

We Have An Anchor!



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

We Have An Anchor!

Learn how to overcome the struggles, temptations, and challenges of life by holding on to the anchor God has provided.

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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

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We Have an Anchor!

Lesson: 1

Facing The Storms Of Life

The deaths of loved ones. Our own impending death. Disease. Cancer. Injuries. Surgeries. Paralysis. Disabilities. Alzheimer's. Tornadoes. Hurricanes. Floods. Layoffs. Firings. Relocations. More bills than money. House fires. Break ins. Losing relationships. Being hurt by people we love. Divorce. Separations. Abuse. Ridicule. Accidents. Wars. Temptations to live according to our own desires rather than do the will of God. Persecutions for living a faithful life to Jesus Christ.

The list could just go on and on and on and on. The fact is that there are many storms in this life. Most people find themselves being lost and wandering in the ocean of life, being driven by the waves and winds that are constantly pounding against them. Thus, many feel fearful, depressed, and worried. Others don't seem to recognize or care that they are lost and in very dangerous waters.

Yet, there is another option while facing the storms of life. The Scriptures speak of an anchor. Hebrews 6:19 says, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil." The hope of eternal

salvation in Heaven through Jesus Christ is the only thing that is strong enough to endure every storm that we encounter during this life. This anchor for the soul is "sure" and it is "steadfast." There is no breaking it.

Unfortunately, there are many people who are either unaware that such an anchor exists or they keep their anchors "aweigh" (not released) so that even though they know about this anchor, they are not using it to its full potential. So, there is a great need to learn about our anchor that God has provided us so that we can safely and effectively navigate the stormy waters of life. This series of lessons will be focused on accomplishing that goal.

In this first lesson, we need to look around us and recognize the storms that exist. We will all surely face them. Even if the waters of our lives are relatively calm right now, we can look around and see that some storms are brewing and headed in our directions. Or, perhaps we are in the middle of one of these storms right now. To help us think about facing these storms, I have chosen the text of Job chapters 1-3. By examining this text, we will be able to gain a better understanding of the storms that we face in this life.

Bad Things Happen To Good People

A basic observation about the storms of life is that they are not prejudice. They eventually hit everyone. They do not just target those who live extremely wicked lives. In fact, they often hit the most morally pure people living on this earth. And, sometimes, they are even the ones who are hit the hardest.

Job was a blameless and upright man

"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large

household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

“And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, ‘It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ Thus Job did regularly” (Job 1:1-5).

Here was a very righteous man. He seemed to be doing everything right as far as living a morally pure life that God would be pleased with. And, not only do we see that Job was very conscientious about his own righteousness, but he was also concerned with his children being right with God. After their days of feasting, he would get up early and offer sacrifices for each one of them – in case they had sinned and cursed God. Then, notice that this was not just Job’s practice on occasion. The Scriptures say that this was Job’s regular practice.

Now, as the story of Job begins in these verses, you observe that Job is an extremely wealthy man with a rather large family (seven sons and three daughters). But, this man was about to experience some absolutely dreadful things. Job 1:13-2:8 goes on to describe how a series of events transpired that brought great suffering on this very righteous man.

First, a messenger came to Job and told him how the Sabeans attacked while Job’s oxen and donkeys were plowing and they were all taken away, and his servants were all killed with a sword (except the one who escaped, see Job 1:13-15). While that messenger was still speaking, another messenger came, saying that he was the lone survivor of a fire that fell from God in Heaven which burned up the sheep and servants (Job 1:16). Then, while that messenger was still speaking, another messenger came, saying that he was the lone survivor of a raid by three bands of the Chaldeans which took the camels away and killed more of his servants (Job 1:17). And, while that messenger was still speaking, yet another messenger came, bringing the worst news of all. This one said that he was the lone

survivor from the place that his sons and daughters were eating and drinking. He said that a great wind came and struck the house so that it fell on and killed all the young people (Job 1:18-19).

Surely, there could rarely be a day in life that was worse than this one! Job suddenly found himself in the middle of a fierce storm! If that was not enough, Job was then afflicted with “painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (Job 2:7). And, he sat in the middle of ashes, using a broken piece of pottery to scrape himself (Job 2:8). Yet, this sad picture of a man caught in a devastating storm was a “blameless and upright” man who “feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1).

Suffering will happen that is unrelated to how we live

Like we see with Job, bad things happen to everyone who lives on this earth. It is an unavoidable reality of life. Now, it should be noted that *sometimes* people bring suffering on themselves. For instance, those who act wickedly so as to consume alcoholic beverages can become drunk and hurt other people or themselves. Those who do not listen to the wise counsel from God to refuse to keep company with people who are engaging in evil things can find themselves in jail. Those who mistreat their bodies by using tobacco products and/or drugs can poison their own bodies so as to experience devastating diseases.

But, this study is not so focused on the storms of life we bring on ourselves. Although, let me simply say this. If any of your storms are self-inflicted, you must first stop the action(s) that are causing these consequences. Now, if you have, you should consider the things we will be discussing throughout this study to help you endure even these storms.

Yet, even when you are not bringing trouble on yourself, we simply live in a world where trouble, sorrow, pain, and death will be experienced. And, this will be experienced by the righteous and the wicked alike. This is because we live in a world in which sin is present. Ever since the first sin that was committed in the Garden of Eden, this earth has not been a paradise.

Sometimes our suffering is a direct result of sin (our own or someone else's). Sometimes our suffering accomplishes a righteous purpose from God. And, sometimes our suffering is just the product of time and chance. For instance, Ecclesiastes 9:11 observes, "I returned and saw under the sun that – The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all." Yes, in the fallen world that we all live in, sometimes bad things just happen. Sometimes people are in the wrong places at the wrong times. And, our suffering is not always connected to something evil that we have done – just like Job's suffering was not connected with anything evil he had done.

God Is In Control

There is a point regarding the storms we face in life that is essential for us to recognize. God is in control! There may be many times that we begin to question whether this is so – since so many bad things are happening to and around us. Then, whenever we recognize that God is in control, we also must recognize that we must not blame God so as to disobey Him whenever we experience suffering.

God is over all

I want you to recognize how God was in control whenever Job suffered. The Scriptures provide a "behind the scenes" look into Job's suffering (that not even Job was privy to). Although we do not have answers to all our questions regarding this "behind the scenes" part of the story, we must simply accept what is said by faith in the word of God. And, when we do, we will learn a powerful lesson that God is in control!

Job 1:6-12 says, "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, 'From where do you come?' So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth

on it.' Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'

"So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!' And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.' So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord."

After this, Satan used this permission and power to bring about suffering for Job through the loss of his livestock, servants, and children. Then, after Satan had caused Job to suffer in those ways, Satan wanted more and inflicted Job with the painful boils.

Job 2:1-6 gives us the "behind the scenes" look into that situation. "Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said to Satan, 'From where do you come?' Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.'

"Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.' So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!' And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.'"

Again, I don't understand everything about what is going on in these passages. But, one thing that should jump off the pages in these passages is God's control. I want you to recognize that Satan could not just do whatever he desired. Even as

powerful and influential as the Bible teaches Satan to be, he is not more powerful than God! Satan could only do these things to Job whenever God agreed to allow Job's faith to be put to the test in these ways. And, recognize that God put a limit on Satan that Satan could not ignore. No matter how much Satan could have wanted to push Job a little more, God was the one in ultimate control.

God is not to blame

So, as you endure the storms of life, you should recognize that God is in ultimate control. Yet, it is wrong to accuse God of some kind of evil because of the sufferings that you experience. But, this is exactly what Job's wife wanted Job to do. After all of this suffering had happened, she told Job, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9).

Job's initial response to all of this suffering is what should help us to refuse to blame God whenever we are caught in the storms of life. Job responded to his wife, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10). And, in it all, Job "did not sin with his lips" (Job 2:10). Interestingly, prior to being afflicted with the painful boils, Job's response to the loss of his flocks, servants, and children was the following. "Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.' In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong" (Job 1:20-22).

Job simply recognized that God is in control. Every good thing that he had was given to him by God. So, just as giving the good things was in God's control, taking those things away was in God's control. And, rather than accusing God of wrongdoing, Job recognized that God must be worshiped and held in high esteem – even though Job was greatly sorrowful.

Then, there is another element that must be considered. That is the fact that God was not the one who was responsible for all of the suffering in this

world. Instead, God created this world as a true paradise (whenever man was in the Garden of Eden). However, through Satan's temptation and the sin that Adam and Eve committed, suffering and death were brought into the world as consequences for rebelling against God. And, they continue to exist on this earth – as mankind continues to rebel against God (Romans 3:23).

Yet, in all of the storms of life that God allows to happen, He always uses them to accomplish a righteous purpose. You see, God is not trying to be cruel. Nor does He just want to see His creation experience hardships. Instead, God always has a perfectly righteous plan for the sufferings that He allows to happen. Sometimes they are the result of His righteous wrath to punish evil. Sometimes they are the result of His discipline to try to get people to turn from their wickedness. Sometimes they are tests to see if we will be faithful to Him and trust in Him. For instance, Paul said that he and his companions had experienced "trouble" in Asia to the point that they were "burdened beyond measure, above strength," so that they "despaired even of life." He said, "Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). So, Paul's storm was about teaching trust in God.

There Is An Enemy

Although God is in control, we must also recognize that there is someone who does *not* want what is best for us. Unlike God, who allows us to be tested so as to pull us closer toward Him, there is one who is trying to tempt and lure us away from God. This one is Satan.

Satan walks to and fro on the earth

You should recall that Satan is the one who desired for Job to experience such a great storm in his life. Recall that Satan was among those who had to present themselves before the Lord (Job 1:6). And, recall that Satan answered the Lord's question about where he had come from by saying, "From going to

and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it” (Job 1:7).

Every picture in the Bible of Satan is such that he is not your friend. Instead, the reference to him as “Satan” means that he is an adversary. He is one who opposes us. He simply is not interested in our well-being (particularly on a spiritual level). Instead, his purpose is to lead us away from God. Thus, as he walks to and fro on this earth even today, he is looking to harm us. For instance, 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

All suffering can be traced back to Satan

It was Satan who wanted Job to suffer. When God asked Satan if he had considered His servant Job – a man God said was unlike any other on earth, “blameless and upright, one who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8), Satan thought of how he could try to lure Job away from God. Satan asked whether Job feared God for nothing, since God had blessed Job so abundantly in all ways (Job 1:9-10). He concluded, “But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!” (Job 1:11). And, God allowed Satan to put Job to the test, providing that Satan did not harm Job physically (and later, so long as Job would not be killed, see Job 1:12 and Job 2:6).

So, once again, we see two very different perspectives. God appears to have had such confidence in Job that He knew Job would not turn away from Him because of these tests. Instead, it would only make Job stronger. However, Satan wanted Job to fall. He brought all of this suffering on Job so that Job would curse God.

The Scriptures demonstrate that although God can use suffering to accomplish His righteous purposes, all suffering can be traced back to Satan – just as it was with Job. Sometimes, it can be directly traced back to Satan. For instance, sometimes the storms we experience in life are the direct result of listening to Satan’s temptations. As I demonstrated earlier, sometimes we are injured or suffer through terrible diseases because we choose to consume alcohol or smoke – contrary to the law of God. Or,

sometimes we suffer through miserable relationships that are sources of great turmoil because we or others are not acting how God’s law tells us to act with regard to those relationships. Regardless of how this is manifested, there are many times that people give in to the temptations of Satan and commit sin that directly produces suffering.

But, even if our suffering is not directly connected with Satan in the sense of a sin that has caused the suffering, it is still indirectly traced back to Satan. As I have mentioned already, God did not create this world to experience suffering and death. Instead, He placed the man and woman He created in the paradise of the Garden of Eden. And, because He had created them with free will, He gave them a law that said they must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In doing so, God warned them that there would be consequences for breaking the law, saying that they would “surely die” in the day they broke the law (Genesis 2:16-17).

Then, Satan enters the Bible’s story for the very first time. Using the serpent, he tempted Eve – luring her away from God by telling her things that appealed to her fleshly desires (see Genesis 3:1-5). And, she gave in to the temptation by eating of the forbidden fruit, and also gave it to her husband (Genesis 3:6). The rest of Genesis 3 goes on to describe the consequences of mankind listening to Satan rather than God. They experienced spiritual death (separation from God), there would be suffering in work and childbirth, they were cast out of the Garden of Eden, and they would experience physical death. Today, all of the physical sufferings and death can be traced back to this time when it first entered the world. And, we should recognize that Satan was behind it. Therefore, he is indirectly involved in all of the sufferings we continue to experience today.

Sometimes When It Rains, It Pours

Whenever we do suffer, sometimes we are fortunate enough to only have to deal with one thing

at a time. But, there are other times in which it seems like everything is falling apart. Sometimes, it feels as if there is a superstorm that has engulfed us and we are struggling to see through it. Sometimes, it feels as if the storm is pounding against us relentlessly and there seems to be no way out. Sometimes, when it rains, it pours.

Job's great sufferings

Think back to the story of Job. He experienced great sufferings in a very short amount of time. Just imagine: You are living the kind of righteous life that you know you should be living. You are so focused on being right with God and care so much about your children that you are even making sacrifices for them. And, up to this point, you have been greatly blessed by God.

Then, all of a sudden (without any warning whatsoever), a messenger comes to you and says that all your oxen and donkeys were stolen and your servants killed. Then, before he can finish telling you about what happened and before you can begin to fully react to that news, another messenger comes to you and says that fire came down from the sky and burned up all your sheep and more of your servants. Then, before he can finish telling you that news, another messenger says that a raid took away all your camels and killed even more of your servants. Then, when you may just begin thinking that you have heard the worst, before you finish hearing what he had to say, another one comes to you and says that all ten of your children were killed by a house collapsing in the wind.

Now that is a bad day (from a physical perspective). Out of “nowhere,” Job went from being an extremely wealthy man with ten children to a poor and childless man. Then, it was not even done. Later, Job is struck with painful boils all over his body. And, after all of this, Job loses whatever support he had from his wife – as she turns away from God and tells him to curse God and die!

Sometimes we will face tests that seem unbearable

Have you ever had a time in your life like Job? Whether you experienced as much loss and

heartache as Job did on this occasion or not, you may have experienced a time in your life in which everything that could go wrong seemed to go wrong. Maybe you had to deal with a couple of deaths at one time, several health difficulties, financial problems, family problems, etc. And, maybe there have been many of those things happening all at the same time for you (or, in a relatively short period of time).

During these times, it is often difficult to recognize that we can make it through. Sometimes, it seems as if the storms are howling so much that surely everything will just fall apart. Even Job did not find any pleasure in the things he was experiencing. Instead, he deplored his situation and thought that he would have been better off to have died at birth (Job 3:11-13). Job even longed for death and it would not come (Job 3:20-23). He said, “For my sighing comes before I eat, And my groanings pour out like water. For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, And what I dreaded has happened to me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes.” (Job 3:24-26).

Yet, it was not more than Job was capable of handling. Remember that God was in control and only allowed Satan to do so much. In the same way, God knows what we are capable of handling – better than we know ourselves! After all, He is the one who has created us! So, even though we may think we have reached our breaking points, the fact that we are still alive and going through the storms means that God knows we can handle it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Dealing With Bad “Comforters”

It is a blessing to have the right people around us during the storms of our lives. These people can greatly help and encourage us to endure the storms. But, sometimes the people who are around us are

actually hindering us. Sometimes, they are even being used by Satan to lure us away from God.

Job's five "comforters"

The Scriptures reveal that Job had five people who were around him when he was trying to deal with all of his sufferings. And, recognize that Job did not know what was behind his sufferings when he was going through them. Yet, these five people did not help Job during this time of grief.

First, we have already considered Job's wife. Although Job should have received support from his wife and she should have encouraged him through this time of shared difficulty, she was a tool of Satan to pull him away from God. During his anguish, she told Job, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). So, Job not only had to overcome the trials of losing all his other family, servants, and possessions, but he lost his wife with regard to serving the Lord! He recognized that she was just like "one of the foolish women" in the way she spoke (Job 2:10).

Second, Job had three friends, plus one other who would be with him through the book of Job. At first, Job's friends acted in support by coming together to mourn with and comfort him. For seven days, they just sat together on the ground and did not say anything (see Job 2:11-13). Then, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar began to speak with Job. And, when they did (along with Elihu later), they kept trying to blame Job for all of his suffering. They reasoned with human reasoning and concluded that Job must have done something to make God angry and punish Him in this way.

Satan works through people around us

Satan often tries to get us down and then pounce (like a lion on its prey) at these times. During our sufferings, Satan wants to work through the people in our lives to try and discourage us even further. Certainly, Job's "comforters" were not very comforting to him. And, sometimes our "comforters" (even though they may have good intentions) are not very helpful to us. In fact, they may often diagnose the problem incorrectly and identify the wrong

solution (i.e. like Job's wife who told him to curse God and die).

One example of Satan working through people around us is found in Matthew 16:21-23. On this occasion, Jesus was showing His disciples that He would go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and then be raised on the third day. But, Peter rebuked Jesus and said, "Far be it from you, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" Then, Jesus recognized that Satan was working through Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

We Don't Always Know "Why?"

Perhaps the thing that makes the storms of life most difficult is trying to understand *why* they happen to us. And, although the Bible does help us to understand some general facts about our suffering (as we have even considered in this lesson), the simple truth is we may never fully understand what is behind our suffering.

Job never knew why

Of all the enormous suffering that Job experienced, we are never told that Job learned what had went on "behind the scenes." In fact, through all the back and forth that happened between Job and the four people who spoke to him from chapters 3 through 37, it appears as if he did not know. Although we are given information concerning God and Satan and why Job experienced these things, Job did not have these answers. Even when the Lord spoke to Job in chapters 38-41, God did not tell Him what happened "behind the scenes." Instead, God just helped Job appreciate how great He really is and how little mankind really knows.

Like Job, there are many things that we will go through during the course of our lives that we will not fully understand. So, one of the things that we will have to learn is how we should not have to have all the answers in order to just have faith in God and patiently endure the storms of life. Yet, there are

many times that people become discouraged and turn away from God because they do not have the answers to satisfy them.

Choosing to maintain integrity

I want you to consider two responses to the same situation and not understanding the reason why. Remember, although the book of Job focuses on Job, he was not the only one who would have endured this storm. Consider the fact that his wife also experienced the loss of her husband's wealth, her ten children (supposing they were all her children), and watched her husband be inflicted with painful boils all over his body to the point that he became unrecognizable to those who knew him (Job 2:12). The implication is that she also did not know why any of this had happened.

In response to this situation, Job's wife did not demonstrate moral integrity. Rather than having faith in God and patiently enduring the sufferings, she criticized her husband for doing so and wanted him to curse God before he died (Job 2:9). She had allowed the storms of their lives to embitter her against God.

