

# CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

Developed by  
Dr. Stephen Gibson



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Some material for this course was adapted from the book *I Believe*, by the faculty of God's Bible School and College, in Cincinnati, Ohio. *I Believe* is available from God's Bible School at 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202. It can be ordered online at <https://www.gbs.edu/product/i-believe/>

# COURSE OVERVIEW

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an understanding of the basic doctrines in each of the major categories of Christian theology, such as God, Christ, sin, salvation, etc. The student will learn how to avoid errors in doctrine. The student will be equipped to teach Christian doctrine to others.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To learn the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith.
2. To properly use the Bible as the source and authority for doctrine.
3. To recognize significant errors in doctrine.
4. To gain understanding that helps to deepen our relationship with God.
5. To receive content and structure for teaching others.

## EXPLANATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR CLASS LEADERS

These directions describe how the class can be taught with the highest level of quality. The class leader must keep this standard for students who receive a certificate from Shepherd's Global Classroom. For other kinds of groups who are not able to meet these requirements, a teacher may adapt the requirements to their ability and give a different certificate.

We estimate that a lesson will take 90 minutes or more. It may be best for a group to meet twice for each lesson. If a group meets twice, some directions must be adapted. For example, there would not be a test both times.

Each student needs a copy of this book.

*Notes to class leaders* are included throughout the course with directions for specific parts of the lessons. *They are italicized.*

At the beginning of the class session, give the test over the previous lesson. Each student must write the answers from memory with no help. If a student is unable to pass the test,

you can let him try again another time (Estimated time: 10 minutes). A test answer key is available for download from [ShepherdsGlobal.org](http://ShepherdsGlobal.org).

After the test, use the list of objectives from the previous lesson as review questions. Ask a question for each objective and allow the students to explain (Estimated time: 15 minutes).

Begin the new lesson by having a student read the passage provided. Let students discuss briefly what the passage says about the subject of the lesson (Estimated time: 10 minutes).

Go through the lesson material by reading and explaining each section. Members of the class may be able to teach some sections (Estimated time: 45 minutes).

Much **Scripture** is used in the course. Scripture references given in the footnotes that begin with the word "Read" should also be read aloud in class. Other footnoted Scriptures are support for the statements in the text. It is not necessary to look up or read those passages in class.

**Discussion questions** and in-class activities are indicated by arrow bullet points. Sometimes discussion questions introduce the section; sometimes they review the section just covered. The class leader should ask the question and give students time to discuss the answer. It is not necessary to completely explain the answer at that time, especially if the question is introducing a section.

The class should read the “**Statement of Beliefs**” together twice at the end of each lesson.

At the end of each lesson, each student should be assigned a Scripture passage from the list provided. Before the next class session, they should read the passage and write a paragraph about what the passage says about the subject. They should show this paragraph to the class leader at the next session.

At least seven times during this course, the student should teach a lesson or part of a lesson to people not in the class. This can be done in a class at church, a home Bible study group, or another setting. At the end of each class session, remind the students of this assignment, and give them the chance to report if they have done any teaching since the last class session.

At the end of class, remind students to read the next lesson’s material before the next class session (Estimated time for announcements and assignments: 10 minutes).

If the student wants to **earn a certificate from Shepherd’s Global Classroom**, he should attend the class sessions and complete the assignments. If a student misses a class, he should study the lesson he missed, take the test, and do the writing assignment. A form is provided at the end of the course for recording the assignments completed.

## EXPLANATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR STUDENTS

You should read the material for each lesson before the class meets, so you can participate in the discussion with better understanding.

At the beginning of each class session, be prepared to take a test over the previous lesson. Study the test questions provided.

Always bring a Bible, the printed copy of the lesson, and a pen for adding your own notes to the material.

Be prepared to look up Scripture references, answer discussion questions, and participate as the class leader directs.

