

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

Book 2



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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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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What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Servant

A Christian Is An Encourager

A Christian Must Produce Fruit

A Christian Is A Doer Of The Word

A Christian's Life Is A Persecuted Life

A Christian Is A True Worshiper

A Christian Is An Ambassador For Christ

A Christian Is An Heir Of Christ

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Servant

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a servant.

You Are Called A “Servant”

The typical person does not like to be called a “servant.” This implies that you are below another person in some way. Instead, most people think of themselves as being “above” the lowly place of a servant, thinking that someone else should actually be serving them. In fact, the “me first” mentality (“What’s in it for me?”) is prevalent today. However, as a Christian, the Bible *does* call you a servant. It does so by using two Greek words. Consider both of them now: The words *doulos* and *diakonos*.

Doulos

This Greek word actually implies something a bit stronger than a servant. In the *New King James Version* of the Bible, this is commonly translated “bondservant.” The word is, perhaps, more appropriately translated as “slave.” This is someone who is devoted to another and gives up his own interests in order to fulfill the desires of another.

Consider some examples of this word being used in the pages of the Scriptures. First, this word could be used regarding those who were literally slaves of earthly masters (see Ephesians 6:5-6; Colossians 3:22; Titus 2:9). Second, this word could be used to describe everyone who is a Christian. For instance, in Romans 1:1, Paul identifies himself as “a bondservant of Jesus Christ.” In Romans 6:17-20, Paul writes that Christians were once “slaves of sin,” but have now been set free from sin in order that they would be “slaves of righteousness for holiness.” And, 1 Peter 2:16 also identifies Christians as “bondservants of God” – even though they were free from being slaves to an earthly master.

Diakonos

This Greek word is more in line with what we typically picture whenever we think of someone who is a “servant.” This word can refer to someone who is the servant or attendant to another in a high position (i.e. a king). But, it is also used of the responsibility every Christian has to be attending to the needs of others – regardless of their position in a society. Then, it is used very specifically to identify the work of a “deacon” in a local church (who is a special servant of the church).

Consider some examples of this word being used in the pages of the Scriptures (with reference to Christians serving others). First, it is used generally and is applicable to all Christians (sometimes translated as “minister”/“ministers”). Paul spoke about he and his companions being “ministers of God” (2 Corinthians 6:4). In 1 Timothy 4:6, Paul encouraged Timothy to be a “good minister of Jesus Christ.” And, Paul speaks of a woman, in Romans 16:1, who was “a servant of the church in Cenchrea.”

Second, this word can be used specifically with regard to those who fill one of the offices in a local church. For instance, Philippians 1:1 identifies a group of “deacons” in the Philippian congregation. And, 1 Timothy 3:8-13 provides specific qualifications for those who would serve as “deacons.” These are special servants of the local church who must meet these God-given qualifications.

A servant of one master

As you can see, Christians are referred to as servants and slaves. Both words contain the same ideas of giving oneself over to accomplish the desires of another. However, as you now begin to consider yourself as a servant, you must come to view yourself as a servant of only one master. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

This word “serve” is a form of the word *doulos*. Obviously, an individual could not be the slave of two masters – and be totally devoted to both. That individual would have to split up his time and divide his focus in order to serve both of them. And, whenever one master would request something that the other master would not approve of, how would the slave please both of his masters? He simply could not. Therefore, that individual would have to choose which master he desired to serve.

In the same way, the Christian cannot serve two masters. As a Christian, you must consider yourself as a servant/slave of God (i.e. Romans 1:1). You must be fully committed to serving God’s ways of righteousness rather than your own selfish and sinful desires (i.e. Romans 6:17-20). You simply cannot please God while you are only partially devoted to accomplishing His will. He will not find your service acceptable if you are living to please Him *some* of the time and living for another master the rest of the time. In another place, Jesus simply said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matthew 12:30).

Now, through this lesson, we will be observing that the Christian *does* have the responsibility to serve others (i.e. God’s family, his own family, and all mankind). However, this is done in service to God – not opposed to His service. The Christian serves all of those people because that is exactly what God wants him to be doing. Yet, the Christian must *never* place his service to those people above his service to God. Instead, it is always done in harmony with the will of the Almighty God. As a Christian, you are a servant of God first and

foremost. Then, as a servant of God, you will also be a servant of others.

Whose servant are you?

I want you to go back to Romans 6. Let’s read all of verses 16-23. “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Please notice that you are a servant/slave of another. Everyone is. It is just a question of who or what. The principle is clearly stated in verse 16: You are the slave of the one you give yourself to obey. Either you are the slave of sin (which results in spiritual death) or you are the slave of righteousness (which results in everlasting life in Heaven). So, this entire issue is boiled down to two very simple points. If you are a slave of sin, you are living to serve the desires of Satan – who wants you to live in the ways that are contrary to the will of God that will result in your eternal condemnation. However, if you are a slave of righteousness, you are living to serve the desires of God – who wants you to live in holy ways that will result in your eternal salvation.

So, once again, the question is not *if* you are a servant. The question is: Whose servant are you? Are you serving the master of sin? This is a master that allows you to live according to your own fleshly

desires. However, sin is a hard master in that you will likely experience some consequences of your sin while you live on this earth, you will never experience true and lasting happiness, and you will suffer throughout all eternity. Or, are you serving the master of righteousness? This master requires great self-denial and sacrifice temporarily; but it is the only master that will result in avoiding physical consequences due to your own sin, experiencing true happiness, and living eternally in Heaven when life on this earth is over.

Why You Are A Servant Of God

As I mentioned in the beginning of this lesson, people do not typically like to view themselves as servants of others. A servant must put someone else's interests above his own and consider someone else to be more significant than himself. So, why should you consider yourself as a servant of God and serve those God instructs you to serve?

Because you chose to serve God

God did not force you to serve Him. Instead, as a Christian, you were the one who made the willful decision to serve God. You were the one who chose to be obedient to the commandments of God so that you could be saved from the consequences of your sin. Look at Romans 6:17-18 again. "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

What was that "form of doctrine" you obeyed in order to be set free from sin and become the servant/slave of God? It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, it is the gospel of Jesus Christ that is God's power for salvation (Romans 1:16). In order to become a Christian and be forgiven of your sins, the gospel required that you: (1) Hear the word of God (Romans 10:17), (2) believe (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6), (3) repent of your sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30), (4) confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:38-

39), and (5) be immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). Upon obeying these instructions from God, you were forgiven of your sins and added to Christ's church (His body of the saved).

Because you were bought at a price

What made that great transformation and change in masters even possible is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. When you were serving the master of sin, you were "dead in trespasses and sins" and were subject to the wrath of the Almighty God (Ephesians 2:1-3). You could not do anything to merit your own release from being enslaved to sin.

There was only one who could provide what was necessary in order for you to be released from sin. That one was Jesus Christ. Listen to John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Romans 6:23 also makes it clear that what you deserved to experience was the "wages of sin" – which is spiritual "death." However, "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Now, you can "not perish" by spending eternity in Hell fire and you can "have everlasting life." Still, this great opportunity is the gift of God. You could never bring this result about through your own conduct.

The only price that was sufficient to ransom you from the consequences of your sins was the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It was Jesus Christ who willingly left Heaven to come to this earth and give Himself as the sacrifice for your sins. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." You could not be ransomed by any amount of physical treasures (like gold or silver). Only the precious blood of Jesus could effect your release from the consequences of sin.

Now, since Jesus Christ has shed His blood for you on the cross (dying for the sins that you had committed), you must not consider your life as your own. You are not free to live in just any way you

desire now that Jesus Christ has ransomed you with His blood. Instead, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says that you are not your own. You “were bought at a price.” Therefore, you must “glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” If you truly recognize the price God has paid to save you from the consequences of your sins, shouldn’t you desire to devote yourself entirely to God’s service (see 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Galatians 2:20; Romans 12:1-2)?

Because Christ was a servant

Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ considered Himself a servant! In Matthew 20:27-28, Jesus taught a lesson about considering yourself as a servant/slave. He said, “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Just think of what would have happened to you if Jesus Christ would have been unwilling to serve! What if He (as the Son of God and the Creator of this world) came to earth and demanded that everyone serve Him while He was here? While He would be fully deserving of that service, mankind would have been hopelessly lost in his sins!

Instead, Jesus Christ came to serve and to provide the ransom sacrifice so that mankind could be saved from the consequences of his sin. Consider Philippians 2:5-11. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Although Jesus Christ possessed the very nature of being God, He did not consider that something to prevent Him from coming to this earth and giving His life as a sacrifice for sins. Certainly,

no one could force Jesus to leave Heaven and present Himself as the sacrifice for sin. He would only do so if He made the willful choice. And, that is exactly what He did. He willfully left Heaven to come to this earth. He chose to take on human form, considering himself as a “bondservant” (slave). He humbled Himself (even though He was God) and obeyed the will of the Father – even to the point of being put to death on the cross! Now, because Jesus Christ has served in this way, He has been exalted by the Father above every name in heaven and on earth! Then, as you consider Christ’s attitude of a servant (even though He was God), you must evaluate why God would expect anything less from you than serving Him? Remember, verse 5 commanded: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Because Christ taught the importance of serving

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is the ultimate demonstration of service. In it, God died for the ungodly (see Romans 5:6-11). But, this is not the only example of Christ’s service or the only time Christ teaches about serving. Also consider the events that transpired in John 13:1-17.

At this time when Jesus was with His disciples and were eating together, Jesus “rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded” (John 13:4-5). Now, please appreciate the fact that during this time, it would have been likely that those who were eating were reclined on the floor, propped up on their left arms with their legs extended outward. Also, understand that those who were traveling to supper would not have had modern shoes and socks or an air-conditioned vehicle to ride in. Instead, they typically wore sandals and walked on very dusty roads to get wherever they needed to go.

Therefore, whenever someone would be invited to dinner, the host would need to show hospitality and wash the feet of those who entered the house. This, as you can imagine, was a very lowly job. Yet, here is the picture of God in the flesh (Jesus Christ) doing the work of a servant. And, please consider that Jesus did not just wash the feet of those

who loved Him (i.e. Simon Peter, John, etc.). John 13 also says that Judas Iscariot was there – and that the devil had already put it into Judas’ heart to betray Jesus Christ (see verse 2). And, even though Jesus “knew who would betray Him” (verse 11), Jesus washed Judas’ feet.

Then, consider what Jesus concluded about His act of service. “So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them’” (John 13:12-17).

Therefore, not only did Jesus provide a great lesson in service through His sacrifice in coming to this earth and dying on the cross, but He also provides a great lesson He wants you to apply about serving others in this example found in John 13. The instruction, “you also ought to wash one another’s feet” is not to be interpreted as some meaningless religious ritual. Instead, it is the instruction to imitate Christ’s sacrificial attitude that He demonstrated as a servant – and look for opportunities to serve other people (even when it is a job that nobody else wants to do)!

Some You Must Not Serve

Now, as you build upon the previously established principles from the Scriptures, you need to begin making practical applications. And, as you attempt to learn about what your service ought to look like, you should also spend some time considering what your service should *not* look like. Remember the important principle that was established earlier in this study: You cannot serve two masters. So, if you truly desire to serve God, you must determine *not* to serve anything/anyone

contrary to Him. Therefore, consider some you must *not* serve.

Sin

Sin is anything that is contrary to the instructions of God. 1 John 3:4, for instance, identifies sin as being “lawlessness.” 1 John 5:17 says that, “All unrighteousness is sin.” So, sin is acting without or contrary to the law of God.

Let’s go back to Romans 6. Now, in chapter 5, Paul has identified spiritual blessings that you have through Jesus Christ (who gave His life for you so that you could be saved eternally). Now, in chapter 6, Paul anticipates some questions about the connection between this grace of God and sin.

First, he asks and answers the question, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (verse 1). That is, can’t you keep on sinning so that the grace of God can just keep abounding and covering your sin? His response (verse 2): “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” He continues (in verses 3-14), then, to demonstrate that you (as a Christian) have died to sin, been buried with Christ in baptism, and been raised to walk in newness of life. He says that you should know that your old man of sin was crucified and done away with so that you should no longer be the slave of sin. Instead, you have been freed from sin and must not allow sin to have any dominion (rule) over your earthly life. You must not consider the members of your physical body as an instrument to accomplish the unrighteousness of sin. Instead, you must consider your body as an instrument to accomplish the righteousness of God!

Second, he asks and answers the question, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (verse 15). Once again, the answer is, “Certainly not!” (verse 15). He reasons (in verses 16-23, as read earlier) that you are the slave of the one you obey and that you have been set free from your slavery to sin (which was leading you to death) and have been enslaved to righteousness (which leads you to eternal life).

Therefore, as a Christian, you must not be devoting yourself to the service of any kind of sin. All sin is contrary to the will of God. And, all sin

enslaves you to the devil and leads you to spiritual death. 1 John 3:8-9 says that this is how you can know whether you are truly a child of God or if you are a child of the devil. “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” Now, this does *not* mean that you cannot sin as a Christian. Instead, it teaches that you will not sin as long as you are following the ways of your Heavenly Father! And, as a child of God, you must choose to serve your Heavenly Father rather than the devil.

Mammon

Let’s look at Matthew 6:24 again. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” We have already considered the truth that no person can effectively serve two masters at the same time. There must be a choice. Ultimately, this choice is between serving God and serving the ways of sin.

But, specifically, Jesus says that it is impossible to serve God and “mammon.” Mammon simply refers to wealth/riches. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus warned about putting your focus on accumulating earthly treasures (see Matthew 6:19-21). He said that earthly treasures will be stolen, rust, and decay. Ultimately, in other passages (i.e. Luke 12:13-21), Jesus identifies the truth that your earthly treasures will be taken away from you at the time of your death. However, heavenly treasures will never be taken away from you.

Yet, there are many people who focus on accumulating earthly treasures during the course of their lifetimes. Still, as a Christian, you must not put your focus on accumulating worldly things (i.e. money, worldly possessions). Putting your focus on such things will cause you to waste your life by chasing after something that will not be of any real benefit to you! While you will likely gain some temporary enjoyment from wealth, listen to 1 John 2:15-17. “Do not love the world or the things in the

world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

An idol

Throughout the pages of the Bible (in both the Old and New Testaments), God has warned His people about the foolishness of serving idols. Yet, throughout the Bible (in both the Old and New Testaments), you can read about people who decided to pursue idolatry. Consider Romans 1:24-25 as an example. “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”

Earlier in the chapter (verses 18-23), the apostle Paul wrote concerning the clear evidence they should have accepted about the existence of God and His complete power. Yet, these individuals decided to reject that knowledge of God in order to worship and serve that which God has created. Unfortunately, idolatry did not stop with the people of Romans 1.

Today, idols exist in all different shapes and sizes, and are made out of many different materials. You see, an idol is anything created that you worship and serve. Therefore, anything that takes away from the worship and service you should be giving to God is an idol in your life! It could be a statue. It could be money. It could be a family member or friend. It could be an earthly possession. It could be a job. It could be worldly success. It could be false religion. It could be some earthly pleasure. It could be a hobby or interest. Still, whatever it is, you must recognize that serving and worshiping anything that is created is foolish and will not result in pleasing God!

Self

Ultimately, the choice to serve anything or anyone besides God (the Creator) comes down to the decision to serve yourself. After all, this is how Satan

Some You Must Serve

tries to lure you away from serving God. He appeals to your earthly desires and tries to convince you to fulfill those earthly desires in ways that do not please God. Then, whenever you act in the way that violates the law of God, you are enslaved to sin. This is what James wrote in James 1:14-15. “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

Paul speaks of some who were only interested in serving themselves in Romans 16:17-18. “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” Interestingly, they were *not* serving God and were serving their own selfish desires (their own bellies/appetites) - even though they were professing to be religious. They were, apparently, claiming to be Christians and would be among the Christian churches in Rome. Yet, their true interest was only in serving themselves.

As a Christian, you are called to deny your own earthly desires in order to serve Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Similarly, the apostle Paul wrote that if you truly desire to be victorious and win the prize of eternal life that God offers to you, you must be willing to deny yourself of the temporary pleasures. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, he says that this is like those who compete in an athletic event. He says that they deny themselves of temporary pleasures in order that they might receive the reward for winning the race. Even more, he says that those who are striving to win an eternal prize (in Heaven) ought to be willing to deny themselves of the temporary pleasures of this life! So, if you want to please God and win the eternal crown of life in Heaven, you must not serve your own earthly pleasures!

Next, not only must you keep yourself from serving all of these, but you must also dedicate yourself to serving some. Therefore, let’s investigate the Scriptures to see what you are taught concerning who you must serve.

God

First and foremost, you must serve God. As we considered earlier in this study, He is actually the only one you are serving (since you cannot serve two masters). However, as we will see, serving God also involves serving others – because He has commanded that you serve them. But, let’s first establish the fact that you must serve God and understand what is involved in this.

We have actually been observing this periodically throughout the course of this lesson. So, at this point, let’s just look at one additional passage. It comes from Matthew 4 – in the context of Jesus being tempted by Satan. The temptation Jesus will respond to in verse 10 is recorded in verses 8-9. This is the temptation of Satan showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Then, Satan said, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” However, Jesus responded, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

Jesus recognized what you also must recognize: God simply does not approve of you worshiping or serving anything or anyone besides Him! So, if you will determine to serve God completely in your life, you will only be doing the things God wants you to do and you will not serve anything or anyone God does not approve. Will you commit yourself to that work today? Will you only serve and worship God? Will you do everything He instructs you to do – even when it means that you must deny yourself of your own physical desires?

God’s family

If you are dedicated to serving God, you will be serving those who are members of God’s family

(your Christian brothers and sisters). Consider some of God's teachings about your responsibility to serve His family. First, recall that Jesus commanded His disciples to serve one another (see John 13:12-17). Second, Romans 16:1-2 records the approved example of one woman who devoted her life to God and was a "servant of the church in Cenchrea." Third, Galatians 5:13 commands, "through love serve one another." Fourth, Ephesians 5:21 instructs that you submit yourself to your Christian brethren. And, 1 Corinthians 13:5 says that one of the qualities of love God approves is that it does not seek its own.

This all should point you to serving the members of God's family. Then, I want you to consider the teaching of Philippians 2:3-4. And, as you consider this passage, recall that verses 5-11 taught you about the service and humility of Jesus Christ, telling you that you should have the same mind of Christ. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

But, how can you actually serve the interests of your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ? There are many ways to accomplish it – both physically and spiritually. Galatians 6:10 gives the principle that should guide you in this work. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." Physically, you look for every opportunity to do something for them. You can look for opportunities to help them do things they are incapable of doing (mowing their grass, cleaning their houses, driving them to appointments, etc.). And, you can do things just to demonstrate your true love for them (i.e. take a meal to them, help them complete a project, etc.). Spiritually, you can offer them spiritual encouragement to overcome temptations (Hebrews 3:12-13), you can help bear their burdens (Galatians 6:2), you can warn them about sin in their lives (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20), etc.

Your family

Next, if you are dedicated to serving God, you will be serving those who are in your own family. After all, the instruction of Galatians 6:10

applies to your own family just as much as it does in your service to anyone else. In fact, not only does it give the responsibility to serve those who are your Christian brothers and sisters (which some of your family members may be), but it also gives you the responsibility to serve all men as you have opportunity.

Specifically, God has given you some responsibilities toward those who are in your family. For instance, read Ephesians 5:22-6:4, Colossians 3:18-21, and 1 Peter 3:1-7 to see some responsibilities involved in your role as husband, wife, father, mother, and/or child. Each one of these instructions involves various ways you should serve these family members. Spouses serve one another to help each other live for the Lord. Children serve their parents by being obedient to their instructions and learning from their training. And, parents serve their children by providing the training in the ways of God. You see, the best functioning family will not be the one in which each member of the family is seeking selfish pursuits, but the one in which all the members of the family are trying to glorify God by serving one another.

But, how can you actually serve the members of your family? Again, I would suggest that you can serve them physically and spiritually. Physically, spouses can help one another accomplish their work. Children can give back to their parents and grandparents when they are older (1 Timothy 5:4). Generally, any family member who needs help should receive help from his/her family members. Spiritually, you can serve your family members by teaching them the gospel of Jesus Christ (John 1:41-42), bearing their burdens (Galatians 6:2), encouraging them to do the right things (Hebrews 3:12-13), warning them for their sins (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20), etc.

All people

Finally, if you desire to serve God, you will be serving all mankind, as you have opportunity to do so. Again, Galatians 6:10 gives you this responsibility. Certainly, you come into contact with many different people during your lifetime who could be served in many different ways. The

Scriptures teach that you are to serve them according to your ability and opportunity.

Just consider Jesus' teaching about the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). First, understand that Jesus taught this parable in response to someone asking about who his neighbor is (verse 29). Then, as this Samaritan came across a wounded man, recognize that these men were complete strangers. Yet, Jesus says that the Samaritan treated the wounded stranger with great love (even though it was a sacrifice for himself). He tended immediately to the man's wounds, gave the man his animal to ride on, and paid for his expenses to bring him back to health. And, just as important as recognizing what this Samaritan did is to also recognizing that there were individuals who were unwilling to serve the wounded man in this way (whose actions are condemned by the parable).

But, what does it mean to serve all men? Again, the instruction of Galatians 6:10 is to do good to everyone as you have opportunity to do good to them. Once more, this could be physical or spiritual. Physically, perhaps you have opportunity to feed someone who is hungry, help someone pay a bill that he/she cannot pay, etc. Spiritually, since these are not Christians, you should be willing to serve them by taking advantage of every opportunity to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ, recognizing the serious danger their souls are in (see 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

Characteristics Needed In A Servant

We have been focused on learning about being a servant so that you can please God. As a servant, you must put the needs and interests of others ahead of your own desires and interests. So, if you are going to fulfill your responsibility to be a servant, you must develop some characteristics. Let's briefly consider a few necessary characteristics.

The heart of a servant

You must live your life viewing yourself as a servant to those we have discussed, as you serve God in your life. You must be viewing every situation you are in from the standpoint of how God wants you to serve Him and how you might be able to serve other people. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Love for God

If you are going to dedicate your life to serving God and fulfilling His instructions in your life, you must love Him with every fiber of your being. In Matthew 22:37, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36). And, if you love God, it means that you must keep His commandments – and His commandments must not be burdensome to you (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3).

Love for mankind

If you are going to serve mankind in the way God desires, you must also love all mankind as much as you love yourself. Jesus said that the second greatest commandment is, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Then, remember what Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan teaches you about loving your neighbor. Also read 1 Corinthians 13 and 1 John 3:18-19.

Humility

If you are going to attend to the needs and interests of others over your own, you must humble yourself. Remember, this was a central characteristic of Jesus when He chose to leave Heaven and come to this earth (Philippians 2:5-11). You must humble yourself "under the mighty hand of God" (1 Peter 5:6). If you will empty yourself, you will be able to focus on the needs and interests of others. It is when you think you are higher than others that you cannot see their needs and interests (see Luke 18:9-14).

