boat, or whatever they had available to help them obey this instruction.

(2) Specific authority. Specific authority is authority for a thing that is specific in how it must be accomplished. For example, that same parent might instruct the child to “walk to the store and buy hot dogs and macaroni and cheese for dinner.” Authority is given to go to the store and buy something for dinner once again (established by a direct command). However, this time the authority is *specific* because how to go and what to buy were specified. Therefore, it would be a violation of the command for the child to ride a bicycle to the store and buy pizza for dinner!

A New Testament example of *specific* authority is found in Ephesians 5:19 (and all other New Testament passages on the subject of music in worship): “speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord.” The specific action that is authorized is singing. The music is to be made in the heart. The songs that are to be sung are specified as psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Therefore, it would be a violation of the command to worship God by using a mechanical instrument of music or to sing popular culture songs! God has given specific instructions on the matter that are to be followed and not changed!

Conclusion

If you want to go to Heaven and fulfill your true purpose of bringing glory to God throughout your life, you will demand Bible authority for everything you do in your life and obey what God says! This is the only way to know that God is pleased with you. So, what should you take from this study? (1) A basic knowledge about the Bible, how it is structured, and its story of salvation. (2) A knowledge that the Bible contains the words of God. (3) A knowledge that the Bible tells us how to live life in a way that is pleasing to God. (4) A knowledge that the Bible contains the words by which we will be judged. (5) A knowledge of the importance of establishing Bible authority, as well as a knowledge of how to do this. While we could discuss more, I hope that this lesson has helped you understand what the Bible is!

Study Questions

Why is it essential to know the answer to this question?

1. Some Basic Facts About The Bible

What does the word "Bible" mean? Discuss some basic facts about the books of the Bible.

What is the theme of the Bible? How is John 3:16 a wonderful summary of this theme?

2. The Bible Contains The Revelation Of God's Will To Mankind

Discuss some facts that indicate the Bible is no ordinary book.

What does the Bible contain? Why is this significant?

How was the Bible written?

Is the word of God complete?

3. The Bible Provides Us With All That We Need For Living Righteous Lives

What does the Bible tell about Christ? How is this significant?

What does the Bible tell about becoming a Christian? How is this significant?

What does the Bible tell about living a faithful Christian life? How is this significant?

4. The Bible Will Be The Criteria Used To Judge Us

Will there be a day upon which you will be judged? What will happen on that Day?

What will criteria for judgment? How do you know?

What is the danger of rejecting God's word while you live?

5. Establishing Bible Authority

Why is it important to establish *Bible* authority for everything that you do in life?

How can you establish Bible authority?

What is the difference between generic and specific authority?

Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Lesson 4: What Is Sin?

Perhaps you have heard people talk about sin. Perhaps you have even heard preachers preach against sin. Perhaps you can name something that is considered sinful. Perhaps you have always been taught that certain things are sinful. Yet, perhaps, you don't fully understand the concept of sin.

As we endeavor to learn the right answers to life's most essential questions, we must seek the right answer to the question, "What is sin?" Where did it come from? What makes something a "sin"? And, why is sin so bad?

Of all the diseases and illness that have plagued mankind throughout history (i.e. leprosy, cancer, smallpox, tuberculosis, diabetes, dementia, etc.), there is nothing that has been so widespread or so deadly as sin! So, having an accurate understanding of the nature and consequences of sin is essential if we desire to live in a way that glorifies God. In addition, a proper understanding of sin is essential if we want to learn about God's plan for saving mankind (which we'll focus on in the next couple lessons).

As you seriously consider the subject of sin in this lesson, I want you to gain an understanding about what sin is and what sin does. Then, I also want you to make two determinations about sin. First, you should determine to stay away from sin in the future. Second, you should determine to seek the forgiveness of your past sins. You see, sin is nothing to be played with. Therefore, in this fourth lesson, we will seek the answer to the question, "What is sin?"

The Introduction Of Sin To The World

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." You can look around and see all the wonderful things God has created – from the universe, to the sky, to the plants, to the animals, to all the people, etc. While we should stand in amazement at God's wonderful creation, we do recognize that not everything that happens on this earth is wonderful. We should recognize that there is evil, death, and suffering in this world. But, since God is a holy God (as we discussed in lesson one), where did these bad things come from? How did sin come into this world?

God did not create mankind in sin

If we are going to develop an accurate understanding about sin, we need to go back to the beginning – to the creation of people and the garden of Eden. God created mankind in His own image (as we've discussed previously from Genesis 1:26-27). As we've seen, this means that God has created people with a spiritual nature – as well as given us a physical nature.

Furthermore, after God had completed His creation, He declared that it was all "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The obvious question is: How could a holy God who is completely separate from everything evil create people in sin – and then declare that His creation was "very good"? Quite simply, He could not – and He did not!

As we keep reading, Genesis 2 shows us the home God gave to the man and woman He had created (who were named Adam and Eve). This home was called the garden of Eden. It was a true paradise on earth. In this place, Adam and Eve had direct access to and a special relationship with God, His Creator. There was no death or suffering. There was no evil being done. At this point, mankind was entirely *sinless*!

God gave mankind a law

In this home, God gave Adam and Eve one law to obey. He commanded them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is

recorded in Genesis 2:16-17. “And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.’”

This law and its consequence was not too difficult for them to understand. In fact, when the woman was tempted later by the devil, she was able to tell the difference between what the devil was saying to her and what God had said (Genesis 3:1-5). They both knew that there was one tree in the garden that was off-limits to them. While it is doubtful that Eve fully understood what death was (since death had never occurred on the earth), she did understand that God had promised death as the consequence for breaking the law.

In this, we see that mankind has been given free will. God created people in such a way that they can either choose to follow God by keeping His law or choose not to follow God by disobeying His law. God did not force obedience on anyone. Adam and Eve recognized God’s law and had a choice either to obey God or disobey God.

Satan tempted Eve

This is the point at which Satan enters the Bible’s story to tempt Eve. This temptation is recorded in Genesis 3:1-5. “Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?”’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, “You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.”’ ‘No! You will not die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

Satan (the devil, who is the tempter) appeared to Eve, using the form of a serpent. This was a fitting choice, since the serpent “was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made.” He proceeded to lie to Eve about what God had said would happen if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, saying that they would not die whenever they ate from it. Then, he even made the tree look appealing by saying that

God just knows that when they would eat from the tree, their eyes would be opened and they would become like God in knowing good and evil. This made it sound like God was trying to keep something away from Adam and Eve that would be beneficial to them rather than trying to keep them away from something that was harmful.

After listening to Satan as he tempted her, Eve responded (and even involved Adam) in Genesis 3:6. Eve chose to give in to the temptation and satisfy her own desires, thereby disobeying the law of God. The passage says, “The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”

Notice how she looked at the tree differently after the temptation. She had believed the lies of the devil. Rather than viewing the tree as something to be avoided, she saw it as a good source of food, delightful to look at, and desirable for obtaining wisdom. Consequently, she ate of the tree. When she did this, she sinned against God. Then, she proceeded to give some of the fruit to her husband, who also sinned whenever he ate from the tree.

They suffered the consequences for sinning against God

After Adam and Eve had violated the law of God, we get to see whether God was bluffing whenever he said they would die on the day they ate of the fruit – or whether Satan was right. Now, it is important to remember something we established in lesson 1: God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). So, of course God meant what He said and said what He meant!

Genesis 3:14-24 records the punishments God gave to Adam and Eve because of their disobedience. These punishments included labor pains in childbirth for the woman and painful labor for the man as he worked the ground for food. Then, they were both punished by being driven out of the garden of Eden and separated from the tree of life.

Being driven out of the garden and separated from the tree of life would mean that they would experience physical death. Although they did not experience physical death on the day they ate from the forbidden tree, the dying process

certainly did begin. Now, life on this earth would no longer be a blissful paradise that was free from evil, suffering, and death. Sin had ruined that paradise. Later, Genesis 5:5 clearly states that Adam died.

But, the punishments that are described also go beyond physical punishments. More important than the physical punishments, their sin also meant that their relationship with the holy God changed. They were separated from the sort of relationship they had enjoyed with God prior to their sin (while in the garden of Eden). This separation from God was the worst punishment of all. The Bible pictures this kind of separation from God as a *spiritual* death. Unlike Adam and Eve's physical death that did not happen until later, their spiritual death did occur on the day they ate the forbidden fruit!

So, with the sin of Adam and Eve, sin entered the world – and has been here ever since! As we continue to study the subject of sin, we can learn a great deal from this first recorded temptation and sin – as our temptations and sins still occur in the same basic way (though a serpent won't talk with us and we won't be tempted to eat any forbidden fruit). We also continue to experience the evil, suffering, and death that remain in this world because of sin. And, those who sin today continue to experience spiritual death by being separated from God.

Understanding Sin

Now that we have a graphic picture of sin in Adam and Eve, we are prepared to consider sin as it relates to us. As we do, let's first try to understand what sin really is. Surely, sin is not just a single act (i.e. eating forbidden fruit). So, let's understand what all sin has in common and what makes something sinful.

Definition of sin

The concept of sin is doing something God considers to be wrong. As I understand it, the Greek word that is translated "sin" in the New Testament is an archery term. Whenever an archer would miss the target with his/her arrow, the arrow would be

said to have "sinned." That is, the arrow missed the mark/target it was supposed to hit.

That's exactly what sin is! God has set a particular "target" for our lives, our conduct, our words, our attitudes, our thoughts, etc. This target God has set for our lives is found in the pages of the New Testament Scriptures – which is the law we all live under today (as we discussed in lesson three). We sin whenever we miss the "target" He wants us to hit! But, as we'll discuss later in our study, there is a very high price to pay for missing God's mark in our lives!

Remember (from lesson 1), God is a perfectly holy God. And, if we want to be in fellowship and at peace with Him, we must also be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). 1 John 1:5-7 states, "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him. If we say, 'We have fellowship with him,' and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." So, missing the mark God has set for our lives is extremely consequential – in that it goes against the ways of our holy God!

Sin is lawlessness

The Bible also defines sin for us. 1 John 3:4 says, "Everyone who commits sin practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." To be "lawless" is to act against the law, as if there is no law to govern that area of your life. For example, if a city street has a 35 miles per hour speed limit and you travel the street at 50 miles per hour, you are being lawless. You are conducting yourself as if there is no law to govern your speed.

In the same way, sin results whenever you act as if God has not given you a law to live by. Some examples will make this clear. Adam and Eve acted as if God had not given them a law when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So, they sinned (or, missed the mark God had set for their lives).

In the same way, whenever an individual commits murder, he/she sins because God has given a law that forbids murder. Whenever an individual

has sexual relations with someone other than his/her spouse, he/she sins because God has given law regulating sexual relations (i.e. only to be had within the confines of Scriptural marriage). When an individual hates his/her enemy, he/she sins because God has given a command to love one's enemy.

Other verses also help us see that sin occurs because of lawless behavior. 1 John 5:17 teaches that "All unrighteousness is sin." Thus, everything that is outside of God's standard of right is sin (remember that He is entirely righteous – so His laws are also entirely righteous). Furthermore, James 4:17 teaches that failing to do the right thing God wants you to do is sin: "So it is sin to know the good and yet not do it."

Two categories of sin

We might put sin into two categories in order to help us better understand what it is. Although God does not put these labels on sin, this should help us in our own understanding. For, God has given two kinds of laws. He has told us some things He does *not* want us to do. Then, He has also told us some things He *does* want us to do. While both kinds of laws are equally important, we should recognize that we can sin regarding each.

These are sometimes referred to as "sins of commission" and "sins of omission." Both fit the definition of sin in that our actions miss the mark God has set for our lives. And, both categories of sin are equally devastating. That is, neither kind of sin is more serious than the other in terms of spiritual consequences.

First, sometimes God tells us *not* to do something. Sins of commission occur whenever we do what God has said we must not do. So, sins of commission would include things like having unlawful sexual relations, lying, stealing, coveting, gossiping, using profanity, etc. These are all things God has told us *not* to do. If we go ahead and do them, we commit sin.

Second, sometimes God tells us to *do* certain things. Sins of omission occur whenever we fail to do what God has said we must do. So, sins of omission would include things like failing to teach the gospel to others, failing to do good to those we have opportunity to help, failing to pray for our

enemies, failing to love our spouses or children in the way God has instructed, etc. These are all things God has told us *to* do. If we refuse or fail to do them, we commit sin.

Examples of sin

There is no single passage in the Bible that lists every sin that can be committed. However, there are some non-exhaustive lists of sin (particularly containing sins of commission). Please read the following passages and seriously consider each of the things mentioned in them – and then continue searching the New Testament Scriptures in order to learn more about the law God has given for your life.

Galatians 5:19-21: "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things – as I warned you before – that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

1 Corinthians 6:9-11: "Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom. And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Romans 1:28-32: "And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right. They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful. Although they know God's just sentence – that those who practice such things deserve to die

– they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them.”

Again, please understand that sin is *not* limited to these lists. However, these passages will help you understand many of the things that are sinful (mostly things that could be classified as sins of commission). Consider each one of the words on these lists very carefully to understand what is being taught. Then, put your continued focused on learning more about God’s law so you can be sure you avoid sin!