At the end of each lesson, you will be assigned a Scripture passage. Before the next class session, read the passage and write a paragraph about what the passage says about the subject of the lesson. Show the paragraph to the class leader.

At least seven times during this course you should teach a lesson or part of a lesson to people who are not in the class. This teaching can be done in a class at church, a home Bible study group, or another setting. Report to the class leader each time you teach someone.

# LESSON 1

## GOD'S BOOK

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - The concepts of general revelation and special revelation.
  - How evidence shows that the Bible is accurate.
  - The right understanding of the inspiration of Scripture.
  - Why the inspiration of Scripture means that it is without error.
  - The terms *inspired*, *infallible*, and *inerrant*.
  - Why the Bible is finished and cannot be expanded.
  - How the Bible is the primary source and final authority for doctrine.
  - How the Bible is important in the daily life of the Christian.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about the Bible.
2. The student will avoid listening to the wrong authority or studying the Bible with a limited purpose.

*Note to class leader: Usually the session will begin with a test over the previous lesson and a review of the objectives of the previous lesson. Since this is the first lesson, go to the Scripture reading below.*

- » Read Psalm 119:1-16 together. Discuss what this passage tells us about the Bible.

God, the Creator of the world, has spoken. He has revealed himself and the purpose of his creation. The truth God has revealed to us is called revelation. There is a book in the Bible called “Revelation,” but the word can also be used for all the truth God has revealed.

- » What are some ways that God has revealed truth to us?

## THE VARIETY OF FORMS OF REVELATION

Because God has revealed truth different ways, we talk about two categories: general revelation and special revelation.

### General Revelation

General revelation is what we can understand about God by looking at his creation. We see the amazing intelligence and power of God in the design of the universe.

We see significance about God in the way that man is designed. The fact that we can reason, appreciate beauty, and tell the difference between right and wrong (though not perfectly) shows us that our Creator must possess those abilities to a higher degree. We know that God must be someone who can think and communicate because we have those abilities.

Because general revelation shows us that God could speak, we realize that special revelation could happen. Because God can speak, it is possible for there to be messages from God and even a book from God.

By general revelation, people know there is a God, that they should obey him, and that they have already disobeyed him.<sup>1</sup> But general revelation does not tell us how to come into a right relationship with God. General revelation shows us the need for special revelation because it shows that people are sinful and "without excuse" before their Creator, but it does not tell us the solution.

### Special Revelation

Special revelation has occurred in the inspiration of the Bible and in the incarnation of Christ. Special revelation explains the condition that general revelation shows us to be in: fallen and guilty. Special revelation describes God, explains the Fall and sin, and shows how we can be reconciled to God.

Imagine that you didn't know the Bible exists. You realize that there is a God. You know that you are in trouble with God. You don't know what is after death. You don't know the purpose of life. You don't know how to approach God.

Then imagine that someone shows you a book and tells you that it came from God to answer those questions. Can you imagine how valuable this book would be?

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1 Read Romans 1:20. This verse tells us some of the things we know from observing the world God made.

## THE BIBLE'S CLAIM

- » What does the Bible claim about itself? Give some examples of statements from the Bible that show that it claims to be from God.

Let's talk about the claim that the Bible makes about itself. Then, we will look at evidence that the Bible is true. The Bible claims to be the Word of God. In the Old Testament, there are more than 3,000 statements that messages came from God, often stated as simply as, "Then the Lord spoke..."<sup>2</sup> Jesus considered the Old Testament to be inspired by God.<sup>3</sup> Writers of the New Testament considered the Old Testament to be from God.<sup>4</sup> Writers of the New Testament considered the New Testament writings to be inspired by God.<sup>5</sup>

If a person does not accept the Bible's claim about itself, he should look at the evidence. Imagine again that you did not know about the Bible. You know that God is a person and could speak if he wanted to. So, you know that a book from God is possible. Then someone shows you a book and tells you that it is a book from God.

- » How can you know that the Bible is really the Word of God? What would you expect it to be like?