Yet, Job did not respond in this same way. In fact, Job held fast to his integrity. Through these early days of his suffering, he worshiped God, blessed the name of the Lord, and did not sin or charge God with wrong (Job 1:20-22; Job 2:10). However, by the end of the book, we do see Job repenting for uttering things he "did not understand," things that were too wonderful for him, which he did "not know" (Job 42:1-6).

How will you respond when you face the storms of life? Will you hold fast to your integrity and honor God in your life? Or, will you turn away from God, blame Him, or act like those who have no hope because they do not serve God? Please recognize that you can choose to maintain your integrity before God, even as you endure the fiercest of storms in life!

Conclusion

We will all experience storms during this life. Some will be fiercer than others. But, as we learn through Job, we can control how we respond to these storms. And, if we will hold fast to our anchor during these times, we will come out of the storm better than we were before (at least spiritually speaking)! But, if we do not hold fast to the one anchor that will hold us, we will surely become lost at sea and headed for destruction!

Study Questions

What are some of the storms of life? What is the anchor for the soul?

1. Bad Things Happen To Good People

Was Job a good man? What happened to him?

Will we experience suffering that is unrelated to how we live?

2. God Is In Control

How does the story of Job illustrate that God is in control?

Since God is in control, is He also to blame for the bad things that happen? Why or why not?

How was Job's response to his suffering different than his wife's response? What can you learn from this?

3. There Is An Enemy

Is Satan active on this earth?

How can all suffering be traced back to Satan?

4. Sometimes When It Rains, It Pours

How much suffering did Job experience all at the same time?

Will we ever face tests that seem unbearable?

5. Dealing With Bad "Comforters"

Who were Job's five "comforters"? How did they try to comfort him?

How does Satan work through the people around us?

6. We Don't Always Know "Why?"

Did Job ever know why he suffered?

We Have an Anchor!

Lesson: 2

Fighting Against The Current

There are two major threats to your faithfulness to God. The first is the storms of life that were discussed in lesson 1. There are certainly many times that these storms catch people unprepared and cause people to doubt in the existence of God, discourage people to the point that they give up on serving God, distract people from what is truly important by causing them to get caught up in the moment, etc. These storms include deaths, sickness/disease, persecution, temptations, and many other things.

The second is the current that is at work in the world we live. Just as there is a current in the oceans that work to pull things away from shore little by little, there are forces at work in this world that are trying to pull those who have come to Jesus Christ farther and farther away from Him. And, these forces (unlike the storms of life) often work very gradually over an extended period of time.

Although the storms of life put us in danger of being swept out to sea and becoming lost very quickly or having our vessels destroyed and drowning, the current that we face acts much differently. It is a slower and much more gradual

process of pulling us away from God. Therefore, the problem that we face with this current is drifting.

Hebrews 2:1-4 identifies this real threat to our faiths. “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

Fortunately, the anchor that God has given to us not only helps us to survive the storms of life, but it also helps us fight against the current that is trying to pull us back into the ocean of sin. Hebrews 6:19 says, “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.” This anchor, once again, is the hope of eternal salvation in Heaven through Jesus Christ.

In this second lesson, we need to recognize this additional threat of drifting. Although the storms of life may receive the most attention, the current that we face may be even more dangerous. You see, the storms of life are much easier identified in our daily lives than the current is. The current is working every single day, moment-by-moment, to try to pull you inches farther from the Lord. And, because it works so gradually, it is difficult to perceive when it is happening. To help us think about the danger of drifting, I have selected the text of Hebrews 2:1-4. By using this text as a foundation for our study, we will be able to gain a greater understanding of this threat and how we can fight against it.

The Process Of Drifting

Regarding the threat of drifting away from God’s salvation, please notice that the writer of Hebrews said that “we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away”

(Hebrews 2:1). The idea is that we must pay very careful attention to the things that God has said regarding His salvation in the pages of the New Testament. Therefore, this tells me that the process of drifting is one that is characterized by carelessness. For, it is not that the current is typically so strong that it overpowers a vessel on the sea. Instead, it typically is only dangerous because people are not watching the threat and being as alert as they should be.

Ignore the threat

There are some who treat the threat of drifting as being an irrelevant problem in their lives. Just like those who do not properly anchor their boats because they are in a hurry or because they do not perceive any real threat, there are many people who ignore the threat of drifting in their spiritual lives. “It won’t happen to me” is one of the most dangerous mindsets that we can ever have. Somehow, people think that all the dangers and threats apply to everyone – except them.

So, there are some who live their daily lives completely unaware of the forces that are at work in their lives to pull them away from the Lord. Or, if they are aware of those forces, they think that they are so strong that the current will not be successful. And, it is possible that some have even done a good job being aware of the dangers of drifting in some areas of his/her life, but have completely ignored another area. Yet, Satan and his allies will surely find the area that you have ignored to try to pull you away from the Lord. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Remember that Satan is often not so bold as to present you with a temptation that is easily recognizable. Instead, he will often try to work discretely so that you will not recognize that you are being tempted. In fact, I believe that Satan knows that many Christians will not completely renounce their faith in a single instant because of a single temptation. However, many Christians are not fastened to their anchor so securely that they are not prone to drifting – because they have ignored this threat and all the ways Satan can use this threat against them.

Deny the problem

It has been said that sin takes us farther than we wanted to go and keeps us longer than we wanted to stay. Whenever we ignore the threat of drifting, Satan is sure to use that as an avenue to pull us away from God. Now, just think about how one moment, a boat seems safe, resting partly on the shore. Then, through a process of an almost imperceptible ebb and flow, the boat goes from partly on the shore, to completely in the water, to a few feet off the shore, to a short distance from the shore, to a mile away from the shore, to being out of sight.

Somewhere along in the process, people usually tend to notice. But, sometimes the reality of the problem is not perceived. Many conclude, “There’s nothing wrong” – even though the boat has drifted back into the water. On a spiritual level, I think this same thing happens whenever Satan works to get us to agree to compromise our values inch-by-inch (perhaps not realizing the real impact of what we are doing). Yet, each inch takes us that much farther away from Christ than where we need to be!

I think King David is a good example of this. David is described in the Scriptures as being a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). Almost certainly, Satan would have had great difficulty in getting this kind of man to go “miles” away from God in a single instant. As you read the Biblical record of this man’s life, you would never suspect that this man would ever commit such wickedness as murder. And, I suppose that Satan recognized the same thing. So, rather than tempting David to commit murder as a first attempt to lure him from God, he began “inching” David from God (as recorded in 2 Samuel 11). First, Satan was successful in getting David to lust after a woman he saw. Second, Satan got David to inquire about her. Third, he got David to send for her after he knew she was another man’s wife. Fourth, he got David to commit adultery with her. Fifth, he got David to act deceptively in trying to cover his sinful tracks. Sixth, whenever David’s plans failed, he got David to effectively murder the woman’s husband. Then, 2 Samuel 12 indicates that David had, apparently, denied the problem. For, it was not until after Nathan

(the prophet) opened David's eyes to the fact that he had left the Lord that David repented.

Justify the situation

There's a point at which the problem of our drifting finally is brought to our attention. Maybe we see it ourselves or maybe someone points it out to us. But, if Satan is to be effective in capturing our souls, he must also convince us to justify the situation. This, to his credit, is where David discontinued his drifting and returned to the Lord. Rather than justifying his sin, he embraced his sin and corrected it.

Yet, there are many people who will justify their drifting and continue to inch farther and farther away from God. They often think, "It happens to all of us." Or, "I'm not *that* far away." So, rather than viewing all of the steps of their digression as being a departure from the safety of the shore and being spiritually dead, they have now viewed their sin as being "no big deal."

David's predecessor, King Saul, is an example of one who justified his drifting. God had commanded Saul to "utterly destroy" all the Amalekites and the things they had (1 Samuel 15:1-3). Yet, Saul and the people "spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed" (1 Samuel 15:9). Whenever God confronted Saul about this digression, Saul first denied that he had done anything wrong by saying that he had obeyed God's commandment (1 Samuel 15:13). Then, he attempted to justify the situation by claiming that he was going to sacrifice what he had spared to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:15). Yet, God was not pleased with his justification!

Embrace the new reality

The final stage of drifting is fully embracing the new reality. Although it is possible to stay in the previous stages of being ignorant of the threat, denying the problem, or justifying the situation, at some point, many people do eventually look up long enough to notice that they have drifted. Yet, there are many who just embrace their new reality rather than

seek to correct it. By this time, they may have drifted so far away from the Lord that they will just claim that their lives have gone in a "new direction."

Some who reach this point believe that they have been "enlightened" and "progressed" in their thinking. Now, they have new goals and new morals as their lives have experienced a complete transformation. However, rather than becoming enlightened, they have actually went into darkness. Rather than making progress, they have actually digressed. And, rather than making a transformation, they have decayed into their previous condition of living in sin (or have even went to a point that is worse than where they were before).

Maybe there is no better example than Judas Iscariot. Here is a man who was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. He spent time in close proximity to Jesus. He would have heard Jesus teach, saw Jesus' love and compassion, and witnessed Jesus' miracles. Yet, Satan was able to enter Judas' heart so that Judas went to the enemies of Jesus and conspired with them to betray Him for thirty pieces of silver. At the appropriate time, Judas led a mob of Jesus' enemies to arrest Him and identified Jesus to them by kissing Him. Then, Jesus was led away and would have the sentence of death put on Him by the Jews. Whenever Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned, he was "remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver" and proceeded to go out and hang himself (Matthew 27:3-10). Judas saw that he was partly responsible for the death of Jesus. To his credit, he returned the money. But, whenever he looked up and saw that he had drifted so far from God, he considered his new reality so hopeless that he compounded sin upon sin by killing Himself.

The Causes Of Drifting

Satan wants to catch us in the currents of life and cause us to drift away from God. And, he does not want us to recognize the problem until we think it's too late to change or until we are so set in our "new" ways that we simply will not change. So, rather than getting caught up in this process we need to recognize that God warns us about drifting away

(Hebrews 2:1-4) and determine to be aware of the causes of drifting in our own lives. Therefore, let's consider a sample of what the "current" (tide) that is attempting to pull us from the shore looks like in our lives.

False religious teaching

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 says, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

One of the most effective ways that Satan can work to draw true Christians away from Jesus Christ is through false religious teaching and practices. You see, Satan is perfectly okay with you being religious and considering yourself a "Christian," as long as you are not actually living in faithful obedience to Jesus Christ. Today, Satan tries to "inch" Christians away from Jesus Christ by exposing them to teachings that claim to be from the Bible, but really are not. So, Satan gets Christians to read the newest and most popular "Christian" books or listen to the most popular "Christian" teachers who will teach some truth, while mixing in a few false doctrines and ideas as well. Or, he will convince Christians that it will not hurt to attend the assemblies of churches that are practicing and teaching things that are not according to God's standard of truth.

At first, perhaps the Christian is on guard when he/she listens to these things. But, through constant exposure to false ideas, many Christians (and entire churches) begin to drift away from the truth. Their morality begins to reflect more and more of what the denominations accept, the language they use is less and less according to Scripture, there is a greater acceptance of the people who are part of man-made churches, and there is less of an emphasis placed on the doctrine of Jesus Christ and the New Testament pattern.

Worldly "wisdom"

1 Corinthians 1:18-21 says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

Satan loves to convince people that they know better than God does. So, Satan tries to get those who are Christians to accept the "wisdom" that the world offers. This "wisdom" is being taught all around us. It is in the schools, it is in the media, it is being shared with us by our friends and family members, and everywhere we look. Those who are not following Jesus Christ have determined that they know best regarding how this world came into existence and how life originated. They think they know what will produce a happy life better than God does. They think they know the meaning of life on earth better than God. And, they think they can determine what is right and what is wrong without God.

At first, those who are Christians may not be willing to accept some of the more extreme beliefs of those who are not Christians. But, through constant exposure to these false ideas, many Christians begin to drift away from the truth that God has revealed and the moral standard that He approves. They begin to accept some of the conclusions offered by the "scientific" community that undermines the Biblical record of creation. They begin to focus more on the pursuit of happiness, success, and purpose through wealth, earthly pleasures, earthly relationships, community involvement, and improving the world physically than they do on living for Jesus and leading others to Him. And, they start to combine the standard of morality that the world accepts with their "Christian" faith.

Peers

1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’” Proverbs 1:10 says, “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.” Proverbs 1:15 says, “My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path.”

One of the ways that Satan gets us used to the kinds of new ideas, situations, and experiences offered by the world is through the people who are around us. Whether it be our family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, classmates, or someone else, the people who are around us and come into regular contact with us have a way of influencing us – for the good or the bad. Certainly, if these people have not fully embraced the truths contained in the Bible, then they will influence us in the opposite direction.

At first, those who are Christians may not be willing to accept some of their more extreme invitations to engage in sin. But, through constant pressure by the peers we want to be accepted by, the more willing many become to compromise the truth and practice error. Maybe a girlfriend or boyfriend wants you to go just a little farther than you are comfortable going. Maybe an unbelieving spouse gets you to go to his/her church “just once.” Maybe a co-worker pressures you into going to a ballgame rather than church services. Maybe a classmate pressures you into having “just one” drink of alcohol. Then, once you have done that “one” thing, the pressure is on to do the next thing. Or, another one of your peers is pressuring you to do something else entirely that is pulling you one inch farther away from God than you have already went.

Culture

John 15:18-19 says, “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.”

The ways of the world are different from the ways of God (see 1 John 2:15-17). This is true about any culture in any community at any point in time.

The fact of the matter is that Christians live in this world, but they must not be “of” this world. That is, they must choose to live differently than the world lives and think differently than the world thinks (Romans 12:2). Yet, because the ways of the world are different from God’s ways, the world will hate those who follow Jesus Christ and try to pressure them to change (sometimes even through violent persecution). So, Christians face the constant pressure of living in a world that is not interested in serving Jesus Christ.

At first, those who are Christians may recognize the fact that the ways of the world are different from what they stand for as Christians. But, over time, the world can pressure Christians into becoming desensitized to wickedness. One of the most effective ways that the world is now inching Christians away from Jesus Christ is through media in culture. So, as Christians watch television programs and movies that are written and produced by those who do not share all of their values, they are introduced to new ideas that are contrary to the ways of God. The same is true with regard to music, books, magazines, blogs, games, etc. Very slowly, sin is presented as being “not so bad” – and, actually, kind of enjoyable. Over time and exposure to various elements within a sinful culture, Christians can find their values and beliefs completely changed to look more and more like the world.

The “daily grind”

Hebrews 11:24-26 says, “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.”

While the causes of drifting I have identified up to this point may seem somewhat obvious, let’s focus now on one that may not be quite so obvious. While we live in this world, it is very easy to get consumed by the “things” that make up our earthly lives so that we lose sight of what really matters. Moses could have done this. He was the adopted grandson of the king of Egypt. He could have just enjoyed the pleasures of being part of a royal family

and tried to excel in Egyptian politics. But, he made a choice concerning what really mattered. And, that choice was to serve God!

At first, those who are Christians may have strong morals and priorities. However, as bills mount, maybe we put our jobs ahead of God, attending church services, or fulfilling the roles in our families “just until we can catch up and get a little bit ahead.” As we run from one activity to another activity for our children, maybe we fail to study the Bible, teach our children the ways of God, pray, be involved in teaching the gospel, attend church services, etc. as we should “until things calm down.” The point is that it is very easy to make one compromise after another with very little thought while we react to the daily grind of living life on this earth. However, Christians must make a choice to serve the Lord first rather than getting caught up in this constant drift away from God!

The Dangers Of Drifting

There are forces at work in this world to pull us, inch by inch, away from God. We have already seen that one of the reasons why this is so dangerous is that it is difficult to notice each one of these digressions away from God. So, drifting can result in people being away from God and not even realizing it! But, there are also some other dangers that are involved in drifting. Two that we should consider are identified in Hebrews 2:1-4.

We will receive a just punishment

Listen to Hebrews 2:2-4 again. “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

The point is that of comparison between those who did not obey the Law of Moses (which was spoken through angels, see Galatians 3:19) and those

who do not obey the new law of Jesus Christ because they drift away from it. The Hebrew writer calls to our minds the fact that those who did not obey the Law of Moses in the Old Testament were punished appropriately for their sins. Think about Nadab and Abihu being destroyed by fire from God for using fire from an unauthorized source in a sacrifice (Leviticus 10:1-2). Think about Korah and those who rebelled against God with him being swallowed by the earth (Numbers 16). Think about Jonah being swallowed by a great fish whenever he disobeyed God’s commandment (Jonah 1-2). There are many examples.

Then, the point is that if those who disobeyed the Law of Moses (which was spoken through angels) were appropriately punished in these ways, certainly we should expect to be punished appropriately (receive a “just reward”) if we neglect the salvation that has been brought through Jesus Christ and drift away. Yes, God has promised that those who are not faithful to Him will spend eternity in Hell fire. Revelation 21:8 says, “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.”

Neglect God’s great salvation

Part of what the punishment those who drift away from God will be due is the result of neglecting the great salvation that Jesus Christ has made possible and that the gospel describes. This “great salvation” is the opportunity to live eternally in Heaven with God rather than spend eternity in the torments of Hell fire!

Surely, then, those who had once tasted the salvation offered by Jesus Christ and drifted away from it so as to be eternally lost in Hell fire will experience a “worse punishment” than others because they will know that they forfeited salvation for things on the earth! Although the fires of Hell will burn just as hot for others as it will for these Christians who drifted from Christ, the anguish will likely be intensified because of the knowledge of what they gave up.

Listen to Hebrews 10:26-31, recognizing that it addresses those who had once been Christians, but drifted away from Him. “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

The Cure For Drifting

Drifting is not only dangerous, it is spiritually deadly. It is the cause for many people losing their souls and spending eternity in Hell fire. But, what is the cure for drifting? Consider two points.

Be observant

As we have seen, one of the problems involved in drifting is that it is difficult to recognize that we are drifting whenever it is happening. So, we need to practice regular and honest self-examination in order to see whether or not we have drifted from God. 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, “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.” We need to make these self-evaluations, to look up from the individual “moments” in our lives and see the trajectory our lives are on. Are they headed toward God and growing in our faith (according to what God has revealed in the Bible), or are they headed away from Him? But, these evaluations must be performed with complete honesty – for they will not help us if we deceive ourselves.

Consider a few “warning signs” that we are drifting. First, those who are falling “asleep” (spiritually) are drifting. God wants us to be “awake” and living zealously for Him (Ephesians 5:15). So, if you are becoming complacent in your spiritual life and find yourself less interested in spiritual things than you once were, know that you are drifting. Maybe it’s easier for you to miss church services than it once was. Maybe it’s not as important for you to pray or study your Bible as it used to be. Maybe you are not as careful about the way you dress or the way you talk as you once were.