How sin works

As you consider what the Bible teaches us about sin, it is not just that people rebel against God for the sake of being rebels (although some people may do this). Instead, we learn from the example of Adam and Eve how Satan is the one who works in the world to lure people into sin. For, Adam and Eve appeared to have had no interest in violating God’s law concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil until Satan told them some things that were not true and made the tree look good. It was at that point Eve decided to pursue her own physical (or, fleshly) desires rather than listen to God. Adam then followed her into sin by making the same choice for himself.

Today, the Bible continues to warn us about Satan’s work. For example, 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.” Although Satan will not literally stand in front of you or whisper in your ear to tempt you, he works in many ways throughout this world. In everything he does, he should be viewed as your enemy because he only wants to destroy you spiritually (just as he wanted to destroy Adam and Eve). He tries to tempt you to fulfill your own physical desires rather than obey the laws God has given.

James 1:14-15 gives the picture of how temptation is connected with sin. “But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.”

Temptation occurs whenever you are “drawn away and enticed by” your own “evil

desire.” That is, whenever the physical part of your person is drawn away from what is right and enticed by the desire to do something that goes against God’s laws, consider yourself tempted. But, it is important to note that just being enticed by this desire is not sin. This is the work of the devil – just as he drew Eve away from her thinking about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and enticed her physical desires to think about the desirable nature of the tree. So, temptation is like a fisherman’s lure – luring the fish away from what is safe and enticing it so that it will act on its desires and bite the hook.

If temptation is answered correctly, there is no sin. You see, Satan can only tempt you; he cannot make you sin! Just think about if Eve (after being lured away by the devil through her physical desires) had insisted, “No! God has said not to eat from the tree and there will be consequences for doing so.” She would not have sinned. So, if you resist the devil’s temptation by refocusing yourself on God’s law and choose to obey God rather than fulfill your own physical desires, you will not sin.

But, whenever you allow your desire to conceive, sin is the result. Whenever Eve chose to please her own physical desires rather than obey God, she sinned. Similarly, whenever you choose to please yourself rather than obey God, you sin.

Sin’s Devastating Effects

“What’s the big deal about sin?” is the question you may be asking. The reality is that sin is not just some harmless thing. God does not just desire to keep you from having a good time in your earthly life. Instead, you should see sin’s devastating effects everywhere you look.

All men continue to sin

Sin did not stop with Adam and Eve. Cain (Adam and Eve’s oldest son) chose to sin when he murdered his brother Abel. Throughout the Old Testament you can read about people who chose to sin against God (by worshiping idols, murdering, committing adultery, committing homosexuality, etc.). In the New Testament, you continue to read

about more of the same – people who chose to sin against God by lying, coveting, having unlawful sexual relations, etc.

But, sin hasn't stopped there. Men and women continue to sin today. Satan continues to lure people away from God. Like we saw from 1 Peter 5:8, Satan is like a prowling lion that is trying to destroy people.

He continues to tempt us to fulfill our physical desires in unlawful ways. You see, everyone is fighting a war for their souls between living for the fleshly (physical) desires they have and their souls (spirits). Satan wants us to convince us to please our own physical desires so our souls will be destroyed. God wants us to listen to Him so our souls can spend eternity in Heaven with Him.

Romans 3:23 tells us the sad reality that we all have been guilty of sin. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Not a single person among us has reached a point of spiritual accountability (where he/she has the ability to know right and wrong and make choices for himself/herself) and has not sinned. At some point, we have all chosen to please ourselves rather than God.

Certainly, the Bible teaches that all sin. However, do you inherit your sin (or a sinful nature) from Adam or from your parents? Many religious organizations teach "inherited sin" as a part of their beliefs. But, I want to quickly help you to see that this doctrine is *not* Bible doctrine! While this subject is too extensive to provide a detailed explanation and refutation of it here, please consider the following passages.

First, Ezekiel 18:20 shows individual responsibility for sin – and directly contradicts the idea that we can inherit sin from those who have lived before us. It says, "The person who sins is the one who will die. A son won't suffer punishment for the father's iniquity, and a father won't suffer punishment for the son's iniquity. The righteousness of the righteous person will be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be on him."

Second, Matthew 18:1-4 demonstrates the purity of children (contrary to this doctrine that teaches children are born in sin or with a sinful nature). In this passage, Jesus said, "unless you turn

and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (verse 3). Now, if children were condemned sinners (due to sin they had inherited), why would Jesus want us to become like them? The truth is that Jesus wants us to become innocent and pure like little children are!

Third, Romans 5:12 says that death spread through sin because all have sinned (not because sin was inherited). "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned." The larger passage (Romans 5:12-21) is used by many to teach the doctrine of inherited sin. However, realize that whatever the passage teaches (and it doesn't teach inherited sin) must be understood by what is said in verse 12 – that death spreads to all people **because all sinned** (not because we have all inherited sin)!

The bottom line is that each person is responsible for his/her own sin. We are born sinless. However, we reach a point of accountability (whenever we can know right and wrong and make choices for ourselves). And, again, everyone who has reached this point of personal accountability has decided to sin (Romans 3:23) – except Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:15)!

But, why is this decision to commit sin so devastating? All of our study (up to this point) has been primarily about gaining an understanding of what sin is. Yet, we have not really considered why it is so bad. At the beginning of the lesson, I mentioned that sin is the worse disease mankind has ever known. Now, let me begin to help you understand the reasons why this is true.

Physical consequences

There are many devastating effects of sin. Some of the devastating effects of sin are physical in nature. In fact, all of the horrible things about this world have direct ties to sin. Certainly, this is not the way God had originally designed the world. Yet, because of sin, this is the sad condition of the world today.

Although Satan often wants us to think that sin will result in pleasurable experiences (which may or may not happen), sin has many physical consequences. For instance, remember that Adam

and Eve experienced physical consequences for their sin. Today, committing some sins result in premature death. Some sins lead to jail time. Some sins can result in diseases and health problems, losing your job, having your trust broken with your family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc. Sin can ruin your reputation and bring a bad name on your family. Sin can destroy relationships and deeply hurt those you love the most. Sin can hurt and kill other people. These are just *some* of the devastating physical consequences that are associated with sin.

Spiritual consequences

While the physical consequences are devastating, they pale in comparison to the spiritual consequences of sin. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And, recall that James 1:15 said, “Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.”

Although physical death exists in this world because of sin, these passages reference spiritual death. For, even those who have not sinned can die physically (think about babies in their mothers’ wombs, newborn babies, and young children). But, spiritual death is reserved only for sinners – and is far worse than physical death!

Death simply refers to a separation. Physical death is a separation between body and spirit. Remember (from lesson two) that James 2:26 teaches physical death occurs whenever the body and spirit separate.

Spiritual death is also a separation – a separation between the sinner and God. For instance, Isaiah 59:1-2 says, “Indeed, the Lord’s arm is not too weak to save, and his ear is not too deaf to hear. But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen.” So, when we sin, we separate ourselves from fellowship with God and from the spiritual blessings that come from Him. This is exactly the kind of death Adam and Eve experienced on the day they ate the forbidden fruit. They were separated from the fellowship they had once enjoyed with God in the garden of Eden!

Therefore, the Scriptures talk of the condition of one who is “self-indulgent” being “dead even while she lives” (1 Timothy 5:6). So, even though you are physically living right now, you are spiritually dead if you have sinned against God and have never obeyed the Lord’s commands for forgiveness (as we’ll talk about in lesson six)!

Then, if you die physically while you are still guilty of sin, you will experience eternal spiritual death. Eternal spiritual death is eternal separation from God. This is called the “second death.” Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars – their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 shows that this eternal punishment in Hell will be away from God (i.e. eternally separated from Him). When Jesus Christ returns, He will take “vengeance with flaming fire on those who don’t know God and on those who don’t obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord’s presence and from his glorious strength.”

Therefore, those who die in their sins will experience the everlasting torment in the place of eternal separation from God the Bible calls Hell. We saw how the Scriptures describe this place in lesson two of our study. Matthew 25:41, Matthew 25:46, Mark 9:43-44, and Revelation 21:8 describe Hell as being a place of eternal fire, extreme torment, and a place that is prepared for the devil and his angels.

The Problem Of Sin

Now that we should have a good understanding of what sin is and its consequences, we need to understand just how big of a problem sin really is. For, we must now begin thinking about how we can escape the consequences we have brought on ourselves by sinning against God. Is there even a way to escape them?

We deserve spiritual death since we have chosen to violate God’s law

When we sin, we separate ourselves from our holy God (Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 John 1:5-7). So, it is not God who leaves us, but we who leave Him! We leave His ways of holiness and righteousness. We leave God to fulfill our own selfish ambitions or desires whenever we sin – demonstrating that we would rather fulfill our own fleshly desires than be in fellowship with Him and receive the blessings that come through Him!

Then, once we have sinned (even just one time), we deserve spiritual death. Remember that Romans 6:23 describes the punishment of spiritual death as being our “wages” for sin. For example, whenever you are hired for a job, you agree to a particular wage in exchange for a certain amount of work. Whenever you complete that work, you receive the wage. It’s what you have earned and deserve.

In the same way, sin pays a particular “wage.” The “wages of sin is death.” This is what you **have earned and deserve** for sinning against God! And, every sin is equally deserving of this punishment (no matter how “big” or “small” it may seem to us). For instance, Romans 1:28-32 (as we read earlier) listed many sins (some of which people would consider to be “big” sins and some people would consider to be “small” sins). However, verse 32 said that “those who practice such things deserve to die” – making no distinction between them!

We can do nothing to justify ourselves

When you understand that sin produces this devastating spiritual consequence, you should desire justification. That is, you should want to become just as if you had never committed sin. So, you should ask yourself, “How can I be justified?”

Then, you will have to come to a very real, but sad, understanding: “I can do nothing to justify myself” (i.e. I can do nothing to make myself just-as-if-I’d never sinned). In fact, even if you never sinned again, you could not remove the consequences of your past sins. You can never undo the sins you have committed. Additionally, there is no good deed that you could ever do to cleanse yourself from your sins so that God will overlook them.

Therefore, you are hopelessly lost and in need of a Savior. You do *not* deserve to be saved

from your sins (remember, you have earned your punishment). Rather, you deserve to be eternally punished in Hell. So, you would be hopelessly lost in your sins – **if** you had nothing else to provide you with hope!

Thankfully, you do not have to remain hopelessly lost in sin! God has provided a remedy. There is a Savior! His name is Jesus. We will study about Him in the next lesson. Then, in lesson six, we will discuss what God requires you to do to be saved.

Conclusion

Sin is a devastating problem for mankind. It is far greater than any other problem we could ever have! This is a problem that deals with the soul and that will condemn our souls to an eternal punishment in Hell! So, what should you take from this study? (1) An understanding of how sin entered the world. (2) An understanding of what sin is. (3) An understanding of what sin does (its physical and spiritual consequences). (4) A desire to discover the answer to our greatest problem (as we will discuss in the next couple lessons). While we could discuss more, I hope that this lesson has helped you understand what sin is!

Study Questions

Why is it essential to know the answer to this question?

1. The Introduction Of Sin To The World

Did God create mankind in sin?

What law did God give Adam and Eve? Did they understand it? Did they have the freedom to choose either obedience or disobedience?

What are the spiritual consequences of sin?

How did Satan tempt Eve? How did Eve respond?

4. The Problem Of Sin

What do you deserve because of sin?

What were the consequences for sinning against God?

Can you do anything to justify yourself? What do you need?

2. Understanding Sin

What is the definition of sin?

How is sin lawlessness?

What are two categories of sin?

What are some examples of sin?

How and why do people sin?

3. Sin's Devastating Effects

Does sin continue today? Are people born in sin or born sinless? Have you sinned?

Identify some physical consequences of sin.

Lesson 5: Who Is Jesus?

Jesus Christ is, without a doubt, the most prominent figure in Christianity. You often see t-shirts about Jesus, bumper stickers about Jesus, jewelry about Jesus, etc. Even the name “Christian” contains the name of Christ!

As we seek the answers to the most essential questions of life, we must find the right answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?” But, why is Jesus so important? What is so special about Him? What has He done for us? Is He important to everyone or just to a few?

Remember where we concluded our last study. Because of sin, we would all be hopelessly lost. The “wages” of sin is death. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We could do nothing to save ourselves. We were desperately in need of a Savior. Fortunately for us, that Savior has been provided! His name is Jesus. Jesus Christ is the answer to the problem of sin!

There is much that we could focus on when studying about Jesus. Four books of the Bible are even specifically focused on His earthly life (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Certainly, this lesson will only be able to summarize what the Bible teaches us about Jesus and consider the impact He has made. Therefore, in this fifth lesson, we will seek the answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?”

The Promise

Although the Biblical record of Jesus' life is given in those four New Testament books, Jesus Christ (the Messiah) was first promised in the Old Testament. In fact, Biblical scholars have estimated that there are over 300 references to Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Remember, the theme of the Old Testament is “Christ is coming.” So, let's consider just a couple specific promises that were made about Jesus to recognize His great importance.

To Satan

After Adam and Eve sinned, Genesis 3:14-15 records the punishment God gave to Satan (who was using the serpent). “So the Lord God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, you are cursed more than any livestock and more than any wild animal. You will move on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.’”

Although the statements are made directly to the serpent, I believe there is a greater application in this passage. Remember, the serpent was being used by Satan. I believe there is a reference to Jesus in this. As we will see through this lesson, Satan would score a momentary victory against Jesus (who was the offspring of the woman) by putting Him to death on the cross. This would be like a serpent that would bite a person's heel. However, Jesus would crush Satan by providing the way for people to be forgiven of their sins. This would be like a person crushing the head of a serpent.