Sacrifice

If you are going to serve in the way we have discussed in this lesson, you must consider that your

earthly life is not about pleasing yourself. You must consider your life to be a life of complete sacrifice to God and accomplishing His interests. Romans 12:1 says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (compare also with Galatians 2:20).

Faith

Finally, in order to do all of these things and deny yourself of so much, you must have unwavering faith in the promises of God. You must have full confidence that you will reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7-10). After assuring some Christians that there is victory in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57), Paul wrote, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Conclusion

Are you living the life of a servant? Are you entirely committed to serving God in your life? Are you looking for every opportunity to serve those you come into contact with? Or, are you serving your own interests and desires? Remember, your life is not your own. You have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, you must consider yourself to be the servant of God! One day, you will be judged for how you have served God and others (see Matthew 25:31-46).

Study Questions

1. You Are Called A “Servant”

What does the Greek word “doulos” mean? Give some Bible examples of its use.

What does the Greek word “diakonos” mean? Give some Bible examples of its use.

What principle about being a servant is established in Matthew 6:24? How should you make application of it?

Whose servant are you?

2. Why You Are A Servant Of God

How did you become a servant of God?

What price was paid to redeem you from your sins? How should this impact your service?

What was the ultimate demonstration of Jesus Christ as a servant?

How did Jesus teach the importance of serving?

3. Some You Must Not Serve

What does it mean to serve sin and why must you avoid doing so?

What does it mean to serve mammon and why must you avoid doing so?

What does it mean to serve an idol and why must you avoid doing so?

What does it mean to serve self and why must you avoid doing so?

4. Some You Must Serve

What does it mean to serve God and why must you do so?

What does it mean to serve God's family and why must you do so?

What does it mean to serve your family and why must you do so?

What does it mean to serve all people and why must you do so?

5. Characteristics Needed In A Servant

List some essential characteristics you need in your life if you want to be a servant.

A Christian Is An Encourager

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is an encourager.

Encouragers Are Needed In The Lord's Work

God wants you to be interacting with other people. However, He does not want this interaction to be for the purpose of fulfilling selfish desires and ambitions. Instead, He wants you to live a life that is focused on both Him and others. One of the ways in which you can serve God and serve others is by being an encourager. He wants you to be helping other people serve Him. He wants you to do this by encouraging those who are lost to become Christians and obtain the forgiveness of their sins. Then, He wants you to help those who are Christians by encouraging them to live for Him.

I want you to carefully consider how you have lived your life relative to accomplishing God's purposes. Think about working for the Lord as building a structure. This work takes a great deal of care, time, and effort to construct. However, think of living contrary to the Lord's work as tearing down the structure that you or others have built. Now, consider: Are you a wrecker or a builder?

Consider the following poem by Charles Franklin Benvegar (originally published in 1967 in "The Songs of the Free State Bards" – access on September 23, 2015 from <https://bible.org/illustration/builder-or-wrecker>).

“As I watched them tear a building down / A gang of men in a busy town / With a ho-heave-ho, and a lusty yell / They swung a beam and the side wall fell

“I asked the foreman, ‘Are these men skilled, / And the men you’d hire if you wanted to build?’ / He gave me a laugh and said, ‘No, indeed, / Just common labor is all I need.’

“I can easily wreck in a day or two, / What builders have taken years to do.’ / And I thought to myself, as I went my way / ‘Which of these roles have I tried to play’

“Am I a builder who works with care, / Measuring life by rule and square? / Am I shaping my work to a well-made plan / Patiently doing the best I can

“Or am I a wrecker who walks to town / Content with the labor of tearing down? / ‘O Lord let my life and my labors be / That which will build for eternity!’”

Which one of these describes your past work? Now, you can examine the fruit that your life has produced and examine whether you have been a builder or a wrecker in God's work. Maybe you have been both – sometimes working to build up, while sometimes working to tear down. However, one of the unfortunate things about tearing down is (as the poem demonstrates) it is much easier and much faster to tear down than it is to build up. Therefore, even though most of your life is spent on building up, you

can destroy everything you have built in a moment of recklessness and carelessness.

Not only do you need to evaluate how you have lived your life in the past, but you need to evaluate how you are living your life *right now*. Are you living your life with great thought and care, measuring each word and deed by the standard of God's word? Or, are you casting aside that standard in order to live how you think you should live?

As you evaluate yourself, I want you to suppose (for just a moment) that you chose not to serve God any longer. How much would you be missed? How much would the lost miss your service for God? Would they miss your attempts to point them to Jesus Christ? Or, would they even notice that you had changed? How much would your brethren miss your service for God? Would they miss the way you took advantage of opportunities to encourage them to be faithful and do good works? Or, would there be little impact in their lives?

You will know whether you are a builder or a wrecker in God's service by your fruit – just as others will know you by your fruit! In Luke 6:43-45, Jesus said, “For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

Who should be an encourager

Now that you have been considering whether you are a wrecker or a builder, I want you to take a moment to understand who God wants to be serving as an encourager. Some might think that this work is primarily for preachers. They might believe that the preacher is the person in the congregation who should be the primary encourager in a local church, knowing the problems all of the members of the congregation may be having (both physical and spiritual) and being devoted to encouraging all of the members at these times. Or, they may believe that this work belongs to elders and deacons.

Yet, while it is certainly true that preachers, elders, and deacons *should* all be devoted to the work of encouraging, this work is not limited to them. Instead, the Bible clearly helps us to understand that every Christian should be devoted to the work of encouraging others. To see all of these points, we simply need to consider Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:11-16.

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head— Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

First, notice that it is the work of those identified in verse 11 to edify (encourage) the body of Christ. This included apostles and prophets for a limited time. Today, this continues to include those who are evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Yes, it *is* their work. These have a definite function to build up Christ's body in spiritual strength, equipping every Christian to be grounded in the faith of the gospel and to accomplish the work God has given them to accomplish.

However, verse 16 demonstrates that even though they *do* have the responsibility to edify, it is not theirs *alone*. Notice that every part of Christ's body (every Christian) has the responsibility to do “its share.” And, notice that when this happens, there will be growth and edification in the body. So, every Christian must contribute what he/she is capable of contributing in order to share in the edification of Christ's body!

Other passages also demonstrate this same principle. For instance, Ephesians 4:29 instructs,

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” Therefore, every word you speak to another person should be focused on providing the necessary encouragement. Certainly, then, you must be devoted to being a builder – and never act as a wrecker. Your words, as specifically identified in Ephesians 4:29, must never be used for corrupt purposes (“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth...”).

Consider Romans 15:2. “Let each of us [those who are Christians] please his neighbor for his good, leading to his edification.” Earlier, Romans 14:19 says, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” There is a clear focus that those who are Christians are expected to have on edifying (encouraging) one another to follow Jesus Christ. And, as these passages (in their context) help us to understand, this responsibility involves making personal sacrifices for the good of your Christian brothers and sisters.

Finally, 1 Thessalonians 5:11 demonstrates the reciprocal element that is to be involved in edification. “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” In the context (beginning in 4:13), Paul has been teaching the Thessalonian Christians about the return of Jesus Christ. He has assured them that those Christians who have died will not miss out on this day. He has taught them about some things that will take place when Christ returns. He has taught them that the coming of Jesus Christ will be like a thief. Then, he demonstrated that those who are Christians should not be caught “off guard” by Jesus’ return – because they should always be preparing and looking for His coming. He says that those who have been faithful as Christians are not appointed to experience wrath on the Day the Lord Jesus returns, but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ! And, as we have already seen, Paul says that these facts ought to be used in comforting and edifying one another.

Notice that Paul did *not* say they should wait to be comforted and edified in this way by a select few people who have been appointed to that work. Instead, they were to “comfort each other” and “edify one another.” Now, there is no member of a local

church who is exempt from this! Therefore, the picture is one of every Christian trying to work to encourage as many other Christians as he/she has the ability and opportunity to encourage. The picture is *not* one of Christians who are sitting back and always waiting for and expecting their brothers and sisters to encourage them!

Who you should be encouraging

As a Christian (and a member of the body of Jesus Christ, the church), you have the responsibility to be an encourager. But, who do you have the responsibility to encourage? Do you only have the responsibility to encourage your family members? Your closest friends? What, exactly, is your God-given responsibility to be an encourager? Let’s consider the two areas every Christian has the responsibility to be an encourager in.

(1) Encourage those who are not Christians to follow Christ. Consider Peter’s work on the Day of Pentecost. In Acts 2, Peter (and the other apostles) preached the gospel to those who were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. As Peter preached to them, some of the people asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). To this question, Peter responded, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Then, Acts 2:40 says, “And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’”

Now, what was Peter doing? He was making God’s message known to the people. Yes. But, he was doing more than this. He was also exhorting them to act upon the truths he had presented in order that they would be saved! He was pleading with them. He was *encouraging* them to do what needed to be done so that they would not experience the consequences of their sins.

Once again, this work of encouraging those who are not Christians to follow Jesus Christ is the work of everyone who is a Christian. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 clearly demonstrates this fact. “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those

who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” Like Peter, you need to be preaching to and exhorting (encouraging) those who are living in Satan’s captivity to come to Jesus Christ and find refuge from the consequences of sin!

(2) Encourage those who are Christians to continue with Christ. Consider some of the opening words in Jude’s epistle. “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). In the context of Jude’s short epistle, Jude recognized the need to warn his Christian brethren about those who pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ. Verse 4 says, “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Therefore, Jude, while he wanted to write to his brethren concerning their “common salvation,” found the need to devote his epistle to exhorting them to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” In the presence of these evil influences, Jude saw the need to plead with and encourage his brethren to diligently pursue the faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Other examples of this can also be seen in the Scriptures (in addition to the passages we have already considered). For instance, Acts 11:23 records the example of Barnabas purposefully visiting new Christian brethren. On this occasion, the Bible says that he “encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” Then, Acts 14:22 records the example of Paul and Barnabas visiting brethren in the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” While these are just a few of many passages we could consider, they clearly demonstrate the responsibility of Christians to be

concerned about encouraging other Christians to continue with Jesus Christ!

Why encouragers are needed

Why do Christians even need to be focused on encouraging others – both those who are and those who are not Christians? Think back to the four passages we have just been considering. In Acts 2:40, Peter exhorted the people so that they would do what was required of them in order to be saved. In Jude 1:3, Jude exhorted the Christians to contend earnestly for the faith of the gospel because there were those who were trying to overthrow that faith. In Acts 11:23, Barnabas encouraged new Christians to continue with purpose of heart in serving the Lord (as he recognized the danger of falling away from Christ). Then, In Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas encouraged Christians to persevere through the tribulations that are associated with following Jesus Christ.

Now, what do all of these passages have in common? And, why was the encouragement that was given in each of these cases even necessary? All of these encouragers recognized that there was a danger of failing to encourage these individuals. They all recognized that there is an enemy who is actively working in this world to stop people from following Jesus Christ and obtaining the salvation of their souls. 1 Peter 5:8-9 identifies him simply as “your adversary the devil,” and pictures him as walking “about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

Satan’s influence is worldwide. He is working to keep those who are enslaved to sin in captivity. He wants to keep these people discouraged, wandering aimlessly like sheep without shepherds (as Jesus saw the lost in Matthew 9:35-38). And, he is working to discourage those who are following Christ so that they will give up Jesus. So, discouragement is one of the most powerful baits Satan uses in his snares!

He discourages people from following Christ by tempting them to pursue their own desires rather than submit their desires to the desires of Christ (see James 1:14-15). He discourages through the wicked conduct of other people. He has convinced people to

speak discouraging words to others. He has convinced people to persecute those who follow Christ. He has convinced people to lead others into false religion.

Consider Hebrews 3:12-13. “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” The Hebrew writer commands that those who are Christians be devoted to the work of exhorting their Christian brothers and sisters every day. But, at this point in the lesson, I want to focus on the reason *why* this passage says this work is so desperately needed. Notice that there is the possibility that those who are Christians can develop an “evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” and that they can “be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Examples of encouragers

Now that we have learned about the personal responsibility every Christian has to be an encourager and learned about the need for encouragement, we will be profited by considering the example of some encouragers. While there are many who could be considered, we will limit our study to focus on only three.

(1) Aaron and Hur. In Exodus 17:8-13, “Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.” Moses instructed Joshua to choose some men to go and fight with Amalek. He said, “Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.” So, while Joshua and the people went to fight with Amalek, Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the Hill. Interestingly, whenever Moses held up his hand, the Israelites prevailed in the battle. Yet, when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. Then, verses 12 and 13 say, “But Moses’ hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.”

What a wonderful example of encouragement! Moses needed help in fighting this

battle. On his own, he became weary. But, through the strength that was offered by Aaron and Hur, he could be victorious! In the same way, the church (the body of Christ) needs every member to be devoted to the work of being arm-lifters! As we see people around us who are engaging in their own spiritual war with the devil, Christians must lend a hand whenever there is opportunity to help others be victorious. You might have the opportunity to “lift the hand” of someone who is caught in Satan’s snare, but does not know the way of escape. You might be able to “lift the hand” of your brother/sister in Christ who is a new child of God and is facing entirely new struggles to live for the Lord. You might be able to “lift the hand” of a brother/sister in Christ who frequently becomes weary and loses battles with the devil. You might be able to “lift the hand” of a brother/sister who has put his/her hands down and is currently seeing the enemy prevail in his/her life. Or, you might be able to “lift the hand” of a brother/sister who is strong and mature in the faith, simply recognizing that even the strong can grow weary if he/she must bear every burden alone. The bottom line is that you have many opportunities all around you to imitate the example of Aaron and Hur – and help someone be victorious in his/her battle with the devil!

(2) Barnabas. The apostles were collecting funds for needy Christians (see Acts 4:32-35). Those who were Christians were selling their possessions, lands, and houses in order to give to their needy brethren. At this time, we are introduced to Barnabas. “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37). Notice that Joses was given the name “Barnabas” (which meant “Son of Encouragement”) by the apostles – who evidently recognized that he truly was dedicated to the work of encouraging. Then, this work of encouraging is demonstrated by his willingness to sell some of his land and contribute that money to help his brethren.

But, this is far from the only example in Scriptures we have about Barnabas as an encourager. In Acts 9, after Saul (who was a well-known persecutor of Christians) had become a Christian and

wanted to join the disciples in Jerusalem, Barnabas was the one who took him to the apostles and declared that he truly was a disciple of Jesus Christ – when all the others did not believe that he was a disciple (read verses 26-27). In Acts 11:19-24, it was Barnabas who was chosen by the church in Jerusalem to go to visit those who had become Christians in new areas, for the purpose of encouraging them all “that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” In Acts 11:25-26, it was Barnabas who sought Saul and brought him to Antioch so that they could assemble with the church there and teach “a great many people.” In Acts 13-15, it was Barnabas who was joined with Saul (Paul) in all the teaching and encouragement that was accomplished during Paul’s first “missionary journey.” And, whenever John Mark had fallen out of favor with Paul to accompany him on his journey, it was Barnabas who went with John Mark and strengthened churches through Syria and Cilicia with him (Acts 15:36-41). Later, John Mark was again considered to be useful to Paul (2 Timothy 4:11). But, I wonder what would have happened with him if Barnabas had not been an encouragement to him.

Barnabas was very clearly devoted to the work of encouraging. So much that the apostles gave him this name! But, what about you? Are you known as being an encourager by those who are around you? Are you devoted, like Barnabas, to taking advantage of any opportunities you are given to encourage others (whether those who are Christians or those who are not Christians)?

(3) Aquila and Priscilla. We are introduced to these two Jewish individuals in Acts 18. They are husband and wife. And, they are providing the apostle Paul with a place to stay while he works to preach the gospel in Corinth. Though the Bible does not say whether they were Christians at the time Paul met them, they did become Christians at some point and Paul developed a very deep affection for them and was thankful for their contribution in God’s service. In Romans 16, for instance, Paul writes that they were his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus,” had “risked their own necks” for his life, and both he and the churches of the Gentiles gave thanks for them (see verses 3-5).

Then, in Acts 18:24-28, we read about the influence this husband and wife had on a man named Apollos. Apollos was “an eloquent man,” “mighty in the Scriptures,” “fervent in spirit,” and was speaking and teaching “accurately the things of the Lord.” However, we discover that he only knew the baptism of John. So, whenever Aquila and Priscilla heard him teach in the synagogue, they “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” From that point, Apollos continued teaching – but now had accurate knowledge concerning the important subject of baptism. Now, just consider how this example of Aquila and Priscilla encouraging Apollos regarding the truth about baptism would not just have helped Apollos, but would have helped everyone Apollos taught thereafter!

Finally, Romans 16:5 indicates that these two people were allowing a church to meet in their house. While this may not seem very significant at first, recognize that everything that is to be done in the assemblies of a local church is designed to edify (see 1 Corinthians 14:26). So, whatever encouragement Christians received at these times and whatever encouragement unbelievers received during these times was accomplished in a small way because of Aquila and Priscilla doing what they were able to do to be encouragers.

As a husband and wife team for Jesus Christ, Aquila and Priscilla demonstrates how a family that is devoted to serving Christ can work together to encourage. Christian families can lean on their example to continue to find encouragement to encourage those who are around them – even today!

Important Principles In Encouraging Others

Now that we have been learning about the Christian’s responsibility to encourage others, let’s embrace some important principles that should help you accomplish this God-given work.

The true purpose of encouragement

Let's understand what true encouragement *looks* like. I believe that many people have become confused when they talk about encouragement/discouragement. You see, the true purpose of the kind of encouragement Christians must be engaging in is not the equivalent of a good *feeling*. Many people speak of being encouraged when they feel good about themselves, happy, content, etc. However, the Scriptures do not teach that true encouragement is to be equated with positive feelings.

Go back and consider what true encouragement looked like in the passages we have already discussed. For instance, Barnabas encouraged people to follow the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23). Peter exhorted people to be saved (Acts 2:40). Jude exhorted Christians to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 1:3). Even Jesus Christ was not focused on leaving people with positive feelings about themselves. In fact, He bluntly told some people that they were hypocrites (when it needed to be said) and offended people at times (see Matthew chapters 15 and 23). Was He tearing people down – or was He actually building them up? He was encouraging them to follow the way of truth rather than live for sin (as they had been doing). The same is true about encouragement today. True encouragement is focused on building people up in the faith of the gospel of Christ. It is focused on encouraging them to do what they need to do in order to be right with God!

The source of true encouragement

The apostle Paul recognized a principle in 1 Corinthians 10:23 that you also need to embrace. He said, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.” So, as Paul was focused on doing everything that was within his ability to encourage others to serve the Lord, he understood that there were some things that would accomplish that goal and some things that would not. Today, I believe that there are many things people try to do to encourage others that fail to provide true encouragement. Sometimes, people will offer worldly and ungodly

advice. Sometimes, people will engage in flattery. Sometimes, people will speak the truth – but will fail to speak the truth in the way it should be spoken.

You need to embrace the fact that the ultimate source of true encouragement is the gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 2:3-5, Paul said, “For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness – God is witness.” Similarly, Acts 20:32 simply states that it is the word of God's grace that is “able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” God and His word is the source of true encouragement. And, in order to be an effective encourager, you must put His word to work in your life as you attempt to encourage others to follow His word!

Remember that you need to be encouraged

Can you remember what it was like when you were living in sin and needed someone to exhort you to be saved? Are there ever times in your life when you quit serving God (even if it is only temporarily)? Do you struggle to overcome any temptations? Do you ever have burdens that weigh you down and hinder your service to God? Have you ever wondered how you would possibly be able to continue serving God and overcome the tribulations you face? Could you ever use a “shot in the arm” to provoke you to be more diligent to serve God?

If the answer is “yes” to any one of these questions, you have been in need of an encourager. Did someone fill that role for you? If so, you can use your experiences to recognize the value of an encourager – and fulfill that role for someone else. If not, you know what it is like to need encouragement and not receive any. Then, you can determine that you will not sit idly by while there are others who need that kind of encouragement!

Recognize that you may be able to help point others to Jesus

There are other people who are living around you who need encouragement. Just like you need (and have needed) encouragement. There are those who have never become Christians you can encourage to forsake their lives of sin and find true peace and salvation through Jesus Christ. And, there are those who are Christians you can encourage to continue with the Lord.

As a Christian, your entire life must be viewed as an instrument to accomplish the righteousness of God (Romans 6:12-13; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). As Matthew 5:14-16 describes, you are “the light of the world” – like a city that is set on a hill that cannot be hidden. And, you are to use your influence in this world to encourage other people around you to glorify the Father in Heaven. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (verse 16).

Recognize that you are a member of your brothers and sisters in Christ

Though you also have a responsibility to encourage unbelievers to follow Jesus Christ, I want you to specifically focus on your Christian brothers and sisters at this time. You need to recognize that the Scriptures give you special responsibilities toward them. In fact, the Scriptures teach that Christians are “individually members of one another” (Romans 12:5).

Developing this kind of mentality toward your brethren will dramatically impact your dedication to encouraging them. The language calls to mind the interconnectedness of the human body. All of the individual members of the body are dependent upon one another and work together in order to accomplish a common goal. The same should be true concerning members of the body of Jesus Christ. Each member of the body is important in helping the other members accomplish their goal of living eternally in Heaven and glorifying God on this earth. Given this close fellowship that binds Christians together, every Christian should be

concerned about the well-being of every other Christian – and do whatever he/she is capable of doing to encourage faithful service to the Lord!

Sometimes encouragement involves correction

I have already established the fact that true encouragement is not defined by developing positive feelings in others. Instead, it is defined by helping other people live in a way that is pleasing to God. So, in keeping with this understanding, it is important to recognize that encouraging others will require rebuke and correction at times.

Certainly, the one who has never become a Christian will need to come to the realization that he/she is dead in sin and be pointed to the spiritual life that is in Jesus Christ. But, the same is also true concerning a Christian who has committed sin. What good would either one gain from “encouragement” that makes him/her feel good about himself/herself while living in sin? Instead, this person needs to understand the serious nature of his/her sin and repent while there is opportunity. Therefore, James 5:19-20 says, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” While each situation may call for a different approach (see Jude 1:22-23), encouragement requires that those who are in sin be pointed away from their sin to Jesus Christ!

Assembling together is crucial to mutual encouragement

While there are many ways you can encourage others to serve God, God clearly states that assembling with your brethren in the local church is one crucial ingredient. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Christian brothers and sisters should be focused on stimulating each other to love and to accomplish good works. It is certainly easy for

Christians to neglect the work God desires them to be involved in. And, generally, Christians face temptations and struggles that work to pull them away from serving Jesus Christ faithfully. Therefore, God has instructed that Christians faithfully assemble with the local church. While these assemblies also accomplish the purpose of worshiping God, they also provide excellent opportunities for Christians to encourage each other in the faith of the gospel.