Second, those who stop exposing sin and start fellowshiping sin are drifting. God wants us to have no fellowship with the “unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Ephesians 5:11). So, if you are becoming more accepting of the sinful things that are going on around you, you are drifting. Maybe being around profanity doesn’t bother you as much as it should. Maybe seeing people immodestly dressed doesn’t concern you very much anymore. Maybe homosexuality, adultery, and sexual relations outside of marriage do not seem quite as bad as God says they are. Maybe you are even a little more comfortable being around people who are actively engaged in sinful things.

Third, those who stop bearing fruit for God are drifting. God expects His people to bear fruit that is pleasing to Him (see John 15:1-8). So, if you are not involved in the good things God commands you to be involved in, you are drifting. Maybe you do not do anything to teach those who are lost about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Maybe you do not visit the people who are lonely and in need. Maybe you don’t help people you have the opportunity to help. Maybe you don’t read your Bible every day. Maybe you don’t pray like God wants you to pray. Maybe you don’t attend church services as often as God wants you to. Maybe you aren’t being kind. Maybe you aren’t showing love toward all people. Maybe you aren’t willing to forgive. Maybe you aren’t being patient.

Be careful

Whenever you observe the fact that you are drifting you need to exercise careful diligence to return to the Lord completely. Hebrews 2:1 says,

“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.” Careful attention must be given to our present situation if we have drifted. Just as carelessness is behind our drifting away, carefulness is the key to returning to Christ. It will take great effort to return to Jesus Christ. Remember, the currents in this world pull us away from Christ, not toward Him. So, we will need to get to work rowing against the current of life, holding to the truths that God has revealed in His word.

We must be careful to make the necessary corrections to the areas in which we have sinned. Honestly evaluate the areas of sin that are in your life and change them – no matter the cost! Determine not to accept the “wisdom” or ways of this world as a standard for how you live your life. Even if you must go against those you love, be careful to observe God’s commands! Those who have drifted away from Christ are told that they must repent of their sins, confess their sins to God, and ask Him for forgiveness (see Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:8-2:2). Those who have sinned in a public way should also confess their sins to those knowledgeable of them (i.e. James 5:16).

We must also be careful to do the things God wants us to do. God doesn’t just want you to *avoid* doing some things. He also wants you *to do* some things. He wants you to study His word every day. He wants you to join a faithful local church and attend all the assemblies that you possibly can. He wants you to teach people the gospel. He wants you to do good to others. He wants you to let your light shine. There are many things you must be careful to do.

Then, we must be careful to anchor ourselves in hope. Once you return from drifting, you must put your anchor down firmly so that you will not get caught up in the current again! Remember, we have an anchor for the soul that is both sure and steadfast (Hebrews 6:19)!

Conclusion

The currents of this life are trying to pull every Christian away from God. Some currents are stronger than others. But, as we learn from Hebrews 2:1-4, it is possible to refuse to get caught up in the currents – and live for Jesus. If we will cast our anchors and hold firmly to them, we will not be caught drifting when our lives on this earth end!

Study Questions

What are the two major threats to your faithfulness to God?

1. The Process Of Drifting

Who can you ignore the threat of drifting?

How can you deny the problem of drifting?

How can you justify your drifting?

How can you embrace the new reality brought about by your drifting?

2. The Causes Of Drifting

How can false religious teaching cause you to drift?

How can you know whether you are drifting? What are some warning signs?

How can worldly “wisdom” cause you to drift?

How will carefulness help you correct and avoid drifting?

How can your peers cause you to drift?

How can culture cause you to drift?

How can the “daily grind” cause you to drift?

3. The Dangers Of Drifting

What kind of punishment will drifters receive?

What salvation have drifters neglected?

4. The Cure For Drifting

We Have an Anchor!

Lesson: 3

Seeking Reconciliation Through Jesus Christ

We all face many things that try to pull us away from God in this life and the eternal salvation that He offers. We have already seen that there are many storms that try and sweep us away quickly through discouragement, feeling overwhelmed, fear, worry/anxiety, depression, etc. Then, we have seen that there are also forces at work to gradually move us away from God through a constant current.

Sadly, we have all gotten caught up in one of these and found ourselves away from God (Romans 3:23). Perhaps we are “lost at sea.” Perhaps we are drowning. Perhaps we have no idea which way we need to go in order to make it back to shore. Or, perhaps we have just begun drifting and can see the shore, but just need some guidance to make it back.

Whatever the case is, anyone who is not being faithful to the Lord has no help from the anchor for the soul. As we have seen, Hebrews 6:19 identifies hope as an “anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast.” But, as we will see in this lesson, there is no hope outside of Jesus Christ. Just listen to Colossians 1:19-29. This will be the main text for this third lesson of our study.

“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”

In this third lesson, we want to consider some basic lessons from this text concerning the reality of living for our sins, why we need to be reconciled to God, how we can find reconciliation, and the results of being reconciled to God. Yes, we have to make very careful evaluation of ourselves to know whether we are in fellowship with God or separated from Him before we can drop our anchors. For, if we are not in fellowship with God, we have no true hope to hold on to. Instead, we are spiritually lost and headed for certain destruction!

Wicked Works Make Us Enemies Of God

It is not the storms of life that separate us from God. Nor is it the very existence of a current that is trying to pull us away from Him. Instead, it is the sin that these things tempt us to commit. So, we must recognize that wicked works make us enemies of God.

Alienated from God by sin

Listen to how James describes temptation 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.”

Whether through the storms of life or the currents, we face temptation whenever our physical desires entice us to respond in a way that goes against the instructions of God. Then, we commit sin whenever we give in to those desires and fulfill them in a way that does violate God’s laws. And, we should notice that the outcome of such sinful activity is not harmless. Recognize that the end result of committing sin is death.

But, this death is not of a physical nature. As we have already considered, physical death has been in the world ever since Adam and Eve sinned against God and were cast out of the Garden of Eden. Yet, there is a type of death that is even greater than physical death. This is spiritual death.

Spiritual death is separation from God – and is the result whenever we sin against God. For instance, Colossians 1:21 demonstrates this to be so. Paul says, “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.” Notice first that the end result is alienation from God and being His enemies. This is to be cut off from all fellowship with Him, separated from all the spiritual blessings that He offers. This is how we can be dead while we still live (see 1 Timothy 5:6) – dead spiritually while alive physically.

Then, notice *why* Paul said these people were alienated from and enemies of God. It was because of their minds through “wicked works.” First, recognize that everything we do contrary to the will of God begins in the mind. Romans 8:5-8 demonstrates this to be true. “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

So, if our minds (hearts) are focused on the things of this world, we will find ourselves doing wicked things. This is because our actions stem from our hearts/minds. Jesus said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19). But, notice that these are “wicked works.” They are not things that have God’s approval in any way. In fact, sin is anything that violates the laws of God. There are no such things as “big sins” and “little sins.” All sin is “wicked” in God’s sight and causes us to be separated from God.

But, why does our sin separate/alienate us from God? 1 John 1:5-7 gives us the answer. “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

God is holy (Revelation 4:8). He is completely separated from everything that is wicked and devoted to everything that is good. The picture in 1 John 1:5 is that He is “light” and completely separated from darkness. So, it is simply impossible for us to live our lives for the sinful ways of darkness and still expect to be in fellowship with God!

What it means to be enemies of God

Not only does our sin alienate us from God, but you should observe that it also makes us the “enemies” of God. This is because the ways we have chosen to live our lives are opposed to the ways of God. Rather than following God as our Father, we have chosen to follow the devil, doing his desires (see John 8:44).

James 4:4 makes it perfectly clear. “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” As I have mentioned already, the ways of this world are contrary to the ways of God. 1 John 2:15-17 commands, “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.”

Now, I want you to consider what it means to be enemies of God, having chosen to do the things that are in direct opposition to His will. The principle that we must recognize is that God will show vengeance on those who are His enemies. For instance, Deuteronomy 32:41 records God as saying, “If I whet My glittering sword, And My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to My enemies, And repay those who hate Me.” Similarly, Hebrews 10:30-31 says, “For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

This vengeance of God can be illustrated in the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16. He and some others from the Israelites rose up against Moses and Aaron, saying that they had taken too much on themselves and exalted themselves. However, by rejecting the authority of Moses and Aaron, these men were rejecting the Lord (who gave them their authority, see Numbers 16:11). Therefore, the Lord caused a “new thing” to happen and punish them. Numbers 16:31-33 says, “Now it came to pass, as he

finished speaking these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men of Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly.” Then, whenever the congregation of Israel complained the next day that Moses and Aaron had killed some from Israel, the Lord’s wrath burned against them and brought a plague against the people that caused 14,700 more people died.

Certainly this is just one example that demonstrates that no one should ever desire to be or remain enemies of God. It *never* ends well for those who are His enemies. They never end up being victorious against God – not even if He tolerates their wickedness for a short time. And, we must recognize that God continues to promise His vengeance to those who are His enemies today, even if He allows them to practice their wickedness during their earthly lives. For instance, whenever Jesus Christ returns with His mighty angels, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 says, “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

Enemies Of God Have No Hope

There is absolutely no true hope for those who are enemies of God. Unfortunately, many people have become so involved in their wicked works or have believed enough lies that they either do not care that they are enemies of God or have a false hope. Yet, God will certainly show His vengeance on all of His enemies one Day. Therefore, those who are separated from God need to recognize that they have no anchor to help them throughout the storms of life or to help them battle the currents!

No hope on this earth

Hope is what helps us to get through the difficult times in life. But, those who have allowed sin to separate themselves from God do not have a true hope while they are living on this earth (although many have been deceived and have a false hope).

There is, of course, little hope that pertains to anything about life on this earth. Whenever you are standing by the casket of a dear loved one, where can you possibly find any kind of comfort if you do not have God in your life? Whenever you are struggling with illness or lying in bed waiting to go into the operating room for a serious surgery, where can you possibly find peace if you do not have God in your life? Whenever you are facing serious family struggles, where you can possibly find joy if you do not have God in your life? Whenever you are out of work, where do you possibly find any assurance of a next meal if you do not have God in your life?

Of course, these are just samples. But, the overall question is this: How can you possibly bear the loads of life without the help of God? Yet, those who are living in sin are attempting to navigate the stormy waters of life by themselves. It is no wonder, then, why so many people in this life suffer from depression and anxiety, commit suicide, and have no real joy while they live on this earth!

Those who are separated from God by wicked works have no access to the spiritual blessings that God provides while people live on this earth. It is only through Jesus that we can experience the “hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:23). For, the apostle Paul described the situation the Gentiles were in without Jesus Christ by saying that they were “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Without God in this world means that we have no source of true joy in our lives. It means that we have no promise of having our prayers answered. It means that we have no assurance that God will give us the things we need to sustain our earthly lives. It means that we have no peace with God while we live. And, all of this means that there is no hope for

overcoming the things that we experience and living with true joy!

No hope beyond this earth

Then, not only do people who are separated from God have no hope during their earthly lives regarding these spiritual blessings, but they also have no hope of anything good beyond their physical lives. The fact is that those who are living in their sins are experiencing the best that they will ever experience. But, these pleasures are passing. They simply will not last.

Then, after living a life of sin and still experiencing the sorrows and pains of this earthly life, these will experience the eternal consequences of their sin. This is eternal spiritual death (separation from God) in Hell fire. On the Day when Jesus Christ returns and judges all people, Jesus says that He will tell those who did not live for Him, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). These “will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46).

Listen to Revelation 21:8. “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.” So, after dealing with the sorrows of death, disease, accidents, lost relationships, etc. while living on this earth, the punishment that is awaiting those who are enemies of God is an eternity in a place called Hell. This place is properly identified as being “the second death” because it is eternal separation from God. And, it is a place that is described as being a terrible punishment.

It is a place that is depicted by a lake that is burning with fire and brimstone. There will be great pain, anguish, and weeping (see Matthew 25:30; Romans 2:6-11). It will be worse than physical mutilation (Mark 9:42-48). And, the fires and destruction of this place are never ending (Mark 9:42-48). Then, the only ones who will be with you in this place are the others who have died in their sins, the devil, and the devil’s angels (see Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 21:8). God will not be there to

offer you any kind of comfort whatsoever (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

This is the only real future “hope” that those who are enemies of God have after their earthly lives are over: Unimaginable torment and suffering. Remember, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 has promised us that God will show His vengeance toward those who do not know or obey Him!

Reconciliation Only Possible Through Jesus Christ

Now, it has been very important for us to consider the hopelessness of those who are separated from God, who are lost and drifting at sea. We need to recognize the reality of our lives on this earth without God. For, it is only when we realize our true situations while we are living in sin that we will look for the true answer that will provide us with true hope. This answer is Jesus Christ. As we struggle through the sinful ways of our lives, we must recognize that Jesus Christ provides the one and only way back to God. He is like a lighthouse along the shore that beams its light to show us the way. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

No reconciliation without Jesus

As we think about the reality of being lost at sea, we must recognize that we do not have the strength to make it back to shore by ourselves. Once we have sinned, we cannot do anything to earn our own salvation. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Separation from God (spiritual death) is what we have all earned by our sins. And, there is no life except through Jesus Christ. It does not matter how many good things we may do the rest of our lives. Even if we never committed any sins for the rest of our lives, we cannot be saved by ourselves.

Instead, the opportunity to be saved is only found through Jesus Christ. For, Romans 6:23

continues and says that God has provided the “gift” of eternal life in Jesus Christ. Listen to Ephesians 2:1-10.

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

“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. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

The blood of Jesus

It is only through Jesus Christ that we can be reconciled to God. Listen to Colossians 1:19-22 again. “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.”

God loved us so much that He did not want us to be hopeless during our lives on this earth or spend eternity in Hell fire. So, He sent His only begotten Son (Jesus Christ) into the world to live a sinless life, suffer, and die on the cross. Then, Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day – forever conquering the enemy of death.

Now, we can be reconciled to God. To be “reconciled” is to be brought back together. As we have already considered, there was nothing that we could possibly have offered to God that would have been sufficient to bring us back together with God. It was only the sacrifice that God offered on our behalves that made this reconciliation possible!

We read about this reconciliation through His “word of reconciliation” (the gospel of Jesus Christ). 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 says, “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.”

Through the blood of Jesus Christ, the sins that had separated us from God can be completely washed away. And, now, listen to Romans 5:6-11. As we read this passage, think about yourself lost in sin, an enemy of God. Think about being lost at sea and unable to find your way to shore. Think about the fact that you would surely drown – except for Jesus Christ!

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

Though we were enemies of God, we can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. And, also notice that this passage demonstrates that we are “justified” (made just as if we had never committed sin) through Jesus Christ, saved from experiencing the wrath of God that would be shown toward His enemies, and saved by the life of Jesus. Now, we have the opportunity to “rejoice in God through our

Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation”!

The plan of salvation

So, God offers each and every person today the opportunity through Jesus Christ to be reconciled to Him. But, we must recognize that God does not force us to be saved. We must grab hold of the lifeline that God has thrown to us through Jesus Christ!

Listen to more from 2 Corinthians 5. “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” (verses 20-21). Then, chapter 6 picks up the thought, urging us to take this “lifeline” immediately. “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (6:1-2).

We must do our parts to be reconciled to God by obeying God’s plan of salvation that is outlined in the pages of the gospel’s message. This message of the gospel is God’s power to salvation (Romans 1:16). But, what is it that God requires of those who are lost in sin in order to be reconciled to Him?

For those who have never become Christians and received the forgiveness of their sins, God requires the following. (1) You must hear His word. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Hearing God’s message and instructions, necessarily, comes before an individual can believe and obey them (Acts 18:8)!

(2) You must believe. Faith/belief in God and Christ is essential for salvation. Jesus said, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). However, the Bible also teaches that faith without works of obedience will not save us (James 2:14-26)!

(3) Repent of your sins. Jesus said, “unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

God now “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Repentance involves a change in mindset regarding past sin (to view past sin with abhorrence and to determine to live differently in the future).

(4) Confess Christ. Romans 10:9-10 says, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” The confession that is commanded in this passage is *not* a confession of your sins; but, the confession of the Lord Jesus with your mouth. A good example of this confession is found in Acts 8:37 when the man of Ethiopia (just prior to being baptized) said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

(5) Be immersed in water (baptized). Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but, he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). Paul wrote that you are “baptized into Christ” (Galatians 3:27). That is, baptism brings you into union with Jesus Christ. Peter wrote that baptism “now saves us” – just as water saved Noah and his family (1 Peter 3:20-21). Clearly, the Bible teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation. Baptism is the point at which an individual becomes a Christian and is forgiven of his/her sins. It is at this point that the sinner is washed, justified, and sanctified through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Acts 18:8; Acts 22:16)! It is also important to understand that the Bible teaches the action involved in being baptized is immersion in water (not sprinkling or pouring – and not Holy Spirit baptism). In fact, baptism is described as being a “burial” in Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12. Therefore, that old man of sin we put to death is buried with Christ in baptism and we are raised to walk in newness of life!

(6) Remain faithful. When you hear God’s word, believe, repent of your sins, confess Christ, and are immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins, you become a Christian – and are added to Christ’s church (Acts 2:41, 47)! However, this does not mean that you are “once saved, always saved”! Instead, the Bible teaches that you must be faithful to

the Lord unto death in order to receive the crown of life (the eternal reward in Heaven, Revelation 2:10).

Then, if you have become a Christian at some point in your life, but have drifted away from God or gotten caught up in the storms of life again, you must consider what you need to do in order to come back to Him. The Bible teaches that you must repent of your sins, confess your sins to God, and ask Him for forgiveness. For instance, whenever a man named Simon had become a Christian (by doing the things previously discussed) and then committed sin, he was told, “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22). 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Then, if we have sinned in a public way so that others are aware of our sin, we should do the best that we can to confess our sins to those who are knowledgeable of them and be reconciled to those we have harmed (see James 5:16 and Matthew 5:23-24).

The Blessings Of Reconciliation Through Jesus Christ

Through Jesus Christ we can be saved from the devastating consequences of our sins! If we will be obedient to His commandments that are given in the pages of the New Testament, we can be reconciled to God through Him. Now, having been brought safely to shore through Jesus Christ, we can put our anchors down as we continue to endure the storms of life and the dangers of drifting. As we do, we should be encouraged to recognize the blessings of being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Peace with God

Through Jesus Christ, God has made reconciliation possible and has “made peace through the blood” of Jesus’ cross (Colossians 1:20). So, through Jesus, you can go from being the enemy of

God to having peace with God. Romans 5:1-2 says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” And, the Scriptures teach that we cannot measure the value of this peace when it comes to surviving the storms of this life. For instance, Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Now that you have peace with God, you do have access to all the spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3) and He has promised to hear your prayers – and says that your prayers are powerful (James 5:16)!