Where the gospel is preached, anywhere in the world, people feel an internal conviction of its truth. When they believe the gospel and repent, they experience God's forgiveness and a changed life. For most people, that is their first reason for believing the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

Then for those in relationship with God, the Spirit of God speaks through Scripture, giving

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**"This law [of God] is an incorruptible picture of the High and Holy One that inhabits eternity. It is God, whom no man has seen in his essence, made visible to men and angels. It is the unveiled face of God; God revealed to his creatures as they are able to bear it; revealed to give life, and not to destroy it, that they may see God and live. It is the heart of God opened to man."**

**John Wesley**

"The Origin, Properties, and Use of God's Law"

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2 For examples, see Numbers 34:1, 35:1, 9.

3 Read Matthew 5:17-18; John 10:35; Mark 12:36.

4 Read Acts 3:18; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16.

5 Read 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Peter 3:16.

6 Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

understanding and conviction. The way the Holy Spirit uses the Bible confirms that it is the Word of God.<sup>7</sup>

As we walk in relationship with God, we find that the Bible accurately reveals his nature and the way he works with us. The Bible shows us the way to begin a relationship with God and the way to continue with him. This is evidence that the Bible is God's Word.<sup>8</sup>

But what if you want evidence that is not based on your own spiritual experience? People in other religions have spiritual experience also, but their experience is not based on truth. How can we know that our experience is based on truth?

» Is there evidence that the Bible is accurate in the things that it says?

The Bible was written by more than forty authors, most of whom were not acquainted with most of the others, over a period of 1,500 years. What would we normally expect of such a book? We would assume that it would have all kinds of mistakes and contradictions. But consider the following facts about the Bible. Thousands of geographical sites mentioned in the Bible have been located; thousands of historical events and individuals mentioned in the Bible are confirmed in history; never has any discovery refuted a biblical statement; and never does the Bible contradict itself. Such statements are not true of any other book ever written. Evidence supports the Bible's claim to be inspired by God.

We can summarize the evidence that supports the Bible's claim to be the Word of God in six points. We know the Bible is truly God's Word because:

1. Thousands of biblical facts are confirmed.
2. No statement of the Bible is disproved.
3. The Bible does not contradict itself.
4. The gospel is proved by its effects.
5. The Spirit of God speaks through the Bible.
6. The Bible guides our relationship with God.

## DEFINING INSPIRATION

» What do we mean that the Bible is inspired?

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7 Read Ephesians 6:17.

8 Read Psalm 119:1-2.

Sometimes people feel like they have been inspired when they have great ideas, but the Bible means more than that when it claims to be inspired by God.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

The phrase “given by inspiration of God” means “breathed by God.” Though Scripture flowed from pens in human hands, the emphasis of this verse is that the Bible came from God. Because the Bible is from God, it is reliable for doctrine, etc. It is better than the best that men could do.

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21-22).

These verses in 2 Peter say literally that writers were *carried along* by the Holy Spirit. Their accuracy did not depend on their own knowledge. The fact that they were moved, or carried, by the Holy Spirit in their writing, shows that the reliability of the writing ultimately depended on God. The Bible is as reliable as God.

Inspiration is the supernatural work in which God revealed himself and brought that revelation to written form. The Bible is the end product of inspiration. The Bible is inspired like no other book. The inspiration of the Bible means that it is completely the Word of God, even to the very words used.

## WHAT WAS INSPIRATION LIKE?

- » What are some ways that the biblical writers received God’s truth before they wrote?

Sometimes people wonder how inspiration worked. How did God communicate his truth and make sure it was recorded accurately? The first fact we should notice about God’s style of revelation is that it has variety. He is not limited to a certain method.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes God spoke with an audible voice, as when he spoke to Moses.<sup>10</sup> At other times he gave dreams or visions, and the writer described them.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the part of Scripture that came most directly from God into print was the covenant with Israel that was “written with the finger of God.”<sup>12</sup> Other sections of Scripture seem to have been dictated, for

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9 Read Hebrews 1:1.