You see, God was not caught unprepared to deal with sin whenever Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden. Instead, the Bible teaches that God had a plan to redeem people from sin – even before He created the world! Acts 2:23 refers to Christ's death as being according to “God's determined plan and foreknowledge.” Ephesians 3:11 says the things that were accomplished through Christ were accomplished according to the “eternal purpose” of God. 1 Peter 1:20 says that Christ was “foreknown before the foundation of the world.” Therefore, God's plan to redeem people from sin was in place from eternity – before God even created us! Genesis

3:14-15 is the first insight given in the Scriptures about God's eternal plan of salvation!

To Abraham

Later, in Genesis 12:1-3, God made three main promises to a man named Abraham. The passage says, "The Lord said to Abram: 'Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"

Consider the three promises referenced in this passage. First, God promised to make a great nation from this man's descendants. This was fulfilled through the Israelite nation. Second, God promised to give this man's descendants a special land. This was fulfilled when God gave the land of Canaan to the Israelites. Third, God promised to bless all peoples of the earth through Abraham's offspring. This was fulfilled whenever Jesus Christ came into the world through the physical lineage of Abraham. Certainly, Jesus Christ would be the greatest blessing ever to the entire world by offering everyone the opportunity to have their sins forgiven!

Early in the Old Testament, the storyline for the entire Bible is set!

People had sinned (beginning with Adam and Eve) and needed a Savior. Now, we have observed that there was one coming who would defeat Satan and be a blessing to the entire world! The remainder of the Old Testament continues to reveal this story that is foretold in the early part of Genesis (as we've just noticed). Many specific prophecies were even made about Jesus (such as where He would be born, what He would do, etc.). Then, this story hits its climax with the birth of Jesus Christ and His life on this earth – in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We will be considering some highlights of this story throughout this lesson.

Jesus Is The Son Of God

Before we begin considering the life of Jesus on earth, we must recognize that there is something

special about Him. He is not like every other person to be born into this world. You see, the Bible teaches that Jesus is the Son of God and had no beginning.

Passages demonstrating this truth

As we attempt to learn who Jesus is, we must embrace the fact that Jesus Christ is identified as the Son of God. He has a unique relationship with God, the Father. In fact, the Bible says Jesus is the one and only Son of God (that is, He is the only of His kind). So, no one else has this same relationship with the Father.

Notice how Jesus is described this way in John 3:16: "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." In addition, Jesus is identified as the dearly loved (beloved) Son of God. In Matthew 3:17, the Father said concerning Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased." Again, in Matthew 17:5, the Father said of the Son, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!"

Jesus is God

As we briefly discussed in lesson 1, there are three Beings who all possess the characteristics of being God: The Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. In fact, this is what the Father is telling us whenever He says that Jesus is His Son. Just as an earthly son possesses the same nature as his father, Jesus Christ possesses the same nature as His Heavenly Father! Therefore, Jesus possesses all the nature and characteristics of being God (Deity, "Godhood")!

For instance, listen to John 1:1-2 and note that Jesus is being called the "Word" in this passage: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." This one passage is, actually, just one of many passages that identify Jesus Christ as possessing the nature of being God. The Bible often declares this truth. You could also consider John 20:28, Romans 9:1-5, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 2:9, Hebrews 1:8, and others. Take some time to carefully consider each one of these passages, as they all simply confirm what John 1 teaches about Jesus Christ being God!

Jesus was with God in creation

Being eternal in nature, Jesus was present with the Father whenever all things were created. Contrary to what some believe, Jesus Christ was *not* created by the Father. Instead, Jesus Christ is eternal – just as the Father is eternal. Notice that John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16 both indicate that Jesus created all things – and that nothing was created without Him! John 1:3 says, “All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.” Colossians 1:16 says, “For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through him and for him.”

So, Jesus Christ was involved in creating all things! You can even see this truth from the Genesis record of creation when you notice the plural pronouns in reference to God (“Our” and “Us”). For instance, Genesis 1:26-27 says, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.” Now, think about it: If Jesus Christ was involved in creating all things (as we have seen), how could Jesus have been the first creation of God? For, if Jesus was a created being, Jesus could not possibly have created *all* things!

Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb

As we will see, Jesus was sent from Heaven to this earth by the Father. For, the Father knew that the only way He could forgive sin was for a sacrifice to be made. Hebrews 9:22 says, “According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” But, not just any blood would do. Although the Old Testament Law had a system of animal sacrifices that were to be made for sin, this was only a temporary solution to the problem. Hebrews 10:4 says, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

Recognizing this, again, John 3:16 describes God’s solution to the problem of sin. “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” Everything Jesus did on this

earth was so that people could be forgiven of their sins, avoid the eternal punishment of Hell, and spend eternity with God in Heaven! For this reason, He is called, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)! God knew that only His Son could provide the sacrifice that could take away sin. Therefore, God loved us enough to send His Son into this evil world as the sacrifice to save us from the consequences of our own sin!

Romans 5:6-11 should also help you recognize the importance of who Jesus is and what He has done. “For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For rarely will someone die for a just person – though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.”

As we prepare to focus on the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, you must recognize just how important Jesus is to you! Without God loving you and Jesus providing Himself as this sacrifice, you could not possibly be saved from your sins. You would have no hope. But, through Jesus, God has provided the gift of eternal life in Heaven. You can now go from being an enemy of God because of your sins to being reconciled and in a right relationship with God. You can go from being lost in your sins to being saved! But, it took Jesus doing all the things we will now begin to discuss.

Jesus Lived On Earth

Although Jesus was and is God, He did not let His Deity prevent Him from obeying the Father’s will in coming to this earth. For, the only way God could save us from sin is if Jesus left Heaven and came to earth. Thankfully, that is exactly what Jesus did. So, let’s consider a few brief points about Jesus’ earthly life.

Christ left Heaven to come to the earth

There are many reasons the Deity of Jesus is significant. One of the points you must consider is the fact that Jesus lived in Heaven with God (the Father). So, He willingly left Heaven and came to earth in order to accomplish God's eternal plan of redemption! Take a moment to consider the place Jesus left (as we briefly discussed in lesson two). It is the place that we all desire to go (the place described in Revelation 21). It is described as a place where there is no crying, sorrow, mourning, pain, or death. It is the place where there is no evil.

So, as we discuss the things Jesus endured while He lived on this earth, consider that Jesus chose to leave Heaven and come to this earth – so that we could be saved from our sins! 2 Corinthians 8:9 summarizes this truth. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” It is only through Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection that we can be forgiven of our sins and live in Heaven with Him one Day! But, we must remember that everything Jesus went through on this earth directly resulted from His choice to leave Heaven and live on earth – and that He could have chosen just to stay in Heaven!

“God is with us”

Matthew 1:23 records the prophecy that had been made about the birth of Jesus Christ. “See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel,” which is translated ‘God is with us.’” This prophecy said that Jesus Christ would be born of a virgin. Certainly, His birth would be different from every other person who has ever been or ever will be born. And, this prophecy was fulfilled when He was born to the virgin Mary (Matthew 1:25)!

Matthew 1:23 also tells us something about Jesus' name. His name was to be “Immanuel,” which meant, “God is with us.” So, Jesus Christ did not give up His Deity when He came to the earth. Instead, Jesus maintained the fullness of Deity when He lived on earth. Colossians 2:9 says concerning Christ, “For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ.” Therefore, Jesus was God living as a man! He was both the Son of God and the Son of Man while He lived on this earth. So, we can know exactly how God would live if He was on the earth because

that is exactly who Jesus Christ was when He was on earth!

Jesus' mission on earth

Jesus left Heaven and came to the earth for some specific reasons. First, He came to fulfill the Law. Matthew 5:17 shows that Jesus came to the earth to fulfill the prophecies that had been made in the Old Testament about Him, His kingdom, and His new covenant. He said that He did not come to overthrow the Old Testament Law (the Law of Moses), but to fulfill it! He accomplished this and brought the New Covenant into effect (read Colossians 2:14 and Hebrews 8-10 to learn more)! Throughout Jesus' ministry on earth, His teachings were laying the foundation for this new covenant that would be established after His death.

Second, Jesus came to preach the coming of His kingdom. Jesus taught a new law and taught concerning a kingdom that would be established during the lifetime of many who were living at that time. In Luke 9:27, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” He taught both about the kingdom and about the characteristics of those who would be part of this kingdom. This kingdom (or, church) has now been established (as we will study in lesson seven).

Third, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Jesus' mission was characterized by His efforts and desire to seek and to save the lost. Luke 19:10 says, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.” Ultimately, this is why Jesus accomplished everything He accomplished while He was on earth. Not only did He teach people to follow Him, but this mission also required Jesus to give Himself as the perfect and sinless sacrifice we needed so desperately! For, Jesus was the only sacrifice that could entirely remove the stain of sin.

Jesus performed many miracles

Besides Jesus' many teachings, one of the most notable things about Jesus' life was the miracles He performed. Jesus healed the sick, caused the blind to see, made the paralyzed walk, cast out demons, walked on water, raised the dead, and performed many signs and miracles! The purpose of all these miracles was to demonstrate that He was who He said He was (the Son of God)! Just think about it. How would anyone know for sure that Jesus Christ

really was the Son of God and believe what He said? One way was by considering all the prophecies that He fulfilled. But, the other way would be through the miracles. Surely, no one other than God would have been able to do the things Jesus did!

In the same way, John 20:30-31 demonstrates that we can now believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God when we read all the miracles that have been recorded in the Bible. “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Jesus’ sinless life was hated by the world

Although Jesus lived in human form and had physical desires, there was something special about His life: He never sinned! Hebrews 4:15 says concerning Jesus, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.” Although Satan tempted Jesus while He lived on this earth (such as the temptations recorded in Matthew 4:1-11), Jesus never chose to please Himself rather than God. Because of this, Jesus was able to be the perfect sacrifice to take away sin!

Also, because Jesus did not sin, the world hated Him. Jesus told His followers, “If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you” (John 15:18-19). You see, Jesus’ sinlessness exposed the wickedness of other people. This made many people very angry with Jesus. As a result, many people wanted to kill Him. He was often mistreated. He was blasphemed. He experienced all sorts of hatred from the world. Ultimately, He was crucified.

Jesus’ Death

Although Jesus accomplished many important things during His earthly life, ultimately, He was sent as a sacrificial lamb. This required Him

to die. So, let’s consider a few brief points about Jesus’ death.

Jesus knew He would die

Remember that Jesus was (and is) God. Therefore, He knew that He was going to die – and how He was going to die. Jesus even foretold His own death and resurrection in Matthew 16:21: “From then on Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.” Yet, despite knowing what awaited Him at the end of His life, Jesus came to the earth anyways and went through with it all (also read Philipians 2:5-11)!

When Jesus knew the moment for His betrayal and death was drawing near, He prayed to His Father in the garden of Gethsemane. This prayer demonstrates the weight that the Lord felt as these things were drawing near. In Luke 22:42-44, Jesus prayed, “‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me – nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.’ Then an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him. Being in anguish, he prayed more fervently, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.”

Jesus was betrayed and denied by His apostles

After Jesus finished praying, He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot (one of Jesus’ own twelve apostles). Judas had went to the chief priests of the Jews, asking them what they were willing to give him if he would deliver Jesus to them. They offered him 30 silver pieces for this (Matthew 26:14-16). From that point forward, Judas sought opportunity to betray Jesus Christ. When the moment arrived, Jesus had just been praying in the garden of Gethsemane. Judas approached Jesus with a great multitude who had swords and clubs. Judas then performed the sign he had given to Jesus’ enemies that would identify Jesus to them (a kiss). Jesus was then arrested by the multitude (Matthew 26:47-56).

Although Jesus could have delivered Himself, He allowed Himself to be arrested. When He did, all His disciples fled (Matthew 26:56). Later, Peter (another of Jesus’ twelve apostles) was asked three times if he knew and had been with Jesus. Yet, Peter denied his association with or knowledge of Jesus all three times. This happened just as Jesus had

said (Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75). When the rooster crowed (as Jesus said it would), Peter recognized what he had done and was sorrowful.

Jesus was mocked, beaten, unfairly tried, spat on, and scourged

After being arrested, Jesus was put on trial by the highest Jewish council, the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:57-68). They sought false testimony against Jesus so that they might put Him to death. After Jesus affirmed that He was the Christ, the Son of God, He was accused of blasphemy – and the Sanhedrin determined that He deserved to die. Afterward, they spat in Jesus' face, struck Him with their hands, and mocked Him.

When it was day, Jesus was given to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate to be tried (Matthew 27:1-2, 11-31). When He faced His trial, Jesus confirmed that He was the King of the Jews. However, while He was being accused by the Jews, Jesus did not answer to defend Himself, which amazed the governor. Now, it was customary for one prisoner to be released at the Feast of Passover. So, the governor gave the crowd a choice. They could either release a known prisoner and murderer named Barabbas or Jesus Christ (the sinless Son of God). The multitude of the Jews asked for Barabbas to be released and demanded that Jesus Christ be crucified. Although the governor knew Jesus had done no wrong, he did not want to upset the Jews and let them have their way. Therefore, Barabbas was released and Jesus was flogged (scourged) and delivered over to be crucified.

Please note: The Roman practice of flogging was brutal. The prisoner would often not even live through this punishment! The prisoner would be stripped of his clothing and stretched over a frame in order to make the process more painful. Then, he would be beaten with a whip that would often have pieces of bone or metal woven into it, which would tear at the flesh with every blow.