Holiness

Through the blood of Jesus Christ, God will “present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight” (Colossians 1:22). Whenever you are living obedient to God and have been reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ, God no longer sees your past sins that made you His enemy (Hebrews 8:12). Instead, through Jesus Christ, you have been made holy – just like God is holy. Now, you can enjoy full fellowship with God since you are walking in the light of His holiness. But, this will only be the case “if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (Colossians 1:23). So, if you allow the storms and currents of life to move you away from God again, you will not continue to be holy in God’s sight. Instead, you must be steadfast in following the faith of the gospel and strive to be holy as God is holy in everything that you do, think, and say (see 1 Peter 1:13-16)! We must get rid of all the sin in our lives and live for Him completely!

The hope of glory

Now that you have peace with God and are holy in His sight through the blood of Jesus Christ, you have tremendous hope. This hope is so great that the apostle Paul could even rejoice in his earthly

sufferings (Colossians 1:24). Through God’s salvation (which was once a mystery) that has now been revealed in the pages of the New Testament, God has made known “what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). If you will allow Jesus Christ to live in you through the word of God by doing what He teaches and following His perfect example, you can live with the hope of glory in Heaven for all eternity! Although you will still suffer while you live on this earth, reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ has produced a hope of living in a place that is free from all pain, suffering, tears, and death (Revelation 21:4)!

Conclusion

The storms are pounding against us, trying to destroy us. The currents are trying to pull us away from God. And, they have been successful against us in the past – for, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We were all hopelessly lost. But, through Jesus Christ, we can all be reconciled to God, have peace with God, be holy and blameless in His sight, and have the hope of glory. But, this is only the result if we will be obedient to God and remain steadfast to Him! Yes, He will rescue and save us from the ocean of sin – if we let Him!

Study Questions

Have you ever gotten caught up in the storms of life or the current so as to sin against God?

1. Wicked Works Make Us Enemies Of God

How do we become alienated from God? What does it mean to be alienated from God?

What does God require you to do in order to be reconciled to Him?

What does it mean to be an enemy of God?

4. The Blessings Of Reconciliation Through Jesus Christ

How will you have peace with God through Jesus Christ?

2. Enemies Of God Have No Hope

How do enemies of God have no hope on this earth?

How will you be holy through Jesus Christ?

How do enemies of God have no hope beyond this earth?

How will you have the hope of glory through Jesus Christ?

3. Reconciliation Only Possible Through Jesus Christ

Is reconciliation possible without Jesus? Why or why not?

How is the blood of Jesus connected with your reconciliation? What does it mean to be reconciled?

We Have an Anchor!

Lesson: 4

Trusting In God And His Word

In order to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, we must place our full trust in God and His word – enough that we will be obedient to Him in everything that He commands us. Hebrews 11:6 says, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

Yet, we do not *just* need that kind of full confidence in God in order to begin living for God. Instead, we must also maintain that kind of unwavering trust in God throughout our lives on this earth. You see, the storms of this life are trying to sweep us up and carry us away from God and the current of living in a sin-filled world is trying to gradually move us away from God.

At the foundation of Satan’s attacks is an attempt to get us *not* to trust in God (at least not as much as we should). He wants us to focus on all of things that are happening on this earth to the point that we begin to doubt that God is real or that He really means what He has said. This is what Satan accomplished with Eve in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:1-6). Although Eve knew God was real, Satan convinced her to doubt that God really meant what He said. So, she took of the forbidden fruit, ate it, and gave it to her husband (who also ate of it).

In Ephesians 6, Satan is pictured as shooting fiery darts at us in order to defeat us. As Paul helps us to learn about the spiritual armor God has

provided for us so that we can withstand Satan’s attacks he says, “above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Ephesians 6:16). Although this is not the only piece of armor we need to be victorious in the battle, it is central to our victory!

Although Satan wants us to put our trust in the things that we can see, feel, and hear, God tells us that in order to be victorious we must “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). If our anchor (which is the hope of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, Hebrews 6:19) is to hold us through all the storms and the current of this life, we must have full confidence in God and His word every step that we take throughout our lives. For, if we take even a single step that is contrary to faith, then Satan will defeat us!

Listen to 2 Timothy 1:8-14. “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.”

In this fourth lesson, we want to consider some basic lessons from this text concerning why Paul could stand so steadfast for the gospel – to the point that he even was willing to suffer for Jesus Christ. The answer is found through his faith in both God and the word of God. And, if we will put our full trust in God and His word throughout our earthly lives, we will not be ashamed on the Day when Jesus Christ returns and judges us!

Know Who You Believe In

The apostle Paul knew who He believed in. Again, 2 Timothy 1:12 says, “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.” Paul could face persecutions for living a godly life in Christ Jesus with boldness because He knew that God was able! And, if you want to please God, you must also have complete confidence that God exists and that He will reward those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Therefore, consider some basic facts about God that you must believe in order for your soul to be properly anchored.

God is real

You cannot be anchored to any hope for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ if God is not real. If there is no God then you must put your faith on the things of this earth. And, your existence will only be temporary. Then, the storms of this life will rob you of all the pleasure you could otherwise experience on this earth.

But, rather than living without complete confidence in the existence of God, God gives you an abundance of evidence to know that He is real. Romans 1:19-20 says, “because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” God says that you are without excuse if you do not accept His reality. He has given you plenty of evidence in all of the things that He has made. Just as you recognize that a computer had a designer whenever you look at it because of how it works perfectly according to the engineer’s design, you must conclude that this world must have had an intelligent Designer when you consider all of its order. From the universe, to the sky, to the plants, to the trees, to the birds, to the fish, to the land animals, to the oceans, to mankind, and everything that exists. It all is simply too magnificent and orderly to have just happened by

chance! The only possible answer is that there really is an eternal God (with no beginning or end) who is behind it all!

God is manifested in three Persons

As you consider the wonders of this physical universe, you can know that God is God. That is, He possesses certain characteristics that only belong to God (His “Godhead,” according to Romans 1:20). The Bible teaches that there is only one God, possessing only one set of characteristics (Deuteronomy 6:4). However, the Bible makes it clear that there are three separate Persons who all possess this nature of being God. Yet, they are one God because they share all the same characteristics and are not competing for your allegiance or working against each other. Still, they all have different roles.

The Bible teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all possess Deity (the nature of being God). For instance, passages like Matthew 28:19 couple all three together. Jesus said, “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.” Yet, they are all three separate Persons (as can be seen in Matthew 3:16-17). And, they each have a unique function in the salvation of mankind from sin. For instance, the Father sent the Son to provide the sacrifice for sin – and sent the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name to reveal God’s word.

God is all-powerful

As you face the storms and the current of this life, it can seem as if there is no possible way for you to overcome them. However, you must recognize that the God who really does exist possesses limitless power! Remember that this is one of the things that you can know about God whenever you look at all the things He has created (Romans 1:20). Surely, the God who was powerful enough to create this universe in six 24-hour days has no limits to His power!

This is essential for you to believe because if God had limits to His power, then He could be defeated. And, if God could be defeated, then you could be defeated by the storms and current of this

life. However, if you put your unwavering confidence in God and recognize that He is all-powerful, then you can stand strong through all of the storms and current of life, being full convinced that God is able to save those who obey Him. Remember, Paul said that he knew who He believed in and was persuaded “that He is able” to keep what Paul had committed to Him (2 Timothy 1:12). Similarly, whenever Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were about to be thrown into the fiery furnace because of their devotion to God, they were persuaded that God is all-powerful. They said, “our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:17)! Likewise, you must be convinced that God is able to save your soul!

God is all-knowing

God’s wisdom and knowledge is beyond comparison. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9). In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:25 says, “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

So, the God that you must place your full confidence in knows more than anyone else who has ever existed or will ever exist! In fact, God is limitless in His knowledge. This means that God knows better than you do. So, although you may be tempted to act in ways that are contrary to God’s will whenever you face the storms or current of life, you must determine to submit to God and resist the devil (James 4:7)! Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” Yes, God’s answers are always the right ones, no matter what your own ideas or “wisdom” says – or even what the “wisdom” of the world says. Just like Satan convinced Eve to think she knew better than God, Satan is wanting to convince you that you (or someone you know) knows better than God. Therefore, you must have complete confidence that God really does know what is best – all of the time!

God is ever-present

Just as God knows everything, He also sees everything. Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.” God sees everything that every person on this earth does. In fact, whenever David spoke of this characteristic of God in Psalm 139, he concluded that there is nowhere that he could escape from the presence of God.

Now, this is important to your anchor. You see, Satan wants you to think that you can do things that are contrary to God’s will – and nobody will ever know, and there will be no consequences. However, God has promised that He sees everything about your life and you will give an account of everything you do on this earth one Day. Hebrews 4:13 says, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes to whom we must give account.” Therefore, in order to have the hope of eternal salvation as an anchor for your soul, you must fully embrace the reality that God sees everything you do, hears everything you say, and knows every thought you think – and will judge you for them whenever Jesus Christ returns.

God is holy

In Revelation 4:6-8, there is a great picture of the Heavenly throne and four living creatures around the throne (their descriptions are also given in this passage). And, around the throne, they do not stop proclaiming the holiness of God. They “do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’” The holiness of God indicates that He is completely separated from all that is evil. For instance, 1 John 1:5 says that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”

The holiness of God is essential to your hope (which anchors your soul) in a couple of ways. First, it is a great comfort to know that this eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present God is only involved in things that are perfectly good, right, and fair. It would be absolutely devastating if there was one who had these characteristics, but was involved in things that are evil. Second, it is important because this holy God requires that we also be holy in order

to please Him. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

God is good

It is a tremendous thought that such a God would think about mankind (as insignificant as we are compared to Him) and demonstrate His goodness toward us. In fact, He has poured out the riches of His goodness on mankind. In a physical way, God has given you every good thing that you have. James 1:17 says that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

But, even more significant than the ways God is good to you physically is the way He has been good to you spiritually. For, without God’s goodness in this spiritual way, you would have no anchor! You would have no opportunity to be saved from the consequences of your sins. Yet, God does not want you to be eternally lost in your sins. 1 Timothy 2:4 says (concerning God), “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Therefore, this God provided the sacrifice of Jesus Christ so that you can be forgiven of your sins and have everlasting life in Heaven through His grace and mercy (see John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:1-10).

God is severe

As you think about the opportunity God has given you to be saved through Jesus Christ, you must also be careful not to develop a false hope that says God will save everyone regardless of how they live on this earth. For, while God is a very good God who has given all people the opportunity to be saved through Jesus Christ, He is also a severe God who will punish those who do not believe and obey Him. Romans 11:22 demonstrates both of these characteristics of God to be true. “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.”

If you choose not to have full confidence in the God who really exists and do not obey His

commandments, He will punish you. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 says that when Jesus Christ returns with His mighty angels, “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” Therefore, as you face the storms and current of life, you must recognize that if you let go of your anchor and live for your own physical desires rather than obeying God, God will punish you eternally!

God is unchanging

As you place your full confidence in the God who is made known through His creation and His written word (the Bible), you should also fully trust that this God does not change! Malachi 3:6 says, “For I am the Lord, I do not change.” James 1:17 says that “there is no variation or shadow of turning” with this God who gives all good things to mankind. Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

The God that you should serve and seek is the same God today that we have been studying about. And, He will be that same God tomorrow, the next day, the day after that, the day after that, and throughout eternity! So, you can place your confident hope in this God, knowing that He will never cease to exist or change who He is. In addition, the word that this unchanging God has revealed “endures forever” (1 Peter 1:25). Therefore, you can live your life obedient to His commandments, knowing that they will never change!

Know What God Has Said

In 2 Timothy 1:8-14 (as we read at the beginning of the lesson), Paul demonstrated that He was fully convinced in God and in the gospel of Jesus Christ as God’s saving message. Paul was so convinced that the gospel’s message was from God that he was even willing to be imprisoned, beaten, and killed to obey and teach that message. For, in this message, God has promised to give eternal life in

Heaven to those who obey Him. So, if you are going to endure the storms and current of this life, you must have a knowledge and unwavering confidence in the words that God has spoken.

God has spoken through His Son

As you consider how God has spoken to you today to reveal His word, listen to Hebrews 1:1-3: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Although God has used other means to reveal His will to mankind in the past, He now speaks to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Whenever Jesus Christ was on this earth, He revealed God’s will directly to the people He taught. We can read about what He taught in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. However, Jesus told His followers that He had more to teach them.

In John 16:12-15, Jesus said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

So, in addition to the things that Jesus spoke while He was on the earth, the Father would send the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name to guide the apostles and prophets into all truth. For instance, consider what the apostle Paul said concerning the message of salvation through Jesus Christ that had once been a “mystery” in Ephesians 3:3-5: “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made

known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.”

In this way, the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been revealed for all mankind to know and obey. This message is the “power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). It teaches you perfect truth and tells you everything God wants you to believe, do, think, and say. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” God has not hidden anything from you that you need to know. It has all been perfectly revealed in the pages of the New Testament. And, this perfect word of God will be the criteria by which your life will be judged one Day (see John 12:48 and Revelation 20:11-15).

God cannot lie

As the storms roll all around you and try to shake your hope in eternal salvation and the current tries to separate you from that hope, you must recognize that your hope is based on something that is absolutely sure! Regarding your anchor, Hebrews 6:19 says, “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.” The reason why your anchor (the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ) is so sure and steadfast is because God cannot lie!

Remember that God is perfectly holy. There is absolutely no evil in God – not even a passing shadow of darkness in Him! Therefore, it is contrary to His nature to be involved in anything that is not 100% true. One verse prior to the identification of our anchor which is both sure and steadfast is the statement that “it is impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18).

The apostle Paul wrote, “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior” (Titus 1:2-3). Notice that Paul’s hope of eternal life in Heaven was based on the God who cannot lie.

And, this promise is made known through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

So, we must recognize that every word of the Bible (which contains God's revelation to mankind) is perfect. James 1:25 identifies the law of God as "the perfect law of liberty." Psalm 19:7-11 says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward."

Things God has not promised

God's word (revealed in the pages of the New Testament) contains many promises that you must put your full confidence in. However, many people become frustrated with God, blame God, or lose faith in God because they place their faith in promises that He has never actually made. So, whenever they experience things that are contrary to what they think He has promised, they do not remain steadfast.

Therefore, you need to carefully recognize that God has not promised you any of the following – so that you will not put your hope in any of these. He has not promised you that life will be easy. He has not promised you that you will have everything that you desire. He has not promised you that things will always work out physically. He has not promised you will escape all the difficult experiences of life. He has not promised to answer your prayers in the way that you ask, regardless of what His will is. He has not promised that everyone will be eternally saved, regardless of whether they believe and obey Him. So, you need to be very careful in evaluating what God has actually promised – so that you do not have a false hope in something that God has never promised, that will disappoint you.

Things God has promised

Although there are many promises that people falsely attribute to God, there are some promises that He has made. And, since God cannot lie, you must live your life trusting in each and every one.

(1) God promises that He will provide for your necessities if you seek Him first. Jesus promised, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). In context, the "these things" refers to the necessities of life (i.e. what you will eat and drink, what you will wear). Notice that He doesn't promise to give you anything besides these absolute necessities. And, He only promises to give you these *if* you seek Him first.

(2) God promises that you will suffer persecution if you live for Him. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Although persecution often differs in severity, God has promised that if you devote your life to serving Him, you will experience it to some degree. So, He has never promised that your life on this earth while serving Him will always be easy and pleasant.

(3) God has promised that He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." No matter how Satan is trying to lure you away from God and how strong the temptation feels, God is stronger and promises that you can overcome it and remain faithful to Him.

(4) God promises He will hear your prayers if you are faithful to Him, and your prayers are powerful. James 5:16 says, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Although God does teach you that your prayers must be offered according to His will (Matthew 6:10; Luke 22:42),

He says that your prayers have great power and can accomplish much through Him.

(5) God promises that you will die. Hebrews 9:27 says, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” Sickness and death are part of life in this fallen world. These truths must be embraced and preparations must be made.

(6) God promises that you will be raised from the dead. John 5:28-29 says, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” Death will not be victorious over you if you live for Jesus Christ. For, there is victory in Jesus over death (see 1 Corinthians 15:57)!

(7) God promises that you will be judged. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” You will stand before Jesus Christ and give an account of how you have lived your life on this earth. And, the criteria that will be used to judge you is the word of God (Revelation 20:11-15).

(8) God promises that you will spend eternity in Heaven if you live a life of faithful obedience to Him. Revelation 2:10 says, “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.” No matter what suffering you experience during your earthly life, everything will work out for your spiritual good if you truly love God by keeping His commandments (Romans 8:28)! Yes, you will be given the crown of life in Heaven one Day if you are faithful to Him!

The Results Of Having Full Confidence In God And His Word

If you will put this kind of full trust in God and His word, you will see amazing results in your life! Even though the fiercest of storms pound against you relentlessly, you will stand strong and not be driven away from God. Even though the current of life works against you daily to pull you away from God, you will not be moved. Consider three results of having full trust in God and His word.

Not ashamed of the gospel

Twice in 2 Timothy 1:8-14, the apostle Paul spoke of not being ashamed. The first time, he told Timothy, “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (verses 8-11). Clearly, Paul knew what the gospel of Jesus Christ offered. And, rather than telling Timothy to stay away from it, warning him of the persecution that comes to those who follow Jesus Christ, Paul told him not to be ashamed of it. Embrace it. Recognize that it saves according to the power of God, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ!

Then, verse 12 says, “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.” Paul knew that God could not lie (Titus 1:2). So, whenever Paul committed His life to Jesus Christ and preaching the gospel, He knew that God would reward Him with eternal life in Heaven if he was faithful until death! There was not even a

small ounce of shame in Paul for believing, practicing, or teaching the saving message of the gospel (compare with Romans 1:15-17).

No worries

Because of Paul's complete confidence in God and in His word, Paul did not worry about his life. Again, 2 Timothy 1:12 demonstrates that Paul was not concerned that he had committed his life to the Lord in vain (for nothing). He knew that He would not be disappointed on the Day when Jesus Christ returns from Heaven.

So, no matter what Paul experienced during his life, he was not worried. He knew that his soul was safely kept by the power of God. No matter how much he was persecuted, no matter how many enemies he had, no matter how sick he got, no matter how much or how little he had, etc., he knew that he could fully trust in the God he had committed himself to seeking!

Hold fast the pattern

Once an individual has this kind of full trust in God and in His word, he/she must hold fast to the pattern God has revealed. 2 Timothy 1:13-14 says, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us."