10 Exodus 33:11

11 For examples of revelation by vision, see Daniel 7 and 8, and most of the book of Revelation.

12 Deuteronomy 9:10

major passages in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers come after the statement, “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying.”

Inspiration does not mean that God spoke the words to the writer in an audible voice. We see differences in personalities and writing styles among various writers. For example, Paul’s style is very different from Peter’s. Our view of inspiration needs to include God’s use of the human writers’ personalities, vocabularies, writing styles, education, and historical research.

The right view of inspiration is that God inspired the whole person, using the human writer’s imagination and personality to express divine truth, not only revealing truth but also supervising the writing process to provide total accuracy.

Some people think that God just gave the ideas that he wanted to communicate, and the human writer explained them the best he could, inevitably making human mistakes in details. That view does not fit the Bible’s description of inspiration. The Bible describes the authors as being “carried along” by the Holy Spirit in their writing, so we know that they were not left to write on their own, making mistakes.

Because the Bible is the Word of God, it does not say anything that is wrong because God does not make mistakes.<sup>13</sup> Since God revealed himself in the history recorded in the Bible, the details must be accurate so that we have a reliable revelation of God. Therefore, because of the biblical description of inspiration, we know that God guided the writing so that it was completely accurate.

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**“The Scripture therefore of the Old and New Testament is a most solid and precious system of Divine truth. Every part thereof is worthy of God; and all together are one entire body, wherein is no defect, no excess. It is the fountain of heavenly wisdom, which they who are able to taste, prefer to all writings of men, however wise, or learned, or holy.”**

**John Wesley**

(In the preface to *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*)

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## TERMS USED TO DEFEND THE BIBLE'S TOTAL ACCURACY

### Inspired

That the Bible is inspired means that it is the Word of God, given by his revelation.<sup>14</sup> This term was originally sufficient to assert the full reliability and accuracy of the Bible, but now some people who say they believe the Bible is inspired deny that it is completely accurate. The following terms have come into use to defend essential aspects of inspiration.

### Infallible

This term means “cannot fail.” When we say that the Bible is infallible, we mean that it can be trusted and will never mislead us. The Bible is infallible not only in its doctrinal statements, but in every statement it makes.

### Inerrant

This term means “without error.” The Bible is accurate in every statement that it makes. Since God would never lie or make a mistake<sup>15</sup> and the Bible is God's Word, we can be sure that it is without mistake. If a person says that the Bible may have mistakes because humans were involved in its writing, he is forgetting the description of inspiration in 2 Peter 1:21-22: the writers were “carried along” by the Holy Spirit. The biblical, historical view of inspiration is that the whole Bible is inspired, even to the very words, and therefore is without error.<sup>16</sup>

### What about errors in copying?

Before machine printing existed, Scripture was copied by hand. We do not have the original manuscripts written by Paul, Isaiah, or Moses. Among the thousands of ancient, handwritten copies that we have in Greek and Hebrew, there are slight differences, and we cannot always know exactly what the exact original wording was. However, the differences are so slight that no doctrine is questionable because of them. Because we know that the originals were inerrant, and because the differences in the copies are so small, we know that we can trust every statement the Bible makes.

- » How do we know the Bible is accurate even though it was copied by hand many times?
- » What are various reasons that some people think the Bible has mistakes?

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14 Read 2 Timothy 3:16. To be “inspired” means that scripture was “breathed out” of God’s mouth.

15 Read Titus 1:2.

16 Read Matthew 5:18.

## Why do some people think the Bible has mistakes?

Sometimes people claim that the Bible has mistakes. That is because they don't understand the nature of the Bible.

The Bible used common human communication. For example, there is a verse that mentions the sun moving across the sky. We know that the earth is turning, rather than the sun moving. But even scientists talk about the sun coming up and going down. That is not an error; it is simply describing the way we see it.