After being sentenced to death by crucifixion and flogged, Jesus was taken by the soldiers of the governor and the whole unit began to severely mock and mistreat Jesus (Matthew 27:27-31). They mocked Him by stripping His own clothes off Him and clothing Him with a scarlet robe, putting a crown of thorns on His head, and putting a reed in His right hand. They bowed before Him and mocked Him by saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Matthew 27:29).

Then, they spat on Him and struck Him on the head with the reed they had given Him.

Jesus was delivered over to be crucified

After enduring all of this, they led Jesus away to be crucified. Matthew 27:31 says, "After they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him." Crucifixion was considered to be the most horrible form of death and was reserved for the worst criminals. The individual being crucified would be stripped of his clothing and laid upon the cross. His hands were fastened to the cross by having nail-like spikes driven through them. His feet would be fastened to the cross in the same way. The process was full of agony and humiliation and was intended to be prolonged torture rather than a quick execution.

Jesus' crucifixion and death are recorded in Matthew 27:32-56 (as well as in Mark, Luke, and John). We read about several things in Matthew's account. First, people cast lots for Jesus' clothing and sat down and watched Jesus as He was crucified. Second, an inscription containing the accusation against Jesus was written on the cross above Jesus that read "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matthew 27:37). Third, He was crucified between two thieves. Fourth, the people who passed by Jesus blasphemed and mocked Him. Fifth, as Jesus hung on the cross, He made seven statements (not all recorded by Matthew). Sixth, after a period of time had elapsed, Jesus died.

The last words of Jesus before He died on the cross (as recorded in John 19:30) were: "It is finished." Jesus had been obedient to the Father and had now finished God's eternal plan of salvation by giving Himself as the ransom sacrifice for the sins of the world! He was the perfect sacrifice!

Jesus' burial

Matthew 27:57-60 records that Jesus' body was taken off the cross and buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb (who had become one of Jesus' followers). A large stone was rolled in front of the opening of the tomb. Matthew 27:62-66 goes on to describe how the Jews were afraid that Jesus' body would be stolen. Since Jesus had predicted His resurrection on multiple occasions, they were afraid that Jesus' disciples would steal His body and say that He had risen from the dead. Therefore, the Jews asked the governor for guards to be placed at Jesus'

tomb. In response, Pilate instructed the Jews to make the tomb as secure as they knew how by sealing the stone and setting the guard.

At this point, we may be asking the questions, “Has Jesus been defeated?” “Has God been defeated?” And, “has Satan just won by putting the Son of God to death?”

Jesus’ Resurrection

Thankfully, this is not where the Biblical record about Jesus ends! Despite all the efforts that had been made to defeat Him, Jesus did raise from the dead! And, it is through His resurrection from the dead that we all have hope of defeating sin and death! So, let’s consider a few brief points about Jesus’ resurrection.

“He has risen”

Matthew 28:1-10 describes the miraculous events of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. On the first day of the week (the third day), Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to Jesus’ tomb. Then, there was a great earthquake as an angel of the Lord descended from Heaven and rolled back the stone from the door and sat on it. The angel appeared like lightning, and his clothing was white as snow. The guards even shook for fear of him and they became like dead men.

Notice, then, what the angel told the women, in Matthew 28:5-6: “Don’t be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. For he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.” Consequently, they were to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead! And, as they went to tell the disciples, Jesus appeared to them. In fact, Jesus Christ appeared to many people after He rose from the dead – including all the apostles. He was even seen by over 500 people at once (1 Corinthians 15:3-9).

Matthew 28:11-15 then goes on to describe how those who had been guarding Jesus’ tomb reported the events to the chief priests of the Jews. However, rather than simply accepting the amazing events as being true, the chief priests decided to bribe the soldiers with a large sum of money so they would say that Jesus’ disciples had stolen His body. The soldiers agreed.

All of this is essential to us. 1 Corinthians 15:16-19 demonstrates the importance of Christ’s resurrection to our salvations – saying, essentially, that if Christ had not risen from the dead, we would have no hope of a resurrection. It says, “For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Those, then, who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.”

Jesus ascended back into Heaven

After remaining on earth for a period of time after His resurrection, Acts 1:9-11 records that Jesus was taken up in a cloud out of sight into Heaven. Two men (probably two angels) promised that Jesus would come again in the same way as those individuals had just witnessed Jesus go into Heaven (as we talked about Jesus’ return in lesson two)! Today, Jesus Christ is sitting at the “right hand of God” (a most honored position), awaiting the time for His return.

Listen to Hebrews 10:12-14. “But this man [Jesus], after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified.”

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the answer to the problem of sin! Now (as the result of Christ’s sacrifice), we can be saved from our sins, avoid the wrath of God, and spend eternity in Heaven. However, we must believe and obey Him (as we will discuss in the next lesson). So, what should you take from this study? (1) A knowledge of why Jesus came to earth. (2) A knowledge of who Jesus is (that He is the Son of God). (3) An understanding of what Jesus did while He lived on earth, including His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. (4) An appreciation of what Jesus’ life, death, burial, and resurrection means for you – which should lead you to make a commitment to live for Him (which we will further discuss in our next lessons). While we could discuss

more, I hope that this lesson has helped you understand who Jesus is!

How was Jesus a sacrificial Lamb? Why is this so important?

Study Questions

Why is it essential to know the answer to this question?

1. The Promise

What was the promise made to Satan? Did God have a plan in place to redeem man from his sin?

What was the promise made to Abraham?

Explain how the storyline for the entire Bible is set early in the Old Testament.

2. Jesus Is The Son Of God

Identify some passages that show Jesus Christ as God's Son.

Is Jesus God?

Was Jesus with God (the Father) in creation?

3. Jesus Lived On Earth

What is the significance of Christ leaving Heaven to come to earth?

What was special about Jesus' birth and His name?

What was Jesus' mission on earth?

What was the purpose of the miracles Jesus performed?

How did the world treat Jesus? Why did this happen?

4. Jesus' Death

Did Jesus have any foreknowledge concerning His death?

What Jesus' apostles do to Him?

What did Jesus endure prior to His death?

How did Jesus die? What was now finished?

Where was Jesus buried? What was done to His tomb?

5. Jesus' Resurrection

What happened in Matthew 28:1-10? Why is this so important?

Where is Jesus today? What is He waiting to do?

Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Lesson 6: What Must I Do To Be Saved?

The previous two lessons in this series have focused on our need for and opportunity to have salvation. In lesson four, we focused on sin, discovering that we have all sinned against God. As a result, we all deserve to be punished in the eternal fires of Hell. Then, in lesson five, we saw that God loved us enough to provide the only sacrifice that could possibly remove the sin from our lives. His name is Jesus Christ. Again, Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

As we seek the answers to life's most essential questions, we must seek the right answer to the question: "What must I do to be saved?" Is there anything God has required of me to be in Christ Jesus and access His gift of salvation? Is there anything God has required of me to be forgiven of my sins? And, if there is, what is it?

It's like the ground between you and God has been broken because of sin – and there is no way for you to get back to God. But, Jesus Christ has provided the bridge (picture the cross as the bridge). Now, you must consider what (if anything) God requires you to do to cross the bridge so as to be reconciled with God and have your sins forgiven. This is the question some people asked in Acts 2:37 whenever they realized they had sinned. They asked, "Brothers, what should we do?"

As we consider the essential nature of this question, we must recognize that many people and churches answer this question differently. Some say

that all you must do is believe in Jesus. Some say that you must say a "Sinner's Prayer" to ask Jesus into your heart. Some say that God has done everything for you; so, there's nothing you must do to be saved. Some say that God has preselected those who will be saved and those who will be lost; so, you cannot do anything to affect your salvation. There are many different teachings about salvation (too many to list here). Yet, we must not be interested in what *people* and *churches* say you must do to be saved. Instead, we should only be interested in what God says we must do to be saved from our sins. *This* is the only thing that matters, since God's word will judge us on the Last Day! Therefore, in this sixth lesson, we will seek the answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

Is There Anything You Must Do?

Since you have sinned and deserve to be punished, the first thing you must consider is whether there is anything you must do for salvation or if God has done it all for you. For, there are some who would tell you that God has done everything necessary for you to be saved. They claim that there are no works required for your salvation, only faith. But, is this Biblically true?

It is impossible to earn salvation

Certainly, there is nothing that you can do to *earn* (or, *deserve*) your salvation after you have sinned – as we discussed in lesson four. Remember that the "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Everlasting spiritual death in Hell is what you *deserve* for your sin. You simply cannot *do* anything to take away the sin you have committed – by yourself!

Ephesians 2:8-10 demonstrates that there is nothing you can do to earn salvation. It says, "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift – not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do."

As we discussed in lesson five, Christ has provided the avenue for your salvation. Again,

Romans 6:23 says that “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Still, the question is: Has God placed any requirements on you in order to be saved? Has He instructed you to *do* anything to be saved? Since eternal life is “in Christ Jesus,” what is necessary in order to enter a right relationship with Jesus?

God has required obedience

Consider this: Jesus Christ died for everyone; but, everyone will *not* be saved. In fact, Jesus taught that most people will be lost (see Matthew 7:13-14). Clearly, there is something God has required of you in order to be saved – or else everyone would be saved through Jesus!

Consider the example of a birthday gift. Let’s suppose someone sends you a \$20 check in the mail for your birthday. It is a free gift. You did not earn it. However, in order to receive that gift, there are some things that must be done. You must go to the mailbox, get the envelope out of the mailbox, open the envelope, take the card out of the envelope, take the check out of the card, sign the check, take the check to the bank, and cash the check. Then (and only then), you will have your free gift. It is still a free gift. You still did not do anything to earn it. Yet, there were required steps to receive the gift.

The same is true concerning salvation. You do not deserve salvation. Yet, God (through His love, grace, and mercy) has provided Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for sin and given you the gift of salvation. However, He has also commanded you to do certain things in order to access the gift of salvation (which we will discuss in this lesson). But, even though you must obey His commandments, you do not nullify His grace or earn your salvation!

You see, there is a difference between works of *merit* (by which you try to earn your salvation) and works of *obedience* (by which you obey the conditions God has put on your salvation)! Whenever you do what God commands, you are *not* attempting to earn your salvation. Instead, you are simply doing whatever God has required, recognizing that you are saved by His grace! For, even when you do these things, you are still undeserving of salvation (see Luke 17:7-10). Still, God does require works of obedience in order for you to be saved. For instance, James 2:24 says, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

In addition, consider what Jesus taught about people who claim to believe in and follow Him in Matthew 7:21-23: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!’” Clearly, just believing in Jesus and calling Him “Lord” is not enough to be saved. Instead, God requires obedience!

An example of faithful obedience

There are many examples of obedience in the Bible. Consider Noah. Hebrews 11:7 says, “By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”

God determined to destroy people from the earth because of their sinfulness (see Genesis 6:5-7). Yet, among all the wickedness, Noah found grace (favor) in God’s eyes (Genesis 6:8). So, God told Noah about the destruction that was going to be brought on the earth and a way to be saved from it. He gave Noah detailed instructions about how to build an ark that would carry him and his family safely through the flood. Therefore, Noah was faced with a choice: Obey God and be saved or disobey God and die. Noah chose to trust in God enough to obey His instructions and build the ark.

This is the same basic decision you are faced with. You are living in a sinful world that God will destroy one day (as seen in 2 Peter 3:10). God has given you the opportunity to be saved (through Jesus Christ). However, like Noah, you must trust in God so much that you obey Him in whatever He says!

Just think: What if Noah would have believed God’s promise about the flood and the way to be saved from it, but did not *do* anything (i.e. if he did not build the ark)? What if Noah would have built the ark out of pine instead of gopher wood (as God commanded)? What if Noah had built the ark a little smaller or a little larger than God specified? What if Noah would have built the ark with five levels instead of with the three God had instructed? Would Noah have been saved if he had changed any of God’s instructions? Would he be considered a great

example of faith if he had not obeyed God in all these things? I believe that we must conclude the answer to these questions is clearly, “No!”

Likewise, God has given you specific instructions about how you can be saved. However, if you change any of these instructions, you put your soul in jeopardy! So, what has God told you that you must do in order to be saved? Let’s examine.

Hear God’s Word

The first step God has required you to take across the “bridge” that leads to salvation is to hear His word. For, it is impossible for you to please God without hearing His word. Let’s consider.

Hearing God’s word is essential for salvation

Romans chapter 10 demonstrates the necessity of hearing God’s word. Verse 13 says, “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” Then, verses 14 and 15 show the role of hearing God’s word in this salvation. “How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.’” Verse 17 then adds, “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.”

Hearing the word of God (the message about salvation through Jesus Christ in the New Testament Scriptures) should lead you to saving faith. You will not develop saving faith by hearing the teachings or opinions of people. Instead, it is only developed through hearing God’s word! Therefore, you need to study God’s word every day so that you can know what God wants you to know (see Acts 17:10-12).

What you must hear

It is only by studying God’s word that you can understand what God has done for you and what God has instructed you to do to be saved! Although God does not require you to have a full knowledge of everything He says in the Bible before you can be saved, He does require you to know some basic

things. For instance, think about some of the fundamental things we have been discussing in this series. You must know about God, that you have a soul that survives physical death, that the Bible is the word of God, that you have sinned and separated yourself from God, and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died to save you and rose from the dead. Then, you must hear about what God requires you to do to be saved (as we are studying in this lesson) and how He wants you to commit your life to Him.