God has given you a pattern of completely pure, true, and spiritually healthy words in the pages of the Bible (especially in the New Testament, which reveals the law you must live by today). This pattern includes everything God wants you to believe, practice, and teach that will be pleasing to Him. So, if you truly do trust in God and His word, you will always cling to this pattern and not deviate from it in any way!

Conclusion

You can be unashamed of the gospel, have no worries in life, and always hold fast to the pattern of sound words in your life if you recognize that God is

faithful. God is real and every word that He has spoken is true. You can put your complete trust in Him and you will not be ashamed on the Day that you stand before Christ in Judgment! Therefore, you anchor yourself in hope of the God of the Bible and in His word!

Study Questions

How will full trust in God and His word enable you to overcome Satan's attacks?

1. Know Who You Believe In

How can you know God is real?

What three Persons possess the nature of being God?

How powerful is God?

How much does God know?

How much does God see?

How pure is God?

How good is God?

How is God severe?

Does God ever change His nature?

2. Know What God Has Said

How has God revealed His word today?

Can God lie?

What are some things God has *not* promised?

What are some things God *has* promised?

3. The Results Of Having Full Confidence In God And His Word

How should your faith result in you not being ashamed of the gospel?

How should your faith result in you having no worries?

How should your faith result in you holding fast the pattern?

We Have an Anchor!

Lesson: 5

Longing For Our Heavenly Home

It is easy to become distracted by the storms of this life or to let our guards down and get pulled out to sea by the current. Sometimes we put so much focus on the individual “moments” of our lives that we lose sight of the “big picture” of what we should be living for. Sometimes the physical concerns and pleasures seem to take precedence over the spiritual things.

So, whenever sickness takes us or our family members by storm, we may overreact and put all of our focus on that physical situation so as to make God take a back seat. Or, whenever we lose a job, we may panic and forsake the Lord until we can “get back on our feet.” Or, whenever we are enjoying good times in our lives, we may be having such a good time that we get caught up in the physical things and forget about God.

Regardless of how it may be manifested, it is a common problem for us to get caught up in whatever moment we are currently living in and forget what really matters. Yet, if we are guilty of this, then we do not have an anchor! You see, the anchor for our souls is the eager anticipation of something that is far better than anything this world has to offer. Hebrews 6:19 says, “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.” But, the problem is that we let go of that anchor far too often in order to hold on to something physical.

However, if we want to correct this problem, we must develop a true and intense longing for our Heavenly home. Listen to 1 Peter 1:3-16. This passage will serve as the main text for this lesson.

“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.

“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

In this fifth lesson, we want to consider some basic lessons from this text in order to develop an intense longing for our Heavenly home. In order to survive the storms of this life, we must throw our

anchor in Heaven and never allow the trials, temptations, or persecutions that are associated with this life to convince us to let go! We simply must recognize that the temporary things of this life are never, ever, ever, ever...ever, ever, ever, ever worth forfeiting the home that God has prepared for those who love and obey Him!

This World Is Not Our Home

Whenever Peter wrote the hope-filled words we read in 1 Peter 1:3-16, who was he writing to? Notice that verse 3 stated, “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” (emphasis mine, EK). But, who is this? Verse 1 says that Peter (who was an apostle of Jesus Christ) wrote to the “pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” So, from these verses, we can gather that Peter was writing to Christians – and that these Christians had been scattered (evidently due to persecution, see 1 Peter 1:6). The fact that they were pilgrims and exiles here on this earth meant that they were in search of something better than the temporary things they were experiencing.

Trials are temporary

Hebrews chapter 11 (as we will study in our next lesson) is full of real-life stories of faithful men and women who found victory through faith in God. But, as we will consider more in our next study, they were not without their share of trials (of various sorts). These trials were opportunities for them to prove that they had placed full confidence in God and would not settle for the temporary things of this life.

So, Hebrews 11:13-16 says, “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.”

Even the worst trials we face cannot begin to compare with the Heavenly country that God’s people should be longing for! Yes, there will be death, serious illnesses of many different kinds, paralysis, blindness, broken families and relationships, layoffs and firings, break-ins and thefts, etc., etc., etc. But, none of these things will last forever. They are all part of this earthly system that is temporary. Therefore, you must fully embrace the promises of God and confess that you are a stranger and pilgrim on this earth and never settle for anything less than the Heavenly country that has been promised to you!

Temptations are temporary

One of the kinds of trials that we face in life is temptation. With temptation, Satan is trying his best to lure us away from God by appealing to our own physical desires (see James 1:14-15). He hopes that appealing to those physical desires will cause us to decide to please ourselves rather than God. So, if he can get us to act to fulfill our physical desires in ways that go against God’s laws, then he will be successful in getting us to let go of our anchor in Heaven!

So, Peter made a plea to those Christians who were pilgrims in 1 Peter 2:11-12. “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.”

Satan desperately wants you to lose sight of what is most important in life in any given moment and put your focus on what will make *you* the happiest or that will appeal to your physical desires in that moment. So, he wants you to engage in sinful sexual relations rather than exercise self-control. He wants you to lust rather than be content. He wants you to worry rather than trust. He wants you to engage in recreation rather than attend the assemblies

of a church. He wants you to work unnecessary overtime rather than spend time teaching your family the ways of the Lord. He wants you to spend your time being busy with mundane earthly work rather than study your Bible, visit those who are in need, pray, encourage your brethren, or teach the gospel. The bottom line is that Satan desperately wants you to put your focus on earthly things that are temporary rather than put your focus on the eternal things of God!

Persecutions are temporary

The Christians Peter was writing to in 1 Peter were, apparently, being persecuted. Once again, 1 Peter 1:6-7 said that they were being “grieved by various trials” and that the “genuineness” of their faith was being tested by fire. But, Peter said this would only be “for a little while.”

Similarly, the book of Revelation deals at length with the subject of Christians being persecuted. During the time the book of Revelation was being written, there was significant and widespread persecution throughout the Roman empire. Sometimes these Christians would be separated from their families. Sometimes they would have great difficulty getting jobs. Sometimes these Christians were thrown into prison. Sometimes these Christians were killed. And, sometimes these Christians were killed in barbaric ways. All because they were Christians. One picture in the book of Revelation (6:9-11) records the souls of Christians who had been slain crying out, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then, the Lord gave them each a white robe and said that they should “rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.”

Even the worst persecution can only last for a little while. But, Satan uses persecution against the people of God to try and pressure them to avoid physical consequences by renouncing their faith in Jesus Christ, by going along with the sinful things of the world, or by simply not teaching those in sin the ways of Jesus. Likewise, he wants you to lose sight of what is most important whenever he persecutes you (and God promises that those who are His people

will be persecuted, see 2 Timothy 3:12). Satan wants you to choose friends and co-workers above God. He wants you to choose a job above God. He wants you to choose worldly security above God. But, as pilgrims on this earth, Christians must persevere through the persecutions, recognizing that (at worst) they only last “a little while”!

We Have A Living Hope

What helps pilgrims make it through the difficulties during the time of their pilgrimage is the hope of the homeland they are seeking. They have made the determination that the homeland is worth the temporary struggles and sufferings that will be part of the journey. And, for Christians, the same determination must be made. Christians must determine that it is worth suffering and denying themselves of worldly pleasures in order to reach Heaven. Then, it is essential to recognize that the Christian’s hope is a *living* one; not one that is just a fantasy! Once again, 1 Peter 1:3-4 says, “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.”

Only possible through Jesus Christ

As we studied in lesson 3, recognize that the only way to have any true and living hope is through Jesus Christ. Outside of the sacrifice made by Jesus, there is no hope. For instance, Acts 4:12 records Peter saying (on another occasion), “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” No other person or thing can offer you the quality of true hope that Jesus Christ offers! Therefore, whenever you are going through trials, recognize that no other response to those trials can give you the kind of hope that Jesus Christ offers. Whenever you are being tempted, recognize that no earthly pleasure can give you the kind of hope that Jesus Christ offers. And, whenever you are being

persecuted, recognize that nothing and no one can give you the hope and comfort that Jesus Christ offers.

Specifically, Peter talks about this living hope being available “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Although Jesus’ life, death, and burial were also all necessary to the mercy of God being shown toward us, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is especially important for the hope of future life. For, Jesus’ blood and death saved us from experiencing the wrath of God. But, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead provided the victory over death that is necessary in order for us to be raised again and live eternally in Heaven (see Romans 5:9-11).

1 Corinthians 15 helps us to understand this even further. After the apostle Paul provided evidence that Jesus Christ did raise from the dead (see verses 1-11), he helps us understand the significance of this. Verses 12-19 say, “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up— if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

An inheritance from God

Thanks be to God that He did raise Jesus Christ from the dead. For, in doing so, we can now experience victory in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57). Those who are victors in Christ Jesus are, according to Peter, “begotten...to a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3). This is identified as concerning “an inheritance” (1 Peter 1:4).

I want you to just imagine being the child of the wealthiest person to ever live on this earth. You would live with an anticipation that you would

receive all of that wealth and those possessions as an inheritance one day. And, you would certainly not want to do anything to make your father angry with you (in fear of being cut off from that inheritance).

Now, I want you to consider that whatever earthly wealth would be included in this inheritance, it pales in comparison with the inheritance that God will give to those who are His children! Even the wealthiest man to ever live only has a relatively small percentage of what can be had or experienced on this earth. But, God is the one who has created the entire universe! For instance, even when King Solomon built a magnificent temple for God out of the most precious and valuable things on this earth (i.e. silver and gold), listen to the conclusion stated in Acts 7:48-50. “However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ‘Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?’”

Incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading

Can you just imagine receiving an inheritance from this Father who is the Creator of the universe? Surely, there is nothing that has ever compared or will ever compare! And, the best inheritances from a physical father only last for a short while. Soon, the heir dies and leaves the remainder of the inheritance to another.

But, the inheritance that God will give to those who are His children never ends or diminishes over time. Listen to how Peter described this inheritance in 1 Peter 1:4. It is “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away.” The best of what we can enjoy on this earth does eventually end or ruin over time. Money gets spent. Houses break down. Automobiles rust. We become discontented and unsatisfied with physical things over time. And, we get separated from everything physical whenever we die. But, this is not so with God’s inheritance! God will give His children such a wonderful inheritance that it will truly last forever. And, even after we have enjoyed the inheritance for a million years, it will still be as fresh and as wonderful as it was on day 1!

This is why Jesus has told us to store up treasures in Heaven rather than on the earth. Matthew 6:19-21 says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” As pilgrims journeying through our earthly lives, we should never settle for the treasures of this land as we pass through because they are more convenient for us at the moment or seem to be pleasurable right now! These treasures will simply not last very long. Instead, Christian pilgrims must recognize that there is a much greater treasure that is just over the horizon – a treasure that will never diminish! We just have to make it up the rugged mountainside in order to reach it.

We Have Reservations In Heaven

Up to this point, we have been generically discussing the inheritance that faithful Christians will receive. And, if this was all that we knew about our hope, it would be more than sufficient to anchor our souls through the storms and current of life. But, we have actually been given much more information than this. You should recognize where Peter says that our inheritance is. Once again, 1 Peter 1:4 says, “to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.” Therefore, all those who are children of God have reservations made for them in Heaven! So, we should consider this place that the Bible calls “Heaven” and the reward that is promised to the faithful. For the purposes of this study, we will be primarily looking at Revelation 20-22.

What will not be in Heaven

Part of the hope of Heaven is to recognize what will be missing in Heaven. Typically, we don't think of things that are missing as being a blessing. But, there are some things that will be missing from

Heaven that will make it worth all of the struggles and hardships to get there!

First, there will be no tears, sorrow, crying, pain, or death in Heaven. Revelation 21:4 says, “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.”

No more crying because someone hurt you! No more tears shed over divorce or breakups! No more tears when you learn that someone you love has been hurt or diagnosed with a terrible disease! No more tears shed because of murders, natural disasters, and famines! No more crying because you have been laid off or fired and are unsure how you will take care of your family! No more pain that is inflicted by those who hate Christians! No more pain caused by automobile accidents! No more pain that is caused by the diseases that afflict us on this earth! No more pain that is brought about by getting older! No more standing by caskets, visiting graveyards, and consoling those who are grieving! No more knowledge and concern about a future death! All of these things are present on this earth during our pilgrimage, but will not have a part (not even a small part) in our Heavenly home!

Second, there will be no evil. Revelation 21:27 says, “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.”

No more suffering because people treat us in wicked ways! No more being ridiculed! No more be abused! No more lies! No more adultery! No more deception! No more murder! No more thefts! No more intoxication! No more envy or jealousy! No more greed! No more bitterness! No more anxiety! No more hatred! No more gossip! No more selfishness! No more divisions! No more strife! No more filthy language! All of these things are present on this earth during our pilgrimage, but will not have a part (not even a small part) in our Heavenly home!

Who will not be in Heaven

Not only will these *things* not be present in Heaven, but the ones who have died practicing those

wicked things will not be there either. So, as you consider the magnificent inheritance that is reserved for you, you should take comfort in the fact that those who have lived for such wicked things will not be in your company throughout eternity!

First, the devil and his angels will not be in Heaven. Revelation 20:10 says, “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Matthew 25:41 also makes reference to what Jesus will say to the wicked on the Judgment Day, “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

No more trying to decide whether something is right or wrong! No more trying to properly navigate through the devil’s deceptions and temptations! No more being on guard for the next attack levied against us by the devil and his angels! No more having the people around us being used by the devil to pull us away from God! No more suffering that is caused by the devil and his associates! All of these are present on this earth during our pilgrimage, but will not have a part (not even a small part) in our Heavenly home!

Second, those who have served the devil will not be in Heaven. Revelation 20:15 says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Similarly, Revelation 21:8 says, “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.”

No more heartache caused by those who treat you in wicked ways! No more sorrow over seeing others engage in wickedness! No more pain inflicted by those who are selfish! No more being mistreated! No more murders, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, liars, idolaters, etc.! All of these are present on this earth during our pilgrimage, but will not have a part (not even a small part) in our Heavenly home! Now, on this point, I also want to add this note: Remember that God will wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4). So, in some way, God will help us *not* be

sorrowful for our loved ones who have not made it to Heaven!

What will be in Heaven

The things and people who will *not* be in Heaven will help Heaven to be a much better place than what we are currently experiencing on this earth. But, Heaven is not just about what will be missing. It is also about what will be present!

First, consider the beauty of Heaven that is depicted in Revelation chapter 21. As you consider these vivid symbolic descriptions, it is well identified as the “Paradise of God” in Revelation 2:7! Her beauty is described as the beauty of “a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). Heaven is described in the text as: Having the “glory of God” (21:11), having a light like a precious jasper stone that is clear as crystal (21:11), having a great and high wall with twelve gates and twelve angels at the gates (21:12), and having twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles on them (21:14). It is said to be laid out as a cube – 12,000 furlongs (about 1,500 miles) in each direction (length, width, and height) (21:16). The wall around the Heavenly city was measured to be 144 cubits high (about 218 feet) (21:17). The wall is said to be constructed with jasper and the city was pure gold, like clear glass (21:18). Each of the twelve foundations of the wall are said to be made with a precious stone (i.e. jasper, sapphire, emerald, etc.) (21:19-20). The twelve gates are said each to be a pearl (21:21). The street in the city is said to be of pure gold, like transparent glass (21:21).

As you think about all of this great beauty of Heaven, I believe we should conclude that it is all figurative language. After all, there will be nothing physical in Heaven (see 1 Corinthians 15:50) and the book of Revelation was written in figurative language with signs and symbols. But, this does not *diminish* the beauty of Heaven. Rather, it *enhances* it! For, this is the best that God can do to convey the beauty of Heaven to our earthly minds. The reality will, I believe, be much better than even this!

Second, consider that the tree of life will be in Heaven. Revelation 22:1-3 says, “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.”

The tree of life that was taken away from Adam and Eve when they were cast out of the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:22-24) reappears in Heaven! Whenever man was separated from this tree, all kinds of death and suffering came into this earth. But, in Heaven, we will enjoy a true paradise prepared by God and have access to this tree (at least figuratively speaking) so that we can live forever in this place!

Who will be in Heaven

I have saved the best for last. Heaven is not just about the *things* that will be present. It is also about those who we will be sharing Heaven with – and One stands far above all the rest!

First, all the saints will be in Heaven. Revelation 22:14-15 says, “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.”

No one who is wicked will be in Heaven. It is a place prepared by Jesus Christ and reserved for those who serve God faithfully throughout their lives. This includes both the angels (and other Heavenly beings) who have faithfully served God and men and women who have been faithful to God on earth. These will be our neighbors in Heaven!

Second, God will be in Heaven. Revelation 21:22-23 says, “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.” Revelation 22:3-5 says, “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 will be the single greatest part of living in Heaven. We will have the opportunity to see God in His full glory throughout all eternity! We will be able to unendingly worship God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! We will never be separated from Him again! And, He will provide everything for us that we need!

Looking To The End

This is the wonderful inheritance that is reserved for us in Heaven and kept by the power of God if we will be faithful to Him unto death (1 Peter 1:3-5; Revelation 2:10). So, as Peter encouraged the Christians he was writing the 1 Peter letter to, we must recognize that during our pilgrimage on earth, our faith is being put to the test in order to see if it is genuine. In fact, our faith may even be severely tested (“tested by fire,” 1 Peter 1:7). But, we must keep our focus on the end result we have been studying about throughout this lesson in order to properly respond to the challenges of life.

Do not focus on things that are seen

Far too often, people become Christians and start on their pilgrimage through the rest of their earthly lives only to become distracted by the things that are on this earth. However, the apostle Paul (in using the illustration of a soldier) said, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

The apostle Paul certainly knew what he was talking about – from experience and through inspiration. Even though the apostle Paul experienced great hardships during his life (even regarding persecution, read 2 Corinthians 11:22-33), he kept his focus on the things that were not seen. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, he wrote, “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.”

Focus on things that are not seen

Just a few verses later, in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, Paul said, “So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

We must keep our focus throughout our earthly lives on that which has been promised to those who are Christians! If we do, we will determine to live the kind of holy lives that Peter instructed in 1 Peter 1:13-16. As Christian pilgrims, we must be diligent to stay away from all of the fleshly lusts that war against our souls (1 Peter 2:11-12). We must not be like soldiers who enlist for battle and then live carefree civilian-like lives! Instead, we must stay focused on the task at hand in order to accomplish our missions.

Then, not only should we be focused on the promises God has made to us, but we should be longing for the end of our faiths, the inexpressible joy we will have when we experience the salvation of our souls in Heaven (1 Peter 1:8-9)! For instance, whenever Paul was imprisoned due to persecution, he considered that “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). In fact, he said he had a “desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” than remaining alive on this earth (Philippians 1:23)! Similarly, Peter told Christians that they should be “looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God,” they should “look for new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells,” and they should be “looking forward to these things” so that they will be “diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Peter 3:11-14).