There are also poetic statements, like "the hills skipped like lambs," or "the trees clapped their hands." That is a style of literature that is obviously not literal.

There are differences in writing styles. There is quotation of other writers, including people who were not inspired. None of that is any problem for the doctrine of inspiration. God guided the writing process to make sure the final product was His Word.

Sometimes people think they see a contradiction in the Bible, but they need to look at it more carefully. For example, Luke 8:26-27 and Mark 5:1-2 tell us about a demon-possessed man who was delivered by Jesus. Matthew 8:28 tells us that there were actually two demon-possessed men delivered. That is not a contradiction. Luke and Mark did not say there was only one man. They chose to focus on the one man who had a history in the area. If a person sees statements in the Bible that seem to contradict each other, he should not hurry to a conclusion, but take time to understand the context.

## THE BIBLE FOR THE CHRISTIAN

- » What are some ways the Christian should use the Bible?

The Bible provides the law of God. The law does not save us, but it shows how God wants us to live. God's law shows God's nature. We should follow it because we want to be like God. Because we love God, we should love his law. Psalm 119 describes how a worshipper of God should delight in the law of God. The person who loves God will pray for God to change his heart to match God's will. It is impossible for a person who loves God to be unconcerned about pleasing God.

The Word of God is light. The Apostle Peter tells us that the world is in spiritual darkness, and

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**"We assert that since Christ and his apostles sojourned on the earth, nothing necessary for salvation has been given which is not in a full manner comprised in the sacred Scriptures."**

**Adapted from  
James Arminius**

"Disputation on the Perfection  
of the Scriptures"

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the Word of God is the light to guide the way we should go.<sup>17</sup> A person should never follow ideas or feelings that contradict God's Word. The Holy Spirit will never lead a person to do something that the Bible says is wrong.

The Word of God is our spiritual food. Good appetite is a sign of health, and a Christian will desire the Word of God like a baby desires milk.<sup>18</sup> As a Christian matures, he is able to understand and digest more of God's truth, like a child learns to eat solid food.<sup>19</sup> A Christian must daily feed himself spiritually with God's Word.

The Bible is our defense against Satan. We are commanded to equip ourselves with spiritual armor. The sword the Holy Spirit uses for us is the Word of God.<sup>20</sup> Jesus answered the temptations of the devil with Scripture.<sup>21</sup>

The Word of God is truth that calls for our response. Jesus compared it to seeds that are planted.<sup>22</sup> Some of the seeds did not do well because the ground was not prepared. As we read the Bible, we must respond to its truth and pray for God to bring fruit from our life by his Word.

## BECAUSE THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD...

- It will never be outdated or irrelevant. It applies to all people in all places and times.
- It is the guide for discerning God's will, since God will never contradict Himself or change his mind.
- It is our guide for getting the best out of life, since God, our Maker, gave it as directions for us.
- It contains everything we need to know to be saved and to walk in relationship with God.

Though we learn from pastors and from church tradition, no idea can be accepted that contradicts Scripture because it is the final authority.

The Holy Spirit illuminates God's Word for our understanding and directs us to obey it.

» God still speaks, but should we expect that anything can be added to the Bible?

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17 Read 2 Peter 1:19-21; Psalm 119:105.

18 1 Peter 2:2

19 1 Corinthians 3:2

20 Ephesians 6:17

21 Matthew 4:3-4

22 Luke 8:11-15

## IS THE BIBLE FINISHED?

From the time that the last apostle died, the church has considered the Bible a finished book. The church did not merely select writings to call Scripture; instead, they recognized that certain writings were inspired by God and had Scriptural authority. The writings that were recognized as Scripture met qualifications that no later writings could meet.

For Old Testament books, the church kept the writings that Israel had preserved as Scripture. New Testament Scripture was recognized by the following qualifications: historical tie to the apostles, self-authenticating quality, unanimous church acceptance, respectful use of the Old Testament, and usefulness for resistance of heresy.