Think about it. If you don’t hear what God has done for you so that you can be saved or what He has commanded you to do to be saved, how can you be saved? The simple fact is that you won’t be! For example, Acts 18:8 says, “...Many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized.” Certainly, they would not have been able to take the required steps without first hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them!

Believe In Jesus

The second step God has required you to take across the “bridge” that leads to salvation is to believe in Jesus Christ. For, it is impossible for you to please God without believing in Christ. Let’s consider.

Belief is essential for salvation

Jesus said, “Therefore I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.” (John 8:24). You must be mentally convinced Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to earth, lived as a man, died the horrible death on the cross, was buried in the tomb, and rose from the dead – so that you can be saved from your sins! And, to be mentally convinced of these things also requires that you be fully convinced that God is real and that the Bible is the word of God.

Other passages that teach the essential nature of belief for salvation include Mark 16:16 and Romans 10:9-10. Mark 16:16 says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Romans 10:9-10 says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one

confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.” Although we will focus on confession and baptism later in this lesson from these same passages, recognize that they also require belief in Jesus.

You are not saved by faith only

While belief (faith) is essential for salvation, it is *not* the only thing essential for salvation. However, it is important to recognize that the Bible speaks of faith in a couple different ways. Sometimes, the Bible speaks of belief (or, faith) in the sense of being mentally convinced something is true (i.e. that Jesus Christ is the Son of God). But, many times, the Bible speaks of a more comprehensive belief (or, faith) that couples a mental conviction with obedience. This is real, saving faith.

Hebrews chapter 11 shows several pictures of this comprehensive faith. First, it begins by defining faith as “the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen” (verse 1). So, faith is all the evidence you need to live in full obedience to God. Verse 6 then adds, “Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Real, saving faith begins with the mental conviction that certain things are true – but it does not end there! I encourage you to read Hebrews 11 and notice all the examples of active and obedient faith (not merely mental conviction). For instance, the faith of Abel caused him to offer an acceptable sacrifice. The faith of Noah caused him to prepare an ark. The faith of Abraham caused him to obey God’s command to offer his only son upon an altar. And, so it goes throughout the chapter. Faith leads to action, which results in pleasing God!

Yet, many religious organizations teach that being mentally convinced that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is the *only* requirement for salvation. However, we are *not* interested in various “church doctrines.” Rather, we are concerned with what God teaches!

James 2:14-26 clearly teaches against this idea of “faith only.” It says, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed,’ but you don’t give them what the body needs, what good is it? In the same way

faith, if it doesn’t have works, is dead by itself. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works. You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe – and they shudder.

“Senseless person! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless? Wasn’t Abraham our father justified by works in offering Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was made complete, and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend.

“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, wasn’t Rahab the prostitute also justified by works in receiving the messengers and sending them out by a different route? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

Repent

The third step God has required you to take across the “bridge” that leads to salvation is to repent of your sins. For, it is impossible for you to please God without repenting of your sins. Let’s consider.

Repentance is essential for salvation

Jesus clearly stated the necessity of repentance in Luke 13:3. He said, “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as well.” Note that He also repeated this in verse 5. Then, in response to the question, “Brothers, what should we do” (as we saw earlier in Acts 2:37), Peter identified two things in Acts 2:38. He said, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” While we will discuss baptism a bit later, notice that repentance is clearly required “for the forgiveness of your sins.” Therefore, you cannot be forgiven without repenting of your sins!

Acts 17:30-31 then answers the question of who must repent. It says, “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world

in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.” Quite simply, God has commanded that “all people everywhere” must repent! So, you cannot please God without repenting of your sins.

Learning true repentance

While you should now recognize that repentance is essential for salvation, you must also learn what true repentance is. First, the Bible teaches that “godly grief produces repentance” (2 Corinthians 7:10). That is, whenever you recognize what your sins have done to your relationship with God, you should mourn over your sins and want to undo the sins you have committed.

Then, repentance requires you to think about your past sins, hating that you have done such wicked things. And, you must determine to live for God in the future. Therefore, repentance takes place in the mind by acknowledging your past sins and determining to put those sins off from your life. In repentance, you are imitating Christ’s death. You are not dying physically or being physically crucified; but, you are putting the old person of sin to death! In putting the old person of sin to death, you are also making way for the new person who is patterned after God’s holiness (read Colossians 3:1-17)!

You should have the same attitude Paul had, as described in Galatians 2:20. He said, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” So, when you repent, you are determining to give your life *entirely* to Jesus Christ rather than continue living for your own desires!

Confess Christ

The fourth step God has required you to take across the “bridge” that leads to salvation is to confess Jesus Christ. For, it is impossible for you to please God without confessing Christ. Let’s consider.

Confession is essential for salvation.

Jesus said, “Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But

whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33). Although the confession Jesus is discussing here is *not* a one-time confession, it does illustrate how God expects people to confess Jesus Christ during their earthly lives in order to be saved.

Romans 10:9-10 also specifically commands that a confession be made in order to be saved. Again, the passage says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.”

What you must confess

This confession is *not* a confession of your sins or that you are a sinner (as many churches teach). Rather, this is a confession that acknowledges your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, your dependence on Him for salvation, and your commitment to make Him Lord of your life. Again, the confession in Romans 10:9 was that “Jesus is Lord.”

The Ethiopian man in Acts chapter 8 provides a good example of such a confession. Since some of the Greek manuscripts do not contain his confession, some Bible translations only put his confession as a footnote. Still, the confession is found in some manuscripts and is in perfect harmony with what we have already studied. Prior to being baptized, he simply confessed, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). In the same way, you must confess Jesus Christ before you are baptized.

Be Baptized

The fifth step God has required you to take across the “bridge” that leads to salvation is to be baptized. For, it is impossible for you to please God without being baptized. Let’s consider.

Baptism is essential for salvation

While most religious organizations do *not* teach that baptism is necessary (required) for salvation, the Bible teaches that it is! Please consider each of the following passages for yourself. Do not allow any preconceived ideas or other religious

teaching to hinder your understanding of what God says.

In Mark 16:16, Jesus clearly couples belief and baptism with salvation. He said, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Ask yourself the question, “Who does Jesus say will be saved?” Clearly, it is the one who believes and is baptized. However, simply failing to believe will lead to your eternal condemnation.

In Acts 2:38, Peter responds to the question his audience had asked (“Brothers, what should we do?,” see verse 37) by stating that both repentance and baptism are necessary in order to have sins forgiven. “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Ask yourself, “Can I be saved without having my sins forgiven?” If not, what does Peter say must be done in order to have your sins forgiven? He clearly says that repentance and baptism are necessary.

In Acts 22:16, Saul (later named Paul) was told to be baptized and that this would accomplish the washing away of his sins. “And now, why are you delaying? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” Again, ask yourself, “Can I be saved without having my sins washed away?” According to the things we studied in lesson four, the answer is clearly, “No!” Since you cannot be saved while you are still in your sins, you must have them “washed away” (forgiven). And, God clearly says that baptism is necessary for that to happen! Also, God says that baptism is involved in “calling on the name of the Lord” (which is said to be necessary for salvation in Romans 10:13).

In Galatians 3:27, Paul says that you are baptized into Christ. “For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.” Why is it important to be “in Christ”? Romans 6:23 and 2 Timothy 2:10 both show that salvation is located “in Christ.” Furthermore, Ephesians 1:3 says that all spiritual blessings are located “in Christ.” Ephesians 1:7 says that this includes the forgiveness of sins. Now, you must recognize that Galatians 3:27 says baptism is what puts you in Christ – where salvation is! So, how can you be saved without being baptized into Christ? You simply cannot be! You are not “in Christ” until you are “baptized into Christ”!

In 1 Peter 3:20-21, Peter says that baptism saves you (just as Noah and his family were saved by water): “who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In it a few – that is, eight people – were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge [or, appeal] of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Did you catch that? Peter said that baptism “now saves you.” Don’t let anyone tell you that baptism does *not* save you!

Very simply, everyone who is in need of what baptism does must be baptized. Those who are not in need of what baptism does do not need to be baptized! For example, infants do not need to be baptized because infants do not have sin in their lives. But, everyone who has sinned must be baptized according to the teachings of God’s word. For, baptism is necessary in order for the sinner to be saved, to be forgiven, and to come into Jesus Christ!

According to Romans 6:3-4, baptism stands between the old person of sin and the new person of righteousness. It says, “Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.” So, you cannot start your new life for Christ until you have buried the old person of sin in the waters of baptism!

Then, let me also state that it is essential for you to be baptized for the right reasons. For, it may be that you have been baptized in the past, but not for the reasons the Bible teaches. Maybe you were baptized as a baby. Maybe you were baptized *after* you thought you were already saved (as many churches teach). But, if you were not baptized to be saved, to be forgiven, and to enter a right relationship with Jesus Christ, you were not really obedient to God’s command and need to be baptized correctly, for the right reasons!

Baptism is an immersion in water

“Baptism” is practiced in different ways in churches today. Some immerse. Some sprinkle or pour water over the head of the individual. But, what is the truth? The Greek word for “baptism” actually

means to immerse or overwhelm. So, it requires completely covering the person with water.

Then, not only is this the meaning of the word “baptism,” but it is also the action the Bible shows us about baptism in the New Testament. For example, whenever Jesus was baptized in Matthew 3:16, the Scriptures say that He came “up immediately from the water,” implying He had been down in the water. Similarly, Acts 8:38-39 shows a man going down into and coming up from the water for his baptism. It says, “So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing.”

Then, we have already seen that the language in Romans 6:3-4 concerning baptism is that it is a “burial.” Certainly, a burial is a complete covering – not a sprinkling or pouring! So, only immersion is acceptable to accomplish God’s command known as “baptism.” The practices of sprinkling or pouring water over someone’s head simply do not fulfill God’s command to be baptized (immersed)! Therefore, if you have not been fully immersed in water for the right reasons, you must do so in order to be saved!

Remain Faithful

After being obedient to the things God has commanded (as we have discussed), you are now a child of God (a Christian)! You can rejoice because you have been forgiven of your sins and are in a saved condition! You have now gained access to all the spiritual blessings that are in Christ Jesus! You have been added to the church of Christ – the body of the saved (as we’ll discuss in lesson seven). But, you must also continue to be obedient to God throughout your life. For, it is impossible for you to please God without remaining faithful to God. Let’s consider.

Faithfulness is essential for salvation

Your life as a Christian must look different than the life you lived prior to becoming a Christian. Remember, you repented of all your past sins. Now, you must act on that repentance and actually live for

God rather than sin! Romans 6:3-4 called this walking “in newness of life.” More will be said about this in lesson eight, when we study what God requires of you as a Christian.

You are expected to live a life of faithful obedience that is fully committed to God. This is your responsibility throughout the remainder of your life – until death (even if it means dying for the Lord’s cause). Consider what Jesus told some Christians who were about to be persecuted for following Him in Revelation 2:10: “Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Notice that the only way they would be saved is if they remained faithful to Christ!

So, in order to remain a faithful follower (disciple) of Jesus Christ, you must always give Him control of your life. Let His will be done in your life rather than your own. Keep His commandments. Deny yourself. Endure hardships for Him. Put Him first. Don’t deny Him. Learn from Him. Grow in His service. And, follow Him wherever He leads you through the pages of the New Testament.

How Christians can be forgiven of sin

You must live properly in the sight of God because it is possible to sin after becoming a Christian and lose your salvation. Galatians 5:4 clearly teaches this. When Paul wrote to some who had previously become Christians and had went back into sin, he told them, “You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace.”

Anytime you violate the law Jesus has given in the New Testament, you fail to put Him first and sin against God. When you do this, you must return to Christ so that you can be forgiven of your sins. One such person who had sinned against God after becoming a disciple was told, “Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, your heart’s intent may be forgiven” (Acts 8:22). And, 1 John 1:9 instructs, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” So, returning to Jesus involves repenting of your sin, confessing your sin to God, and asking Him to forgive you. When you do this, He will forgive you!

Conclusion

God has told you exactly what you must do in order to be saved from your sins. If you have not obeyed His instructions, you are not saved – and should obey Him immediately! So, what should you take from this study? (1) A knowledge that God has required you to *do* something to be saved and a proper understanding of obedience. (2) An understanding of what you must do to be saved (hear God’s word, believe in Jesus Christ, repent of your sins, confess Christ, and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins). (3) An understanding that you must live a life of faithful obedience *after* you have become a Christian and how you can be forgiven when you fall back into sin. While we could discuss more, I hope that this lesson has helped you understand what you must do to be saved!

Study Questions

Why is it essential to know the answer to this question?

1. Is There Anything You Must Do?

Can you earn your salvation after you have sinned?

Has God required you to do anything to be saved?

How is Noah a good example of obedience?

2. Hear God’s Word

Is hearing God’s word essential for salvation?

What must you hear?

3. Believe In Jesus

Is believing in Jesus essential for salvation?

Are you saved by faith only?

4. Repent

Is repentance essential for salvation?

What is repentance?

5. Confess Christ

Is confession essential for salvation?

What must you confess?

6. Be Baptized

Is baptism essential for salvation?

What is baptism?

7. Remain Faithful

Is faithfulness essential for salvation?

How can you be forgiven of your sins after becoming a Christian?

Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Lesson 7: What Is The Church?