Conclusion

We should be longing for our Heavenly home! We should view our lives on this earth and everything about them (whether good or bad) as only being temporary. And, we must never sell our eternal Heavenly inheritance for the temporary treasures and pleasures on this earth. Therefore, as we face the storms and current of life, we must cast our anchors in Heaven and hold on throughout our lives!

Study Questions

What is the danger of getting caught up in the individual “moments” of your earthly life?

1. This World Is Not Our Home

How long do trials last?

How long do temptations last?

How long do persecutions last?

2. We Have A Living Hope

Why is Jesus Christ so crucial to your hope?

How are you encouraged to keep your focus off the things that are seen?

What is the significance of your inheritance being from God?

Why is it important to keep your focus on the things that are not seen?

How long will this inheritance last?

3. We Have Reservations In Heaven

What will not be in Heaven?

Who will not be in Heaven?

What will be in Heaven?

Who will be in Heaven?

4. Looking To The End

We Have an Anchor!

Lesson: 6

Learning From Champions

It is easy to feel overwhelmed whenever the storms of life hit us or discouraged as we fight against the continual pull of the world. Sometimes we even feel as if we are the only ones going through such difficult times. And, whenever we feel all alone, it is possible to feel as if there is no one in this world who can help us. Or, we can feel as if there is no one who has ever experienced or was victorious over such things as we face.

These are dangerous “waters” for us to be in. For, if we allow ourselves to think in this way, it is an easy “next step” for us to use our situations as an excuse for not always doing what is right. Rather than choosing the path of right, we can justify our sinning by saying that “it’s just too difficult.”

However, the reality is that there have been many faithful people who have gone before us and have shown us what faithfulness through such difficult times looks like. And, even though the specifics of our situations are quite likely different from theirs, we can still learn from their faithfulness. In fact, the reality is that some of these faithful men and women have paved roads of faithful living through far more difficult circumstances than we have ever experienced (or may ever experience).

We can and should learn from their faithfulness in these times so that we can make applications to our current struggles on this earth. For instance, Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of

witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

As Paul uses the illustration of running a race, we think about how easy it is to get partway into a marathon and have discouragement kick in. The temptation to stop running and not push toward the finish line can be strong – especially as other obstacles can creep into the picture. But, as you and I struggle through our earthly lives and try to remain faithful to the Lord, the Hebrew writer pictures this great “cloud of witnesses.” As I understand it, the picture is one of a great crowd of spectators who are watching you and I run our races of faith – and they are cheering us on to victory!

Then, as you look around this crowd, you notice something very special about it. There are many “faces” in this crowd that are familiar to you. They include Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and many, many others who have completed their races and demonstrated faith to us. Now, as they cheer you on to victory through the storms and the current of this life, you are emboldened and heartened to endure your struggles in life, set aside all the sin that hinders you, and finish the race.

And, if that was not enough, as you look toward the finish line, you see Jesus. He is the perfect example for you as you face obstacles in your life. Jesus overcame so much and paved the way for you to be saved! Now, you must keep your eyes focused on Him, straining to see Him through all of the distractions of life that are around you constantly. For, you know that He endured even the cross for the joy that was set before Him. Now, He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God!

In this lesson, we want to find encouragement from those people who are in the stands. They will help us keep our eyes focused on Jesus. For, they have endured some of the greatest storms ever to be faced on this earth and fought against the same

current that we fight against (and sometimes even a stronger current than we face). But, they faced all of this with faith! So, as we look into our text of Hebrews 11 and prepare to study a few of the examples given in this chapter, we notice that God gives us a definition of what faith is in verse 1: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith provides the assurance that what we hope for will not disappoint us – even though we do not see it. Therefore, when we are strong in faith, we will hold securely to our anchor (which is the hope of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, Hebrews 6:19)!

Noah

Hebrews 11:7 says, “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” Let’s learn from this champion of faith, who is cheering for you and me as we try to live faithfully throughout our earthly lives.

Lived in an extremely wicked world

As wicked as the world around you may seem to be, know that it is not any worse than when Noah was living. The reality is that if anyone could have felt all alone in a world full of wickedness, it would have been Noah. Although I do not have any idea how many people inhabited the world at the time Noah lived, I do know how few there were who pleased God and how vast the wickedness was.

Genesis 6:5-7 says, “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’”

Can you imagine trying to live in a world that could be described in this way? The wickedness was

so great that God wanted to wipe out His creation from the earth. It was not just that man sinned frequently. The text says that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” So, this was complete wickedness – all of the time. And, as God searched for those who were faithful to Him, there were not many to choose from.

The only ones God found to be pleasing to Him were Noah and Noah’s family. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8). Besides these eight people, there was no one who was righteous. And, God was so angry at this wickedness that God determined to destroy mankind by means of a flood, only to save Noah and his family.

Now, just imagine being Noah during this time. 2 Peter 2:5 describes Noah as a “preacher of righteousness” and “one of eight people” who would be saved. As Noah tried to live his life for the Lord and teach his family to do the right things, don’t you suppose that it would have often been discouraging for him? Don’t you suppose that he may have felt disheartened whenever he tried to preach to the people about the right ways of God and no one ever listened (outside of his family)? Don’t you think he probably felt the entire world trying to pull him away from God and into wickedness?

Faith caused him to obey God

Yet, Noah obeyed God because of his faith. Whenever God told Noah that He was going to destroy the world by means of a flood and that Noah needed to make an ark of gopherwood according to a specific pattern God revealed to him, Noah obeyed. In fact, Genesis 6:22 says, “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.”

Regardless of the pressure that was put on him by the outside world that was full of wickedness, Noah chose to be different and live for God! Just imagine being Noah while he was trying to build the ark. Do you suppose that the wicked people around him were ridiculing him – even as he was trying to preach righteousness to them so that they could be saved?

Still, he built the ark according to all of God’s specifications. Then, the Lord said to Noah, “Come

into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation” (Genesis 7:1). Noah had now been successful in remaining faithful to God even though the pull of the world against him was as strong as it has ever been for anyone!

But, why did Noah remain faithful to God during this time of great wickedness on the earth? Hebrews 11:7 gives us the answer. Even though the things God said were going to happen had not happened yet, Noah had faith in God. He had faith in God in at least two ways. He had faith that God was able to flood the whole world. And, he had faith that God was able to save him and his family if they remained faithful to Him.

So, moved with godly fear, Noah prepared the ark according to God’s specifications. He kept his focus on what God had promised and would not give in to the pull of the world. Thus, Noah had full confidence that God really would save him and his family from the wickedness of the world – and held firmly to that anchor through the difficult times that led up to the flood!

Abraham

Hebrews 11:8-10 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Then, Hebrews 11:17-19 says, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.” Let’s learn from this champion of faith, who is cheering for you and me as we try to live faithfully throughout our earthly lives.

Experienced some great tests

As difficult of tests that you face in your life, you have likely never faced tests of the same degree that Abraham faced in his life. If anyone could have decided that the tests of his life were just too much to demonstrate faith through, it would have been Abraham. However, throughout his life on this earth, Abraham demonstrated that he had full confidence in God.

Specifically, the Hebrew writer calls our attention to two specific tests Abraham faced. First, God called him to leave his homeland in order to go to a land that God promised to give to Abraham’s descendants. Genesis 12:1-3 records the call that the Lord gave to him. “Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

Abraham had a choice to make. He could choose to obey God and leave the comforts of his home and his family to go to this new land, or he could choose to remain in the land of his family. Then, there is an added layer of difficulty in this test. Recognize that the promises God was making to Abraham about this land were dependent on Abraham having descendants of his own. Yet, at 75 years old, Abraham was still childless.

Then, a second test Abraham faced was the sacrifice God called him to make. After God blessed Abraham and Sarah (his wife) with a son in their old age, God commanded Abraham to take his only son (Isaac) and sacrifice him. God told Abraham, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Genesis 22:2).

Not only would this have been an unimaginably difficult task to do as a father, but this was also the son God was supposed to fulfill all of his other promises through! Once again, Abraham faced a decision that must be made in his life. He

could either choose to obey God and offer his only son as a sacrifice or he could choose to disobey God and rely on his own human reasoning.

Faith caused him to obey God

Yet, Abraham obeyed God because of his faith. It is interesting that in the verses following both of these great tests, Abraham does not even waver in making a decision! For instance, after God called Abraham to leave his homeland, Genesis 12:4 says, “So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him.” Then, after God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Genesis 22:3 says, “So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.”

How difficult it must have been (from a physical perspective) to split the wood that you expected to be used in offering your son! How difficult it must have been (from a physical perspective) to pack up all of your belongings and go to a place that is away from home and family. But, faith made all of these difficult actions possible.

Hebrews 11 demonstrates Abraham’s great faith through these two tests. As Abraham journeyed to this land that was foreign to him, Hebrews 11:10 reveals that he was actually waiting for the Heavenly city, whose “builder and maker is God.” Hebrews 11:13-16 teaches that Abraham viewed himself as a stranger and pilgrim on this earth, one who was seeking “a better, that is, a heavenly country.” He was fully convinced that God would provide him with this much better land if he would choose the path of faithfulness in his life.

Then, whenever he was tested to offer his son, Hebrews 11 demonstrates Abraham’s great faith that God would fulfill his promises to him in some way. Even though the earthly circumstances looked dim, hope shined brightly for Abraham whenever he looked through the eye of faith in God! He even concluded “that God was able” to raise Isaac up from the dead in order to fulfill His promises (Hebrews 11:17-19). He was so fully convinced that God would provide some answer for this test, that he set

his hope in God and acted by faith that God was able to make a way for him!

Joseph

Hebrews 11:22 says, “By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.” Let’s learn from this champion of faith, who is cheering for you and me as we try to live faithfully throughout our earthly lives.

Endured mistreatment with regularity

Joseph’s story takes up many chapters in the book of Genesis (from chapter 37 through chapter 50) and takes many different twists and turns. And, this was a very difficult road for Joseph throughout his life. Surely, if anyone could have lost his faith in God, blamed God, and grown bitter throughout his life, it was Joseph. Yet, even in his dying words, he expressed the same kind of faith that characterized his life.

Whenever we are introduced to Joseph as a primary character of the Genesis record, we see a young man of 17 years old. He was the envy of ten of his brothers and the favorite son of his father (Jacob). After Joseph was given a special coat of many colors from his father and dreamed that his brothers, father, and mother would bow before him one day, these ten brothers had enough.

They decided that they would kill Joseph. However, with one brother talking them out of killing him, he was put into a pit. What Joseph must have been thinking when he was down in this pit, not knowing what his brothers would do to him! Then, he was sold into slavery when a company of Ishmaelites came by. What Joseph must have been thinking when he was traveling with this company, not knowing what would happen to him next! Then, he was sold to an Egyptian man named Potiphar. What Joseph must have been thinking to find himself alone in a strange land – as a very young man! Then, his master’s wife kept trying to get him to commit adultery with her. But, when he refused, he was accused of forcing himself on her, and her husband

had Joseph imprisoned! What Joseph must have been thinking when he was in prison in a strange land for doing the right thing! Then, when Joseph interpreted a dream for the chief butler of Pharaoh and told him that he would be restored to his position in three days, the butler forgot about Joseph for a period of two years. What Joseph must have been thinking while he remained in prison and did not hear anything from the butler or Pharaoh!

Faith caused him to obey God

Yet, Joseph obeyed God because of his faith. Now, it is easy for us to read the story of Joseph and know how the story turns out (with Joseph being elevated to second in command over Egypt and being used to save his family from a great famine). But, Joseph did not know how things would turn out!

Still, we see Joseph demonstrating faithfulness to God at every point in his life. The circumstances with Potiphar's wife provide an excellent example of this faithfulness. As a young man in a strange land, he could have decided to act with wickedness. After all, surely none of his family would find out about what he had done! Yet, in refusing to commit adultery with his master's wife, he told her, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:8-9).

He knew that God saw everything that he did at every point of his life. And, he determined that he would place his full trust in God. As a result, God made him prosper and used him to preserve his people during a great time of famine. It was not until sometime later in his life that he fully understood what God had done through him. He told his brothers, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

Then, when Joseph was 110 years old, Joseph demonstrated faith with his dying words (as referenced by the Hebrew writer). Knowing the

promises that God had made to his fathers concerning the land of Canaan, Joseph said that God "will surely" visit and bring the Israelites out of the land of Egypt and "to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Genesis 50:24). Then, he took an oath from the children of Israel, that they would carry his bones out of Egypt (Genesis 50:25). Thus, Joseph was absolutely convinced that God was able to bring them out of Egypt and give them the land He had promised to the fathers.

Moses

Hebrews 11:23-29 says, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned." Let's learn from this champion of faith, who is cheering for you and me as we try to live faithfully throughout our earthly lives.

Refused the treasures in Egypt

If anyone could have attempted to justify rejecting God in order to enjoy the pleasures that were offered to him by the world, it would have been Moses. For, Moses was in a very unique position to experience worldly pleasures. His story begins during a time when the Pharaoh had commanded all of the male Israelite children to be cast into the river and drown. Yet, his parents acted by faith and refused to allow their child to be killed.

Whenever they hid baby Moses in the bulrushes, it happened that Pharaoh's daughter came

to that place to bathe in the river. And, one of her maidens discovered the baby. Pharaoh's daughter had compassion on Moses and had his own mother nurse him. Then, after Moses grew, he was brought to Pharaoh's daughter and became her son.

Now, just imagine what Moses had access to as the adopted grandson of the king of Egypt. The Hebrew writer helps us to recognize that Moses had access to the "treasures in Egypt" (Hebrews 11:26) and "pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25). Perhaps he would have had all the wealth that he could have hoped for. Perhaps he could have had any earthly desire granted whenever he wanted. Perhaps he could have lived in a great palace. Perhaps he could have experienced great fame. Perhaps he could have had opportunity to excel as a military leader for the powerful Egyptian army. Perhaps he could have rose up the ladder of Egyptian politics. Perhaps he was even heir to this king.

Although we do not know exactly what kinds of earthly treasures and pleasures Moses was in line to experience, they were definitely present. And, Moses had a choice to make. He could forget about his actual Israelite ancestry and forget about God in order to enjoy these earthly pleasures and treasures – or he could give them all up in order to live in a different way entirely. Certainly, if most people were faced with this choice, they would choose to experience the earthly pleasures and treasures. And, I find it difficult to believe that Moses was not tempted to do the same. On one hand was a life of ease, luxury, and pleasure. On the other hand was suffering affliction with the people of God.

Faith caused him to obey God

Yet, Moses obeyed God because of his faith. Whenever Moses became of age, he made a firm decision that would change the trajectory of his life on this earth – as well as (presumably) the future home of his soul! The Hebrew writer plainly states that because of Moses' faith, he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Hebrews 11:24). Because of his faith, he chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God" rather "than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25).

But, why was his faith so strong to cause him to make this decision? Once again, the Hebrew writer provides the answer. First, notice that he states the pleasures of sin were only "passing" (verse 25). So, the best that Moses would experience in the land of Egypt during his earthly life was only temporary – and Moses recognized this fact. Then, as Moses compared the life he would experience living in Egypt and living for God, he considered "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11:26).

Now, I really do not know what Moses understood about life after death. But, this is evidence that Moses recognized there was more to life than what you can experience on this earth. In fact, Moses recognized that the pleasurable things a person can experience on this earth are only temporary and pale in comparison to the riches and reward that await those who serve God. So, his hope in such a future reward anchored his soul so that he made the decision to serve God in his life rather than live for his own earthly pleasures.

Then, even after making this initial decision, Moses continued a life of faithfulness and service to God in leading the people of God out of Egypt. Even though the king of Egypt was powerful, Moses "forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king," kept the Passover, and passed through the Red Sea (Hebrews 11:27).

But, again, why was Moses willing to put his physical life in such jeopardy? Hebrews 11:27 tells us that these actions were taken by faith and because Moses saw "Him who is invisible." So, rather than seeing the power of the king of Egypt, Moses saw the power of the King of kings who dwells in Heaven! And, Moses trusted enough in this King to obey Him – even when it required him to make sacrifices during his earthly life and do things that seemed improbable (from an earthly perspective).

Others

Hebrews 11:30-40 says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for

seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” Let’s learn from these champions of faith, who are cheering for you and me as we try to live faithfully throughout our earthly lives.

Fought through many storms and faced many currents

If people could have had reason to give up on God and fail to survive the storms and current of life, surely it would have been these people. Some of these people are unknown to us by name. Yet, we know that the Bible is full of examples of faithfulness through extremely difficult and challenging circumstances.

Can you imagine facing the kinds of struggles that these people faced. Think about Gideon going up against a mighty and innumerable army with 300 men. Think of the prophets of God who proclaimed God’s word to wicked people even when they were killed and punished for doing so. Think about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego when they were about to be cast into the fiery furnace because they would not bow before an idol. Think about Daniel

when he was about to be cast into the lion’s den because he prayed to God. Surely, there are many Old Testament stories that demonstrate many of the things mentioned by the Hebrew writer in this section.

Think about the apostles of Jesus Christ. Think about how severely they were persecuted for preaching the gospel of Christ throughout the world. Think about how all but one of these experienced martyrdom (according to a combination of Biblical and secular history). And, think about how the apostle John, even though it is not believed that he was martyred, experienced persecution and exile for the Lord’s cause.

Then, think about the early Christians. Although the Hebrew writer was not alluding to them, they experienced many of these same kinds of hardships. For instance, during the time of the Roman empire, Christians would experience some of the worst and most widespread persecution that has ever been known to mankind. The Roman emperors would even refine their cruelty in order to devise new ways of torturing those who followed Jesus Christ. Much of this is pictured in the book of Revelation in symbolic language. They were separated from their families, left destitute, put into prisons, tortured, and killed in inhumane ways.

Faith caused them to obey God

Yet, all these obeyed God because of their faith. I want you to imagine being faced with the prospects of some of the things these people faced. Being fed to lions. Violence of fire. Being slain by the sword. Being tortured. Being put through a mocking trial and scourgings (severe beatings that many did not survive). Being confined by chains of imprisonment. Being stoned. Being sawn in two. Being destitute, afflicted, tormented, and wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins. Wandering in deserts, mountains, dens, and caves.

Surely, none of this is what we hope to experience during our earthly lives. But, this is the severity of some storms that some have faced. Yet, their mention in this chapter of Hebrews indicates that they remained faithful through all of these storms!