Avoid everything that tears down

While you think about things you can do to encourage other people to serve God faithfully (whether your brethren or unbelievers), it is just as important to avoid doing things that tear other people down or cause them to stumble. We began learning this principle from Ephesians 4:29. “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification.” So, the implication is that there are many ways you can use your words to harm people spiritually. You could gossip, deceive, lie, blaspheme, slander, use offensive language, etc. All of these things would fail to point people to Jesus Christ.

Romans 14-15 is another passage that helps to see that there are things you can do to hinder people from following the Lord. The context deals with issues involving Christian liberty (things that God has not commanded to be done or not to be done). Yet, even in these issues that are of no consequence to God, there is a way to destroy the one for whom Christ died. Consider the instruction in Romans 14:19-20. “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.” So, this passage (and many others) should simply encourage you *not* to be a participant in anything that would cause another to stumble or turn people away from following Jesus Christ.

Encouragement is needed every day

You have now seen the importance of being an encourager. But, I now want to impress upon your mind how often this encouragement is needed.

Hebrews 3:12-13 says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Earlier in this lesson, we looked at this passage to understand why encouragement is needed. We established that there is an enemy who tries to stop people from following Jesus Christ. Now, I want you to recognize that you are instructed by the Hebrew writer to “exhort one another daily.” Just as there is daily pressure that tries to pull you away from God, you need daily encouragement to serve God. And, other people need that same daily encouragement. You have been given that responsibility to work to encourage people to follow Jesus Christ every single day!

You can do something to encourage others

“What can I do?” Maybe you are asking yourself that question right now. Maybe you just do not know what you could ever do to encourage someone to follow Jesus Christ. Yet, God says that you *do* play a role in this encouragement. Ephesians 4:16 says that every member of Christ’s body, when each one does its share, causes “growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Each Christian has different abilities, opportunities, strengths, weaknesses, etc. And, though some can do more than others, everyone can do something to serve God and encourage others. I simply want to challenge you to focus on others – and learn to see their needs. Then, consider how you can utilize your individual abilities and opportunities to encourage each person who is around you (whether Christian or unbeliever) to follow Jesus.

Conclusion

Are you actively working every day to encourage other people to faithfully serve Jesus Christ? Let me simply suggest that if you are not doing your part to encourage those who are around you, you are helping them to be discouraged! Remember that there are those who are around you

who would greatly benefit from your encouragement – just as you benefit from the encouragement of others. Won't you determine to do your share and encourage people to serve the Lord with purpose of heart?

What are your opportunities to point others to Jesus?

How should you view your Christian brothers and sisters?

Study Questions

1. Encouragers Are Needed In The Lord's Work

Are you a wrecker or a builder? How can you tell?

Who should be an encourager?

Who should you be encouraging?

Why are encouragers needed in the Lord's work?

List and briefly explain three excellent examples of encouragers.

2. Important Principles In Encouraging Others

What is the true purpose of encouragement?

What is the source of true encouragement?

Why do you need to remember your need to be encouraged?

Does true encouragement ever involve rebuke and correction?

How is assembling together crucial to mutual encouragement?

What are some things you should avoid (i.e. things that tear down)?

How often is encouragement needed?

What can you do to encourage others?

A Christian Must Produce Fruit

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian must produce fruit.

Jesus Expects You To Produce Fruit

Does God expect anything from you after you do what is necessary to become a Christian? Or, are you “once saved, always saved” – as some suggest? Revelation 2:10 clearly teaches that you must be faithful until your death in order to receive the crown of life in Heaven. Furthermore, Galatians 5:4 is one passage that clearly states the possibility of falling away from the grace of God after you have been saved by it. So, both of these passages demonstrate the need for the Christian to live in the way that is pleasing to God throughout the duration of his/her earthly life. And, one of the things Jesus expects from your life is that you must bear/produce fruit during your life.

In John 15:1-8, Jesus teaches the importance of His disciples producing fruit. While we will not consider every lesson from this passage, we will want to examine the importance of producing fruit. But, first, let’s consider the text itself.

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

In this text, Jesus identifies Himself as the “true vine,” His Father as the “vinedresser,” and His disciples as branches of the vine. Those who originally heard Jesus speaking these words would have likely called to mind the grape vine, the one who tends to the vineyard, and the various branches/tendrils that were attached to the vine. And, Jesus will demonstrate that this familiar sight has tremendous implications for how Jesus’ followers are expected to live their lives. Consider a few significant lessons from this text.

(1) All life is in the vine. What is a branch without the vine? It will never grow. It will never produce any fruit. Jesus said, “the branch cannot bear fruit of itself.” It will simply wither and die. The same is true concerning those who want to be Jesus’ disciples. There is no spiritual life outside of Him. There is no spiritual fruit worth anything that will be produced without Jesus. Jesus said, “for without Me you can do nothing.”

Certainly this is a solemn reminder that you cannot choose to live your life in just any way. You

must be following the ways of Jesus Christ in order to maintain your relationship with Him and continue to receive spiritual life through Him. And, the only way your life will produce anything that is worthwhile or profitable is if you are joined to Jesus Christ! For, it is only when you are following Him that your life will be producing the kind of fruit that will please God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 indicates that the inspired word of God completely equips you to do every good work God wants you to be doing.

(2) The fruitless branch is worthless to the vinedresser. What good is a fruitless branch to the vinedresser? His entire work (as a vinedresser) is to cultivate the land and the vine to produce the greatest harvest of fruit that is possible. Certainly, then, a branch that never produces any fruit (though he has tried to cultivate it so that it would bear fruit) will be removed from the vine. Not only is this fruitless branch useless to the vinedresser, but, it is actually working contrary to his goals – as it steals valuable nutrients from the fruit-producing branches.

Jesus plainly states that God “takes away” every branch that does not produce fruit. If you claim to be a Christian but do not produce any fruit, you are only putting on a false appearance. Perhaps your life looks religious to others who are living around you. Yet, perhaps your life has nothing but leaves in it. However, God (the vinedresser) will examine each branch at the appropriate time – and He will evaluate whether the branch produced as it should have produced. At that time, if God finds that you have not been producing fruit for Him as you should, you will be cut off from the vine (“cast out as a branch”) and wither. Then, those branches that had been cut off will be gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. Ultimately, eternal punishment in Hell fire is your eternal destination if you do not produce spiritual fruit for the Lord.

(3) The fruitful branch will glorify the vinedresser. Why is it so important for the branches of the vine to produce fruit? Why will the fruitless branches be cast off and burned (even if they look like they are alive)? The answer is found in the purpose of the vinedresser. The vinedresser does not spend his time, energy, and resources to cultivate a vine that just looks good to the eye. He is expending himself in this way in order that he might receive a

return on his investment. Perhaps it is to have fruit for his family. Perhaps it is to sell the fruit and make a profit. Regardless of his specific purpose, only the fruitful vine will glorify the vinedresser.

Look carefully at verse 8 again. “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” God is not glorified when you just put on a show of righteousness in front of others. In fact, He condemns such hypocrisy (see Matthew 23). Instead, He is glorified whenever you truly apply His teachings to your life and produce the kind of fruit He wants from your life. The Father has not created all things and sacrificed His only begotten Son in order to receive your empty praise. Rather, He wants your complete devotion and your true worship! After all, this is your true purpose in life (see Isaiah 43:7 and Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

(4) The fruitful branch is pruned in order that it might bear more fruit. How much fruit should one branch produce? Is just one cluster of grapes enough for a branch to produce in its lifetime? Certainly, the vinedresser knows that some branches are capable of producing more than others. Yet, he also knows that each branch ought to be continuously producing fruit. He knows how to cultivate each one in order to help it accomplish that goal – by pruning the branches that have already produced fruit.

Jesus said that God prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it “may bear more fruit” (verse 2). God knows what you are capable of producing. He does not expect more from you than you are capable of producing. However, He also does not expect less from you than you are capable of producing. Therefore, it is important for you (after you have produced spiritual fruit in the past) to continue to grow and produce more spiritual fruit. While it can be easy for a Christian to rest on his/her past successes as a Christian, he/she must realize that now is not the time for rest! Instead, rest will come after life on this earth is over (see Revelation 14:13). As long as you are living on this earth, God is trying to get your life to produce more fruit to glorify Him!

Mark 4:14-20

In Mark 4:14-20, Jesus explains the parable He had taught in Mark 4:3-9. The parable deals with

three elements: The seed, the sower, and the soils. While we will not consider every lesson from this passage, we will want to examine the importance of producing fruit. But, first, let's consider the text itself.

“The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

This teaching of Jesus has many of the same applications as the first one we considered. Once again, the emphasis is on fruit being produced. However, this parable helps us understand why some people will produce that spiritual fruit and others will not. In the parable, Jesus helps us to see that the seed is the word of God. And, when this seed is sown, it comes into contact with different types of soil (which represent the different hearts of men and women). Therefore, whether fruit is produced in your life or not will depend upon what kind of heart (mind) you have. If you are focused on earthly things, you will not produce fruit for God. However, if you are focused on the things of God, you will be producing fruit. So, you will find yourself *somewhere* in this parable – as one of these four different types of soil. Now, let's briefly examine each one.

(1) The wayside soil. This type of soil refers to the ground that is hard-packed. It is ground that has not been touched by the plow. Therefore, whenever seed falls on this kind of soil, it just lays on the surface and it is easy for the birds to snatch the seed away so that it can never have any kind of impact on the ground.

This category would refer to many people who are simply not interested in the gospel – at least not interested enough to seriously consider its message. Satan has blinded their minds so much that the gospel has no effect on their thinking. Now, in the case of the wayside soil, it is not as if the gospel is too difficult to be understood and obeyed. Instead, these individuals do not understand it because they are not focused on spiritual things. As long as Satan has blinded this person by the temporary things of this world, he/she will never believe the gospel and be saved! Unfortunately, there is a lot of “wayside soil” who will never be interested in God's saving message (just as the majority of land in this world is uncultivated land).

(2) The rocky soil. This type of soil is soil that it intermixed with a lot of rock. Therefore, the top layer of the soil may look good for sowing seed. And, initially after the seed is sown, a plant does spring up. However, because of the rock below the surface, it cannot take sufficient root. Then, due to its inability to get the proper nutrients, the plant withers and dies whenever it is subject to the heat of the sun.

The one represented here initially accepts the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice that Jesus states this one hears the word and “immediately receive it with gladness” (Mark 4:16). He/she is willing to accept the fundamental teachings of the gospel and desires the salvation that is offered in Jesus Christ. However, this individual did not count the cost of discipleship. Unfortunately, those who are like the “rocky soil” will not endure the persecutions and tribulations that are associated with living for Jesus Christ (“for the word's sake”) and they fall away. They are not sufficiently rooted (steadfast) in the hope of the gospel.

(3) The thorny soil. This type of soil is soil that is not only supplying nutrients for the seed that was planted; but, it is also supplying nutrients to many weeds. Therefore, this type of soil does produce a plant; but, because of all the other weeds that are growing alongside of it, the plant is choked out and will not bring any fruit to maturity. Notice that no fruit is said to be brought to *maturity*. Perhaps there will be some buds that can be seen or some fruit that starts to grow. However, nothing will ever be brought to a place of maturity so that it is useful.

You Will Be Known By Your Fruit

Once again, the implication is that the individual who is represented by this type of soil does initially obey the gospel of Christ (as the seed did produce a plant in the parable). However, this “Christian” is not entirely devoted to cultivating the word of God in his/her heart so as to make diligent application of all its teachings. Instead, this individual has not given up cultivating the desires for worldly things (such as the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things). Because these individuals have divided allegiances, there may be times at which this person appears promising in his/her service of God. However, this individual simply never makes the kind of commitment that is required by Christ to truly serve Him. He/she will never produce the kind of spiritual fruit that God desires.

(4) The good soil. This type of soil is soil that is prepared to receive the seed, provide it with the right nourishment, and will produce the desired result. While every seed results in fruit being produced, not every plant produces the same amount of fruit. Each one simply produces according to its own ability.

These individuals do more than just initially hear and obey the gospel’s message. These individuals are diligent in making the right application of that message to their lives and live accordingly. Therefore, these individuals will see the kinds of spiritual fruit being produced in their lives that is pleasing to God. Then, Jesus says that not every person will produce the exact same amount of spiritual fruit. Instead, just as some plants produce more fruit than others (due to the ability of each one), some people have greater abilities to produce more spiritual fruit than others. However, God knows exactly how much fruit each person is capable of producing – and He expects each one to produce that much (as demonstrated in Jesus’ parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30).

Though more could be said about the expectation Jesus has for you to produce fruit, we now need to consider the fact that you will be known by your fruit. You see, fruit does not just have the characteristic of demonstrating that a branch is alive and useful; but, it is also useful in identifying. For instance, an apple tree will produce apples. A peach tree will produce peaches. And, a grape vine will produce grapes.

The fruit you produce identifies yourself

The type of fruit you produce will identify yourself. This principle is identified in multiple passages in the Scriptures. Consider two examples.

(1) Matthew 7:15-16, 20. In this text, Jesus warns, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits...Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

Those who were promoting false religion could be known by the things their lives produced. Namely, in the realm of false teachers, you can know them by examining their teachings.

(2) Luke 6:43-45. In a parallel passage to Matthew 7, Jesus provides more insight to the value of fruit in identifying. “For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

Here is the general principle stated (without specific reference to false religious teachers). Jesus says that “every tree is known by its fruit.” If you wanted to gather grapes, you would not go to a bramble bush. In the same way, Jesus says that men produce good things whenever they have good hearts

(hearts that are focused on the right things). However, men produce evil things whenever they have evil hearts (hearts that are focused on wrong things). Likewise, your heart will be made known by your fruit.

Known to God

God is all-knowing. Therefore, He already knows your heart (Acts 15:8). He knows if your heart is good or if your heart is evil. However, in order for His judgment to be righteous and fair, He gives you opportunity to demonstrate your heart to Him through your works.

Are you known to God as being one who produces good fruit? Whenever God looks at your life and evaluates your heart, does He see an individual who is focused on accomplishing His will? Does He see someone who is interested and engaged in leading others to Him? Does He see a person who is focused on growing spiritually and maturing in faith? Does He see an individual who is truly and unquestionably devoted to serving and worshiping Him? The fruit you are producing in your life will help make all of this known to God!

Or, are you known as being one who produces bad fruit? Whenever God looks at your life and evaluates your heart, does He see an individual who is focused on living according to your own desires and interests? Does He see someone who is not truly interested and engaged in leading others to Him? Does He see a person who is not growing spiritually or maturing in the faith – at least not how you should be growing and maturing? Does He see someone who is sowing seeds of discord and doubt? Does He see an individual who is devoted to gossip and tale-bearing? Does He see a person who is not 100% devoted to His cause? The fruit you are producing in your life will help make all of this known to God!

Known to others

God is not the only one who is watching your life. You are also being watched by the world. The world is watching those who claim to be Christians. For instance, in Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus demonstrates that the Christian's life should be as

different from the world as light is from darkness – and demonstrates that everyone who is around you will be able to see your shining light (if your light indeed is shining). However, this is not the only time that the world takes notice of those who claim to be Christians. The world also takes notice when a person claims to be a Christian and then lives in ways that are contrary to the teachings of the Bible – demonstrating himself/herself to be a hypocrite. In the same way, you will make yourself known to those who are around you (i.e. other Christians, your family, your friends, your neighbors, your co-workers, your classmates, etc.) by the fruits you are producing.

Are you known to others as being one who produces good fruit? Do others know you as someone who puts God first in everything that you do and in every decision that you make? Do others know you as a person who tries to serve and do good to others whenever there is opportunity to do so? Do others see your spiritual growth and maturity in the faith? Do others know you as a person who will try to encourage them to serve the Lord and overcome the temptations of life? Do other people know you as an individual they can come to and ask their Bible questions? The fruit that you are producing will make all of this known to others!

Or, are you known to others as being one who produces bad fruit? Do others know you as a trouble maker? Do others know you as being dishonest and dishonorable? Do others know you as someone they cannot count on? Do others know you as fitting in with the crowd? Do others know you as being an individual who pursues your own selfish desires? Do others know you as using filthy language, consuming alcoholic beverages, and engaging in other sinful activities? Do others know you as a person who is seeking your own earthly pleasures and riches? Do others know you as someone who is religious, but just not deeply devoted to serving God? The fruit that you are producing will make all of this known to others!

Known to yourself

Finally, your fruit will not just make yourself known to God and to others. Your fruit will also make yourself known to yourself! You see, it is

Some Fruit You Must Not Be Producing

possible for you to deceive yourself. For instance, James wrote, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). So, when you know the right things God wants from your life, but fail to actually do those things He requires, you can deceive yourself into thinking that you are pleasing to God.

It can certainly be quite challenging to objectively look at our own lives – because we usually want to view ourselves in the best possible way. We don’t like to be wrong and have to make changes in our lives. Often, whenever someone else (after looking at our fruit) tries to encourage us to do better or rebuke a sin in some area, we get defensive – because we don’t see what they see! However, if you will dedicate yourself to self-examination by looking at the fruit of your life, you can know whether your life actually is pleasing to God or not. This is exactly what Paul instructed to be done in 2 Corinthians 13:5. “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?— unless indeed you are disqualified.”

Is your life pleasing to God? Are you completely dedicated to serving and worshiping God? Are you always putting Him absolutely first in the things you do and the decisions you make? Are you really interested in doing the things He wants you to be doing? You will be able to know the answer to these (and similar) questions by looking at the fruit produced in your life.

Or, does your life fail to please God? Are you focused on pursuing things that make you happy and that please yourself? Are you unwilling to sacrifice in order to do the things God wants you to do? Are you participating in sinful things? Are you settling for a form of religion rather than following the steps of Jesus Christ? Are you conforming to the world rather than transforming into a person devoted to holiness? You will be able to know the answer to these (and similar) questions by looking at the fruit produced in your life.

Now, as we have been talking about the need for the Christian to produce fruit, we need to be more specific. Indeed, there are many people who profess to be Christians – but, they don’t produce the kind of fruit God wants them to be producing in their lives. While there is much that could be said about this point, I want to look at only two passages.

Ephesians 5:3-7

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.”

Take a moment to observe the fact that there are some things that can be produced in your life that are not fitting for one of God’s saints to be producing. A “saint” is a most holy thing. Specifically, “saints” are those who have been made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ and are committed to living according to God’s standard of holiness. Therefore, anything that is not according to the holiness of God is not fitting for you to produce in your life – as one of God’s holy people.

Then, consider the things identified in this passage that are not fitting for you to produce in your life. Fornication. All uncleanness. Covetousness. Filthiness. Foolish talking. Coarse jesting. Being a partaker with those who disobey God. All of these things are contrary to God’s will for your life. And, in order to produce any of these things in your life requires that you abandon the teachings of God’s word and the spiritual life that is found in Jesus Christ. Remember, a tree produces fruit after its own kind. Therefore, your life will never produce any of

these “rotten” fruits if you are truly following after Jesus Christ!

Galatians 5:19-21

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

This passage actually begins back around verse 16 and continues through verse 26. In it, the apostle Paul demonstrates that those who are Christians ought to be following the ways of God (as revealed by the Holy Spirit – the things written in the pages of the Bible). And, the Christian must not be living to fulfill the desires of his/her flesh. This is because the ways of the flesh and the ways of the Spirit are “contrary to one another.” They do not lead you to live in the same kind of ways – which Paul demonstrates in verses 19-23. He then states that those who are Christ’s have “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (verses 24-25).

Now, take a moment to look at the things which should *not* be produced in the life of the Christian (who is dedicated to following the ways of the Spirit). Adultery. Fornication. Uncleanness. Lewdness. Idolatry. Sorcery. Hatred. Contentions. Jealousies. Outbursts of wrath. Selfish ambitions. Dissensions. Heresies. Envy. Murders. Drunkenness. Revelries. Then, the phrase “and the like” demonstrates that there are even more types of “rotten” fruit that are produced in the life of the person who is living to please his/her own fleshly desires rather than following the ways of God. However, this list provides an excellent starting point to see the kinds of things God does *not* approve of your life producing. He says that those who produce these kinds of fruits in their lives “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Therefore, you should be diligent to study the activities that are identified in this passage (along with finding similar sinful things in

the rest of the Scriptures) so that you can keep your life from producing this kind of “rotten” fruit.

Some Fruit You Must Be Producing

We have already established the fact that, as a Christian, Jesus Christ expects you to be producing fruit in your life. And, as we have already seen (from Jesus’ parable of the soils in Mark 4), some will produce a greater quantity of fruit than others will – because some have greater abilities and opportunities. Still, all will be producing something. And, all will be producing the same kinds of spiritual fruit (though in different quantities). This is because God gives every Christian the same basic responsibilities. The instructions He gives (unless He says they are only applicable to a particular classification of people, i.e. husbands and wives) are equally applicable to all. Therefore, let’s consider some of the fruit that every Christian must be producing in his/her life. As we do, understand that we will almost certainly not identify every type of fruit discussed in the New Testament. That will take an ongoing commitment to studying the word of God.

The fruits of righteousness

Hebrews 12:3-11 speaks about the chastening (discipline) of God. That is, God (through various means) will discipline you whenever you sin against Him. However, the Hebrew writer indicates that God does not do this because He likes to watch you suffer. Instead, He does so for your own profit, that you may be a partaker of His holiness. Verse 11 says, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

So, God wants you to be producing the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” in your life. This simply refers to every kind of fruit in your life that is in line with the righteousness of God. Romans 6:22 states that, as a Christian, you will “have your fruit

to holiness.” While both of these passages are very generic, they are applicable to so much!

Whenever you make any kind of decision in your life that is in harmony with the righteous and holy ways of God, you are producing this kind of fruit. Therefore, whenever you decide to clothe yourself in modest apparel, you produce the fruit of righteousness. When you refuse to engage in sinful entertainment, you produce the fruit of righteousness. When you work for a living rather than stealing, you produce the fruit of righteousness. When you control your tongue and only speak words that will glorify God and encourage those who hear, you produce the fruit of righteousness. When you fulfill your God-given role in your family (i.e. as a husband/wife, father/mother, child, etc.), you produce the fruit of righteousness. Since God’s word is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17), you produce the fruit of righteousness whenever you give yourself to being obedient to its instructions!

Personal spiritual growth

Growth is a fundamental part of life. For instance, plants work to grow stronger throughout the duration of their lives so that they will be capable of producing the proper fruit. Babies grow and mature into toddlers, young children, young men/women, young adults, etc.

In the same way, God expects you to be growing spiritually. Just as newborn babies are not capable of the same amount as a mature adult, a new Christian is not capable of the same things that a mature Christian is capable of. Each one must simply produce all the fruit he/she can at the time – and must be continually devoted to growing and maturing. For instance, 2 Peter 1:5-7 identifies things which must be supplemented to your faith. “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.”