There are tens of thousands of different churches in the world today, all with different doctrinal beliefs and involved in different works. Typically, it is suggested that God approves of this kind of arrangement. Yet, we have to allow God's word to challenge our thinking on this point and see whether such an arrangement is according to the Bible and pleasing to God.

As we seek the answers to life's most essential questions, we must seek the right answer to the question: "What is the church?" Is it important to join a church? Does God approve of all the different churches that exist today? How do I know what church to join?

The Bible is clear in teaching that Jesus has only established one church. For instance, before the church was established, Jesus said, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18). Based on the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Jesus would build His *church* (singular) – not His *churches*. Then, when the church was established in Acts chapter 2, only one church was established. Whenever some of the people obeyed the command to repent and be baptized (as we saw in lesson six from Acts 2:38), they were "added to them" (Acts 2:41). Then, God continued adding the saved "to their number" (Acts 2:47; note that some Greek manuscripts say they were added to the church). Regardless whether the word "church" appears in the text, that is clearly what they were added to. This was the *church* (singular) that had now been established by Jesus Christ. And, there was only one church in existence.

Since Jesus has only established one church, you must understand what is involved in being part of that church. Many people have been deceived into being part of churches that have been created by people rather than the one church established by Jesus Christ. However, you need to live as a member of Christ's church – and only Christ's church! Therefore, in this seventh lesson, we will seek the answer to the question, "What is the church?"

What The Church Is Not

Most people have heard of "church." And, because the word is commonly misused, you should recognize that it is quite possible that you have developed an incorrect view of the church. For, the reality is that there are many false views of the church today that are not at all supported by the Bible. Therefore, let's spend the first part of our study eliminating these false ideas from our minds so that we can build the right understanding of what the church is.

Many false views of the church

There are thousands of different churches in the world today. But, can they all be right in God's sight? There are Catholic churches, Baptist churches, Methodist churches, Pentecostal churches, Lutheran churches, Episcopal churches, "non-denominational" churches, etc. Each one of these different churches have different beliefs, teach different doctrines, and practice different forms of "Christianity." So, how can they all be right if they all teach and practice different things?

The simple truth is: Everyone can't be right! There is only one Way! In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Then, in 1 Corinthians 1:13, Paul asked the rhetorical question, "Is Christ divided?" The obvious answer is "No!" So, since Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father and Jesus Christ is not divided, how can it be okay for churches to be divided in their beliefs, teachings, and practices? How can they all be following the one Way of Jesus Christ? They simply cannot be! In fact, God commanded, "Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no

divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Paul also wrote and said that there is only “one faith.” This is the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27), meaning that there is only one system of religious belief, teaching, and practice that is acceptable to God. Notice the language in Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope at your calling – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” So, since there is only one system of acceptable religious belief, teaching, and practice, God simply cannot approve of the religious division that exists in the world today.

In addition to there being only “one faith,” also notice that Paul says there is only “one body.” Other passages help us understand that the body is the church (see Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18). So, there is only one church. This is precisely the number of churches Jesus promised to build and actually built (as we saw from Matthew 16:18 and Acts 2:41, 47).

Yet, despite the fact that God has only established one church and provided only one faith, many people have introduced false ideas as to what the church is and have greatly distorted the church in the process, making it become something God never intended for it to become! Let’s briefly discuss some of these false ideas about the church.

An earthly organization

Some people view the church as being nothing more than an earthly organization. Just like many who lived during Jesus’ lifetime were looking for Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom, many people today have not improved in their concept of this kingdom (church). People often still see the church only through a physical lens – making it into nothing more than an earthly organization that accomplishes physical work to make this world a better place. However, the Bible never teaches that the church Christ established is an earthly organization!

Consider some characteristics of an earthly organization – as churches today often have been made to resemble these. (1) They have hierarchical systems that have put some people above others. In these systems, there is often a division made between

the “clergy” (or, spiritual professionals) and “laity” (“common” Christians). And, those in the greatest positions of authority make changes to the rules and regulations. In business, this is good and proper. However, regarding the church, there must not be central governing bodies, counsels, or human heads of any kind (like the Pope) who make “policies” regarding the doctrines of the church! The Bible is the church’s only guide and Christ is the church’s only Head! (2) They have business-oriented goals. Businesses *should* think about customers and finances. However, churches cannot be driven by financial ramifications or be engaged in “people pleasing.” Both will lead to a distortion of God’s plan! Instead, the church must be concerned about souls! (3) They focus on fundraising. As businesses and secular organizations seek to increase their “bottom lines” they will try to do as much as they can to accomplish this. The church that is viewed as an earthly organization will also likely be engaged in fundraising activities that are unauthorized by the Scriptures (i.e. bake sales, rummage sales, etc.).

A social club

Some people view the church as being a social club. This may be due to the misguided views many people have about the subject of fellowship. To many, fellowship is primarily concerned with physical things. While fellowship between Christians is certainly important, the fellowship discussed in the Bible is a spiritual fellowship that is based on a mutual relationship with God (see 1 John 1:7). Then, due to this spiritual fellowship, Christians should want to be close to each other on a physical level. However, it is not the role of the church to provide for and organize such social gatherings/events – as there is *no authority* in the Bible for such as the work of the church!

Consider some characteristics of the church that views itself as a social club. (1) It will often have assemblies that “water down” God’s word (since the primary focus often becomes physical socialization rather than spiritual instruction and encouragement). (2) It will often be involved in putting on plays, field trips, singles’ nights, movie nights, athletic leagues, and other entertaining activities. (3) It will often build, maintain, and use gymnasiums, kitchens, and theaters for social and recreational activities.

A political machine

Some churches have stopped speaking God's word and have exchanged it for the "social gospel." They begin focusing on social issues and reforms. So, they become political activists. Now, please understand that individuals *do* have the opportunity to be involved in politics and social issues. But, this is not the God-given role of the church (except as it may influence individuals and societies through the teaching of God's word)!

Consider some characteristics of the church that views itself as a political machine. (1) They often stop preaching God's word. (2) They will often present "sermons" that are focused on "culturally-relevant" matters. (3) They will often present "sermons" concerned with being "politically correct" (i.e. no longer speaking out against homosexuality, abortion, divorce for any cause, women preachers/elders/deacons, etc.).

A building where religious people meet together

Some people act and talk as if the church is nothing more than a building where religious people come together. However, when Saul was persecuting the church (see Acts 8:1-3), what was he doing? Was he destroying a physical structure by using demolition tools and setting fires to buildings? Or, was he harming the people who belonged to Jesus Christ? The answer is obvious that the church was *not* a physical structure! Yet, many people today talk of "going to church" as if the church is a physical place.

Consider some characteristics of a church that becomes nothing but a meeting place. (1) Members of that "church" will probably view their responsibilities lightly (if they recognize any responsibilities at all). And, this is only reasonable. After all, if you are someone who "attends church," it carries far less responsibility than being part of the church! (2) Members who have this view of the church will be less likely to become involved in one another's lives. They will only view each another as attending the same church (building) every once in a while. They will not be devoted to helping one another live in the way God wants His people to be living. (3) It often develops the "see you next week" mentality. This mentality is demonstrated when people gather together "at church," leave "church"

(the building), and have minimal contact or interaction with one another until the next "meeting."

Christ

Some people view the church as possessing the role that only belongs to Christ. So, some churches have reversed their role with Christ's role. These churches see themselves as being the head of the body, rather than giving Christ that exalted position (as Colossians 1:18 describes). Christ is the only Head of the body (which is the church). Yet, *churches* are often seen as the giver and interpreter of the law. The Pope, bishops, priests, counsels, central governing bodies, "church creeds," etc. are all proof of this. Furthermore, the church can be viewed as the savior, rather than Christ! Some believe that as long as they are on some church's "membership role" that they will go to Heaven. However, as we will observe, the church is composed of the saved. So, if an individual is not living right before God, he/she will not be saved (no matter what church's membership role he/she is on)!

Consider some characteristics of the church that exalts itself to the role of Christ. (1) It dictates and changes the law rather than simply upholding the law God has revealed in the Bible. (2) It becomes a human organization that submits to men and women rather than a spiritual kingdom that is only subject to Jesus Christ. (3) It may teach salvation through a church rather than salvation through Jesus Christ.

A group of denominations

Finally, the church is often believed to be a collection of all the "Christians" from all of the various churches. So, the "Church of Christ" is viewed as a big umbrella. And, under that umbrella are all the different "Christian" denominational and non-denominational churches. So, the church is often believed to consist of "Christians" from the Catholic Church, "Christians" from the Baptist Church, "Christians" from the Methodist Church, "Christians" from the Lutheran Church, "Christians" from the Pentecostal Church, "Christians" from the Nazarene Church, etc., etc., etc.

Consider some characteristics of the church that views itself as a group of denominations. (1) It accepts what is called "unity in diversity" (or, ecumenism). That is, folks believe we can all believe and follow the Bible differently – but all still be acceptable to God and be part of the one church of

Christ. However, this is *not* the true unity that is described and commanded within the pages of the Bible (see 1 Corinthians 1:10 again). (2) It considers people to be “Christians” who have never really been obedient to God’s plan of salvation (as we discussed in lesson six). Instead, the majority of people who have joined these churches have obeyed some man-made “plan of salvation” that involves such things as “faith only” teaching, the “Sinner’s Prayer” in which people are taught to pray for Jesus to enter their hearts, false teaching that says baptism is something to be done *after* you have already been saved, infant baptism, baptism by sprinkling or pouring, etc. (3) It considers the church to be made up of religious bodies instead of people. Yet, we will see that the church is composed of people. (4) It accepts churches that believe, teach, and practice false teachings that are contrary to the Bible. In reality, the false teaching about salvation is only a small part of the false teaching that exists in churches today. And, God has told us that we must not tolerate any false teaching (see 2 John 1:9-11 and Galatians 1:6-9)!

The “Universal” Church

Certainly, there are many false ideas about the church. I am sure the ones we’ve considered only represent a few of the false ideas that exist. I am also certain that additional points could be made about each of the things we’ve just discussed. However, my intention has simply been to draw some contrasts between these false ideas and the truth about the church that is taught in God’s word. Having eliminated the false ideas about the church from our minds, let’s now focus on what God teaches the church is. As we do, let’s begin by focusing on the “universal” church.

“Ekklesia”

The Greek word that is translated “church” is the word “ekklesia.” In addition to the translation of “church,” this word can also be translated “congregation” and “assembly” – all referencing a group of people. Consider a couple Bible references to this word in order to develop a better understanding of what the church is.

First, it has an ordinary use with reference to a gathering of people. This can be seen when a riot

had formed in the city of Ephesus in Acts 19. Three times in Acts 19 (verses 32, 39, and 41), the Bible refers to this “assembly” by using the Greek word “ekklesia.” So, this word has a general use that refers to any assembly/group of people.

Second, it is primarily used in a religious sense in the New Testament. Jesus used the word in this way when He said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). The word is also used in this way in Acts 8:3, when the Scriptures talk about Saul ravaging the church. When it is used in this way, it denotes the congregation/community of those who have been obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ and have given their lives to the Lord. Therefore, the word denotes a “called out” people. To such disciples of Christ, Peter wrote, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). So, this is a collection of people who have been separated from sin and are now living for the Lord!

The collection of God’s people

Sometimes, the word “church” is used in a “universal” sense. This is seen in Matthew 16:18. Again, Jesus said, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” There is only *one* church in this “universal” sense. This term (“universal church”) refers to the collection of God’s people – all those who are in a saved condition. So, only those who are part of this one church are in a saved condition.

As you can see, when this word is used in reference to God’s people, this is a very special designation – as Christ only established *one* church. That is, He only has one collection of saved people who belong to Him (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:4). And, it is only this church that belongs to Him who have access to all the spiritual blessings Christ provides! Notice that “every spiritual blessing” is “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). These spiritual blessings include such things as being adopted as children of God (Ephesians 1:5), the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7), and eternal salvation (2 Timothy 2:10). No other church has access to these blessings!

Then, as you recognize the significance of being part of Christ’s church, please be reminded how you become part of Christ’s “universal” church.

The Bible clearly teaches that God only adds those who are obedient to His plan of salvation to His church (hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, and be baptized – as we studied in lesson six). Notice the events of Acts 2 to clearly see this. In Acts 2, Peter preached the message of the gospel. When many of the people heard this message, they wanted to know what they needed to do to be saved (verse 37). Then, Peter instructed them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (verse 38). After Peter continued preaching to them, about 3,000 people obeyed the gospel. And, God added them to the church (verses 41 and 47).

Furthermore, there is no earthly organizational structure over this “universal” church (as Jesus Christ is the one and only Head of the church). There is no collective earthly work this “universal” church is engaged in wherein all members of the church must send money to a headquarters of some sort (though every member of the church does have an individual work to accomplish). And, there is no collective worship of the “universal” church wherein members must travel to a certain location at a certain time (though every member of the church must be committed to worshiping God individually).

Other terms used to refer to the church

Let’s observe some other terms that are used to reference this same group of people (Christ’s church). Through an observance of these things, we will be able to gain a better understanding of what the church really is!

First, the church is the kingdom of God. Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry, He announced the coming of His kingdom. And, please note that this kingdom was to be established during the lifetime of some who heard Jesus preach. In Luke 9:27, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

Today, Jesus’ followers are part of that kingdom – which is the church. Notice how the terms “church” and “kingdom” are used interchangeably in Matthew 16:18-19: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been

loosed in heaven.” Also notice how Colossians 1:13 identifies the kingdom of God as being in existence: “He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” So, we are not still waiting for Jesus’ kingdom to be established. Instead, Christ’s kingdom is His church that is composed of kingdom citizens who are devoted to their King, Jesus Christ (who has all authority)!