I think verse 35 is very helpful in understanding the thinking of these people – and should serve as an encouragement to us as we run our races. The author says, “Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.” Just imagine being tortured for your faith in God and living according to His laws. Then, as you are being tortured, you are given an offer to be delivered from it – *if* you will renounce your faith and no longer serve God or teach His commandments to others. Would you accept that deliverance? These people did not! And, they did not accept the offer because they had an anchor of hope for a better resurrection that would make all of their sufferings worthwhile!

So, while we could study each one of these points and consider some Old Testament accounts of faith for many of them, we are impressed by the collective faith that has been demonstrated in this section of Scripture. And, these all died in faith without even having access to the better promises that God has given to us today (as part of His new covenant)! Surely, we should act with even stronger faith now that we have heard the better promises that have been given to those who are in Christ Jesus!

Conclusion

As you think about the things that you have been through in your life (as bad as they may be), you should consider whether they top anything that these people in Hebrews 11 experienced. But, even if they begin to compare with some of the people we have been studying about, they surely do not compare to Jesus Christ – who was tortured and put to death even though He had committed no sin! Therefore, as we try to navigate the stormy waters of life and remain steadfast against the current, we should look to and learn from these great champions of faith! They truly demonstrate that faith will overcome the world and lead us to victory through Jesus Christ, who has overcome the world (1 John 5:4-5)! We must always remember that “without faith it is impossible to please Him [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those

who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Allow all of these great champions of faith to strengthen, encourage, and embolden you as you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, while pressing toward the finish line! If they could be victorious in their faith, so can you – through Jesus Christ! Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”!

Study Questions

How can you learn from those who have successfully endured the storms and current of life before you?

1. Noah

What difficulty did Noah experience in the world?

How did his faith cause him to obey God?

2. Abraham

What difficult tests did Abraham experience?

How did his faith cause him to obey God?

3. Joseph

What kind of mistreatment did Joseph endure regularly on this earth?

How did his faith cause him to obey God?

4. Moses

What kinds of treasures and pleasures did Moses have the opportunity to experience?

How did his faith cause him to obey God?

5. Others

Why kinds of storms and current was experienced by others?

How did their faith cause them to obey God?

We Have an Anchor!

Lesson: 7

Rejoicing In Hope

We are not the only ones who are facing the fierce storms of life. We can see how most of the people who are around us respond to the various trials of life. For the most part, they are choosing to allow these storms to drive their lives. However, this does not have to be the case for the one who is a Christian, whose anchor is the hope of eternal life in Heaven through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:19).

No matter how strong the storms are howling or the current is pulling, the Christian who remains anchored in hope can rejoice in the trials! Although it seems to contradict itself at first, the Christian can actually find joy in the sufferings and trials he/she experiences on this earth. The reason this is possible is because even the trials of life will result in good for the one who is a Christian.

For instance, listen to James 1:2-4. “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Then, listen to a similar statement made by Paul in Romans 5:1-5. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not

disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

You see, there is a major difference in the joy of people who are Christians and people who are not Christians. Those who are not Christians claim to find happiness in the things of this life (i.e. their relationships, their wealth, earthly pleasures, etc.). However, when their lives are hit by the storms of life, their happiness is also destroyed. This is because their happiness was based on things that could be taken from them.

Yet, the joy of a Christian can increase even as the storms of life become fiercer! This is because the Christian’s joy is *not* based on anything that is earthly. So, even the fiercest storms of life cannot shake the Christian’s joy, as long as he/she remains anchored in hope.

Surely, we need to unlock the “secret” of how we can rejoice in hope – even when the storms and current of life are at their strongest! In order to consider this matter, we will be using Romans chapter 8 as our primary text. I believe that this chapter is one of the most encouraging and “heartening” chapters in all of the Bible.

In this lesson, we want to gain even more encouragement from the Scriptures so that we can be better equipped to face the storms and current of life. This encouragement should be hidden securely in our hearts in order that it might help us cling to the anchor of our hope during the difficult times of life and to help us not get swept away by the current.

No Condemnation In Jesus Christ

Even at the best life can possibly be, without Jesus Christ there is only the expectation to receive condemnation (a sentence of punishment). But, for those who come to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and put their focus on the spiritual things of God rather than the physical things of this world, there is no sentence of condemnation! Therefore,

those who are Christians can face the storms of life knowing that they do not have any sentence of condemnation on themselves.

Jesus Christ makes us free

Romans chapter 7 helps to understand the significance of Romans chapter 8. Romans chapter 7 demonstrates the reality of our situations without Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ had not given Himself as the sacrifice for sin, we would be dependent upon law alone. And, Romans 7 demonstrates that sin takes advantage of the law and produces death in us when we violate God's law.

And, since we all sin and fall short of glorifying God (Romans 3:23), we would all find ourselves doing the things that we know is not the right thing to do. But, there would be no deliverance from the death produced by sin if we were dependent on the law of God alone. For, once we had committed sin, we could not do anything (by ourselves) to earn God's forgiveness – even if we never committed any other sin. So, we, like Paul, would be forced to conclude, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

But, there is an answer. His name is Jesus Christ! So, Paul says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1-4).

In Jesus Christ, we can go from being trapped in sin without spiritual life to being made free from sin and having spiritual life! We can go from being under the condemnatory punishment due to violating God's law to having no sentence of condemnation on us. The reason why is because Jesus Christ came to earth and gave His life to provide the ransom sacrifice for sin. In doing so, “He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law

might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

To be spiritually minded is life and peace

Only by Jesus Christ can we have the righteous requirement of law fulfilled in us. That is, God's law requires that we obey it. Whenever we commit sin, we can never be made righteous by ourselves – because we are lawbreakers. But, we now can be righteous through Jesus Christ. However, verse 4 also told us *who* would have the righteous requirement of law fulfilled in them. Paul said it would be fulfilled in those “who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” That is, we have to be focused on the things of God rather than the things of this world.

Romans 8:5-8 explains even further. “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

If you want there to be no condemnatory sentence of punishment on you, you must put all of your focus on the ways of God. For, being focused on the ways of this world results in spiritual death and remaining the enemy of God because such a person will not try to please God in all things. However, the one who is focused on the spiritual things of God will be trying to please God in everything.

Therefore, the one who is spiritually minded will enjoy life and peace through Jesus Christ. Rather than living with the knowledge of impending spiritual destruction, you will be able to live with the eager expectation of eternal life in Heaven. And, you will enjoy a peace with God that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:6-7).

God's Spirit dwells in us

Romans 8:9-11 continues, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the

Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

Whenever we were living in sin, we were dead while we were living (spiritually dead while alive physically). Therefore, whenever we faced the storms of life, we were without the hopeful assurance of anything better than what we were currently experiencing. So, when there is no assurance of better days ahead, it is reasonable to be discouraged by the storms.

However, those who are serving God have God’s Spirit in them. This is because they have the word of God (which the Holy Spirit has revealed) living and working in their lives. And, this Spirit of God gives life! Rather than living in a spiritually dead condition while we are separated from God and from all of the wonderful spiritual blessings He offers, we can enjoy spiritual life by living for God – and face the storms and current of life with a completely new perspective!

What a transformation! As Christians, we can go from being dead in our sins, enemies of God, and having no hopeful assurance of anything better to having spiritual life, peace with God, and the confident assurance of eternal life in Heaven! Surely, the fact that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not put their minds on the things of the flesh, but rather on the things of God, will strengthen us as we face the storms and current of this life. Surely, we will not want to let go of this hope and go back into the ways of condemnation!

We Are Children Of God

We have went from being enemies of God to being children of God. Now, there is a significant difference in facing the storms and current of life when you are fighting against God and when you are

one of His children! This does not mean that the storms of life will be any less severe for children of God. In fact, they can be even more severe due to persecution. However, we can rejoice in these times because we know what our Heavenly Father has promised to give us!

We are not debtors to the flesh

Romans 8:12-13 says, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

As we face the storms that try to drive our lives away from God or the current that tries to gradually pull us away from God, we must remember that we are not debtors according to the flesh. That is, we do not owe the flesh anything. Because we have listened to our own fleshly desires in the past, we have sinned against God, had a sentence of condemnation placed on us, and experienced spiritual death. So, when we face these storms and current of life, we should not think that we owe it to the flesh to do whatever is pleasing to it!

Instead, we owe God a life of commitment to serving Him. He is the one who has sacrificed Jesus Christ so that we can have the righteous requirement of law fulfilled in us. But, we must live with our focus on the spiritual things. We must be committed to following the words that have been revealed by the Spirit of God (in the pages of the Bible).

For, if we do this, God says that we will live! This spiritual life should be something that is greatly valued by each one of us. And, as we face the storms and current of life, and are tempted to put our own physical interests above God’s desires, we must remember what each one has given us! Christians must refuse to go back into debt for the flesh that has resulted in our own spiritual death! For, God has given us spiritual life!

We have been adopted as children of God

Not only has God given us spiritual life through Jesus Christ, but He has made us His own children. Romans 8:14-15 says, “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.’”

Whenever we lived according to the desires of the flesh, we were children of the devil (see John 8:44 and 1 John 3:10). As children of the devil, we were in bondage because of the sin that we committed. And, this resulted in great fear.

Just think about what it was like to live your life prior to becoming a Christian. You still faced the storms of life. But, whenever these storms would hit, you had nothing solid to hold on to. These storms completely shook your life and everything that you had hope in. This produced great anxiety and fear because there was nothing stable to get you through these difficult circumstances. And, even when things were going well in your earthly life, you were still living in fear because you knew that you were not prepared for your earthly life to end (and you always knew that you were just one heartbeat away from spending an eternity in the devil’s Hell)!

Now, recognize how much better your perspective on life is as a child of God. Those who are led by God’s Spirit (through the word of God) are children of God. So, if you are following God in all things, He has adopted you. But, He has not adopted you because of some great quality that you have. Rather, He adopted you because He loves you and wants to save you. He wants you to be safe. And, you can have full trust in your Heavenly Father!

So, whenever you face the storms of life and the current that is trying to pull you away from God, you can cry out, “Abba, Father” (an expression of deep trust that only a child can use in reference to his father)! Rather than fearing the storms that we face, we can face them with courage, being assured that our Heavenly Father will take care of us for as long as we live for Him!

We are heirs of God

Romans 8:16-17 says, “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.”

There is joint testimony that we are the children of God between the Spirit of God and our spirits. The Holy Spirit testifies concerning what God has required of us in order to be God’s children. Our spirits testify whether we are living according to those instructions. If we are, then our spirits testify with God’s Spirit that we have done what God requires for us to be His children. But, if we are not living in obedience to the things revealed by God’s Spirit in the word of God, we cannot rightly conclude that we are the children of God.

If we are truly God’s children, then we are heirs of God! As we discussed in lesson 5, we are set to receive 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 ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:4-5).

This inheritance that will be given to those of us who are God’s children is unfathomable in its great beauty and splendor! As we considered in lesson 5, only the God who created all things and is ruler over all is capable of giving such a marvelous inheritance. It far surpasses anything that we could ever hope to receive on this earth. Still, God warns us that there will be suffering involved in living for Jesus Christ, as His children.

Our Hope Is Greater Than Our Sufferings

We now need to recognize the two realities that those who are children of God face (as we have seen up to this point in our study of Romans 8). We have no sentence of condemnation on us, since we are children of God. But, we also have the assurance of suffering. In fact, verse 17 said that we will only be heirs with Christ and be glorified with Him *if* we suffer with Him. So, as we face these two great realities, we must consider the truth that the hope we have as Christians is greater than any of the sufferings we will experience!

Incomparable glory awaits

Paul states, “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). Essentially, Paul is saying that there is no comparison between the Christian’s suffering and joy. The only difficult part is in keeping our perspective in this regard. For, the sufferings are all being experienced now. But, the greatest joy that we will experience is waiting for us in Heaven.

Paul’s own life gives us perspective in this regard. Earlier in this series, we considered Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. He said, “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.”

Now, I want to put this in a little more context than we considered previously. Let’s listen to what Paul’s “light affliction” included. In 2 Corinthians 11:22-33, Paul says that he was “above measure” in stripes (beatings), in prisons “more frequently,” and “in deaths often.” He had received “forty stripes minus one” five times from the Jews. Three times he was beaten with rods. He was shipwrecked. He spent a night and day “in the deep.” He experienced frequent dangers in his journeys – including dangers of waters, of robbers, of his own countrymen, of the Gentiles, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren. He was weary and laboring. He was often without sleep. He experienced hunger and thirst. He was in cold and nakedness.

Yet, despite all that Paul went through, he said, “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). You see, despite all the ways that Paul would suffer in his life for the cause of Jesus Christ, he was convinced that the glory that was reserved for him as a child of God would far surpass

them all! So, even when he was in prison for the sake of Christ, he could tell his Christian brothers and sisters, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4).

Now, by any other measure, the sufferings that Paul experienced were far from “light.” But, when they were compared with the glory of the Heavenly home Paul was longing for, they were like a small bump in the road that leads to far better things. In fact, he said that these points of “light affliction” were working for “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Eager anticipation for something better

So, like Paul, whenever we experience the storms of this life, we should never lose sight of our Heavenly prize! We should never become so absorbed by our momentary sufferings to let go of our anchor – not even for a moment. Instead, we should be longing for deliverance from the sufferings we experience on this earth.

Romans 8:19-25 says, “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 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.”

As God’s new creation, we long for the freedom from the corruption that began to be experienced on this earth after the sin in the Garden of Eden. We should be groaning through these trials of life with eager anticipation for our full adoption to be complete and we can be taken home to live forever with our Heavenly Father. And, if we are faithful to God, we will be glorified together with Jesus Christ (as seen in Romans 8:17).

This tremendous hope that we have saves us. And, although we do not currently experience this great deliverance, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. So, as we wait for this hope to become reality, the fact that we must persevere means that things will not always be easy for us. There are things that we will have to endure. But, our hope saves us through all of these times and from the current of life that tries to pull us away from God if we refuse to let go of it!

We have help from the Holy Spirit

Thankfully, we are not alone as we face these difficult times. Romans 8:26-27 says, “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

Now, I do not know all about how this intercession of the Holy Spirit works. But, I do know that it works for the benefit of those who are children of God! Certainly, there are times in our lives and in our sufferings that we struggle to know how we ought to pray or what we ought to pray for.

Fortunately, the Holy Spirit is there to help! God knows our hearts and the Holy Spirit, evidently, helps to communicate that to God when we pray. So, regardless of what is all involved in this work of the Holy Spirit, it should be very comforting to know that those who are children of God have this great help in prayer, as we recognize that the prayers of the righteous are powerful (James 5:16)!

All things work together for good

Then, here is further comfort for those who are Christians: The assurance that everything will work out for the good. Romans 8:28-30 says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He

also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Though we experience sufferings on this earth, we can rejoice in knowing that “all things work together for good.” But, we must begin by recognizing who this promise is made to. It is *only* made to those who are Christians – those who love God and are called by the gospel according to God’s eternal purpose of salvation through Jesus Christ! For, God has determined that only those who are in Christ Jesus will be forgiven of their sins and glorified in Heaven with Jesus.

So, these who are Christians should take comfort in the promise that all things work together for good. But, does this mean that every hardship we face on this earth will work out for our physical good? For instance, does this mean that if you lose your job God promises you will have a better one? Absolutely not! In fact, the Scriptures demonstrate (by Paul and others) that many Christians suffered throughout their earthly lives without seeing their physical situations improve. Some even died for Jesus Christ!

Instead, this is a spiritual promise that provides a tremendous amount of comfort. No matter what situations we face on this earth, we know that they will work out to our spiritual benefit if we are faithful to God. There are two ways for us to consider this.

First, all things will work out for our spiritual benefit in the sense that those who are faithful to the Lord will be strengthened as the result of their hardships. This is just as we saw in James 1:2-4 and Romans 5:1-5. Whenever we faithfully endure the trying of our faiths, we grow in faith, learn how to persevere, build character that pleases God, and increase in our hope! Therefore, we can rejoice whenever we experience these hard times because we know that we will get stronger by enduring them.

Second, all things will work out for our spiritual benefit in the sense that Heaven will be the eternal home of those who are faithful to the Lord. No matter what struggles we face on this earth, it will all be okay in the end. In fact, it will be more than just *okay*. It will be great! At the end of the way is a

crown of righteousness that is laid up for us in Heaven.

Therefore, as the apostle Paul contemplated his own impending death (which secular history tells us came by being beheaded for the cause of Christ under persecution by the Roman empire), consider some of the final words he wrote, in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

We Are More Than Conquerors

Although many people in this world look at the lives of Christians and think we are missing out, those who are Christians are the only ones who truly have reason to rejoice in this life! For, we are the ones who will be more than conquerors – even over death! All others will be defeated by the enemy of death, and then will receive eternal punishment in Hell because of their sins. Only the Christian has all things work together for good.

Who can be against us?

Romans 8:31-34 says, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”

Listen to the hope-filled words of Paul! God is for us, therefore it is insignificant as to who is against us. God did not spare His own Son, but sacrificed Him for us. Surely, then, He will also freely give us all of the things He has promised to

those who are His children. No one is able to bring a charge against us that will override God's judgment and mercy toward us. For, God is the one who justifies those who are His children. Furthermore, no one can condemn us because it is Christ who died for us and makes intercession for us at the right hand of God!

What tremendous comfort as we face the storms and current of life! Nothing is such a powerful force against us that it can ruin the hope that we have as children of God. So, we can face all of the trials of life with great joy, rejoicing in the hope of everlasting life in Heaven!

Who can separate us from the love of God?

Romans 8:35-39 continues, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The love of God and Christ has saved each one of us who are His children. Therefore, we should consider whether any of the things we face can separate us from God's love. Think through everything that Paul mentions in this text for just a moment.

Shall tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword separate you from God's love? That is, are any of the sufferings we experience in life so difficult that they press against us and force us to be eternally lost? What about persecution? What about being destitute and naked? What about being executed for having faith in Christ?

Paul says that even though there were Christians who were being executed like sheep that are led to the slaughter, they were “more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” That is, they were overwhelming victors in Christ Jesus! They

were not defeated by the things they faced. And, they were not just barely victorious over those things. Instead, they were overwhelmingly victorious! It wasn't even close!

Surely, if none of these things can separate us from the love of God, nothing will be able to! So, Paul concludes that there is nothing and no one who is *able* "to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." No powerful government. No army. Nothing that is present. Nothing that is looming in the future. No angel. Nothing! Period.

The only thing that can separate us from the love God and the hope that we have in Christ Jesus is *us*! Nothing and no one is powerful or influential enough to destroy us by themselves. But, if we choose not to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, we will be destroyed and lose our hope. Therefore, Jude exhorted his fellow Christians, "keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus unto eternal life" (Jude 1:21)!

If we will remain faithful to Jesus Christ through all the storms and the current of life, we are assured of eternal salvation in Heaven! For instance, listen to what Jesus told Christians in the city of Smyrna who were about to experience persecution. "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" (Revelation 2:10)!