Problems come, however, whenever Christians aren’t growing and maturing. Wouldn’t you be concerned as a parent if your newborn child never grew or matured? Wouldn’t you be concerned as a farmer if your plants never grew beyond the point of a tiny sprout? God also is not pleased whenever His children are not growing. He is not pleased as the vinedresser whenever the branches on the vine are not maturing! For instance, the Hebrew writer spoke concerning some Christians who had not matured and grown properly in Hebrews 5:12. “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.” As a Christian, you must be making incremental progress every day to be more of what God wants you to be!

The fruit of the Spirit

In the context we discussed previously, the apostle Paul identifies some things that God’s people will be producing in their lives whenever they devote themselves to living according to His word (as revealed by the Holy Spirit). Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

Whenever you give yourself to obeying God’s word rather than fulfilling the desires of your own flesh, you will be producing these fruits. You will be demonstrating your love for God and for your fellow man. You will be living a life that is full of joy through the hope of the gospel. You will be living a life that demonstrates peace with God and with your fellow man (as much as depends on you, see Romans 12:17-21). You will be patiently enduring all of the trials, temptations, persecutions, and hardships of living life for the Lord and maintaining your faithfulness in God’s service. You will be demonstrating kindness to others in your thoughts, your words, and your actions. You will be living according to God’s standard of what is good in every area of your life. You will prove yourself to be faithful/trustworthy to God no matter what obstacles you face in life. You will conduct yourself in a gentle/meek way. You will be diligent to exercise

self-control to do only those things which will glorify God. In fact, as Galatians 5:24 indicates, all of the passions and desires of your flesh will be given over entirely to the Lord's service!

Spiritual instruction

As you study God's word to see what kind of fruit God wants you to produce in your life, you should observe that God expects for all of His people to be actively involved in teaching His saving message to others. Notice again that the Hebrew writer said there was a time in which those who had once been babes in Christ "ought to be teachers" (Hebrews 5:12). Over time, these Christians are expected to mature in the faith and grow in their understanding of God's word. Then, as you grow in this way, you also increase in your ability to communicate God's word to others.

"But I am not a good speaker," someone might think. Yet, almost everyone who considers himself/herself "not a good speaker" could tell someone how to drive a car, how to prepare a meal, how to run the vacuum cleaner, how to work a computer, how to do the job he/she is trained to do at work, etc. You see, whenever you know how to do something, you can use whatever abilities and opportunities you have to help someone else learn the same. Yes, perhaps someone else is *better* equipped to train another in those areas. Still, you do have the responsibility to use your abilities and opportunities to teach what you know.

Regardless of where you are right now in your spiritual development as a Christian, you can teach other people the message of Christ. A Christian (a servant of the Lord) "must" be "able to teach" and must be actively involved in helping those who are living in opposition to God "come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:24-26). Every Christian can begin by teaching people about the love of God and what he/she did to become a Christian. Then, as you grow and mature, you can teach even more people, respond to even more questions, and even teach those who are Christians in order to help them grow in Jesus Christ!

Edification

Every Christian has the responsibility to be edifying his/her Christian brothers and sisters. Hebrews 3:12-13 states, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Notice that this is even a "daily" responsibility for those who are Christians. The Christian is clearly expected to be concerned about his Christian brothers and sisters – and be actively involved in helping them overcome the challenges they face in living for Jesus Christ. This fruit of edification involves bearing the burdens of your brethren (Galatians 6:2). It involves not neglecting the assembling together of the local church (Hebrews 10:24-25). It involves forgiving your brethren who have repented of sin (Ephesians 4:32). It involves helping your brethren when they are in need (Acts 4:32-37). All of these things (and others) are involved in producing the fruit of edification.

And, sometimes, this edification also includes rebuke and correction. You see "edification" is not about leaving someone with a good feeling. Instead, it is all about building someone up in the faith of Jesus Christ. However, when a brother or sister has sinned and left the faith, edification involves going to that brother/sister and pointing him/her to Jesus Christ (see Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19-20). In doing so, James says that you can "save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins"!

Good deeds toward others

The Christian is taught to be a servant – of God and of other people (see John 13:1-17). In performing this kind of service, the Christian should be producing the fruits of doing good to people as they have opportunity. For instance, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) demonstrates that truly loving your neighbor involves using your abilities to do good to those you have the opportunity to help.

Galatians 6:10 records this commandment. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” So, you must “especially” take advantage of your abilities and opportunities to help your Christian brothers and sisters. But, this responsibility also extends to all mankind. You could produce this kind of fruit by giving a meal to someone in need, helping someone financially through a difficult stretch of time, mowing the grass or cleaning the house of someone who is unable to do so, giving someone a ride to the doctors or to the assemblies of the local church, etc. Opportunities to do good are everywhere. You must simply lift up your eyes and focus on producing this kind of fruit!

True worship

As you seek to produce fruit throughout your life that is pleasing to God, you must not fail to produce the fruit of true worship to God. In fact, true worship is one of the things God expects of those who are His people. Listen to Jesus’ words in John 4:23-24. “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Since the Father is “seeking” those who will engage in true worship, shouldn’t you desire to produce this kind of fruit in your life? Hebrews 13:15 states the following: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” However, as you seek to produce the fruit of worship to God, remember that you must worship Him in spirit (heartfelt, sincere) and in truth (according to God’s revelation of truth) in order for your worship to be pleasing to Him.

Conclusion

Are you producing spiritual fruit that pleases God? As a Christian, you must produce fruit that is pleasing to God throughout the course of your lifetime. And, no matter how much fruit you have

produced in the past, you must continue to produce even more fruit (note that even the apostle Paul – with all the fruit he had produced in his life – said that he could become “disqualified” and lose his salvation, see 1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Get to work today in producing the fruit God wants from your life!

Study Questions

1. Jesus Expects You To Produce Fruit

What do you learn about the importance of producing fruit from John 15:1-8?

What do you learn about the importance of producing fruit from Mark 4:14-20?

2. You Will Be Known By Your Fruit

How will the fruit you produce identify yourself?

How will the fruit you produce make yourself known to God?

How will the fruit you produce make yourself known to others?

How will the fruit you produce make yourself known to yourself?

3. Some Fruit You Must Not Be Producing

What fruit must you *not* be producing, according to Ephesians 5:3-7?

What fruit must you *not* be producing, according to Galatians 5:19-21?

4. Some Fruit You Must Be Producing

List and briefly explain each of the fruits identified in this lesson.

A)

B)

C)

D)

E)

F)

G)

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A Doer Of The Word

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a doer of the word.

A Christian Is A Doer

When James wrote his letter to encourage and give direction to Christians, he addressed the issue of being a doer of the word of God on multiple occasions. Two notable occasions are found in James 1:22-25 and James 2:14-26. Let's consider both of these passages to see that God expects His people to be doers of the things He has instructed – and not just hearers of His word or just mentally acknowledging what He says to be true.

Not just a hearer

In James 1:22-25, James identifies the fact that those who are not doers of God's word fail to please God. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man

observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."

Of course, the focus in this passage is to address the issue of being only a hearer of God's word. This is an individual who learns the things God desires for that person to practice. So, the problem is not in the knowledge of what is right. The problem is in actually putting that accurate knowledge into practice so as to produce actions that are pleasing to God.

It is possible for an individual, then, to know exactly who God expects him/her to be. He/she (if this individual is honest with himself/herself) can probably even identify areas in which he/she needs to change. However, there are no actions taken to make those changes or to be the kind of disciple Jesus is pleased with. You see, true discipleship involves both learning from the Master (Jesus) and following Him (by putting what He has said into action). Therefore, an individual who is a hearer only has failed to be a true disciple of Jesus!

Now, before we continue to consider this passage, I want to emphasize the importance of hearing the gospel's message. Consider verse 21. "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." With a spirit of gentleness, you must receive the word of God (the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of the New Testament) that someone has tried to plant in your heart – like a farmer who plants seed in the soil (see Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23). But, this is not just any kind of seed. This seed (when accepted and put to work in your life) will produce the "fruits" (actions) in your life that are pleasing to God – and ultimately result in the eternal salvation of your soul!

Certainly, having the proper instruction/teaching from the gospel of Jesus Christ is essential to pleasing to God. But, as James demonstrates, it is not the equivalent of obedience! You *must* put what you have heard into practice. Think about it. All the instruction in a college

classroom does not automatically translate into a successful career. There must be an application (doing) of what has been learned. In the same way, an entire lifetime of learning from the best gospel preachers and personal Bible study does not automatically translate into a life that is pleasing to God or into eternal salvation in Heaven! There must be an application (doing) of what has been learned!

Given this truth that James expresses, consider the fact that he says some will deceive themselves by being hearers only (and not doers of God's word). Now, there are all kinds of ways you can be deceived and many different people who are trying to deceive you. But, perhaps the most difficult kind of deception to identify and change is self-deception.

James says that you deceive yourself when you are a hearer of God's word and not a doer. Perhaps, because you are convinced that you know the right things (and may even be able to teach others the right things), you deceive yourself by thinking that is enough for God to be pleased with you. Romans 2, for instance, describes how the Jewish people deceived themselves in the same kind of way. Verses 17-24 describes how they knew the law God had given them, they believed they were God's people, and believed He was pleased with them because of this. However, even though they could teach others the right things (because they possessed an accurate understanding of His commandments), they were condemned because they were not practicing the things God approved. In the same way, someone who has become a Christian in the past will not be saved just because he/she is dedicated to learning what God wants from him/her! There must be a commitment to putting God's word into practice!

Consider the picture James paints of an individual who is a hearer of God's word only. He says that this is like an individual who looks into a mirror and walks away, forgetting what he/she saw. Can you picture it? A man looks in the mirror and sees that he has several hairs sticking up on the back of his head and he has a few small pieces of food between his teeth. He identifies these things as being truth. But, he walks away from the mirror without

making any changes, convincing himself that everything is OK.

I think most people would recognize the error in this kind of action. Yet, there are many people who hear God's word every single day, understand what God wants them to do – and then walk away from it without making a single change God's word required them to make! The one major difference is the fact that walking away from a physical mirror without making the appropriate changes will only result in some short-term embarrassment. Walking away from God's word without making the necessary changes will result losing your soul in Hell fire!

In contrast with this one who is a hearer only is the one described by verse 25. This individual "looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it." Yes, he/she does hear God's word. There is an intentionality in looking into the gospel of Jesus Christ (the "perfect law" that offers "liberty"/freedom from sin). He/she has an intense longing to know the right things. But, this intense longing to know the right things also translates into an intense longing to *do* the right things (to continue in it). Notice that "this one" (not the hearer only) will be "blessed in what he does." He/she will be "blessed" (happy) because he/she has God's approval and has access to all of the spiritual blessings that are available in Jesus Christ, including the hope of eternal salvation in Heaven!

Not just a believer

Next, James emphasizes being a doer of God's word through putting faith into action. This is his main point in James 2:14-26. Let's consider this passage section-by-section.

Consider verses 14-17. "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

What is the profit of faith without works of obedience? This is a question every person who believes in Jesus Christ must consider. Is mentally

accepting the truths revealed in the Bible about Jesus enough for that individual to be acceptable to God and be saved? Or, is there more that is required? Many times in this section of Scripture, James will emphasize the fact that more is required! In fact, even in verses 14-17, James both states and demonstrates that faith without accompanying works of obedience is dead! He illustrates this truth by comparing it to the “good” that is accomplished whenever an individual sees another who is in need of food and clothing – and does not give the person what is needful to the body. Instead, he only wishes him well. This is exactly how God views the individual (even the Christian) who professes faith in Jesus Christ, but will not do the things Jesus has taught!

Consider verses 18-20. “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”

Not only is God not pleased with a faith that does not have works. But, this kind of “faith” is not even a genuine faith. Though this disobedient “faith” may acknowledge some Bible truths that are necessary for salvation, it demonstrates that there is *not* a full trust in those truths. Think about it. If you *completely* and *truly* believe in the truths God has revealed in the pages of God’s word, you would be diligent to act accordingly! Instead, this kind of workless “faith” puts your faith in the same category as the “faith” of demons (who believe and tremble, but do not live accordingly). Once again, you need to recognize that “faith without works is dead”!

Consider verses 21-24. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

Abraham is, perhaps, the most well-known example of faith in all of the Bible. Yet, even

Abraham’s faith was accompanied by works of obedience (not by works done to earn salvation, see Romans 4). Abraham’s faith was only described as “perfect,” was “accounted to him for righteousness,” resulted in being called “the friend of God,” and resulted in justification because it was accompanied by works of obedience. Hebrews 11 helps us to see this. “By faith” Abraham obeyed God when he was told to leave his homeland and go to a place God promised to give his descendants (even though he did not know where he was going). “By faith” Abraham dwelt in that foreign country. “By faith” Abraham offered up his only begotten son on the altar in accordance with God’s instructions – believing that God would even be able to raise him up from the dead. These are demonstrations of true faith! And, if you want to be approved of God, you also must have this kind of active and obedient faith! James 2:24 says, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

Consider verses 25-26. “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

Like Abraham, Rahab provides an excellent example of an individual who demonstrated true faith by works. Now, this passage does not approve of her lifestyle or every choice that she made (she was, after all, a harlot). Instead, this passage expresses approval for this one specific act that was related to receiving the spies who were sent into Jericho, believing in God’s power to overthrow the city. In the same way, again, your faith is empty/worthless if it does not have works of obedience to accompany it. Faith without works is just as dead as the body without the spirit is dead!

Things That Prevent Us From Being Doers Of The Word

James clearly states and demonstrates that it takes obedience in order to please God. Hearing God’s word is a necessary thing. But, it is not enough

by itself. Faith (believing the right things) is a necessary thing. But, it is not enough by itself. You must be a doer of God's word – even after you have taken the necessary steps to become a Christian. But, as you consider the need to be a doer of God's word, you should recognize that there are many real obstacles to putting what you have heard and believe into action. Consider some with me now.

Unwilling to accept the truth

Sometimes, an individual hears the word of truth – and doesn't like what he/she hears. Maybe the truth challenges a deeply held belief. Maybe the truth requires a change that an individual is unwilling to make. Maybe the truth requires a difficult stance to be taken. Maybe following the truth is not viewed as pleasurable as another way is viewed.

Regardless of the exact circumstance, this individual can be like someone who looks in the mirror and does not like the truth he/she sees. However, rather than making the appropriate changes, he/she will search for a reason to think what he/she saw was not really the truth. And, he/she will search for something else to accept as truth. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 describes this kind of situation. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

Having such an unwillingness to accept the truth as truth will *always* prevent you from pleasing God and being a doer of the word in some area! Instead of having an intense desire (a hunger and thirst) to do what is *right* (Matthew 5:6), you will only accept the things that you want to be true. Thus, you will not be acting on the right foundation of truth in your life.

Failure to make applications

Sometimes, an individual hears the word of truth, accepts the truth as truth – but fails to make the appropriate applications to his/her own life. Maybe he/she can see the truth plainly and refuses to make the appropriate applications. Maybe he/she can see the truth enough to apply it to everyone else's lives,

but just not to his/her own life. Maybe he/she understands the truth intellectually, but has deceived himself/herself regarding the reality of his/her own life. Maybe he/she understands the truth, but has convinced himself/herself that the truth just does not apply to his/her life.

Regardless of how this is manifested, this individual is blinded to his/her own faults and the areas in which he/she needs to make changes. Two Bible examples of this principle will help us understand and avoid this. In Matthew 7:3-5, Jesus provides an example of the type of hypocritical judgments He had just condemned. In this example, one individual is pictured as having a beam protruding from his eye. But, rather than addressing his own problem first, he is seen as trying to remove the tiny speck that was in his brother's eye. Then, a second example is found in 1 Samuel 12 (after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah). In this passage, Nathan (a prophet) came to David speaking about a rich man who possessed a great flock and a poor man who only had one small ewe lamb that was "like a daughter" to the poor man. And, Nathan described how that rich man took the poor man's one ewe lamb to prepare for a guest, rather than taking from his own flock. Of course, David was enraged when he heard this story. However, he did not recognize that he had done the same thing in committing adultery with Bathsheba – until David was told, "You are the man!"

Failing to make the application of truth will *always* prevent you from pleasing God and being a doer of the word in some area! Though it is always easier to apply God's truth to someone else, it will only help you please God if you address your own life *first*. As Jesus indicated in Matthew 7, you need to correct the faults you see in your own life *first* – and then you will be able to see clearly to help others who need to apply God's truth to their lives.

Excuses

Sometimes, an individual hears the word of truth, accepts the truth as truth – but excuses himself/herself from being obedient to the truth. Some excuse themselves for their failure to obey the truth because they say they *cannot* obey it. Some excuse themselves for their failure to obey the truth

because they blame other people. Certainly, there is no lack of excuses people will make for why they will not obey the truth.

Regardless of the excuses people make (which some even truly believe themselves), this individual refuses to accept personal responsibility for his/her own actions or inactions. Somehow, this individual views himself/herself as having no other possible course of action except to do what is contrary to God's word. Adam and Eve provide perfect examples of this. From the very first time sin was committed by mankind, man is seen as offering excuses for his sin! When God confronted them for eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam blamed Eve and God. He said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). Then, Eve proceeded to blame Satan. She said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:13).

Failing to accept personal responsibility for your actions/inactions that are contrary to God's truth will *always* prevent you from pleasing God and being a doer of the word in some area! Remember, God has promised that He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to endure and overcome. Every time you are faced with the decision to do right or wrong, God has assured you that it is possible for you to do right (see 1 Corinthians 10:13)! Now, it is just up to you to make the decision to do right.

Fear

Sometimes, an individual hears the word of truth, accepts the truth as truth – but is fearful of applying God's truth in every area of his/her life. Some fear ridicule for doing what is right. Some fear how others will treat them for making the changes God requires. Some fear losing relationships. Some fear losing the things they enjoy in life. Some fear trying but failing. Some fear new experiences and new levels of commitment to serving Jesus Christ.

Regardless of what produces the fear of doing what is right, you must choose to fear God above everything! Jesus put this into the proper perspective when He told His apostles, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body

in hell" (Matthew 10:28)! The most that mankind is capable of doing to you for obeying God's word is taking your physical life away from you. However, if you do not do God's word in your life, He is capable of destroying you in the everlasting torment of Hell fire!

Failing to have the proper fear of God (rather than fearing earthly consequences) will *always* prevent you from pleasing God and being a doer of the word in some area! Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 encourages you to consider that your entire and true purpose in life is to "Fear God and keep His commandments." For, you must recognize that God will bring every work you do (or don't do) into Judgment – when you will either be welcomed into Heaven or condemned to everlasting punishment in Hell fire (see Matthew 25:46).

Indifference

Sometimes, an individual hears the truth, accepts the truth as truth – but is not committed to doing everything God desires to be done. This individual may do many good things that God desires to be done – but, then leaves other things undone. Sometimes, when it is easy or convenient, this individual will be devoted to doing God's word. But, there are other times when this individual will leave God's word of truth undone.

Regardless of how this indifferent attitude manifests itself, it fails to fully embrace service to God and fails to put His word into action in every area of his/her life. Consider this kind of situation that had developed among the Christians in the city of Laodicea. Jesus rebuked these who had once become Christians by telling them, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16). They were not fully relying on God. They were trying to live for themselves and trying to live for God (a task Jesus said was impossible to accomplish, in Matthew 6:24)!

Failing to be zealous to accomplish the will of God in your life will *always* prevent you from pleasing God and being a doer of the word in some

area! Consider how Jesus told the Laodiceans to overcome their problem of spiritual indifference. First, He demonstrated that they needed to come to Him completely and open the door for Him to have control over all of their lives. Then, He also told them to “be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19).

Procrastination

Sometimes, an individual hears the truth, accepts the truth as truth – but is not committed to urgently acting on the truth. Instead, this individual plans to be a doer of God’s word *someday*. Perhaps he/she is waiting for a more convenient time to obey God. Perhaps he/she is anticipating a time when there will be fewer changes that will need to be made in order to obey God. Perhaps he/she is waiting to obey God until he/she is perfect.

Regardless of how this procrastination is manifested, it delays putting God’s word into action in some area of an individual’s life. Consider the example of Felix, the governor. In Acts 24:24-26, Felix sent for Paul (while Paul was in prison) in order to hear him “concerning the faith in Christ” (verse 24). However, as Felix reasoned about “righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you’” (verse 25). Meanwhile, he was hoping that Paul would try to bribe him so as to be released from prison. So, even though Felix had heard, understood, and believed the truth (to the point that he even trembled), he refused to be a doer of God’s word at that time.

Procrastinating to obey God will *always* prevent you from being pleasing to God and being a doer of the word in some area! Even if you are only procrastinating being a doer of the word in one area of your life, it keeps you from pleasing God. Instead of procrastinating in this way, God wants you to make the most of the time and opportunities you have at the present time to do the things He has instructed you to do! 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, “...Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Lack of self-discipline

Sometimes, an individual hears the truth, accepts the truth as truth – but simply fails to have the necessary self-discipline to do God’s word! In this case, there is often a desire to do the right thing. There is just not the doing of what God has commanded. Perhaps it is because an individual (though he/she wants to please God) simply is unwilling to overcome his/her own desire for the physical treasures and pleasures of life to live for the Lord.

Regardless of what the physical desire behind the lack of self-discipline is, this individual (ultimately) values something physical above being right with God. However, in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul warned that self-discipline is necessary in order to live in a way that pleases God. Specifically, verse 27 says, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

Failing to properly discipline yourself will *always* prevent you from being pleasing to God and being a doer of the word in some area! A proper demonstration of self-discipline involves refusing to do those things God has forbidden and doing those things God has commanded. It involves valuing God’s instructions above the pursuit of physical desires – to the point that you will sacrifice your own physical desires and pleasures in order to accomplish the will of God! As Jesus demonstrated in Luke 9:23-26, the proper self-discipline is even willing to deny oneself of his/her own physical life in order to be obedient to the will of God!

Lack of love

Sometimes, an individual hears the truth, accepts the truth as truth – but fails to show the right degree of love. Now, this lack of love could be for the Lord or it could be for other people. Yet, even though such an individual may be *doing* all of the right things, the activities are not properly motivated. These could be nothing more than empty displays of service to God rather than completely dedicated acts of obedience.

Regardless of whether an individual fails to show love for God or for others, God does not approve of loveless service. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 demonstrates that even though you do all of the right things in serving God and even if you would give your life for Jesus Christ by allowing your body to be burned, it would all be of no profit if you did not have love! The Ephesians (in Revelation 2:1-7) also demonstrate this point. Jesus commended them for many good things – such as their works, their labor, their perseverance, their hatred of evil and evil doctrines, etc. However, Jesus told them, “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (verse 4). Evidently, all of the good things they were doing were being done without love and fervor for Christ.