God still speaks, but can something be added to the Bible now? It is impossible for any new writing to meet the qualifications for inclusion in the original Scriptures. For example, no new writing can be tied to the apostles, for they are not still with us. Neither would any new writing be accepted by the whole church worldwide.

Scripture is complete and sufficient for salvation and Christian living.<sup>23</sup> Nothing important and necessary can be added to Scripture because it already has all we need. People who claim to be receiving new revelation should instead spend their time studying the revelation God has already given. They will find there all they need and be guarded from error.

*Note to class leader: The following two blocks of information ("Errors to Avoid" and "Errors of the Cults") could be explained by two members of the class.*

## ERRORS TO AVOID

### **Compromising Biblical Authority**

What is your final authority? Many Christians would say that the Bible is their authority, but they actually trust their own feelings the most. A person will say an action is okay because he does not feel guilty when he does it. This person is making his feelings the final authority instead of the Bible.

Sometimes a person does not take the Bible seriously because he is influenced by others. There is a command in Scripture that he does not obey because other people who claim to be Christians do not obey it. He is following a popular kind of Christianity, but biblical Christianity usually is not popular.

### **Studying the Bible with a Limited Purpose**

The Bible is the primary source of doctrine. It is the final authority for any doctrinal question. However, it is a problem when people study the Bible only to find proof for their doctrines. They do not use the Bible for spiritual food. They think only about how to show that someone else is wrong. It is right for us to develop and defend our doctrines with Scripture. However, if that is our only use of the Bible, we will lose the joy that comes from using it in our personal relationship with God.

Some people read the Bible only for the purpose of feeling encouraged. We need to remember that the purposes of the Bible include conviction and correction. We should not skip the commands of the Bible, looking for the promises that make us feel better. Maybe what God wants to do for you today is conviction or correction.

## ERRORS OF THE CULTS

Some religious groups claim to believe the Bible, but they make something else their final authority. They claim that only they can explain the Bible, using revelation or a special system that only they have. Their most important doctrines cannot be proved from the Bible.

They may have another book that they use as Scripture in addition to the Bible. They may say that the Bible is not reliable because it has translation and copying errors.

Those ideas imply that the Bible is not complete as the Word of God. For those people, something else becomes the final authority.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

## STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

The Bible is the Word of God. God inspired the writers so that they wrote without error. The Bible includes everything that we need to know in order to be saved from sin and to walk in relationship with God. The Bible is the primary source of our doctrine and is the final authority. The Christian should study the Bible daily to know God better, to be guided, and to be spiritually fed.

## LESSON 1 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Passage Assignment: Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Psalm 119:33-40
  - Psalm 119:129-136
  - Proverbs 30:5-6
  - Revelation 22:18-19
  - Matthew 5:17-19
  - 2 Timothy 3:15-17
  - 2 Peter 3:15-16
2. Test: You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 1. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. Teaching Assignment: At least seven times during this course, you will teach a lesson or part of a lesson to people not in the class. This teaching can be done in a class at church, a home Bible study group, or another setting. You are responsible to create these opportunities and report to your class leader.
4. Remember to always read the next lesson in preparation for the next class.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

**LESSON 1 TEST**

1. What is general revelation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In what forms has God given special revelation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What truths are revealed by special revelation that are not revealed by general revelation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What claim does the Bible make for itself?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What six reasons show that the Bible is really God's Word?

6. Why is the Bible “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”?
7. What description does the Bible give of inspiration that assures us that the writers were kept from making mistakes?
8. What are some various methods God used for inspiration?
9. What does it mean that the Bible is inspired?
10. What does it mean that the Bible is infallible?
11. What does it mean that the Bible is inerrant?