Second, the church is the body of Christ. Colossians 1:18 says that the church is the body of Christ and Christ is its Head: “He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.” Similarly, Ephesians 1:22-23 says, “And he subjected everything under his feet and appointed him as head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.”

This comparison is also found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. In this passage, we discover that Christians are like individual members of a body – each one performing an important function that contributes to the overall growth and strength of the body. This passage also forbids division within the body of Christ! Therefore, we learn that the church must take its direction from the Head, Jesus Christ (as a body takes direction from its head). We also learn that each member of the body is important and has something to contribute.

Third, the church is the household of God. 1 Timothy 3:15 says, “But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” Ephesians 2:19-22 says, “So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.”

The church enjoys a special relationship with God and with one another. It is a spiritual family. Christians are God’s children and He is their Father. And, Christians are brothers and sisters within God’s household. Because of this, Christians are heirs of God – and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ! Consider the

language of Romans 8:14-17: “For all those led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons. You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father!’ The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs – heirs of God and coheirs with Christ – if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

Fourth, the church is the temple of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 identifies the church as the temple of God: “Don’t you yourselves know that you are God’s temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is holy, and that is what you are.” The church, therefore, constitutes “God’s dwelling in the Spirit” (as Ephesians 2:19-22 also demonstrated) and its members are expected to be holy!

Today, God dwells in Christians and the church through His word (directing and changing their lives through it). And, as the temple of God, God’s people (His church) are expected to honor and glorify Him in all areas of their lives by keeping His commandments and being faithful to Him! Listen to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. “Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.”

Fifth, the church is the church of Christ. The church is the people belonging to Jesus Christ, having been purchased by His blood. Acts 20:28 says (in the context of Paul speaking to the elders of a local church), “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.” We could just as easily say that the church is Christ’s (or God’s) church.

Romans 16:16 then identifies local churches as “churches of Christ.” It says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send you greetings.” If local churches are “churches of Christ,” the one “universal” church could accurately be called the church of Christ! The church, then, is composed of those who have been separated from the world to accomplish the mission of God on this earth and be rewarded eternally! These people are happy to wear the name of Jesus Christ – the one who died

to save them. Therefore, they will reject being identified in any other way besides the names that are identified in Scripture! This church belongs to Jesus Christ – and they will refused to be called by human names such as “Catholic,” “Baptist,” “Methodist,” “Lutheran,” “Wesleyan,” etc.!

The “Local” Church

Having now considered what the church is from a “universal” perspective (i.e. the one collection of all the saved), we also need to consider that the word “church” is used in a “local” sense in the Bible. Therefore, not only do we need to understand the “universal” church, but also have the right understanding of “local” churches as God designed them. For, like the “universal” church, the “local” church has also been designed by God!

A local collection of God’s people

Sometimes, the word “church” is used in a local sense. This refers to a collection of God’s people (Christians who are members of the one “universal” church, having obeyed God’s plan of salvation) in a local geographic area who have joined themselves together to work for and worship God. For example, the New Testament discusses such local churches in places like Philippi, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Rome, Corinth, Antioch, and many others.

While there are many churches in this “local” sense (in many different geographic areas), these are *not* different denominations that hold to different beliefs and practices! Rather, the local churches that you can read about in the Bible were expected to be united and to all believe, teach, and practice the same things (as revealed by the one faith of the gospel of Christ)! So, please understand: The Catholic church, Baptist church, Methodist church, Christian church, Presbyterian church, Lutheran church, etc. are *not* all branches of Christ’s church! For, they do not accurately teach and practice what the Bible teaches (they may teach *some*, but, not all of Christ’s doctrine). For instance, many of these churches change God’s teachings about the plan of salvation. Instead, true local churches are composed of those who have been obedient to the commands of God and hold on to God’s pattern!

Furthermore, the Bible does teach that you should join a local church. Throughout the New Testament, the approved example goes as follows: People become Christians (as discussed in our previous study), are added by God to His one “universal” church, and then join themselves to Christians in their local geographic areas who have done the same (thereby, forming local churches). Acts 9:26 shows the example of Saul doing this after he became a Christian and came to Jerusalem: “When he arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples...” You see, God does not want His people to be alone. Therefore, He has created the local church to be a base of fellowship and strength that is greater than the individual. However, you should not attempt to join just any local church (as there are many local churches that do not follow the New Testament pattern for local churches). Instead, if there is no faithful local church (one that adheres to the teachings of the New Testament) in your area, you should endeavor to start one as you teach the gospel in your community or move to an area where you *can* associate yourself with faithful Christians. For, you do not want to be guilty of participating in anything that goes against Christ’s teaching in the New Testament (see 2 John 1:9-11)!

The pattern for local churches

You see, God has given a clear blueprint (pattern) for local churches to follow (as revealed in the New Testament). Remember (as we discussed in lesson three), Colossians 3:17 demands that everything you do and say be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” This equally applies to what is done by a local church. 2 Timothy 1:13 simply instructs, “Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” Consider a few brief points about the pattern God has given the local church.

First, God has given a pattern for the organizational structure of the local church. Unlike what we have observed regarding the universal church (which had no God-given earthly organizational structure), God has given local churches an organizational structure. Philippians 1:1 summarizes this organizational structure. Paul addressed his letter to the local church at Philippi by saying, “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.” Within a local congregation, God wants there to be “overseers”

(also called “elders,” “shepherds,” “pastors,” “bishops,” and “presbyters” in the Scriptures) who must meet specific qualifications in order to serve in this capacity and have been given the oversight of the congregation. “Deacons” also must meet specific qualifications to fill the role of special servants of the congregation. Finally, the “saints” refer to all those who are Christians. Although local churches are authorized to exist without elders and deacons, God’s plan is for every local church to be organized in this way.

Second, God has given a pattern for the work of the local church. Unlike what we observed regarding the universal church (which had no collective work), God has given the local church a specific work to accomplish (collectively). The authorization God has given local churches in the New Testament regarding their work is to proclaim His word (1 Thessalonians 1:8), edify/build up the saved (1 Corinthians 14:26), and show benevolence/generosity toward needy Christians (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). While individual Christians have been given many different works and responsibilities in the pages of God’s word, God has limited the collective work of local churches to these three areas.

Third, God has given a pattern for the worship of the local church. Unlike what we observed regarding the universal church (which had no collective earthly assembly or worship), God has authorized the local church to assemble and worship together (1 Corinthians 14:23). When a local church does assemble to worship, God has authorized five activities. These are: Praying (1 Corinthians 14:15), singing (1 Corinthians 14:15), preaching (Acts 20:7), partaking of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of every week (Acts 20:7), and taking up the collection on the first day of every week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). While individuals can and should be worshipping God outside the assemblies of the local church any time they have opportunity to do so (see John 4:23-24), there is a specific God-given responsibility for local churches to engage in these five specific acts of worship. And, when the local church does assemble together, members of the church have the responsibility to attend (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Conclusion

Christ has only established one church that is composed of all those who have been saved by Him (in obedience to His word). Then, God desires all Christians to join themselves to a local church that follows His pattern in all things. So, what should you take from this study? (1) An understanding that there are many false ideas about what “church” is and that not all churches are the same or right in God’s sight. (2) An understanding of your need to be part of Christ’s one true church, which is His collection of the saved. (3) A basic understanding that the word “church” is used in the Bible with reference to the “universal” and “local” church. (4) A basic understanding that God has a pattern for local churches to follow and that you should be part of a local church that follows this pattern! While we could discuss more, I hope that this lesson has helped you understand what the church is!

Study Questions

Why is it essential to know the answer to this question?

1. What The Church Is Not

Can all the different churches in existence today be right in the sight of God?

Is the church an earthly organization? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as an earthly organization.

Is the church a social club? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as a social club.

Is the church a political machine? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as a political machine.

Is the church a building where religious people meet together? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as a building where religious people meet together.

Does the church have the same role as Jesus Christ? List some characteristics of the church that views itself in the role of Christ.

Is the church a group of denominations? List some characteristics of the church that views itself as a group of denominations.

2. The “Universal” Church

What does the Greek word “ekklesia” mean?

What is the “universal” church of Christ? Who is part of this church?

What is the significance of the following terms used in connection with the church?

1. The kingdom of God –

2. The body of Christ –

3. The household of God –

4. The temple of God –

5. The church of Christ –

3. The “Local” Church

What is a “local” church of Christ? Should you join a local church of Christ?

What is the pattern for local churches in each of the following areas?

1. The organizational structure of the local church –

2. The work of the local church –

3. The worship of the local church –

Answers To Life's Most Essential Questions

Lesson 8: What Does God Expect Of Me?

If you have taken the steps discussed in lesson six, you are a Christian. You have been forgiven of your sins and now live with the hope of being saved eternally, as part of Christ's church! Yet, God is not finished with you. Instead, He has given you certain responsibilities as a Christian. For, the Bible teaches that it is possible for you to sin so as to fall from the grace of God and be lost. Galatians 5:4 says, "You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace."

As we seek the answers to life's most essential questions, we now come to our final question that we must have answered accurately: "What does God expect of me?" What are my responsibilities as a Christian? What should my life look like, now that I am a Christian? Are there things God continues to require of me so that I might be saved?

As a Christian, you are a "disciple" of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26). Now, there are two characteristics to being a disciple. First, a disciple is a student of the Master (Jesus). Second, a disciple is an imitator of the Master (Jesus). Therefore, being a Christian is *not* a one-time decision. Rather, it is a new way of life that is dedicated to learning and following the ways of the Master! Because of this diligence that is required of His disciples, Jesus told people to count the cost (Luke 14:25-33)! That is, they needed to make sure that they were *willing* to do all that would be required of them before they followed Him (just like a person who wanted to build

a tower would see if he had enough money to complete it before starting or a king would consider if his army would be victorious before entering a war). Therefore, you should carefully consider the things that will be discussed in this lesson, and determine whether you are willing to live your life as the Lord desires! However, you need to make this determination with the understanding that you will be judged and spend your eternity somewhere – either in Heaven or in Hell (as we discussed in lesson two), realizing you cannot be saved outside of Jesus Christ (i.e. without being His disciple)! For, although the cost of being Christ's disciple is high, the reward of discipleship is much higher!

Since the Bible teaches you can fall from the grace of God after being saved by it, you must remain faithful to Jesus throughout your life in order to be saved (Revelation 2:10). Although you will still sin after you become a Christian, you must remember that God has told you what you must do to be forgiven of that sin (go back and review this point in lesson six). So, you will need to continually press forward as a disciple of Christ. Therefore, in this eighth (and final) lesson, we will seek the answer to the question, "What does God expect of me?"

Fully Trust In God

You must fully trust in God. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight." The Christian will be tempted to rely on his/her own ways or on the ways of other people. Yet, the child of God must fully rely on the ways of God – recognizing His ways as the only right way to live! Jeremiah 10:23 points out no one is capable of making all the right decisions by himself/herself, without guidance from God: "I know, Lord, that a person's way of life is not his own; no one who walks determines his own steps." Therefore, consider some areas in which you must demonstrate your full trust in God. For, it is only when you fully trust in God that you will give yourself entirely to Him, knowing that He will guard what you have entrusted to Him and you will not be distracted by the things of this life!

Trust God in prayer

Satan desires for you to be worried about the things of this life (i.e. finances, security, health, etc.). He wants you to become distracted by these things so they steal your focus away from serving God. However, as a Christian, you have the tremendous blessing of taking your concerns to God in prayer. 1 Peter 5:7 says, “casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.” It should be a comforting thought to know that the Almighty Creator of this universe invites you to cast all your cares and anxieties on Him – because He cares for you!

James 5:16 says that the “prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.” It is important to realize that when you cast your cares on God that He does hear your prayers and has promised that your prayers (as a Christian) have great power. Still, prayer is only effective when it is accompanied by faith (James 1:5-8) and offered according to God’s will (Matthew 6:10). So, you must trust that God cares for you and take your cares to Him in prayer!

Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” As a Christian, you have access to God through prayer. Therefore, while the rest of this world gets overwhelmed by the stresses, uncertainties, and hardships of this life, you must fully trust in God by casting all your cares on Him and choose not to worry, having the peace of God to guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus!

Trust God to provide

As a Christian, you must not put your focus on chasing after earthly things (see Matthew 6:19-34). Matthew 6:19-21 teaches you not to set your heart on storing up treasures on the earth. Instead, you must store up treasures in Heaven. Then, Matthew 6:22-24 teaches you to have a single focus in life rather than attempting to serve two masters (the implication is that your single focus must be to please God). And, Matthew 6:25-34 teaches that you must not worry about the things of this life and that you must simply trust in God to provide.

Specifically notice Matthew 6:25. It teaches you not to be worried about the things of this life – not even the things that are essential to life (food, drink, and clothing). Jesus said, “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing?” Rather, Jesus taught that you must seek God first (even above the necessities of life), promising that God will provide everything you need physically if you do. Matthew 6:33 says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.” Note that the “these things” refers to the necessities of life. Now, consider that if you must seek God above the necessities of life, then you must certainly seek God above earthly things that are *not* necessities! The point is: God must come first in your life – above everything and everyone!