Failing to have the appropriate motivation of love behind your obedience to God will *always* prevent an individual from pleasing God and being a doer of the word (at least in the area of love). Yes, God *does* want you to be doing the right things in your life (as we have been discussing through much of this lesson). However, He also wants you to serve Him with joy and gladness and not in a begrudging kind of way. 1 John 5:3 says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” Yes, God wants you to be on fire (zealous, passionate) about serving Christ (see Titus 2:11-14)!

Satisfaction

Sometimes, an individual hears the truth, accepts the truth as truth – but is not dedicated to doing God’s word because he/she believes that he/she has done enough to serve God. Perhaps this individual views serving God as having some kind of quota attached to it. Perhaps this individual views his/her past service as being enough to cover the debt of sin he/she has committed in the past. Perhaps he/she believes that it is time to “cut back” on his/her service for the Lord and allow the younger people to do the work that needs to be done.

Regardless of how this is manifested, this individual fails to view his/her service to God in the proper kind of way. Ultimately, this individual views the sin he/she has committed as a payable debt rather than an unpayable one. For, if an individual viewed

the sin he/she has previously committed as an unpayable debt, he/she would be devoted to the Lord throughout his/her entire life – trying to do as much as he/she could possibly do to serve God. Instead, this individual believes that there is a point at which he/she has done “enough” – and that it is time to intentionally do less for God (even though he/she could be doing more)!

Failing to understand that salvation will never be earned (no matter how many good works are done) will *always* prevent an individual from pleasing God and being a doer of the word! The apostle Paul recognized this. Once again, 1 Corinthians 9:27 says, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” Even after everything Paul had accomplished during his years of serving God as an apostle, he could be “disqualified” (lose his salvation) if he did not properly discipline himself to be a doer of God’s word at that present time! And, if this was true about the apostle Paul, it is certainly true about everyone living today!

How To Be A Doer

There are many things that try to prevent us from serving God by being doers of His word. I am sure I have not listed every potential obstacle. But, I hope these have encouraged you to be sure that you do not succumb to anything that would prevent you from doing God’s word. Now, before closing this lesson, I want to focus on how you can be a doer of God’s word.

Defining “sin”

To begin putting God’s word to work in *every* area of your life, you need to understand what “sin” really is. You see, sometimes folks fail to do God’s word because they seem to change the definition of sin to fit their own ideas. Often, folks treat “sin” as something that only applies to the *really bad* things that people do on this earth. Or, they will commonly separate “sin” into the categories of “big sins” and “little sins.”

However, “sin” is anything that violates the instructions of God. 1 John 3:4 says, “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” 1 John 5:17 says that “All unrighteousness is sin.” So, sin is acting without/contrary to the laws of God (given in the pages of God’s word). Therefore, sin is doing the things God has instructed us *not* to do. And, sin is failing to do what God has instructed us *to* do. James 4:17 says, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” And, all sin results in spiritual death (Romans 6:23)!

Learning from Jesus’ parable of the soils

So, if you want to keep yourself from sin, what must you do? Jesus’ parable of the soils (Matthew 13:3-9) should be helpful in answering this question. In Matthew 13:18-23, Jesus explained this parable and demonstrated that only the person who hears God’s word and allows God’s word to work in his/her life gains the approval of God and produces the kind of spiritual fruit God desires an individual to produce.

Most people who hear God’s word will either not allow it to penetrate their minds so as to take the appropriate actions, will allow the fears and concerns of living to please God to prevent them from doing so, or will pursue their own physical desires. However, the one who has a noble and good heart will hear, understand the word, and put it to work to produce spiritual fruit in God’s service!

A model

If you want to live your life to please God, I suggest that you revisit the things James taught in James 1:22-25. I believe we can find a model in this passage for how we can be doers of God’s word and not be hearers only or just have faith only. The model is to constantly be looking in the mirror of God’s word! Now, this applies to both areas in which God has forbidden things from being done and to those things God has commanded to be done.

Remember, God’s word is the “perfect law of liberty” we all must look into and use to evaluate whether we are pleasing to God or not. So, you must do a few things. First, you must hear what God’s

word teaches. This will help you see the picture God’s word wants your life to be like. Second, you must honestly reflect on that picture and compare your life to it. If you do this, you will be able to identify the areas in which your life falls short of the picture God has painted. Third, you must be a doer of the word. That is, you must simply take the appropriate actions to bring your life into agreement with what God’s word desires you to be.

You need to apply this model to sins of commission (i.e. doing things that God has forbidden). As you study God’s word, you will discover many things God condemns. He does not want these things to have any part in the life of a Christian. These include things like fornication, lewdness, idolatry, envy, covetousness, immodest dress, forsaking the assembling together of the local church, etc. And, as you see these (and many other) truths in God’s word, you should diligently reflect on your life to see if you are practicing anything God has commanded that you do not practice. If you do identify something in your life that God has forbidden you from practicing, you must determine to be a doer of God’s word! You must simply decide that you will not overlook the sin that is in your life and determine that you will eliminate it from your life (no matter what it costs you)!

Then, you also need to apply this model to sins of omission (i.e. failing to do what God has instructed to be done). As you study God’s word, you will discover many things God wants His people to be doing. These are to be made part of the Christian’s life. This includes things like fulfilling your God-given role in the family, doing your part as a member of Christ’s church, serving and doing good to others, teaching the gospel to those who are lost in sin, etc. And, as you see these (and many other) truths in God’s word, you should diligently reflect on your life to see if you are actively engaged in those things God wants you to be doing. If you identify that you are failing to do those things God has instructed you to be doing, you must determine to put yourself to work in order to accomplish those responsibilities! You must simply decide that you will be a doer of what God has instructed you to do (no matter what it costs you)!

Conclusion

A true follower of Jesus Christ is not just someone who hears God's word or believes it to be true. A true follower of Jesus Christ is someone who is a doer of God's word! And, you must recognize that the Bible promises eternal consequences for those who fail to be doers of God's word (see 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). On the other hand, God says that Jesus Christ is the "author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9)! Determine that you will be a doer of God's word – no matter what God's word requires of you!

Study Questions

1. A Christian Is A Doer

List some observations from James 1:22-25 about being a hearer of God's word *only*.

List some observations from James 2:14-26 about being a believer *only*.

2. Things That Prevent Us From Being Doers Of The Word

How can an unwillingness to accept the truth prevent you from being a doer of the word?

How can a failure to make applications prevent you from being a doer of the word?

How can excuses prevent you from being a doer of the word?

How can fear prevent you from being a doer of the word?

How can indifference prevent you from being a doer of the word?

How can procrastination prevent you from being a doer of the word?

How can a lack of self-discipline prevent you from being a doer of the word?

How can a lack of love prevent you from being a doer of the word?

How can satisfaction prevent you from being a doer of the word?

3. How To Be A Doer

What is sin? Why is it important to properly define "sin"?

What can you learn about doing God's word from Jesus' parable of the soils?

How will following the model explained in James 1:22-25 help you be a doer of the word? Apply this model to both sins of commission and sins of omission.

What Does It Mean To Be A
Christian?

A Christian's Life Is A Persecuted Life

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian's life is a persecuted life.

What Is Persecution?

To “persecute” someone is to harass or punish someone with the desire to harm that person – particularly due to some belief that individual holds. Persecution is particularly applicable to the suffering experienced by individuals as a result of their religious beliefs. Therefore, it should come as no surprise to discover that God's people were persecuted throughout the Bible – and God promises that His people will continue to experience persecution.

Varying degrees of persecution

Let's be clear that persecution can take many different forms. There are many ways that individuals have expressed and continue to express hostility toward those who are God's people. Yes, sometimes this hostility is so severe that it results in

violent attempts to kill or injure being made against God's people. However, this hostility can also be manifested through much lighter forms of persecution. Some are slandered. Some are mistreated by their employers. Some are given greater burdens by their family members. Some are mocked and publicly ridiculed. Some are treated unfairly by earthly governments. Some are caused financial burdens. There are many degrees of persecution. But, the common denominator is that these individuals are unjustly made to suffer in some way.

In addition to the different forms persecution takes, you should also understand that persecution varies in intensity in different times and places. For instance, beginning in the mid-to-late first century, Christians experienced severe and often widespread persecution under the Roman Empire. Yet, there were other times when persecution was less severe in some places. The same remains true today. Not every Christian will have threats made against his/her life in every place around this world (at least not most of the time). Yet, just because Christians all around the globe are not threatened by that kind of severe persecution doesn't mean all Christians will not be persecuted.

Examples of persecution in the Old Testament

As we think about persecution, I believe that viewing some Biblical examples of persecution will prove beneficial. Not only will these help us understand the nature of persecution, but they will also serve as an encouragement to recognize that there have been others who have faithfully endured various degrees of persecution in order to follow God.

(1) Abel. Adam and Eve bore Cain and Abel. Abel was a “keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.” “And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell” (Genesis 4:2-5). Later, Cain demonstrated his hatred and hostility toward his

brother by killing him (Genesis 4:6-8). 1 John 3:12 asks, “And why did [Cain] murder [Abel]? Because [Cain’s] works were evil and his brother’s righteous.” This fits the definition of persecution. Because of Abel’s diligence in offering a sacrifice that God would be pleased with (coupled with Cain’s own wickedness), Cain became angry at Abel – and demonstrated his hostility through murder.

(2) Joseph. After Joseph arrived in Egypt (having been sold by his brothers into slavery), Joseph was made head over Potiphar’s house. During his time serving in this capacity, Potiphar’s wife “cast longing eyes on Joseph” and wanted him to lie with her and commit adultery (Genesis 39:7). However, Joseph refused. Again and again, he refused. Finally, Potiphar’s wife grabbed Joseph by his garment and again tried to get Joseph to commit adultery with her. Yet, Joseph fled from her – leaving the garment in her hand. After this, Potiphar’s wife called for the men of her house and told them that *Joseph* had tried to force himself upon *her* – and fled when she cried out for help. As she repeated this same story to Potiphar, he believed the words of his wife and had Joseph put into prison. Thus, Genesis 39 records the persecution of Joseph. Joseph was committed to being righteous. However, the hostile actions of a wicked individual resulted in suffering (at least temporarily) for Joseph.

(3) Zechariah. 2 Chronicles 24:15-19 records the rebellion of Judah against the ways of God. The people left their service to God in order to serve idols. Consequently, God sent prophets to them in order to bring them back to Him, but they would not listen. “Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, who stood above the people, and said to them, ‘Thus says God: “Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He also has forsaken you.”’ So they conspired against him, and at the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 24:20-21). This man faithfully proclaimed the ways of God – and experienced the hostility of wicked people as the result.

(4) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. In Daniel 3, the king of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar)

had a golden image erected and commanded that all the people fall down and worship it whenever they heard the instruments be played. However, when the music was played, some people noticed and reported to the king that some of the Jews (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego) refused to worship the image. The punishment for this defiance of the king’s command was to be cast into the burning fiery furnace. And, when the king was enraged against them, he had the furnace heated seven times more than usual – and they were cast into it. Though the text goes on to describe their miraculous survival, it again illustrates how God’s people have endured hostility from wicked people.

Examples of persecution in the New Testament

Although there are certainly other Old Testament examples of persecution that could be given, let’s spend a few moments considering some examples of persecution in the New Testament. Once again, through these examples we can both learn about persecution and be encouraged to faithfully endure it.

(1) Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate example of persecution. Certainly, He had done nothing wrong. Yet, He suffered at the hands of evil men whenever He was committed to accomplishing the will of the Father. At the conclusion of each of the four gospel records, Jesus is seen as being betrayed, arrested, given unfair trials, mocked, spat upon, scourged (a severe beating), and crucified. Why did Jesus experience this persecution? Because He was not of the world (John 15:18-19). Jesus further explains in John 3:19-20. “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”

(2) Stephen. In Acts 6-7, we read about a Christian named Stephen and his bold stance for truth. In chapter 7, Stephen addressed Jews – and did not withhold the truth that they had rejected the ways of God and murdered the innocent Son of God. When the people heard this, “they were cut to the heart, and gnashed at him with their teeth” (verse 54). Then,

Who The Bible Says Will Be Persecuted

they proceeded to cast him out of the city and stone him to death (verses 57-60). Now, Stephen presented the absolute truth to these individuals. However, because they had no interest in hearing and obeying the truth, they were hostile toward the one who was telling them the message of truth.

(3) Christians persecuted by Saul. Saul was involved in consenting to the death of Stephen. Then, following Stephen's death (in Acts 8-9), "a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison" (Acts 8:3). Chapter 9 records Saul "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" and going to the high priest to ask letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus "so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (verses 1-2). Also read Acts 26:9-11 to see how Paul described his work. Therefore, Christians were imprisoned, driven away from their houses, likely separated from their families, and even put to death because of the hostility one man had toward them (while believing that he was doing the will of God).

(4) Paul. In Acts 9, this persecutor became a Christian. His name was later changed to Paul and he was appointed by the Lord as an apostle. He faithfully executed his task as an apostle of Christ and preached the gospel throughout much of the world. Read Acts 9-28 to see a description of his work. However, as he went about faithfully proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and encouraging those who were disciples of Christ, he often experienced persecution. Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-33 and observe the kinds of persecutions he endured. They included imprisonments, threats of death, beatings, a stoning, hunger and thirst, etc.

This is just a sample of persecutions we can read about in the Scriptures. Yet, all of these examples demonstrate something about who will be persecuted. In all of these examples, we can see that those who are faithful to accomplishing the will of God have experienced persecution. Now, building on these examples, let's observe some direct teachings from the Scriptures concerning who God says will be persecuted.

General expectation for those who follow God

Those who have dedicated their lives to doing the will of God should have an expectation to experience persecution during their lives. Consider Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:10-12. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

In Matthew 5:3-12, Jesus gives a series of statements concerning those who will truly be blessed. In doing so, He makes these statements concerning persecution. First, notice that persecution is something that results in truly being blessed (happy). Then, I want you to focus on the fact that Jesus' statements come as assuring His people that they will experience persecution. Notice that Jesus said, "Blessed are you *when*..." – not *if* (emphasis mine, EK). Jesus knew that those who truly dedicate their lives to following His ways would experience persecution in their lives. It was not a matter of *if*; but *when* it would happen. And, notice that they should rejoice at this persecution – knowing that they are following the examples of the prophets who faithfully followed the ways of God and experienced persecution before them!

Now, who were these people who would experience persecution? Look through the entirety of Jesus' sermon on the mount and notice some things that are said about and to these same people. They are described as: Poor in spirit, meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, the light of the world, the ones who do good to others, the ones who pray sincerely, the ones who are focused on storing up treasures in Heaven, the ones who put God first in their lives, seekers of God, the doers of God's word, etc. *They* would experience persecution. They would truly be persecuted "for righteousness' sake."

Next, consider the things Peter wrote to some Christians in 1 Peter 4:12-16. "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."

The letter Peter wrote to these Christians clearly indicates that they were experiencing persecution. Though we are not told the specifics of the persecution, understand the significance of Peter's statement in verse 12. They were not to "think it strange" that they were going to experience such a "fiery trial." They needed to recognize (just as all Christians today need to recognize) that persecution should be viewed as a general expectation of those who serve Jesus Christ. In fact, Peter connects their sufferings with the sufferings of Christ in verse 13. They were to view their sufferings as partaking in the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Those who are not of the world

Those who are Christians today should not think it strange that they are called to suffer at the hands of wicked people – because that is exactly what happened to Jesus! In fact, Jesus promised His

followers as much in John 15:18-21. "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me."

The reason Jesus said He was persecuted is also the reason He says His followers will be persecuted. That is because the world hates those who are not *of* the world. Let's listen to John's description of the difference between the ways of the world and the ways of God in 1 John 2:15-17. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

The world is focused on physical things. Therefore, the world pursues the physical. However, God's people are "not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2). They have their treasures in Heaven rather than upon this earth (Matthew 6:19-21). What this all means is that the ways most people live (those who live according to the world) are diametrically opposed to the ways God's people live (who are focused on doing the will of God). They do not recognize the same things as truth. They do not value the same things. They do not have the same goals. They do not do the same things in the same ways.

The end result – as Jesus recognized and experienced – is people who are so devoted to the ways of this world that they will harm those who are following the ways of God. This was explained in John 3:19-21. The world (as it participates in sinful things) hates to have its works of evil exposed as being evil. So, rather than changing their evil to pursue the righteousness of God, they will demonstrate hostility toward those who shine God's light on their wicked ways (whether by word or by example)!

Those who desire to live godly in Christ

Jesus

Paul summarized these points in a statement to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12. He said, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” This is a simple yet powerful statement. Let’s break this verse down into its various parts.

First, Paul said, “Yes, and...” This is significant because he is connecting this statement about persecution (in verse 12) with what he has already said. Consider verses 10-11. “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.” Paul speaks about persecutions he experienced in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. These are recorded in Acts 13-14. When you read these passages, they demonstrated that Paul experienced persecution and was “expelled” from Antioch. There was a violent attempt made to abuse and stone him in Iconium. Then, he was stoned to the point folks thought he was dead in Lystra. All of this because he stood for the truth and tried to teach the truth to others (thereby exposing the wickedness and error in their lives).

Second, Paul said that “all” of some group will experience this kind of persecution. Therefore, this persecution was not something that would be reserved for the “leaders” of this group. Instead, it was for every single member. For instance, this is exactly what was demonstrated in Acts 8 regarding the persecution Saul had brought on Christians. “Ordinary” Christians were murdered, imprisoned, cast out of their houses, forced to flee, etc. This persecution was not just for the apostles.

Third, the persecution is promised to come on all “those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus.” These are the ones who are devoted to living for God (they *desire* to live in this way). They accept the truths about God, about Jesus Christ, about the eternal reward for faithfulness to Christ, and about the eternal punishment for rebellion against Christ. They stand for what God has commanded of them.

They try to live God’s commandments in their own lives. And, they try to teach God’s holy ways to others.

Fourth, these individuals “will suffer persecution.” Just as Jesus promised in Matthew 5 and John 15, there is an assurance of persecution. Paul does *not* say that persecution is *possible*. He doesn’t even say that it is *likely*. He said that it “will” happen!

Is there any reason to believe that these individuals will no longer be persecuted?

As we have been considering these points concerning who will experience persecution, ask yourself: Is there any reason to believe that these individuals will no longer be persecuted? That you (as a Christian) will not be persecuted? Has society (as a whole) become so pure or enlightened that it recognizes the evil of persecuting disciples of Jesus Christ? Does the world no longer hate those who denounce wickedness and determine to live godly in Christ? Do wicked people now like to hear God’s people expose their wickedness and call for changes to be made in their lives?

Not only do I not *think* these things are true – I know they are not true. God’s word endures forever (1 Peter 1:25). It contains timeless truths. And, as we have seen, this persecution and hatred the world has demonstrated toward God’s faithful people has not ever been limited to one period/age. It was seen prior to the Law of Moses, during the time the Law of Moses was in effect, during the time of Christ, and after Christ ascended into Heaven. God’s people have endured such persecution from wicked people for thousands of years.

Therefore, the truths that we have been considering continue to be true and applicable. The world still hates those who are dedicated followers of Jesus Christ. The world, therefore, will still demonstrate that hatred toward Jesus’ disciples in various ways. Now, as we established at the beginning of the lesson, this persecution can be manifested in various ways and vary in degree. Yet, it is still true that God’s people will experience persecution.

Please do not misunderstand the point that is being made in this section. The Scriptures do *not* teach that Christians should go looking for persecution. They should not be trying to incite anger and persecution against them. Instead, I am affirming that persecution is a by-product of living a faithful Christian life. That is, while you are trying to produce faithfulness to following Jesus Christ in your life, the natural response by those who are focused on doing evil toward you will be to bring some kind of persecution against you.

Why Some Are Not Persecuted

We have just seen assurance from God that those who are dedicated to doing His will, *will* suffer persecution. So, you should evaluate (if you have been a Christian for any length of time) whether you have experienced persecution in your life. But, as some evaluate their lives, they may find that they have never really experienced *persecution* (at least not because of their devotion to Jesus Christ). Why? Let's consider a few reasons why some do not experience this persecution that God says His followers will experience.

Because they are not true followers of Jesus Christ

There are, undoubtedly, some who profess to be "Christians"; yet, they are not true disciples of Jesus Christ. A true disciple of Jesus Christ is someone who is dedicated to learning from Jesus Christ and following His ways. Anywhere. Everywhere. All of the time.

In fact, Jesus spoke of this kind of commitment as a requirement to follow Him. Listen to Luke 9:23-26. "Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is

ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.'"

This kind of true disciple is devoted to even dying for Jesus Christ! Certainly, then, he/she is devoted to putting Christ above the other physical desires an individual may have. And, he/she is devoted to accomplishing the good works Jesus requires of those who will follow after Him. In fact, Jesus said (in Luke 14:25-33) that those who do not put following Him above their families, their possessions, and their own lives "cannot" be His disciples!

Yet, there are many people who try to be "fair-weather-followers" of Jesus Christ. Like "fair-weather-fans" of certain sports teams (who will only support their teams by attending the games when the weather is nice), there are many people (who call themselves "Christians") who are only devoted to following Jesus Christ when it is easy or convenient for them to do so. Therefore, they never (or rarely ever) do any of the hard work that would bring about persecution. They won't align themselves with Jesus Christ enough to be ridiculed. They won't teach others they think will be hostile toward them. They don't present enough of a contrast between themselves and the world for folks to notice a clear distinction.

In Luke 22:54, the Bible says that "Peter followed at a distance." This was after Jesus was arrested. Now, I do not know what was running through Peter's mind. But, immediately following this statement, Peter was given the opportunity three times to say whether he had known or been with Jesus. However, he adamantly denied Jesus each of those times. Therefore, I believe that the reference in Luke 22:54 demonstrates a knowledge that he should follow Jesus. But, he did not want to be associated with Him so closely that he would have to suffer.

Does this describe your life? Do you follow Jesus at a distance? If you are trying to follow Him in this way, understand two things. First, Jesus does not approve of your discipleship. Jesus said that the one who is not "with" Him (entirely with Him) is "against" Him (entirely against Him) (see Matthew 12:30). There is no acceptable middle ground for

Jesus (see also Revelation 3:14-22). Second, God does not promise persecution to those who “follow” Jesus in this way. Instead, the world will love this kind of undevoted “disciple” of Jesus Christ. However, the world will hate and persecute those who dedicate themselves to the Lord entirely – as seen in the example of the apostle Paul. In Galatians 2:20, he said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Because they live like the world

Let’s go back to John 15 and look at verse 19 again. Jesus, in this verse, identifies something that will help some understand why they are not being persecuted (even though they identify themselves as “Christians”). “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

While the world hates those who are not *of* the world (and will persecute them), the world fully embraces (it loves) those who are *of* the world. Therefore, if you do not experience persecution because of your faith, you need to seriously evaluate whether you are any different from the world. According to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:14-16, those who are dedicated to be His followers should be easily distinguishable from the world. He said they will be like a city that is illuminated on top of a hill that is in plain sight of everyone around. He said they will be like a candle that is set on a candlestick that gives light to all who are in the house. Are you showing this kind of contrast to the sinful ways of this world? Or have you conformed to the ways of the world?