Conclusion

If we will be faithful to Jesus Christ through all the storms and trials of life, we have glory waiting for us that is incomprehensible! So, although we groan through these storms and current of life, we live our lives rejoicing in the hope of everlasting life in Heaven. And, we are convinced that no matter what we are faced with on this earth, God is stronger – and we know that He has promised everything works together for our spiritual good!

Study Questions

What is the difference between the happiness of the world and the joy of a Christian?

1. No Condemnation In Jesus Christ

How has Jesus Christ made us free?

Why is it essential to be spiritually minded?

What happens when God's Spirit dwells in us?

2. We Are Children Of God

Why are we not debtors to the flesh?

How have we become children of God?

What are we set to receive as children of God?

3. Our Hope Is Greater Than Our Sufferings

How does the glory waiting compare with the present sufferings?

What should our anticipation be?

What help does the Holy Spirit provide?

How does everything work together for good?

4. We Are More Than Conquerors

Who can be against us?

Who can separate us from the love of God?

We Have an Anchor!

Lesson: 8

Steadfastly Abounding In The Work Of The Lord

We have an anchor that works to keep us steadfast in serving the Lord, even though the storms of life pound against us and the current of life tries to pull us away from God! Surely, we would be drifting and lost at sea without this anchor. This anchor, as we have seen throughout this study, is the hope of eternal life in Heaven.

Once again, Hebrews 6:19 says, “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.” Through Jesus Christ, the Christian has the great expectation of living eternally with God in Heaven! And, this hope is sure and steadfast. It will not disappoint those who rely on it (as long as they follow the commandments of God).

Think back over the storms of life that are howling all around you. These are the trials and sufferings that people experience while they live on this earth: The deaths of loved ones. Our own impending deaths. Disease. Cancer. Injuries. Surgeries. Paralysis. Disabilities. Alzheimer’s. Tornadoes. Hurricanes. Floods. Layoffs. Firings. Relocations. More bills than money. House fires.

Break-ins. Losing relationships. Being hurt by people we love. Divorce. Separations. Abuse. Ridicule. Accidents. Wars. Temptations to live according to our own desires rather than do the will of God. Persecutions for living a faithful life to Jesus Christ.

Then, think back over the threat that you face from the current that is at work in this world. This is the constant pull and lure of the world away from God. We face this through our relationships, such as our family members, friends, co-workers, classmates, neighbors, etc., who do not live to serve God. We face this through the media, such as television, radio, books, magazines, internet sites, movies, etc., that are trying to plant and cultivate ideas and desires in our minds that are contrary to God. We face this through worldly “wisdom,” such as is gained through some forms of secular education, books, the conversations we have with others, etc., that are trying to teach us to think in ways that go against the wisdom of God. We face this through false religious teaching, such as is seen even within what is called “Christianity,” that tries to convince us that we can have the hope of Heaven without obeying all that is taught in the pages of the Bible. And, we face this through the daily grind of this life, such as dealing with money concerns, family problems, busyness, etc., that tries to distract us from the kind of service we should really be offering to God.

There is so much that is working against us in order to get us away from God. But, if we keep our eyes focused on the eternal salvation that God has promised to those who serve Him faithfully, we will be steadfast and abound in the work of the Lord! After assuring Christians of a future resurrection, Paul told the Corinthian Christians, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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 15:57-58)!

Then, listen to Paul in Galatians 6:7-10. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting

life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

In this final lesson of this series, we want to consider this text in Galatians 6 and learn how we can steadfastly abound in the work of the Lord – in the face of all that we are struggling to overcome. Even in a world that is full of evil, suffering, trials, temptations, and persecutions, it is possible to remain steadfast in serving the Lord Jesus Christ. And, it is possible to even abound in the work of the Lord. But, it all comes back to the anchor of your hope!

We Will Reap What We Sow

The Christian must view the world and his/her decisions in a different way than those who are living for the world. The world views everything through the prism of earthly things. However, the Christian must keep a long-term focus and not get caught up in any particular “moment” on this earth. This is because the Christian knows he/she will reap what is sown.

God is watching

It can be tempting to live our lives on this earth and make decisions based only on what we think is best or based on what we want to do. That is what the people who are living all around us do. However, the Christian must not be so deceived as to think that his/her actions have no consequences.

Again, Paul stated, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). God will not be ignored. Even though there are many people who conduct their earthly lives thinking that they are getting away with how they are living, they will not escape God.

God is watching. And, He promises that there will be a just reward or punishment. He promises that everyone will be judged. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s

all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.”

On this Day of Judgment, we will all reap according to what we have sown. And, recognize that God does not just know some of the things that we do during our earthly lives. Instead, He knows them all – even the things that we thought were done in secret because our Heavenly Father sees in these secret times (Matthew 6:4). Proverbs 15:3 gives us the following warning: “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.”

Therefore, whenever you face the storms of this life that try to sweep you up and carry you into a sea of sin or the current that is gradually working to pull you away from God, recognize that God is watching how you respond. Do not allow yourself to be deceived (by yourself or others) into thinking that God does not know or does not care how you respond. God knows every decision you make, every thought you think, and every word you say. He knows every intent of your heart!

The spirit versus the flesh

We are at war during our lives on this earth, whether we realize it or not. No, this is not a war that is fought with physical weapons on a physical battlefield against a physical enemy. Instead, this is a spiritual war – a war for our souls.

Satan is fighting against us. His allies include those people in this world who are not living for God. The battlefield is our hearts (minds), to see whether God or Satan gets to control them. Whoever controls our hearts will control our lives. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.” Satan wants us to focus on the things that are of this world that will please our flesh. However, God wants us to focus on the spiritual things that He has told us about in His word (centering around the hope of eternal salvation in Heaven).

Galatians 5:16-26 helps us to understand the nature of the conflict that we all face. Paul says that “the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you

wish” (verse 17). Those who follow the desires of their flesh produce the sinful works of “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like” (verses 19-21).

In contrast, those who are focused on the spiritual things God has revealed in His word will produce the fruits of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (verses 22-23). Those who belong to Jesus Christ have committed themselves to living in this way. In fact, Paul said that “those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (verse 24).

Those of us who are Christians need to view ourselves as members of Christ’s army. We have enlisted in His service. So, we need to view our lives differently than all of the others who are living around us. Rather than living carefree civilian lives, we must focus on winning the war we are engaged in! Therefore, as we face the storms of life and battle against the current, we should view it as a war. 2 Timothy 2:3-4 says, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”

God will punish

It is important to recognize that we are fighting in this war with battles between the flesh and the spirit as we live our lives on earth because we will reap what we sow. It is interesting and very comforting to note that the outcome of this war is already decided. God wins! And, He will save those who faithfully serve Him. There is victory in Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:57)!

As we must recognize that God wins, that means Satan loses. And, if Satan loses, that means those who follow him and fight on his side will also lose. Remember, as we will reap what we sow, God says, “For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption” (Galatians 6:8).

Therefore, if we respond to the storms of life in a way that pleases our fleshly desires rather than serve God, we should know that we will reap corruption. And, if we allow the current of life to pull us away from God, we will experience this same corruption. For, after identifying the works of the flesh, God said that those who practice such things “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21).

Every Christian who is living on this earth and involved in this spiritual war *must* recognize that if they respond to the storms and current of life in a way that is contrary to the word of truth, they will miss out on Heaven! This is because the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). It is simply impossible to sow to the flesh and reap the benefits of serving God!

The punishment that God has prepared for such people is unimaginably terrible. Revelation 21:8 depicts this punishment as being in a lake that burns with fire and brimstone. And, just like I believe Heaven will be far greater than we can imagine, I believe that Hell will be much worse than we could ever imagine. Regardless, He has given us the picture of a place of endless suffering in fire and brimstone.

God will reward

Just as it is important to recognize that Satan’s side will lose this war, we must be continually refreshed to recognize that God’s side wins in the end. So, no matter how difficult life on this earth gets, we should take comfort in the victory that is promised through Jesus Christ!

The God who will not be mocked has assured us that “he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:8). As we have studied previously in this series of lessons, this everlasting life in Heaven will make all of the sufferings and trials that we experienced on this earth seem as if they were nothing (Romans 8:18)! Therefore, as we are engaged in this spiritual warfare, God encourages us, “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12).

As you face the struggles of living for God on this earth and try to do the work of the Lord, you must maintain a confident assurance that God will not allow your service to go unrewarded. Be confident that you will reap what you sow. Once again, 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “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.” Your steadfast, immovable, and always abounding work and labor for God *is not in vain*. It is not worthless!

In fact, it is worth far more than anything this world has ever known! Revelation 14:13 says, “Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’” The things of this world cease to be of any spiritual benefit to you whenever you die. But, the works that you do in the service of the Lord “follow” you! This is why Jesus has told us that we should store up treasures in Heaven rather than on this earth.

Do Not Grow Weary

There is a Day coming when we will all reap according to what we have sown. God is watching and He will either reward or punish you, depending on whether you chose to fight with Him or against Him during your earthly life. Still, it is easy to become weary and lose heart in the middle of the battle. Sometimes the storms of life seem unbearable and we become weary trying to endure them. Sometimes the current of life pulls against us so often and with such force that we become tired of trying to fight against it. The temptation is strong to let go of our anchors “for just a moment,” until we gain some strength. Then, God reminds us, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Galatians 6:9)! But, how can we keep our focus and not grow weary in doing the good things God desires for us to do?

Put on the whole armor of God

God has not left us unprotected in this spiritual warfare. He has given us everything that we need in order to be victorious through Jesus Christ. This includes the right kind and amount of armor so that we will be able to overcome the assaults of Satan.

Ephesians 6:10-17 explains, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Notice the positive encouragement that God gives us in this passage to assure us that we can be victorious. If we put on this armor we “may be able to stand” against the schemes Satan is using to destroy us (verse 11). If we take up the whole armor of God we “may be able to withstand in the evil day” (verse 13). Again, verse 14 tells us to “stand” by putting on the armor. And, verse 16 says that we will “be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”

So, we need to put on every single piece of armor in order to achieve this desired outcome of victory. We must put on the truth that God has revealed by believing and obeying it. We must put on righteousness by determining that we will only do those things that are right in the sight of God. We must put on the preparation of the gospel of peace to always be prepared to answer any temptation with Scripture and live in the peace of God that surpasses

all understanding. We should put on faith that demonstrates complete confidence in God at every point in our lives. We should put on the hope of salvation that will serve as the anchor for our souls in a world full of evil and suffering. And, we should take the word of God and use it in a way that will protect us from Satan's attacks as well as in a way that will advance the cause of Jesus Christ in this world!

The devil cannot defeat us if we put on all of this armor. There will be no crack or weakness that he can take advantage of. He will not be able to convince us to believe his lies. He will not be able to get us to pursue our own pleasures above the will of God. He will not be able to get us to doubt in God or in His word. And, he will not be able to distract us by the things of this world. The only way he will be able to defeat us is *if* we do not equip ourselves with a piece of this armor. Then, he will surely exploit the area that is left unprotected and defeat us.

Pray always

In the very next verse in Ephesians 6, Paul says, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (verse 18). Similar passages include Romans 12:12, saying, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer." And, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Prayer is an absolutely indispensable element of living faithfully for the Lord and not growing weary during our earthly lives. You see, although this world can (at times) feel like a lonely place for those who serve God, the reality is that the Christian is never alone. Even if there was no one else who was interested in serving God on this earth, those who are Christians can always find comfort in communicating directly to the Creator of this world, the Sustainer of life, the Provider of all good things, the Judge of all mankind, and the Savior of the world through prayer!

And, this is not some kind of meaningless exercise that just makes us feel good inside, with no

other benefit. Instead, the Scriptures promise that God hears the prayers of His people – and these prayers are powerful. James 5:16 says, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

In fact, the apostle Paul teaches us about one of the benefits we will experience from prayer, in Philippians 4:6-7. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Even though there are many challenges that those who are Christians face during their earthly lives, we can experience a kind of peace that no one else experiences when we cast all our cares upon God and make request of Him! Although prayer is not some sort of "Aladdin's lamp" that will always give us whatever we want unconditionally, there is great power in the righteous person praying. And, there is great peace that is produced by knowing that we have entrusted our concerns to the one true and living God who is over all!

Find encouragement in brethren

Although Christians can often feel as if they are all alone in this world, the reality is actually far different than this. Although the number of those who follow God are a minority, it is true that we are part of the family of God and we have brothers and sisters who live on this earth and are also fighting on the winning side of this war! And, like a family, we should lean on each other and help one another be victorious.

We should recognize that our brethren are facing the same difficulties that we are facing. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." So, we are not the only ones who are trying to resist the devil and endure the sufferings.

First, we should be helping our brethren who fall. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Sometimes we succumb to the trials and temptations of life and let Satan get the best of us. Thankfully, we are not alone! We have brothers and sisters in Christ who love us and want to see us go to Heaven who will help us recognize our sin and make the necessary corrections. In doing so, our brethren save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

Second, we should be helping to bear the burdens that our brethren face. Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Our brethren are burdened – just as we are burdened. They are facing some great storms in their lives. And, they are also fighting against the current of this world. But, we should not allow one another to bear these burdens alone! Instead, those who are strong should be helping the weak bear their burdens. And, we should hope that our brethren will help us bear our burdens whenever we are weak. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 instructs, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”

Third, we should be exhorting our brethren to live faithfully. 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.” It is not just about being there for our brethren whenever they are experiencing difficult times. Instead, we also need to be building up our brethren every single day! You see, the devil is working to try to get each person to move away from God every day. So, it is only fitting for God’s family to counterbalance those attacks every day with the needed encouragement to live godly in Christ Jesus!

Trust in God

God has done so much for us that we cannot identify it all! Yet, whenever we experience difficult times, the temptation is to put more trust in the things we can see than in God. Therefore, if we want to keep

from becoming weary in doing good, we must maintain full trust in God! We must, in the language of 2 Corinthians 5:7, “walk by faith, not by sight.”

Listen to Proverbs 3:5-6. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” Our own understanding often leads us in the wrong directions. And, our own understanding often can only see the physical things. But, if we truly put full trust in Him, He will always direct our paths in ways that are beneficial for us spiritually. Remember, God has promised that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)!

You see, our strength is *not* in ourselves. It must be in the Lord God! Recall that when God spoke of the whole armor of God, we would not be victorious because of *our* strength. Instead, Paul wrote, “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10)! We must trust that He is powerful enough to cause us to be victorious if we will obey what He tells us to do!

But, what about when God does not provide the relief that we feel we need? How do we remain steadfast then? Listen to 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Satan was trying to get to Paul through this “thorn in the flesh.” No one knows for certain what this was (though many suggest that it was poor eyesight). Regardless, this was such a burden for Paul that he pleaded with the Lord three times concerning it. However, the Lord did not remove it. Instead, God told Paul that His grace was enough and

His strength was enough to overcome Paul's weakness. So, Paul boasted in his infirmity.

In the same kind of way, there will be times when we plead and plead with God to take some kind of suffering away or make something easier on us. Perhaps we think that it is just more than we can bear. However, even if it is not the will of God to do according to our request, we must trust in God. Trust that His strength is sufficient for overcoming whatever difficulty or struggle you are currently experiencing!

Be Faithful Until Death

Do not lose heart! God has given you everything you need to overcome! Even though it is not always easy, you must not grow so weary in doing good that you give up and give in to the devil's attacks. For, you must remember that you will reap what you sow. Therefore, there is great reward in being faithful to Christ until death!

Do good whenever there is opportunity

After reminding us that we will reap if we do not lose heart, 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). Opportunities to live for Jesus are all around us. So, rather than giving in to the pressures of life, we should seize those opportunities and show Jesus Christ working in us!

We should take advantage of our opportunities to do all the good things that God wants us to be doing for others. This includes serving them, praying for them, visiting the sick, the widows, and orphans, helping those we know are in need, etc. And, the best kind of good that we can do for anyone is to help them learn the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ! We can and should be working to expose sin in this world and point people to Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls!

The night is coming

Here is the importance of taking advantage of every opportunity that we have: We never know which opportunity will be our last! Jesus recognized the limited number of opportunities a person has while living on this earth when He said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4)! So, we must make the best use of the time that we have on this earth (Ephesians 5:16). We must take full advantage of the opportunities that are presented to us to accomplish God's works – if we truly find them to be worthwhile. And, we should not just *do* the works of God, but abound in them (1 Corinthians 15:58)!

The "night" that is coming when no one can work is one of three things. First, the "night" will come for us whenever our earthly lives end. At this time, we will not have any more opportunity to accomplish the work of God. Second, the "night" will come when those we have opportunity to do good toward die. At this time, we will not be able to do good toward them any longer. Third, the "night" will come for everyone when the Lord Jesus returns from Heaven. At this time, the world will end and all opportunity to do good will be gone. Therefore, since "night" can come at any time, we must work and do good while it is "day"!

There is victory in Jesus

God wins! There is no question about it. God is stronger than all of His enemies – and it is not even close. Therefore, those who choose to live on God's side and remain steadfast in good works will experience an overwhelming victory. We will be more than conquerors through Him who loved us (see Romans 8:37)!

Listen to 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and

this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.”

A crown of life is waiting for the faithful

Whenever Jesus addressed the church in Smyrna, He said, “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 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” (Revelation 2:9-10).

These Christians had been experiencing some difficult times – and it was about to get even more difficult. Please recognize that when Jesus told them to be faithful until death, that death could have been coming sooner rather than later – and by means of being killed for Jesus. But, if they would be faithful for just a little while throughout their earthly lives, there was a crown of life waiting for them in Heaven! And, the same thing is true for us. If we will be faithful to Jesus Christ and accomplish His works during our lives on this earth, we will have that same crown of life in Heaven!

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that we face difficult circumstances, sufferings, persecutions, temptations, etc. while we live on this earth. But, the Christian has an anchor! That anchor is the hope of everlasting life in Heaven. And, that anchor is so strong that it will cause us to endure all the storms and the current of

life and steadfastly abound in the work of the Lord. For, we know that our labors in the Lord will not be in vain!

May we all hold fast to that anchor so that when the time for us to depart from this earth comes, we can utter the same words that Paul stated in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

Study Questions

Describe your struggles against the storms and current of life.

1. We Will Reap What We Sow

How much of your life does God see?

What is the conflict between the flesh and the spirit?

Who will God punish?

Who will God reward?

2. Do Not Grow Weary

How can you be protected against Satan's attacks?

What will be given to those who are faithful until death?

How will prayer help you live for the Lord?

What help can you find in your brethren?

Why is it so important to trust in God completely – even when He does not provide the relief you ask for?

3. Be Faithful Until Death

How often should you do good to others?

Why should you take advantage of every opportunity to do good?

Where is victory located?