## LESSON 2

# ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - Why a person's concept of God is so important.
  - How the fact that God is Creator makes him distinct from all else.
  - Attributes of God, what it means that he is personal, spirit, eternal, trinity, all-powerful, present everywhere, unchanging, all-knowing, holy, righteous, and loving.
  - How each attribute of God is significant for our relationship with him.
  - A biblical view of the sovereignty of God.
  - A statement of beliefs about God.
2. The student will avoid the error of misunderstanding the importance of forms of worship.

- » Read Isaiah 40 together. Discuss what this passage tells us about God.
- » Why does it matter whether or not a person has the right concept of God?

Who is God? A.W. Tozer showed the importance of this question when he said, "I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts of God."<sup>1</sup> Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that a problem with the Samaritans' worship was that they did not know whom they worshipped. Any person's most important characteristic is his concept of God. A person's concept of God is the foundation of his religion. There can be no more serious error than to be wrong about what God is like.

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1 A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 10.

Comparisons are inadequate to completely describe God, for he is infinitely beyond and above us. Not even the Bible gives us a formal definition of him, but everywhere it describes his being and his power. Genesis tells us how God made the heavens and the earth; the sun, the moon, and the stars; plants and animal life; and finally human beings. The first lesson of Scripture is very clear: God is the Creator of all that is. Thus he is distinct from all else that exists, for he is not part of his creation.

But throughout the Bible are many other statements about God. Theologians have carefully summarized the biblical data in lists of God's attributes. We can never master these with our imperfect understanding. However, a reverent study of God's attributes is a valuable spiritual exercise. Thus we consider the following statements about God. They are based on his revelation of himself in the Bible, and for that reason we know that they are true.

## ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

What we will cover is not a complete list of God's attributes, but the ones that are most important for us to know.

- » What attributes of God can you list?

### God is Personal

This means that he is a real, living person with intellect, feelings, and will. He is not the sum of the laws of nature or an impersonal force like electricity or gravity. He creates, acts, knows, wills, plans, and speaks.

- » What difference would it make to us if God were not personal?

The fact that he is personal makes it possible for us to have a relationship with him. If he were not personal, we could not pray to him. If he were not personal it would not be possible for him to be pleased or displeased.

### God is a Spirit

"God is Spirit; and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."<sup>2</sup> The fact that he is spirit provides the basis for our spiritual communion with him and our worship of him. Prayer and worship do not depend on material objects, specific physical positions, a scheduled program, or a building. Those things may help us focus our attention in worship, but worship does not depend on them.

The fact that God is spirit is one reason that he forbade us to make any physical image of him.<sup>3</sup> As spirit, God is invisible to us<sup>4</sup> except when he chooses to take a visible form.<sup>5</sup> Because our perception of God is limited, even when he appears in a visible form, it is true to say that nobody has fully seen God.<sup>6</sup>

## God is Eternal

There was never a time when he did not exist, and there will never be a time when he will not exist; God has no beginning and no end. God revealed himself by the name, *I AM WHO I AM*.<sup>7</sup> He is described by John as *the one who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty*.<sup>8</sup> From everlasting to everlasting, he is God.<sup>9</sup> Some religions have myths about when their gods were born, but the true God is eternal.

## God is a Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity comes from the fact that the Bible says there is one God, yet refers to three distinct persons as God. There is only one God, but in his nature are three persons. Though we cannot fully understand the Trinity, it is not illogical, for we are not saying that there are three yet one of the same thing. There is one God, existing as three persons. Because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit possess together all the attributes of deity, each of them may properly be called God and be worshipped as God.

## God is All-Powerful

He is able to do whatever he wishes. "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases."<sup>10</sup> He has no limits except that he never acts contrary to his holy nature and always carries out what he has promised to do. Nothing is difficult or challenging for God. "The Lord God omnipotent reigns."<sup>11</sup>

» What difference does it make to us to know that God is all-powerful?

This is encouraging, for we know that in the midst of our struggles, he is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in

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3 Read Exodus 20:4-6.