Are you providing a stark contrast to the world in the way you think? Are you devoted to bringing every thought into captivity for the obedience to Christ? Are you valuing the things God wants you to value? Are you meditating on the laws and ways of God? Do you refuse to allow your mind to be filled with envy, greed, or covetousness? Do you refuse to have inappropriate desires for the

things of this world? Are you devoted only to thinking on things that are pure?

Are you providing a stark contrast to the world in the way you talk? Are you speaking only the truth? Are you refusing to engage in gossip? Are you devoted to speaking only words that edify others? Are you seasoning every word you speak with the grace of God? Are you refusing to utter any corrupt/useless word? Do you refuse to use God’s name in vain? Do you refuse to use profanity or euphemistic expressions? Do you refuse to involve yourself in any kind of vulgar/inappropriate speech?

Are you providing a stark contrast to the world in the things you do? Are you devoted to doing good for the Lord? Do you take advantage of opportunities to encourage others to follow Christ and warn them about sin? Do you try to use your opportunities to do good to all mankind? Do you demonstrate love and compassion for your fellow man? Are you devoted to only participating in activities that meet God’s approval? Do you continuously work to eliminate every habit that would fail to please God? Do you show faithfulness to God in assembling with the local church? Do you “practice what you preach”?

Does your life reflect Jesus Christ to the world? Or, does your life reflect the world to Jesus Christ? If you are truly devoted to following Jesus Christ, your life will look very different to the world. And, the world will persecute you. However, the world will embrace those who are living according to its ways.

Because they do not take bold stands for the truth

Finally, it is not enough just to believe in or profess to follow Jesus Christ. Instead, God requires those who are true followers of Jesus to boldly stand for His way of truth – even when it is not easy or convenient to do so. This not only involves doing the right things when there are consequences attached with doing them; but it also involves saying the things that need to be said when they need said.

Listen to Paul’s instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2-5. “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all

A Christian's Response To Persecution

longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Paul encouraged Timothy to be faithful to Christ in preaching God's word. He said that sometimes God's word would be accepted. Sometimes it would be rejected. However, Timothy's responsibility remained the same – “Preach the word!” Clearly, there would be times when Timothy would try to preach God's word (standing boldly for the truth) – and others would not appreciate what he had to say. In fact, the instruction to “endure afflictions” indicates that there would be difficult times that would result from standing for what is right.

Likewise, God requires you to stand boldly for His way of truth – whether the people around you accept that truth or not. God does *not* permit you to change your response to the truth because the people you are around would mock you, slander you, or try to hurt you! In addition, God does not lighten your responsibility to preach His word faithfully to others because they will not accept it. In fact, God wants to use you in these situations to warn those who are rebellious toward Him!

Yet, perhaps you have not been taking these kinds of bold stands for Jesus Christ. Perhaps you are faithful to Christ in your private life. However, when you get around other people who aren't Christians, perhaps you try to blend in with them. Perhaps you hold back from speaking God's message of truth to them. If this is the case, you should not *expect* to be persecuted. But, you should not expect to have God's approval either – because you are refusing to stand for the truth at all times!

I encourage you to evaluate your life and consider your persecutions. Are you really living a life that is faithful to Jesus Christ? If so, you have been experiencing and will experience persecutions. Therefore, I want to spend the final part of this lesson focusing on how a Christian should view and respond to the persecutions he/she experiences.

Willing to endure persecution

Whenever Jesus spoke concerning the cost of discipleship, He did not try to mislead anyone. He warned that the cost of discipleship is high. In fact, He warned that it costs a person *everything* that pertains to this physical life. Again, Jesus said that His disciples must be *willing* to put Him above their families, their possessions, and their own physical lives (Luke 14:25-27, 33). Jesus said that those who are not willing to do this “cannot” be His disciples.

So, Jesus encouraged those who desire to follow Him to count the cost of discipleship. He wants people to consider whether they are willing to commit themselves to Jesus Christ in this kind of complete way. Certainly, this involves making a determination about whether an individual is willing to endure persecution. Therefore, those who are Christians must be so committed to Jesus Christ that they will faithfully endure persecution. After all, those who are Christians are seeking the same eternal home in Heaven as Christ's faithful martyrs will experience. But, how can you possibly expect to receive the same reward as they – if you are unwilling to commit to the same degree (i.e. a full commitment)?

Faithful endurance

The Christian must not just be willing to endure persecutions; he/she must actually faithfully endure them whenever they come. 1 Peter 4:19 says, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.” Listen to what Jesus told some Christians in the city of Smyrna who were about to

be severely persecuted: “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (Revelation 2:10-11).

What does it mean to faithfully endure persecutions? Think about Jesus. Think about Stephen. Think about the Christians who were persecuted by Saul. Think about Paul after he became a Christian. They did not turn away from following Jesus in order to avoid the persecutions! They dedicated themselves to following Christ – no matter the cost!

Courageous in Christ

Fear has the potential to make God’s people weak in the face of persecution. Why did Peter deny Jesus? I believe it was because of fear concerning the potential consequences of following Jesus. However, I want you to consider what Jesus taught in Matthew 10 – as you face persecutions in your life. In this chapter, Jesus sent His apostles out to teach the gospel (often referred to as the “Limited Commission”). In sending them out, He warned that some would persecute them. Yet, He said, “Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:27-28).

Jesus wanted His disciples to know – and wants you to know that man can only harm your physical body. They cannot touch your soul. But, God can! So, you need to fear God rather than men. In Romans 8:31-39, Paul demonstrates that nothing and no one is able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Not even the most severe of persecutions! Therefore, you truly can stand courageous in Christ Jesus in the face of any persecution.

Happy to suffer

We often don’t think of suffering as an occasion for rejoicing. Yet, that is exactly how faithful disciples of Jesus Christ viewed persecutions in the New Testament – and how Jesus has told you to respond. Look at Matthew 5:10-12 again. Jesus said, “Blessed [happy] are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake...Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad....” Similarly, Peter told Christians who were being persecuted, “rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13).

But, this is not just the instruction concerning how you must view persecution. There is also an example of the apostles responding in this very way. After being threatened and beaten, the apostles can be seen “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). When you suffer as a Christian, rejoice that you have been counted worthy to suffer for Jesus Christ (the one who suffered for you)!

Glorifies God

The Christian has committed his/her life entirely to bring glory to God (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). You do this whenever you faithfully obey the will of God. For, violating God’s instructions results in falling short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In Matthew 5:16, Jesus says that those who shine as lights in the world will even cause others to glorify the Father in Heaven.

This is just as true regarding your perseverance in times of persecution as it is at any time. 1 Peter 4:16 says, “Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” Every way you respond to the persecutions you experience must be focused on how you can bring glory to God – and help others glorify God through your sufferings!

Hopeful concerning the life to come

Ultimately, the Christian endures all of the persecutions he/she experiences because of the

tremendous hope that is in Christ Jesus for eternal life in Heaven. Paul said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18)! Remember that Jesus said you will gain your life if you lose it for His sake; but you will lose it if you desire to save it for yourself (Luke 9:24).

As Paul experienced a great amount and degree of persecution, consider the hope he expressed in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Conclusion

A true disciple of Jesus Christ will experience persecution. This is promised in the Scriptures. Therefore, you must not consider it strange when you experience such things (1 Peter 4:12). Instead of considering it strange to be persecuted, the true follower of Jesus Christ should find it strange if he/she is *not* being persecuted! In Acts 14:22 (after being persecuted in Antioch, Lystra, and Iconium), Paul exhorted Christians to continue in the faith, saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

Study Questions

1. What Is Persecution?

Does persecution always come in the same form and the same degree of severity?

List and briefly explain some examples of persecutions in the Old Testament.

List and briefly explain some examples of persecutions in the New Testament.

2. Who The Bible Says Will Be Persecuted

Why should persecution be a general expectation for those who follow God?

Why will those who are not of the world be persecuted?

What does 2 Timothy 3:12 teach concerning those who will be persecuted?

Is there any reason to believe that these individuals will no longer be persecuted?

3. Why Some Are Not Persecuted

Why will those who are not true followers of Jesus Christ *not* be persecuted?

Why will those who live like the world *not* be persecuted?

Why will those who do not take bold stands for the truth *not* be persecuted?

4. A Christian's Response To Persecution

How much must you be willing to endure for Jesus Christ?

What does it mean to faithfully endure persecutions?

How can you be courageous in Christ Jesus?

Why should you rejoice to suffer for Jesus Christ?

How can you glorify God in persecutions?

Why does the Christian faithfully endure persecution?

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is A True Worshiper

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is a true worshiper.

What Is Worship?

“Worship” is a term that is somewhat difficult to define. You see, English Bibles commonly translate many different Hebrew and Greek words as “worship.” And, the Bible does not say “*this* = worship.” Instead, the subject of worship is presented in the pages of Scripture as something that God’s people have done in the past and should do in the present and future. Still, we can gain some understanding of worship by considering specific teachings the Bible gives on the subject.

Examples of worship

As we begin molding our ideas about worship, let’s look into the Scriptures for some examples of when individuals are said to have worshiped. First, whenever Abraham’s servant had been sent to find a bride for Isaac, he was assured of God’s help in finding a bride for Isaac. And, whenever he had found one, Genesis 24:52 pictures him as worshipping God. “And it came to pass, when

Abraham’s servant heard their words, that he worshiped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth.”

Second, after Hannah had vowed that if God would give her a son she would dedicate him to God, Eli (the priest) told her that God would grant her request. Then 1 Samuel 1:19 says, “Then they rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord, and returned and came to their house at Ramah.” And, after Samuel was born to her and was weaned, she took him to the house of the Lord. They took with them provisions that would be used for a sacrifice and “worshiped the Lord there” (verse 28).

Third, in Nehemiah 8, all the people of Jerusalem gathered together in the open square, the book of God’s Law was brought out before the people, and Ezra read from it from morning till midday. Then, Nehemiah 8:6 says, “And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” Later, in Nehemiah 9:3, the Israelites “stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God.”

Fourth, there was a man with an unclean spirit in the country of the Gadarenes who ran out of a tomb to meet Jesus. This man could not even be bound with chains and shackles. Night and day he was in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. Then, Mark 5:6-7 says, “When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.’” From that point, Jesus proceeded to cast the demon out of him.

Fifth, in Matthew 28, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had seen Jesus’ empty tomb. And, as they went to tell Jesus’ disciples, verse 9 says that “Jesus met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’ So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.”

Sixth, 1 Corinthians 14 is a chapter that talks about the assembly of a local church in which spiritual gifts would be used. And, verse 25, specifically makes reference to a situation in which

an unbeliever comes in among the assembly and is convicted by what was being done. “And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.”

Worship is not...

As you search the Scriptures for an understanding of what worship is, you do need to recognize certain things that worship is *not*. These are important to identify in order to help us keep from diminishing worship. Consider a few points.

First, worship is not sacrificing. Under the Old Testament system, sacrifices were often included in a person’s worship to God. But, merely making a sacrifice was not worship. Observe the distinction made in 1 Samuel 1:3. Elkanah (Hannah’s husband) went to Shiloh yearly “to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of hosts.”

Second, worshiping is not the same as serving. The Scriptures frequently distinguish worship and serving (though they are often coupled together in the same verse). For instance, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to worship or serve the god set up by king Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:12, 14). Also consider Deuteronomy 8:19, Deuteronomy 11:16, 1 Kings 9:6, Jeremiah 25:6, and Romans 1:25.

Third, worship is not everything an individual does. As you search the Scriptures, you discover that worship always had a start and end point – and was something that was very intentional. For instance, Genesis 22 records the events of Abraham obeying God in sacrificing Isaac. Notice verse 5. “And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.’” 1 Samuel 1:19 (as referenced earlier) says that Elkanah and Hannah “rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord, and returned and came to their house at Ramah.” Then, Acts 24:11 references how Paul “went up to Jerusalem to worship.” From all of these examples, notice that their entire lives were not one continual worship service. Instead, their worship occurred for a particular period of time – and then it ended. Yes, while everything you do in your

life must be done in such a way that it will glorify God (see 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Romans 12:1), everything you do in your life is *not* worship! As examples, mowing the grass, using the toilet, driving a car, etc. are not (of themselves) worship.

Fourth, worship is not limited to a specific place. There may be some who are under the impression that worship is only something that we can do whenever a local church assembles together. Yet, while local churches do engage in collective worship in their assemblies (and there are a couple of activities of worship that we only read about being done in these assemblies – i.e. the Lord’s Supper and the collection), God has not limited worship to these assemblies. Jesus addressed this issue in John 4. The Samaritan woman He met at Jacob’s well asked about the place of worship (note that at that time, some had said the proper place was Jerusalem and others said the proper place was Mount Gerizim, see John 4:19-20). And, Jesus responded by saying that the time had come when worship would not be confined to a specific physical location. Instead, true worshipers would worship the Father “in spirit and truth” (see John 4:21-24). Then, as an example, Paul and Silas are seen as “praying and singing hymns to God” while they were in prison (Acts 16:25). Today, God’s people are both authorized and expected to be worshiping the Father privately (as well as collectively). Since every Christian is identified as being the temple of God (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:19-22), true worship is not limited to one specific place or environment.

Fifth, worship is not “five acts.” Now, please do not misunderstand my point. The worship a local church is authorized to engage in during its assemblies is limited to five specific activities. These are: Singing, praying, gospel teaching, the Lord’s Supper, and the collection. However, let’s not confuse true worship with a specific physical activity. For instance, not all singing is worship. There are many people who sing all different kinds of songs (i.e. country music, pop, rap, R&B, rock-n’-roll, folk music, etc.). There are even some who sing spiritual songs with the accompaniment of instrumental music. There are some who sing spiritual songs that do not express Bible truths. There are some who sing spiritual songs but are not focused

on the words they are singing. There are some who are among people who are singing spiritual songs but are not engaged in singing themselves. Are all of these individuals engaged in true worship just because there is singing involved? Absolutely not!

Worship is...

Now that we have been discovering some things that worship is not, let's consider the consistent picture of worship in the pages of the Scriptures. When our English Bibles use the word "worship," the consistent ideas of the Hebrew and Greek words they are translating are the ideas of bowing before and kissing toward. Worship is always pictured as an intentional act that is done to express praise and reverence toward something/someone. It is a bowing of the heart before the object of worship.

Worship, then, is something that is intentional (not accidental or continuous) and it is directed toward a specific object. And, the Bible records a number of activities that have accompanied this worship. For instance, Old Testament worship frequently was accompanied by the activity of offering sacrifices to God. And, the worship local churches of Christ engaged in during their assemblies were the five activities I have previously identified (singing, praying, gospel teaching, the Lord's Supper, and the collection). As we will discuss later in this study, true worship is bound by the criteria of being done in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

Not All Worship Is True Worship

As we continue to consider the subject of worship, let's now move beyond a generic understanding of "worship" and begin to really focus on "true worship." You see, there are a number of ways people can worship that do not have God's approval. In John 4:23-24 (a passage I will continue to reference throughout this study), Jesus told the Samaritan woman who had inquired about the place

of worship, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." As you recognize God's desire for true worship (and before we discuss what is involved in being true worshipers), you need to clearly understand that not every kind of worship man offers is true worship.

Examples

Before we consider some direct statements about various types of worship which fail to meet God's approval, let's consider some examples. First, consider the example of Cain in Genesis 4. Both Cain and his brother, Abel, offered sacrifices to God. Abel (who was a keeper of sheep) brought an offering to the Lord of the "firstborn of his flock and of their fat" (Genesis 4:4). Cain (who was a tiller of the ground) "brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord" (Genesis 4:3). However, even though both of these individuals offered sacrifices to the same God, consider what is said about God's response to these sacrifices. "And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering" (Genesis 4:4-5). Though we are not given many details about what made Abel's offering acceptable to God and Cain's unacceptable, the Scriptures do teach that Abel offered his sacrifice by "faith" and that it was a "more excellent sacrifice" than Cain's (Hebrews 11:4). By implication, Cain's sacrifice was not accepted by God because it was not according to what God wanted from their sacrifices.

Second, consider the example of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10. Verses 1-2 say, "Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." God had given specific instructions concerning the offerings the priests were to make, including instructions concerning its fire. Though we have not been told everything about the nature of their error, the Scriptures say that they offered "profane" (unauthorized) fire "before the Lord." And, this fire was such that it was not according to God's

commandments. Clearly, God did not accept their attempt to serve and (presumably) worship Him – as He sent fire to devour them.

Now that we have considered a couple examples in which attempts were (presumably) made to worship God that were unacceptable to God, let's focus on some direct statements about such in the Bible.

Idol worship

Idol worship is worship that has the wrong object. Romans 1 identifies a situation in which individuals who should have known the truth about God so as to serve and worship Him chose instead to serve and worship the creature rather than the Creator (see verses 18-25). Paul said that “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (verses 22-23). Then, Paul explains that God gave them over to the lusts of their hearts and they “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (verses 24-25). Certainly, their worship was not acceptable to God whenever they were bowing their hearts before something/someone other than Him! In fact, idolatry is repeatedly condemned in both the Old and New Testaments – and will result in everlasting torment in Hell for the one who practice such (Revelation 21:8).

Vain worship

Vain worship is worship that goes through the motions or may appear to be pleasing to God, but it is empty of what God actually desires from worship. Jesus identifies a case of vain worship in Matthew 15. In the text, Jesus condemned the actions of the Jewish leaders (i.e. the scribes and the Pharisees). Jesus said that they had transgressed the commandment of God by holding to their own tradition (verse 4-6). Then, Jesus referenced the prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus said was applicable to those hypocritical Jews. “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the

commandments of men” (verses 8-9). Though they were honoring God verbally, their hearts were not pleasing to God. Thus, their worship was vain (empty). Furthermore, their worship was empty because they were not teaching the truth of God. Instead, they were teaching their own man-made commandments and ideas. Certainly, their worship was not acceptable to God whenever they appeared as if they were bowing themselves to God but their hearts were not fully engaged or when they were not worshipping according to God's truth!

Self-imposed worship

Self-imposed worship is worship that is focused on self. It is what you choose to view as being acceptable worship, without being focused on what God views as being acceptable worship. Colossians 2:20-22, for instance, speaks of individuals who were subjecting themselves to man-made regulations, commandments, and doctrines. Then, Paul said, “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (verse 23). Many translations say they were involved self-imposed “worship.” Rather than being focused on what God wanted from their worship, these individuals were imposing their own desires on God – trying to make Him accept whatever they chose to offer Him. Certainly, God would not accept their worship just because they wanted to offer God something they called “worship”!

God, The Object Of True Worship

The entire subject of true worship hinges around the Object of worship – God. The only one who can ever be acceptably worshipped is God. Therefore, all who possess the nature of being God (God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Spirit) are deserving of worship.

Worship is about the Object

Every activity involved in worship must have an object. Think about it. If you are going to bow your heart in worship (expressing reverence and praise), there must be an object you are bowing before. And, in order for an object to rightly receive that kind of devotion, it must be *worthy* of your worship.

Though there are many good and wonderful people and things, nothing and no one surpasses God! Listen to a couple of passages from the Psalms. Psalm 95:1-6 says, “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is the great God, And the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth; The heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; And His hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.”

Psalm 96:1-6 says, “Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.”

This God is the only one who is eternal. This God is the only one who possesses limitless power to do whatever He desires. This God is the only one who has complete knowledge and wisdom. This God is the only one who sees and hears everything that goes on – because He is ever-present. This God is the only one who is perfectly holy, righteous, just, and fair. This God is the only one who loved mankind enough that the Father sent His Son to the earth to die so that mankind could be saved from the eternal consequences of his sin. This God is the only one who has revealed His perfect message by the Holy Spirit so that man can know what God desires, obey it, and live eternally in Heaven. Certainly, there is no other who is so deserving of being worshiped!

Everyone living on this earth should surely long to worship such a marvelous and awesome God!

True worship is controlled by the Object of worship

To continue emphasizing the fact that true worship is *about* the object of the worship, you need to recognize that the object of the worship controls how it is to be worshiped. Take a moment to consider this principle. Let’s suppose that you believed you needed to worship a world leader. You admired this individual so much and were so appreciative of what he had done that you dedicated yourself to worshipping him. And, for the sake of this illustration, suppose that this individual both desired and demanded to be worshiped. However, suppose that you also chose to worship another world leader during the times you were not worshipping the first and most prominent individual (even though this one had demanded your entire allegiance). Do you suppose he would be pleased?

Furthermore, what if (as an attempt to worship him and express your reverence) you decided that you would offer the best corn that you could bring him from your garden. You meant for it to be an expression of your reverence. But, suppose that he had instructed everyone within his kingdom to bring him tomatoes. Would he be pleased with your offering?

While this is a completely fictitious example, I believe that it demonstrates an important point concerning worship. God, the one most deserving of worship, has given some definitive instructions regarding worship. Specifically, I want us to consider two areas – in light of the fact that God is the one who has full authority to control our worship!

First, He has said that He does not want you to worship any other besides Him. God is so great and worthy to be worshiped that He demands all of your worship and devotion. There is nothing and no one He permits to be worshiped in your life besides Him. When God gave the Israelites the foundational ten commandments, consider the fact that the first two of these had to do with this one principle. Exodus 20:3-6 says, “You shall have no other gods before Me.

Elements Necessary For True Worship

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

Please recognize that when God said no other gods were to come before Him, that meant there must be no other gods – period! No other gods could be put before Him at any point in their lives. So, this gives absolutely no room for worshiping or serving another besides God. In Matthew 4:10, after Jesus had been tempted to worship another god (Satan, the god of this world – 2 Corinthians 4:4), Jesus stated this same truth. In quoting from the book of Deuteronomy, He said, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.”

Second, God has set certain criteria for worship that is acceptable to Him. Since God is the one who is to be worshiped, He is the one who has full authority to instruct you how to worship Him. After all, it would only be self-imposed and vain worship to try to force God to accept something as worship that He had not authorized (like Cain, Nadab, and Abihu were apparently guilty of doing).

God has specified two elements (in addition to worshiping only Him) that are involved in true worship. These are both identified in what Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:23-24 (as quoted earlier). Notice, from this text, that God is “seeking” those who are “true worshipers.” And, He defines a true worshiper as one who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Therefore, any worship that fails to meet both of these criteria is *not* true worship that pleases God (the kind of worship He is seeking)!