You see, worrying about earthly things steals your focus! So, rather than focusing on earthly things (even the necessities of life), you must focus on the things of God! Yet, please also understand that God’s promise to provide for the physical necessities of life does *not* mean that you do not have to work (see 2 Thessalonians 3)! Still, you must trust that God will provide for your necessities if you seek Him first!

Trust that God will save you

You should not spend your time questioning whether God will save you (as long as you are obedient to Him)! No matter what difficulties and temptations you face during your earthly life, God promises that everything will work out for you spiritually as a Christian. Romans 8:28 says, “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

Then, consider the great promise that is given in Romans 8:37-39: “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So, there is nothing and no one who can separate you from God! No matter how much you are tempted or tried, no matter how severe persecution you may face, and no matter how strong the enemy

may appear, God says that they cannot separate you from the love of God (i.e. they cannot make you sin)! Instead, the Scriptures teach that the only one who can cause you to be separated from the love of God is **yourself**. For, you can choose to sin and separate yourself from God again (remember what we read in Galatians 5:4). Therefore, Jude 1:21 instructs you to keep yourself “in the love of God.” So, again, as long as you keep yourself in the love of God, you can experience the great comfort of knowing that nothing and no one is powerful enough to steal your soul away from God! You must trust that God can and will save you if you are faithful to Him!

Completely Devote Yourself To God

You must completely devote yourself to God. When you fully trust in God, you will have no problems making a full commitment of your life to following God. This sort of devotion will impact every area of your life – including the way you act, the things you think, the way you talk, and everything you do!

Jesus requires complete devotion

Let’s go back to Matthew 6. For, Jesus taught that you cannot serve two masters. Matthew 6:24 says, “No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” You must devote yourself to serving just one master (either to Christ or something/someone else)! Therefore, you simply cannot be pleasing to God unless you are entirely devoted to serving Him!

As you consider your devotion to Christ, you must recognize that you are either completely with Jesus or you are entirely against Him. In Matthew 12:30, Jesus said, “Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters.” You cannot be a “fair-weather-follower” of Christ (only serving Him when it is easy or convenient to do so)! In addition, you cannot be acceptable to God if you are only following Him part of the time. For, Jesus said that if you are not *completely* (100%) committed to Him, you are His enemy!

Then, whenever you commit yourself to following Him, you must not look back. Luke 9:57-62 says, “As they were traveling on the road someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus told him, ‘Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’ Then he said to another, ‘Follow me.’ ‘Lord,’ he said, ‘first let me go bury my father.’ But he told him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.’ Another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

In this passage, Jesus demonstrates the commitment it will take to follow Him. He points out that it requires commitment and sacrifice, and that you cannot take your eyes off the prize/goal by looking back! But, how can Christians be guilty of looking back? Sometimes Christians look back by desiring the relationships, riches, pleasures, comforts, or ways of this life rather than focusing on the things of God and pursuing His will! Christ’s point in this passage is: “To be My disciple, it requires intense focus on the things God has commanded and you cannot allow yourself to be distracted or misled by the things of this world!”

The simple fact of the matter is that nothing and nobody can come before Jesus Christ in your life. In Luke 14:26-27, Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — yes, and even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” Then, verse 33 adds, “In the same way, therefore, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.

Now, Jesus is *not* saying that you must act in a way that is harmful or contrary to others (as other passages of Scripture clearly command you to love everyone). Instead, what Jesus *is* saying is this: “I must come first. There cannot be anything or anyone more important or more precious to you than Me.” So, you must consider whether there is anything or anyone in your life more important than serving Jesus Christ. Is there anything or anyone in your life you would not give up in order to follow Jesus Christ? If so, Jesus said that you cannot be His disciple until you change this!

Listen to how Romans 12:1-2 describes this complete commitment to Christ. “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” So, realizing everything God has done to save you through Jesus Christ, how can you do anything except give your life entirely to living for Him?

What this will require

Jesus Christ requires you to make a complete commitment to following Him. But, how do you actually accomplish this complete dedication to Christ? Briefly consider each of the following.

First, you must practice self-denial. Read Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:20 and evaluate if you could say the same thing about your life. He said, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” You see, you cannot live for yourself *and* for Christ. You must make a choice between the two! Again, there can only be one master of your life. Will that master be Christ, yourself, or something/someone else? To be Christ’s disciple, you must deny yourself and faithfully follow Him. In Luke 9:23, Jesus said, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

Second, you must love Christ. You must recognize what Christ has done for you – in giving you the opportunity to be saved from your sins (as we discussed in lesson five). Now, He wants you to give your life to Him! You do that by allowing the love Christ demonstrated for you to control the decisions you make, always remembering how much He has done for you. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: If one died for all, then all died. And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.” However, please remember that loving Christ is not just about *saying* you love Him. Instead, it is about keeping His commandments. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15).

Third, you must focus on Jesus throughout your life. Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” You must lay aside the weight of sin that hinders you from running the “race” God would have you run, focusing on living in a way that is pleasing to God and on the prize of eternal life in Heaven. In doing so, you must not become distracted by the temporary things of life! For, if you focus on worldly things, you will not finish the race of faith and please God with your life!

Walk In Newness Of Life

You must walk in newness of life. God wants your life as Christian to be different than it was prior. Before you became a Christian, you lived for your own physical desires. However, now that you are a Christian, your life must be committed to His ways of holiness.

You have been raised to walk in newness of life

In Romans 6:1-4, Paul reminded the Christians he was writing to that they must not continue to live in sin. Instead, they had died to sin and were buried with Christ in baptism. Then, Paul reminds them that they had been raised to walk in newness of life!

The passage says, “What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.”

The same is true about you. If you are a Christian, you have died to sin (remember, you put your past sinful life to death whenever you repented of your sins). You buried that old person of sin in the

waters of baptism to be forgiven and enter a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Then, you were raised to walk in newness of life. Therefore, you are a new creation in Christ Jesus and you must not continue living for the old ways of sin! 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!”

Walking in newness of life

Take a few moments to consider what walking in newness of life really looks like. First, consider Ephesians 4:22-24: “to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.” So, walking in “newness of life” involves these three elements: (1) Putting off the old person of sin, (2) being renewed in your mind, and (3) putting on the new person by patterning your life after the holiness of God!

Now, having considered Ephesians 4:22-24, look at Colossians 3 to see more about what this new life looks like. First, Colossians 3:1-4 describes the change in your priorities and desires – emphasizing that you are now focusing on the things of God rather than the things of the earth: “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Next, Colossians 3:5-10 identifies some things you must put off (put to death) in your new life as a Christian. These things must have absolutely *no* part in your new Christian life: “Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, God’s wrath is coming upon the disobedient, and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator.”

Finally, Colossians 3:12-4:1 discusses what your new Christian life *ought* to look like. Verses 12-17 say, “Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Then, Colossians 3:18-4:1 describes how even your relationships are impacted by walking in newness of life!

Everything is impacted by your decision to become a Christian! Since you will work to put every sinful thing in your life to death and pattern your life entirely after God and His holiness, your thoughts will be different, your words will be different, your conduct will be different, your relationships will be different, your priorities will be different, etc.! As a Christian, you will be focused on living every part of your life according to God’s standard of holiness. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

Be Diligent

You must be diligent. We have already seen that following Jesus impacts every area of your life. So, it should come as no surprise that the life of a Christian requires diligence in every area. Consider just a few.

In Bible study

God expects you to be diligently increasing your knowledge of His word. 2 Peter 3:18 says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.” Furthermore, 1 Peter 2:2-3 says, “Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk

of the word, so that you may grow up into your salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is good.” But, why is increasing your knowledge of God’s word so important? (1) To know what God expects of you (to know what His will is). (2) To keep yourself from sin. (3) To teach others. Because studying God’s word is so important, you should desire to study the Bible every day (following the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11).

In spiritual growth

God expects you to be diligent in spiritual growth. You are not “full-grown” when you become a Christian. Rather, you are a newborn baby (spiritually-speaking) and must develop into maturity! 2 Peter 1:5-7 is one passage (of many) that talks about growing, by indicating some qualities that must be added to your faith: “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.” Again, God expects you to be continually growing stronger in the faith and become more Christ-like!

In good works

God expects you to be diligent in doing good works. In fact, you have been created in Christ Jesus *for* good works! After describing how you have been saved by the grace of God, Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.” You must always work to be fruitful in Christ’s service by doing the good things He wants you to do. Knowing that there is victory in Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

In evangelism

God expects you to be diligent in evangelism. God has given His people (including you) the responsibility to teach others the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave His disciples the responsibility to carry His saving message to the lost throughout the world, in Matthew 28:19-20: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Just as someone taught you the gospel of Christ, you have the responsibility to teach someone else – who, in turn, can teach another (2 Timothy 2:2). This is a work that every servant of the Lord (every Christian) *must* do, according to 2 Timothy 2:24-26!

In church membership

God expects you to be diligent with respect to local church membership (as we discussed in the previous lesson). You should join a local church that faithfully follows God’s pattern. Then, you have certain responsibilities as a local church member. For example, you must attend the assemblies of the church (not willfully missing any of them – although some things may be outside of your control, such as sickness). Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.” You must also participate in the work of the church by doing your part and fulfilling your responsibilities toward your brethren. You must be diligent in all aspects of your membership in the local church.

In keeping God’s commandments

God expects you to be diligent in keeping all His commandments. God expects more from you than just saying that you are His follower. In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do the things I say?” So, you must be a doer of His word. James 1:22 says, “But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” And, as we’ve seen, if you really love Christ, you *will* keep His commandments (John 14:15)!

Persevere

You must persevere. There will be many difficulties that come up during your life, but, you must not give up! God expects you to persevere (stay the course) as you live on earth. You must continue to live in the way that is pleasing to God – no matter how difficult living for Jesus Christ becomes!

In persecutions

Persecution is promised to those who follow the Lord. Remember (from lesson five) that the

world hated Jesus – and Jesus promised that the world will hate those who follow Him (John 15:18-19). Then, in 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul simply stated, “In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” As we have seen, the Christian’s life is different from the world. Therefore, the world will hate Christians. Now, persecutions can take many different forms and can be more severe in some places of the world and at different times than others. However, no matter what form persecution comes in or how severe it is, you must persevere! You can persevere by looking to Jesus’ example (how He was faithful when people hated and killed Him) and by looking to the apostles’ examples (as recorded throughout the New Testament). And, think back to Revelation 2:10, as Jesus offered words of encouragement to His followers who were about to be severely persecuted. “Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

In trials

There are going to be times when your faith will be put to the test. There may be times of death, sickness, financial hardship, family struggles, and many other situations that arise throughout your life. However, you must never allow these trials to weaken you or cause you to lose your faith! In fact, the Bible teaches that if you persevere through these trying times, your faith will become stronger. Therefore, you can actually find joy in trial by knowing that they will help you become stronger! James 1:2-4 says, “Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

In temptations

You will experience temptation. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, “Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.” Satan wants to destroy your faith – and he will try to lure you away from God any way he possibly can! Yet, you must overcome/resist

his temptations. You can overcome temptation by utilizing the way God always provides for you to escape it (1 Corinthians 10:13), following Jesus’ perfect example (who lived a sinless life, Hebrews 4:15), and putting on the armor that God has given to enable you to be victorious over the devil (as described in Ephesians 6:10-18). If you do these things, you will overcome Satan!

In good works

Satan will try to discourage you from doing the good that you should be doing. Yet, you must not lose heart in doing what is right! Galatians 6:9-10 says, “Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.” Instead, as we saw from 1 Corinthians 15:58, you must “be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord’s work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” Therefore, you must always remember that God sees everything you do and be encouraged by the fact that He will not forget your good works! Instead, God promises that those who die in the Lord will be given rest from their labors, “since their works follow them” (Revelation 14:13)!

Conclusion

God has called you to give your life entirely to Him. Your focus in life must be completely set on accomplishing His will and offering your life as a living sacrifice to Him! So, what should you take from this study? (1) That you must fully trust in God. (2) That you must completely dedicate yourself to God. (3) That you must walk in newness of life. (4) That you must be diligent. (5) That you must persevere. While we could discuss more, I hope that this lesson has helped you understand what God expects of you after you become a Christian!

There they are. Eight essential questions and their Bible answers. I want to thank you for taking the time to consider these lessons. I pray that this study has been beneficial to you. These lessons were intended to help you establish a solid foundation for your faith so you can do two things. First, if your life is not right with God, you need to follow Biblical

instruction to get right with Him. Then, you should continue using this foundation to build on in the future. These lessons were only intended to overview these eight subjects. So, you should commit yourself to learning even more about all these subjects to know God's will even better and to teach it to others! May you choose to glorify God through your life and help others do the same!

Study Questions

Why is it essential to know the answer to this question?

1. Fully Trust In God

Why is it important to fully trust God in prayer?

Why is it important to fully trust God to provide?

Why is it important to fully trust God to save you?

2. Complete Devote Yourself To God

What kind of devotion does Jesus require from His followers?

What will this kind of devotion require?

3. Walk In Newness Of Life

When and how were you raised to walk in newness of life?

What should your newness of life look like?

4. Be Diligent

Why is it important to be diligent in Bible study?

Why is it important to be diligent in spiritual growth?

Why is it important to be diligent in good works?

Why is it important to be diligent in evangelism?

Why is it important to be diligent in church membership?

Why is it important to be diligent in keeping God's commandments?

5. Persevere

How can you persevere in persecutions?

How can you persevere in trials?

How can you persevere in temptations?

How can you persevere in good works?