Now, having identified these two elements that are necessary for true worship, let’s consider what is involved in each one. Again, your worship must be in spirit and it must be in truth.

Worship God in spirit

The expression of your worship to God requires that you recognize God is Spirit. Jesus plainly stated that “God is Spirit” in John 4:24. The conclusion is that you must worship Him in spirit. Though individuals could physically bow before and express their worship to Jesus while He lived on this earth (Matthew 28:11 says that two women held Jesus by His feet and worshiped Him), God does not exist in human form to worship Him in that way now.

Now, it requires the spiritual element of man to be engaged in worship. You see, God created mankind in His own image (see Genesis 1:26-27). Numerous Bible passages help us to understand that this means mankind has been created with a spiritual existence (a soul). Therefore, of all God’s earthly creation, it is only mankind who is able to express worship to God. In fact, man (as a spiritual being) longs to worship. Unfortunately, mankind has often worshiped the wrong object or has failed to worship God acceptably.

The necessary element of worshiping God in spirit, then, requires you to be fully engaged in your expression of worship. Since God does not exist in the flesh, you must bow your heart before the awesome God. You must not just be going through the motions of an external act of worship – while allowing your heart to be far away from God (as condemned in Matthew 15:8-9). Instead, you must be focused on whatever you are doing. For instance, when you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in worship to God, you must be focused on the words and meanings of those songs and not focused on the melody or some other thing!

Worship God in truth

The expression of your worship to God also requires you to recognize that God has revealed an objective standard of truth. You cannot express your worship to God in just any way or corrupt the true nature of God. Instead, John 17:17 says that God's word is truth. And, John 8:32 says that it is God's truth that will set you free from sin. Yes, God has revealed His word of truth in the pages of the Bible.

Then, consider what Paul stated in Colossians 3:17. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." God's word reveals the standard for all things in our lives. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that the Scriptures (which have been given by inspiration of God) are profitable "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Everything God wants you to be doing that pleases Him can be found within the pages of the Bible (His word of truth). Therefore, in everything that you do, you must have Bible authority! This is the only way to know that what you are doing pleases God.

Furthermore, this general truth must be applied specifically to your worship. You can only please God in your worship if what you are doing has Bible authority behind it! Otherwise, it is self-imposed worship (worship you are trying to force God to accept). Again, recognize that God has told us (in His word of truth) exactly what pleases Him in worship. If you decide to offer Him something He does not want, how can you please Him through your worship? You simply cannot. As an example of this principle, God has authorized singing as an expression of worship to Him. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." However, in addition to the authorized action of singing, many people have attempted to worship God by using a mechanical instrument of music. Yet, God has not authorized the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship anywhere in the pages of the New Testament (which governs God's people today).

Simply put: Anything that is according to God's standard of truth for worship is acceptable to Him. But, anything that He has not authorized is not acceptable to Him for worship!

Principles Involved In True Worship

Before closing this lesson, I want to emphasize some principles involved in worship that pleases God. If you desire to please God in all things, then I encourage you to take these principles to heart and apply them to your worship.

God is the only one to be worshiped

This point has already been demonstrated in this lesson. However, I want you to make some personal application of this point. You see, idolatry is not limited to worshiping before a statue made of wood, gold, silver, bronze, etc. Instead, idolatry occurs anytime we worship or serve the creature rather than the Creator! For instance, Colossians 3:5 references covetousness as idolatry. So, anything and anyone can be an idol. Your family members can become idols. Your friends can become idols. Your job can become an idol. Your physical possessions and wealth (or the pursuit of such) can become an idol. Your hobbies and recreational activities can become an idol. So, you need to seriously evaluate your life so as to make sure that you are not worshiping any idol. You need to do this because God (as we have seen) will not accept your worship that is directed toward Him whenever you are also worshiping an idol in your life at other times!

Worship requires humility

As we have seen, worship is about the object of the worship and not about the one who is worshiping. Therefore, in order to worship God acceptably, you must put aside your own feelings, desires, etc. and focus entirely on praising and showing honor for God. Consider how Jesus demonstrated this in Luke 18. In verses 9-14, Jesus taught a parable to some "who trusted in themselves

that they were righteous, and despised others” (verse 9). In the parable, He described two people who went up to the temple to pray. One man was a Pharisee. This man “stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess’” (verses 11-12). The other man was a tax collector. This man, “standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner’” (verse 13)! Then, Jesus said that it was only this tax collector who went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee. He said, “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (verse 14). In the same way, if you are not clothed with humility when you try to worship God, you will not be able to get yourself out of the way in order to worship God acceptably (see 1 Peter 5:5-7).

Worship God with a pure heart and clean hands

James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” You should not expect God to accept your worship to Him if your life is not committed to His service. The prophet Isaiah prophesied against the people of God who had been failing to observe the instructions God had given them to live by (see Isaiah 1). And, as long as they were living for such wickedness, God asked, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me” (verse 11)? Later, God said that their attempts to worship Him were troubling to Him and He was weary of bearing them (verses 12-14). In fact, God wanted them to bring no more worthless sacrifices to Him and He would not hear their prayers – even though their prayers were many (verses 13, 15). Listen, then, to verses 16-17. “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.” Similarly, God would rather you stop trying to worship Him if you are determined to persist in sinful activities!

God deserves your best

What should the quality of your worship to God be? Certainly, this question is answered by the nature of the one who is being worshiped. If you were worshiping someone/something that was not all that special, the quality of your worship may be justifiably weak. Perhaps you would only offer your “leftovers” to this one. However, God is worthy of much more than you can possibly give Him! Therefore, He is certainly deserving of nothing less than your best. Read Malachi chapter 1 and observe how the people of God were rebuked for offering the blind, the lame, and the sick as animal sacrifices to God. Instead, you can search the Old Testament to see that God always expected the very best to be offered to Him. In the same way, you must not give God the leftovers you have in your life as worship to Him. You must always reserve the best of what you have for your worship to God!

Long to worship God

Please remember that Jesus said the Father is “seeking” true worshipers. Now, if God is seeking true worshipers, don’t you think that it is important for you to devote yourself to worshiping Him? You see, worship is an expression of praise, devotion, reverence, thankfulness, etc. It is *not* to be a burdensome obligation for God’s people. In fact, 1 John 5:3 helps us to see that God does not want us to view any of His commandments as being burdensome. This is not true love for God! So, as you contemplate the subject of worship, recognize that God wants you to long to worship Him. You should work to develop the attitude the psalmist expressed. Psalm 42:1-2 says, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” In Psalm 122:1, he said, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord.’” There are certainly many things that you can do with your time. But, there is nothing better you can do than worshiping God – both privately, with others, and in the assemblies of the local church! Furthermore, you should long for the day when you can be with God eternally in Heaven and worship Him forevermore!

Conclusion

God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Are you entirely devoted to giving God the worship He deserves from you? If not, dedicate yourself today to being a true worshiper. For, if you do not long to worship God in the way He wants to be worshiped, you will not enjoy Heaven – where you will be worshipping God for all of eternity!

Study Questions

1. What Is Worship?

List some examples of worship in the Bible and explain what you learn.

List some things worship is *not*.

What is worship?

2. Not All Worship Is True Worship

List some examples in which individuals worshiped God in a way that was not acceptable to Him.

What is idol worship? Why does it fail to be true worship?

What is vain worship? Why does it fail to be true worship?

What is self-imposed worship? Why does it fail to be true worship?

3. God, The Object Of True Worship

Who is worship about? Why?

Explain how true worship is controlled by the Object of the worship.

4. Elements Necessary For True Worship

What does it mean to worship God in spirit?

What does it mean to worship God in truth?

5. Principles Involved In True Worship

Why is it necessary that God be the only one who is worshiped?

Why is humility important in true worship?

What does it mean to worship God with a pure heart and clean hands? And, why is it necessary?

Should you give God anything less than your best when you worship Him?

Describe the longing you should have to worship God.

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is An Ambassador For Christ

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is an ambassador for Christ.

Christian Ambassadorship

Ambassadors have been employed by nations for thousands of years. And, nations continue to use ambassadors even today. Certainly, then, there must be some value to a leader of a nation sending out an ambassador to another nation. But, ambassadorship is not just important with regard to nations in this world. The apostle Paul even considered himself to be an ambassador. Therefore, let's learn a little about ambassadorship to begin this lesson and understand how the term can be rightly applied to those who are Christians.

What is an ambassador?

In its most common use, an “ambassador” refers to an individual who is sent from one nation to another in order to be the official representative of the nation he/she was sent from. Typically, the work of an ambassador is to facilitate diplomatic relations

between two countries or to promote a particular kind of activity.

In a more general way, an “ambassador” is any kind of representative. It references someone who is sent to accomplish a particular mission. This individual is responsible for maintaining relations with those in an area the one who is sending this “ambassador” will not be present.

Paul was an ambassador

The term “ambassador(s)” is infrequently used in the pages of Scripture. Primarily, it is used in the Old Testament Scriptures to refer to ambassadors in the sense of being sent from one nation as a representative to another. However, it is this word's use in the New Testament that we specifically want to consider at this time. On two different occasions, Paul used this word to identify the work that he was doing.

First, consider Ephesians 6:18-20. Paul, after identifying the armor God had given the Christian to be clothed with, said, “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

In this text, Paul desired to have prayers on his behalf, for his work as an ambassador. Specifically, he was “an ambassador in chains” (in prison). Now, he had not been sent from his home country to another country as an ambassador in a *physical* sense. Instead, he was speaking in this sense of being imprisoned (likely in Rome) for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the message he recognized the need to speak boldly. As an ambassador of Jesus Christ, he had been given the responsibility of taking the message of the gospel throughout this world.

Second, consider 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus

Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Notice that it is through Jesus Christ that God was working to reconcile the world that was lost in sin to Himself. And, Paul and his companions had been entrusted with the “ministry of reconciliation” that revolved around teaching others the “word of reconciliation.” This is the gospel of Jesus Christ (as it is the power of God for salvation, see Romans 1:16). Therefore, Paul and his companions were “ambassadors for Christ” because their work was focused on telling others the message God had entrusted to their care. In carrying out their work of pleading with people to be reconciled to God, it was as though God was pleading through them and “on Christ’s behalf.” Then, in 2 Corinthians 6:1, Paul said, “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.”

All Christians are ambassadors

These are the only two Scripture references concerning ambassadorship in the pages of the New Testament. And, as you can see, they both have direct reference to the work that the apostle Paul was doing. Yes, as an apostle of Christ, he had been sent with special orders to fulfill. However, the 2 Corinthians 5 reference makes it clear that this concept does *not* just apply to the work the apostles were doing. Instead, Paul references both himself and his companions (particularly Timothy, see 2 Corinthians 1:1) as “ambassadors for Christ.”

They were all focused on doing the work God had given them to accomplish in their lives upon this earth. Particularly, they were focused on accomplishing the work of spreading the “word of reconciliation.” But, this work was not limited to a select few among the early Christians. Instead, every Christian had been given the responsibility to teach

the gospel of Jesus Christ to others. For instance, Acts 8:4 makes reference to the Christians who were scattered because of Saul’s persecution going everywhere preaching the word of God. And, 2 Timothy 2:24-26 states that helping those who have been taken captive by Satan to do his will come to their senses is a work that a servant of Christ “must” do.

Therefore, the concept of being an ambassador for Jesus Christ is something that applies to everyone who is a Christian. And, though the term is specifically used in these two New Testament passages with reference to teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is much more in the concept of Christian ambassadorship that fits with the teachings of the Bible.

The Basics Of Christian Ambassadorship

As you consider who an ambassador is, there are several comparisons to who the Christian also must be. Therefore, we want to take a few moments to consider two basic facts about Christian ambassadorship.

Temporary resident of a foreign land

As briefly mentioned at the beginning of this study, an ambassador is commonly sent from one nation to another. Typically, this ambassador will stay as a guest in the host country for an agreeable period of time while he/she works to accomplish the mission he/she has been sent to fulfill. During this time he/she lives in this foreign country, he/she learns a great deal about the culture of this place, communicates and interacts with the people of the land, etc. – but he/she never becomes a permanent resident of this country. He/she is always a guest and has his/her home as the country that sent him/her.

In the same way, a Christian ambassador is a representative of Christ here on this earth. Though the Christian lives on this earth, learns a great deal about the culture on this earth, and interacts with the people he/she lives around, the Christian must never

try to take up permanent residency here on this earth. He/she must constantly be reminded of the fact that he/she is not on this earth to fulfill his/her own pleasures; but to fulfill the purposes of Jesus Christ!

There are a number of passages in the Scriptures that remind us of the fact that Christians are only on this earth as temporary residents – and not as permanent citizens. First, consider Hebrews 11:13-16. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

Specifically, this passage speaks of the Old Testament patriarchs (i.e. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob). They had received the promises God had made to them concerning their descendants and the land of promise. However, they had not received the promises themselves. Yet, they lived lives of faith, being assured of them. Then, they also viewed themselves as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” They recognized that they were not permanently upon this earth. And, the passage states that they sought a better country than the one they had come from. Namely, they were seeking a Heavenly country. Like these faithful individuals, Christians should only be considering themselves as strangers and pilgrims on this earth who are seeking a better and Heavenly country. Certainly, this will transform the way the Christian will approach his/her time on this earth.

Second, consider Philippians 3:20-21. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Actually, the attitude taken by Paul in these verses is a contrast to the attitude of those described

as “enemies of the cross of Christ” who focused on earthly things and fulfilling their own desires (see verses 18-19). Instead, those who are Christians recognize that their true citizenship is not on this earth. Rather, it is in Heaven! Therefore, those who are Christians will not be focused on fulfilling their own physical desires above accomplishing the mission of Jesus Christ!

Third, consider 1 Peter 1:17-19. “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

The conduct of the Christian ambassador during his/her stay here on this earth is to be “in fear.” This is the fear of God that includes both reverential respect for God and a terror of the Lord. And, the Christian ambassador recognizes that he/she must be a devoted representative for Jesus Christ upon this earth because he/she was redeemed from slavery to sin by the “precious blood of Christ”! So, the Christian's stay here on this earth is not about service to his/her own selfish desires or ambitions. Instead, it is entirely about fearing God and keeping His commandments (compare with Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Fourth, consider 1 Peter 2:9-12. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Peter described the Christian by using a number of different terms in verses 9 and 10. Particularly, notice that Christians are identified as

being the “people of God” who have obtained mercy from God. As such, Peter begged the Christians he was writing to that they would “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” and keep their conduct honorable among the people they were around. But, the basis for conducting themselves in these ways was in recognition of the fact that they were only temporary residents here on this earth. And, as such (i.e. as Christian ambassadors), they needed to recognize that there were things in this foreign land that would be detrimental to their mission and needed to keep away from them. The same continues to be true for every Christian ambassador today. Thus, Paul instructed the Roman Christians to present themselves as living sacrifices and not to be conformed to the ways of this sin-filled world (Romans 12:1-2).

Fifth, consider John 15:18-19. “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

Jesus wanted His disciples (those who would be His ambassadors) to understand that the world hated Him because He lived in a way that was different from their ways. So, those who would dedicate themselves to following Him would also be hated by the world. This, Jesus said, was because even though they were living *in* the world, they were not “of the world.” Everyone who chooses to follow Jesus Christ must recognize themselves in this same way. They are *not* citizens of this world or live the same ways as those who are citizens of this world. Instead, they are (as Paul identified himself) citizens of Heaven who are dedicated to living according to the holy ways of God!

Representative of the King and the kingdom

For a brief time, God lived as man upon this earth. That is precisely who Jesus Christ was. In fact, Jesus’ name “Immanuel” meant, “God with us” (see Matthew 1:23). Whenever He lived on this earth, He perfectly accomplished the will of the Father and did everything that was necessary to establish His kingdom. Included in this work was teaching people

on this earth about the kingdom He was going to establish.

Yet, God is not living as man any longer so as directly interact with the people of this world and teach them about the kingdom of Heaven. Instead, He has sent ambassadors to continue accomplishing this mission. For instance, just prior to ascending in Heaven, Jesus told His disciples, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus Christ was no longer going to have a physical existence on this earth to accomplish the mission that needed to be accomplished. He had fulfilled His mission. Now, He could fulfill all future work by sending ambassadors. So, Christian ambassadors are representatives of Jesus Christ (the King) and His kingdom (the church). The Christian’s hands are Jesus’ hands to accomplish His work. The Christian’s feet are Jesus’ feet to go where He wants them to go. The Christian’s mind is Jesus’ mind to focus on doing the works of God. The Christian’s eyes are Jesus’ eyes to watch for opportunities to serve and do good. The Christian’s ears are Jesus’ ears to listen for those same opportunities. The Christian’s tongue is Jesus’ tongue to speak words that are helpful in accomplishing God’s purposes.

Consider Romans 6:11-13. “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

As a Christian ambassador, you have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ (see 1 Peter 1:17-19 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Therefore, though you had served sin at one time in the past, you have been ransomed from that slavery to sin in order that you might serve God during your time on this

earth. And, this means that you must not permit unrighteousness (sin) to be accomplished in your physical body. Instead, you must use all the members of your physical body to accomplish things that are right and pleasing to God.

The Character Of The Christian Ambassador

As a representative of Christ and His kingdom, you must put Him absolutely first in your life. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus instructed, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Therefore, you must be entirely devoted to accomplishing His mission for you as you dwell in this foreign land. To do this involves two things: Possessing the right character and participating in the right work. Let’s begin considering these now by first considering some of the traits you must put off and put on in your life to appropriately represent Jesus Christ while you live on this earth.

A focus on heavenly things

To work toward developing the character Jesus Christ requires of His representatives, let’s focus in Colossians 3. And, as we begin considering this text, recognize that there must be a transformation in the focus of the ambassador of Jesus Christ.

Consider Colossians 3:1-4. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

Those who have become Christians have been “raised with Christ.” Romans 6:3-4 explains that there was a putting to death of the old man that was committed to the ways of sin, a burial of this old man in the watery grave of baptism, and a raising to walk in newness of life. So, by implication, since everyone who is truly a Christian has been raised

with Christ, everyone who is a Christian must be seeking those things that are above rather than the things that are on this earth – because everyone who is a Christian has died, has his/her life “hidden with Christ in God,” and has Jesus as his/her life!

Therefore, the Christian ambassador is not focused on living to fulfill his/her own earthly desires. Those things have been put to death. Instead, for the Christian, “to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). Everything a Christian decides to do is entirely focused on accomplishing the will of Christ – as if Christ was living in his/her physical body. For instance, Paul stated, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). As such, Paul said that “those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).

Put off

Colossians 3:5-11 goes on to identify a number of characteristics that have no place in the lives of those who are Christ’s representatives. For, as His representatives on this earth, Christians must be imitators of Jesus Christ and God (see 1 Corinthians 11:1 and Ephesians 5:1). As you consider the specific things identified in this text, recognize that these things are not fitting for those who are representatives of Jesus Christ because they do not fit with the holy life Jesus lived on this earth or with the holy ways God calls His people to live.

Colossians 3:5-11 says, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

Using your body to fulfill your own physical desires. Pursuing physical things above the desires of God. Demonstrating anger, wrath, and malice that are contrary to the love and patience God desires. Speaking in ways that harm others and fail to point people to Jesus Christ. These are all things that have absolutely no place in the life of a person who is a representative of Jesus Christ and His kingdom on this earth! Therefore, I want you to notice the very strong language that is used concerning these types of unrighteous activity. All of your members that are “on the earth” (devoted to fulfilling earthly desires rather than God’s desires) must be “put to death.” They are not to be temporarily halted. They are not to be slowed down. They are to be *killed* so that they have no part in the life that you live on this earth! After all, these are the kinds of activities that cause an individual to be subject to God’s wrath and created the need for Jesus Christ to come to earth and die in the first place!

Put on

Instead of living according to these old ways that are full of unrighteousness, Christ’s representatives are to have “put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:10). Notice, then, that the kind of character that will be depicted in Colossians 3:12-17 is fitting with the character of Jesus Christ when He walked on this earth.

Colossians 3:12-17 says, “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Holiness. Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Gentleness. Patience in suffering wrong. Willingness to bear with others. Forgiveness shown toward those who have wronged you. Love toward all people. A heart filled with the peace from God that surpasses all understanding. A mind that is filled with the word of Christ. Teaching and admonishing others through the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. A commitment that whatever you say or do will be done by the authority of Jesus Christ. Thanksgiving expressed to the Father through Christ. These are central components of the Christian ambassador’s character. Without these things, an individual cannot accurately represent Jesus Christ or His kingdom on this earth! Then, Colossians 3:18-4:1 continues and demonstrates that even the relationships that the Christian ambassador has must be governed by the will of Christ (including his/her family relationships).

The Work Of Christian Ambassadorship

Though other passages would also be helpful in considering the character of the Christian ambassador, Colossians 3:1-17 has provided an excellent overview of things we needed to consider. The right character is necessary to make the work of a Christian ambassador the most effective and pleasing to God. Now, we need to spend some time considering the work that Christ has given to those who are His representatives on this earth.

Sacrificing

Everything that is involved in the work of a Christian ambassador requires sacrifice. Remember, Romans 12:1-2 depicts the responsibility of the Christian as presenting his/her body as a “living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” And, this kind of complete sacrifice requires that the Christian not be involved in the sinful things of the world (i.e. the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of eyes, and the pride of life which belong to the world rather than belong to the Father, 1 John 2:15-17). Instead, the Christian must have

his/her mind transformed so as to focus on living according to the holy ways of God.

Therefore, whenever Jesus spoke about following Him, He told people about the sacrificial nature of true discipleship. For instance, in Luke 9:23, Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Then, He continued to demonstrate that the extent of this sacrifice was to be willing even to die for Him! In this way, Jesus demonstrates that living for Him and being His representative requires a focused determination and an understanding that your life is no longer about yourself. As I have already demonstrated in this lesson, your life is about Jesus Christ!

Setting a good example

In part, this was the focus of the previous section about developing the character Christ requires for the Christian ambassador. However, I want to take this a step further in recognizing the power of being what Christ desires His representatives to be. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus identifies His followers as being “the light of the world.” They are like an illuminated city that is set on top of a hill that is visible for miles around whenever it is dark. They are like a lamp that gives light to all who are in a house. And, this will be true whenever Christ’s representatives imitate Christ’s life because Jesus identified Himself as “the light of the world” (John 8:12).

But, notice one of the main things accomplished by working diligently to be who Christ desires you to be as His representative on earth. Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” In living a life that is consistent with the teachings of the gospel and the life that Jesus lived, you will point others to Christ through your very example! Every part of your life, then, is a constant message about the importance of living for Christ and shows what living for Christ every day looks like.

Teaching the gospel

Not only does Christ want His representatives to let their lives be a message that points people to Him; but, He wants His people to actually be telling others His saving message. Remember, this was the main focus of Paul whenever he wrote about being an ambassador for Christ in Ephesians 6 and 2 Corinthians 5. And, as we have already seen, this was a primary responsibility Jesus left into the hands of His disciples whenever He was preparing to leave this earth and ascend into Heaven (go back and review Matthew 28:18-20). They were entrusted with the tremendous responsibility of taking the word of reconciliation to those who were separated from God because of their sins!

And, as Paul had considered himself to have been “entrusted with the gospel” (1 Thessalonians 2:4), everyone who is a Christian today has been entrusted with this same wonderful saving message from God! The Christian ambassador is *not* permitted to neglect the responsibility of sharing this gospel with others. In fact, Jesus Christ wants to use you to share His saving message with the people you interact with and come into contact with. So, He expects those who are His representatives to be working diligently to grow in the faith and knowledge of the gospel’s message (see 2 Timothy 2:15) – because there is a point at which He expects all of His followers to be qualified to teach others the gospel (see Hebrews 5:12-14). After all, what kind of representative would you be for Jesus Christ if you were silently allowing those who are living around you die in their sins so that they will spend eternity in Hell fire?

Encouraging

Jesus was always encouraging people to serve God. He encouraged them to reflect on their own lives. He encouraged them to recognize the changes they needed to make and to make those changes. He encouraged them to listen to His teachings as He sought to instruct them in the ways of God. Jesus knew that there were many obstacles people face on this earth in order to serve Him faithfully. So, you can even watch Jesus as He

encouraged His disciples to overcome the schemes the devil would try to use to pull them away from following Christ.

Therefore, Jesus expects His earthly representatives to be diligently working to encourage others to follow Him. Even in all the words His people speak, Jesus wants His people to provide the “necessary edification” (Ephesians 4:29). Consider Hebrews 3:12-13. “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Specifically, this text indicates that those who are Christians are expected to encourage their fellow ambassadors to overcome the schemes of the devil and live faithfully as representatives for Christ in foreign lands.

Serving

Jesus’ earthly life was the life of a servant. He even taught His disciples that He “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Now, Jesus did not make this statement to boast about His willingness to sacrifice. Instead, Jesus was addressing the subject of humbling oneself as a servant. In verse 27, He taught, “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave.” Jesus perfectly demonstrated throughout the course of His life that His focus was on other people. And, the ultimate demonstration of this was Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross for the sins of the world.

Therefore, it is only reasonable for Jesus to expect His representatives on this earth to also be focused on serving others. Jesus, in teaching about serving, said, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14-15). The Christian ambassador, therefore, should be looking for opportunities to sacrificially serve and do good for others in this world. In fact, the apostle Paul said, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Showing hospitality

One of the ways you can serve is by demonstrating hospitality. Hospitality commonly involves using your home and your home’s resources to do good toward or entertain another. Showing hospitality is one of the best ways to build relationships, do good to those who are in need, encourage those who are followers of Christ, and teach the gospel to those who are unbelievers.

The responsibility of the Christian ambassador in showing hospitality should extend to both those who are Christians and those who are not. Romans 12:13 says that the Christian must be “given to hospitality.” For instance, Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” As you have opportunity, show your hospitality toward those who you do not even know. Although he did not use his home, Jesus taught a great example of this when he taught the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). And, 1 Peter 4:9-10 says, “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Remember, as Jesus pictures in Matthew 25:31-46, part of your judgment will involve how you have served and shown hospitality toward others.

Conclusion

As a Christian, you are an ambassador (representative) for Jesus Christ. There are a number of things that are involved in representing Christ during your life on this earth (even in addition to the things that have been mentioned in this study). Therefore, you need to consider how you have been representing Christ during the course of your life. You should be dedicating your life to Christ so that He will be pleased with your representation of Him whenever He returns for the final Judgment!

Study Questions

1. Christian Ambassadorship

What is an ambassador?

What did it mean for Paul to be an ambassador for Christ?

Why are all Christians ambassadors for Christ?

2. The Basics Of Christian Ambassadorship

Where must your citizenship be? What does this mean?

How should you view every member of your physical body as a representative of the King and the kingdom?

3. The Character Of The Christian Ambassador

Where must your focus be – according to Colossians 3:1-4?

What are some characteristics you must put off – according to Colossians 3:5-11?

What are some characteristics you must put on – according to Colossians 3:12-17?

4. The Work Of Christian Ambassadorship

How is sacrificing the work of the Christian ambassador?

How is setting a good example the work of the Christian ambassador?

How is teaching the gospel the work of the Christian ambassador?

How is encouraging the work of the Christian ambassador?

How is serving the work of the Christian ambassador?

How is showing hospitality the work of the Christian ambassador?

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is An Heir Of God

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is an heir of God.

Adopted As A Child Of God

An heir is one who is set to gain an inheritance from another. An individual is most commonly an heir because of the physical relation one person has to another (i.e. a child or grandchild). Particularly, the Christian is an heir of God because he/she has been adopted as a child of God. Consider Romans 8:14-17. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

Previously a child of the devil

Before you can appreciate the opportunity you have by being a child of God, you need to recognize that there was an adoption that took place.

And, if there was an adoption (as indicated by Romans 8), you also must recognize that you were not always a child of God. Actually, the Scriptures clearly indicate that you were a child of the devil because you were involved in doing those things the devil would approve of.

1 John 3 makes this point very clear. Verses 8-10 say, “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.”

The devil practices that which is contrary to God’s righteousness. Therefore, those who are following his ways are spiritual children of his rather than God’s – because they resemble him rather than God. And, Romans 3 makes it perfectly clear that every morally responsible person has committed sin at some time. Verse 23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Listen to Jesus’ statement to some who believed they were children of God in John 8. Though they claimed to be Abraham’s descendants (John 8:39), Jesus told them that they would do the works of Abraham if he was truly their father. Yet, Jesus said that they were seeking to kill Him for telling them the truth He heard from God. He said, “You do the deeds of your father” (verse 41). Still, they claimed to have God as their Father. In verse 42, Jesus told them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God....” Then, listen to Jesus’ rebuke of them in verse 44. “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

Although this specific text was a rebuke to some who claimed to be children of God on the basis of their physical ancestry (being descendants of

Abraham), Jesus demonstrated that God was concerned about much more than that! Today, you should learn that you must love God (which involves keeping His commandments, John 14:15) in order to be a child of God. And, your life must resemble who God is rather than following the ways of the devil.

Then, one final passage to consider on this point is Ephesians 2. In this text, Paul explains both the need for the grace and mercy of God and states that it has been provided. In verses 1-3, Paul identifies that you were dead in your trespasses and sins (i.e. when you were living as a child of the devil). During this time that you were living according to the desires of the world and the devil, Paul said that you were a child of wrath in your nature (verse 3). That is, you were deserving to experience the wrath and vengeance of the Almighty God for living according to these sinful ways.

So, take a few moments just to appreciate the spiritual condition you were in prior to becoming a child of God. You were a child of a father who did not care for you. Your father lied to you, deceived you, and spiritually abused you. As long as you stayed in his “home” and lived according to his sinful ways, you were spiritually dead because you were separated from God. And, if your life would end in that condition, you would face eternity in the fires and torment of Hell along with your father and all those who are his children (see Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 21:8). This will be the ultimate manifestation of God’s wrath that will be shown to those who refuse to obey Him (see 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

Adoption is only possible through Jesus

You were enslaved to sin whenever you listened to the lies of Satan (see Romans 6:15-23). You were living in the way that you were taught by your “brothers and sisters” in the world. You were doing whatever you felt would best please your own physical desires. But, whenever you heard the message of the gospel of Christ, you discovered that you had been deceived and spiritually abused. And, you learned that there is a Father who has opened His “home” to many who have come from your same background (who had also been children of the devil).

Ephesians 2 continues to explain this tremendous opportunity God has given to all who were dead in their sins as children of the devil to have spiritual life through Jesus Christ. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (verses 4-7).

Therefore, this Father is the only one who could provide the payment necessary to adopt you away from Satan! This was only possible through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. This Father willingly sacrificed Jesus Christ by sending Him from Heaven to earth in order to teach those who were children of the devil and give His life as the ransom sacrifice by being crucified.

Listen to Ephesians 1:3-6: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

It was God’s decision to give the children of the devil the opportunity to access all the spiritual blessings He would provide through Jesus Christ. God (the Father) chose that those who would come to Jesus Christ would have access to all these spiritual blessings (including the forgiveness of their sins, see verse 7) and should live holy lives. Then, He also predetermined that those who would come to Jesus Christ would also be adopted as sons.

Listen to Galatians 4:4-5: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no

longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

God sent Jesus Christ to this earth at just the right time in order that He might provide the opportunity for those who were enslaved to Satan as his children to be redeemed by His precious blood (see 1 Peter 1:18-19). Now, God has given everyone the opportunity to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ. And, no longer being a slave to Satan, you can be a son (or daughter) of God. Then, as a child of God, you can be an “heir of God through Christ.”

But, recognize that this is all only possible through Jesus Christ. No matter how much you might have hated the devil as your father and hated living in slavery to him, you could not escape this “home” without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear that your salvation was by the grace of God through faith, and that it was not of yourself. No matter how many good works you would try to do, you could not earn your own adoption by God!

Those who follow God are adopted as children

Although you could not earn your own adoption by God after you had decided to sin and become a child of the devil, God does require you to live for Him in order to receive the adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. Think back to Romans 8:14. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” As you consider this statement in the context of Romans 8, you discover that these are individuals who are focused on the spiritual things of God rather than the physical things of this world. Being led by the Spirit of God requires following the teachings of God the Spirit has revealed. Thus, you are led by the Spirit whenever you give yourself to obey the words of God (as revealed in the pages of the Bible).

Recall that 1 John 3:8-10 said that the one who is born of God has God’s “seed” in him. This seed is His word (compare with Luke 8:11 and 1 Peter 1:22-25). Furthermore, the one who has been born of God through His seed is also the one who practices righteousness and loves his Christian brothers and sisters. And, once again, it is through the words God has revealed in the pages of the Bible

that God has told you everything you need to know to live in a way that is right with God (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Now, you must recognize that God’s word did require you to do some things in order to become His child. God has not made every child of the devil His child unconditionally. As we have seen, God required you to obey Him by doing what the Bible instructs you to do. He required you to hear His word (Romans 10:17), believe in Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Acts 17:30), confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38). Then, He required that you remain faithful to Him after you have become His child by continuing to be led by His Spirit and practice righteousness (see Revelation 2:10; Romans 8:14; and 1 John 3:10).

Specifically, please consider Galatians 3:26-27. “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Notice the essential place this passage assigns to both faith and baptism in becoming the adopted children of God. Without either one, a child of the devil cannot become the adopted child of God!

Why God adopted you

Now, the entire idea of adoption implies a choice on the part of the one doing the adopting. This one is not forced to be a father or mother to any children who are not their own. Instead, there is something within this individual that provokes the desire to parent a child/children he/she does not have the natural responsibility to parent.

Now, I want you to imagine that you decide that you want to give a child who is not your own a good home and an opportunity to experience your love and affection. You want to give a child the opportunity to do well in his/her life. Whenever you go to select the child you will adopt, which one do you choose? Do you choose the most problematic child or the least problematic one? I’ll let you decide for yourself.

While I cannot tell you which one you would choose, I do know which ones God has adopted. God

has adopted (through the process we have already discussed) the ones who had lived contrary His desires. He has adopted those who had demonstrated hatred in their actions toward Him whenever they rebelled against Him. And, just as this is true about everyone who had been a child of the devil, this has also been true about you.

So, this begs the question: Why did God give you the opportunity to be adopted and be one of His children? John 3:16 explains what you need to know. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” God simply loved those whom He had created so much that He could not do nothing and watch all mankind go down the path in life that would result in everlasting torment in Hell fire. So, He provided mankind with the opportunity to be saved through Jesus Christ and have everlasting life in Heaven!

Ephesians 1:5-6 also identifies why God gave you the opportunity to be adopted. The passage says that this decision to adopt through Jesus Christ was “according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” Why did He make such a great sacrifice to save you from the consequences of your decision to sin again Him? Because that is who He is! It is His “good pleasure” to give you the opportunity to live as His child and praise Him for His grace! “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15)!

The Christian’s Inheritance

Having received this adoption, you (as a Christian) are a child of the Almighty God. Therefore, you can cry out “Abba, Father.” The term “Abba” was used as an expression of closeness in relationship. No one could rightly say “Abba, Father” to God except those who are God’s children (Romans 8:15-16). And, Romans 8:17 says that if you are a child of God, then you are an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. Therefore, let’s spend some time considering this wonderful inheritance God has made available to His children. And, please

note that God offers this same inheritance to all who are His children – even those who are His children by adoption!

Heirs of God, the Father

The idea of being an heir differs in significance depending on who the father is. For instance, one individual may be an heir but may receive little/no inheritance. However, others are heirs to great wealth, royalty, possessions, etc. So, to appreciate the fact that a Christian is an heir, you must recognize who the Father is!

Notice that Romans 8:17 says that you are an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ. This God is the one who is described in Acts 17. Verse 24 says that this is the God “who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth.” And, He is the God who is so full of magnificence that He is too wonderful to be confined by a physical structure – no matter how extravagant man may build a temple. Verse 25 says that He is the one who is not in need of anything man can do for Him. Verses 26-28 emphasize that God has made man. Verse 29 says that He possesses Divine nature (meaning that He is eternal, He is all-powerful, He is ever-present, He is all-knowing, He is all-seeing, and everything that is involved in God being God). And, verses 30-31 say that God will judge the world.

Now, I want you to think about the wealthiest and most powerful king who could ever live. Most of the people on this earth would love to be this man’s heir. However, the opportunity you have as a Christian to be the heir of the Almighty God makes you a greater heir than even he! This is because your Father is greater than any earthly father could ever be! While some have wealthy fathers who are kings, the Christian has a Father who is Lord of Heaven and earth! There is nothing good that does not belong to the Christian’s Father!

In fact, Jesus helps us to see that even if an individual would inherit everything this world has to offer from an earthly father, it would all be worthless if he/she was not an heir of God! In Matthew 16:26, Jesus said, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Rather

than putting your focus on being an heir of physical things, you must recognize the tremendous opportunity you have been given to be the heir of God and humble yourself under His authority so that He will grant to you all the blessings of His inheritance. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3)!

Full adoption coming

Now, though we are children of God while we live on this earth and have access to all the spiritual blessings God has provided through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3), we only have a small portion of the inheritance that God has prepared for His children. In addition, those who are heirs of God are not always distinguished from those who are not while we live on this earth. There are many who claim to be heirs of God who have actually rejected God as their Father.

Yet, there will be a Day on which all those who are true children of God will be identified as such and the full inheritance the Father has prepared will be given to them. Listen to Romans 8:23-25. “Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

Throughout our lives on this earth, the children of the devil will make life burdensome for the children of God. In fact, the Scriptures picture this as a war. However, the children of God are saved in the hope they cling to – and this hope focuses on the Day when Jesus returns to take all of God’s children to Heaven with Him. Thus, as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, we will all spend eternity in the place the Scriptures identify as Heaven. This hope serves as an anchor for the child of God who is experiencing difficult situations while he/she lives on this earth (see Hebrews 6:19)!

A description of the Christian’s inheritance

What is this inheritance in Heaven – and why is it so wonderful so as to persevere through all of the difficulties of life in order to receive? Consider a number of Bible passages that help us to understand the nature of this inheritance.

First, this inheritance has been (or, is being) prepared for God’s children. 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 speaks of the fact that God has revealed His will to mankind through His Holy Spirit. This is because it is only the Holy Spirit who can know the mind of God. Now, whenever we read what the Holy Spirit has revealed through the inspired writers of the Bible, we can understand the mind of God and Christ. In this context, particularly notice what Paul said in verses 9-10. “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.”

Not only has the Spirit revealed what God has prepared concerning how God’s children are expected to conduct themselves, but He has also revealed what wonderful inheritance is prepared for God’s children who love Him. So, we observe a couple of things. First, there is something that the Almighty God who is Lord of Heaven and earth has prepared for those who are His children. Second, this inheritance has never been seen by man’s eyes. Third, the only way we know anything about the inheritance He has prepared is through what God (by His Holy Spirit) has revealed about it.

Jesus used the same kind of language about the inheritance being prepared in John 14. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions [dwelling places]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know” (verses 1-4). Then, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (verse 6).

Can you just imagine the place that the one who performed miracles of healing the sick, causing the blind to see, making the paralyzed walk, and raising the dead is capable of preparing? And, then to understand that He is preparing this place in His “Father’s house.” As a Christian, therefore, you have a dwelling place in your Father’s house that is being prepared for your eternal occupancy! One Day, Christ will come and take those who are joint heirs with Him to live in this place He is preparing with His Father!

Second, listen to the description of this wonderful inheritance in 1 Peter 1:3-9. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”

Ultimately, this inheritance is the salvation of your soul. So, this inheritance is two-fold. God saves you from the punishment those who are children of the devil will experience in Hell. And, God gives you eternal life in Heaven. Notice that this inheritance is pictured as being “reserved in heaven for you” (verse 4). Therefore, given Jesus’ language we observed in John 14, picture having a room God has prepared for you in Heaven – with a note on the door saying, “Reserved for [insert your name here].”

Furthermore, this inheritance is not something that perishes. Inheritances we get from earthly fathers fade away over time. They rust, are destroyed, are stolen, are spent, and are left to others when our lives end. And, they typically require the death of the one who is leaving the inheritance.

However, our Heavenly Father will never die – and His inheritance will never fade away!

Third, this inheritance offers rest to those who have labored for the Lord. As we will observe in a few moments, this inheritance is conditional and will only be given to those who are diligent in living in the way their Heavenly Father desires. Certainly, there is much work that your Father wants you to be doing and there will be suffering experienced as you labor. However, Revelation 14:13 speaks of the Christian’s inheritance as rest for these. “...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”

The sacrifices that the child of God makes while living on this earth will not be for nothing. As 1 Corinthians 15:58 assures, the Christian’s labor will not be in vain! Instead, there is rest that is offered in a place that is described as being eternal life (Matthew 25:46).

Fourth, the most complete picture that we have been given of this inheritance is seen in Revelation 21:1-22:5. In context, the apostle John was given a vision through the Spirit into Heaven. And, he writes what he has seen. However, as we prepare to consider what he says, let’s understand an essential point: The book of Revelation was written in symbolic language. It is full of imagery that must not be taken literally. So, as you read the book of Revelation, you must picture the images that are being painted to try to describe Heaven in terms that our human minds can grasp.

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’ Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He

said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.' And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.'

"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

"Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

"But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever."

This inheritance is conditional

What a wonderful inheritance that has been prepared by God for His children! But, in order to receive this inheritance, you must comply with the conditions that have been placed upon it. Just as an earthly father can place conditions in his will for others to meet before they can obtain his inheritance, God has placed conditions upon receiving the wonderful inheritance that has been described.

We have already discussed the conditions God has placed upon becoming an adopted child of His (i.e. hearing His word, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized). Now, I specifically want to consider the responsibilities you have as a child of His. Consider a few points briefly.

First, you must practice righteousness and love your Christian brothers and sisters. John said that those who are children of the devil are known because they do not practice righteousness and do not love their brethren (1 John 3:10). The reverse is true

about those who are children of God. They do practice righteousness and love their brethren.

Second, you must love Him. Recall that Paul spoke about the things God has prepared “for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). By implication, those who fail to love Him will not receive the things He has prepared. The wonderful inheritance we have been discussing is reserved for those who love God. And, recognize the fact that true love for God means that you will keep His commandments and His commandments will not be burdensome (1 John 5:3).

Third, you must be faithful to Christ. Being faithful to Jesus Christ means that you conduct your life according to His will. It means that you will act in the way He desires rather than in the way you desire – and that you conduct yourself in this way through the point of your physical death, even if being faithful to Christ means suffering and dying for Christ. In Revelation 2, listen to what Jesus told a group of God’s children. “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (verse 10). In Romans 8:17, Paul said that those who are children are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, “if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” So, you cannot expect to receive the inheritance if you are not willing to be faithful to Him through suffering!

Fourth, recall that God has only promised this restful inheritance to those who “die in the Lord” (Revelation 14:13). So, it is only the one who dies physically while in a right condition with God who will receive this eternal inheritance in Heaven. Therefore, receiving this eternal inheritance depends upon you conducting your entire life according to the things that are revealed in the pages of the Bible concerning how God wants you to live and what He wants you to do!

Avoiding prodigal living as an heir

Finally, as you recognize these conditions God has placed upon His heirs receiving this inheritance, you need to consider the importance of avoiding prodigal (wasteful) living. To illustrate this,

I want to focus on Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. Please note that if you are unfamiliar with this parable you should read it now.

In the parable, a man had two sons. And, the younger of these two sons demanded his father’s inheritance early. Not long after he received this inheritance, he went away to a far country and wasted all of his inheritance with wild and reckless living. Eventually, he had wasted everything that he had inherited and was in desperate need of food for survival. Then, when he hit “rock bottom,” he returned to his father to simply ask to be made a servant. Although the older brother was disappointed by his father’s reception, the father welcomed the return of his son and gave him the best of what he had.

Every child of God needs to listen carefully to Jesus’ parable! For, this parable has often been demonstrated as true whenever those who are children of God take their inheritances and waste them by their wild and reckless living! Rather than being grateful for the opportunity to be saved through Christ, many who have become Christians depart from Christ in order to please their own physical desires. Thus, they throw away the opportunity to receive the wonderful inheritance God has promised in order to experience temporary pleasures associated with life on this earth.

However, even when an individual has acted with such recklessness, it is still possible to return to the Father. The Father wants those who have left Him to return. Like the father in Jesus’ parable rejoiced whenever his son returned to him, God will rejoice whenever His erring children return to Him – and He will again give them access to His great inheritance!

Conclusion

What love God has shown to you in sending His only begotten Son to die for you in order that He might have you (who had sinned against Him) as an adopted child! Now, through Jesus, you have the opportunity to experience all of the wonderful blessings of the inheritance God has provided for His

children. But, you must be faithful to God throughout the course of your life if you wish to receive it!

B. 1 Peter 1:3-9 –

Study Questions

1. Adopted As A Child Of God

When were you a child of the devil? What is being a child of the devil like?

C. Revelation 14:13 –

Through whom is adoption possible? Explain.

Does God require you to do anything in order to be His adopted child? If so, what?

D. Revelation 21:1-22:5 –

Why did God adopt you?

What does God require of His children to receive this inheritance?

How is it possible to waste this wonderful inheritance?

2. The Christian's Inheritance

Contrast being an heir of God with being an heir of an earthly father. What is so special about being an heir of God?

When you will be fully adopted?

Discuss the Christian's inheritance through the following passages.

A. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 and John 14:1-6 –