4 1 Timothy 1:17

5 Read Genesis 18:1; Isaiah 6:1.

6 John 6:46; John 1:18; Exodus 33:20

7 Exodus 3:14

8 Revelation 1:8

9 Psalm 90:2

10 Psalm 115:3

11 Revelation 19:6

us."<sup>12</sup> Even if things seem out of control, we know that God's great plan will be fulfilled. We can pray in confidence that God is able to intervene in any situation.

## God is Present Everywhere

There is no place where he is not, and nothing happens that he does not see. "Thus says the Lord, heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool."<sup>13</sup> He is the God of the universe, and his power is not limited to any region. "Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?" says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth?"<sup>14</sup> This assures us that God knows our situations and our problems. It also tells us that no one can ever hide from God, or sin where he cannot see. All things are naked and opened to His eyes.<sup>15</sup>

## God is Unchanging

There was never a time when he became God, and he will never cease to be God.<sup>16</sup> There are religions that believe that God is in a process of development, but the Bible tells us that in his being and nature, and in his attributes and purposes, God never changes.<sup>17</sup> He always loves what is right, and he always hates what is wrong. The Eternal God who revealed himself as the I AM to Moses is the I AM of today. He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. He is always the same, and his years shall have no end.<sup>18</sup>

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**"Just as I am assured that there is an infinite and independent Being, and that it is impossible for there to be more than one; so I believe that this One God is the Father of all things.... I believe this Father of all is not only able to do as he pleases, but also has an eternal right to make whatever, whenever, and however he pleases, freely possessing or disposing of all that he has made; and that he, out of his own goodness, created heaven and earth and all that is in them."**

**John Wesley**

"Letter to a Roman Catholic"

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12 Ephesians 3:20

13 Isaiah 66:1

14 Jeremiah 23:24

15 Read Hebrews 4:13.

16 Read James 1:17.

17 Read Malachi 3:6.

18 Psalm 102:27

## God is All-Knowing

"His understanding is infinite."<sup>19</sup> There is no process of learning for God, for he knows everything. God has never learned anything from anyone, and there is nobody that can advise him.<sup>20</sup> God knows the future and therefore is never surprised or unprepared for anything that happens.<sup>21</sup>

» What difference does it make to us to know that God is all-knowing?

Related to the knowledge of God is the wisdom of God, shown in creation and especially in the plan of salvation.<sup>22</sup> Because He knows and understands everything, He always knows the right thing to do. The will of God is always best for us because God understands every situation completely and knows what the results of every action will be.

## God is Holy

God has described himself primarily as holy. The prophet Isaiah repeatedly referred to God as "The Holy One of Israel." The angels cry "Holy, Holy, Holy" before him continually.<sup>23</sup> The holiness of God was the theme of worship: "Let them praise thy great and awesome name; for it is holy."<sup>24</sup> He is the absolute standard of all moral perfection. His actions are marked by the presence of all goodness and by the absence of all evil, and can never be otherwise. God's holiness shows that man is not fit to serve and worship without first being transformed by grace.<sup>25</sup> God desires that we be holy like himself. "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."<sup>26</sup>

## God is Righteous

God's actions are always right. His actions flow from his holy nature.<sup>27</sup> His own nature is the standard of what is right. He always keeps his word and never tells a lie.<sup>28</sup>

» Why does it matter to us that God is righteous?

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19 Psalm 147:5

20 Read Isaiah 40:13-14.

21 Psalm 139:4

22 Read Psalm 104:24; Romans 11:33.

23 Isaiah 6:3

24 Psalm 99:3

25 Read Isaiah 6:5.

26 1 Peter 1:15-16

27 Read Deuteronomy 32:4.

28 Numbers 23:19; 2 Samuel 7:28

His righteousness is the basis of his law, which is the perfect standard of our duties to him and to others. He administers his law justly, rewarding those who obey it and punishing those who break it. This comforts those who are suffering and oppressed, but it also warns us that no one will ever get away with doing wrong. "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."<sup>29</sup> He "will render to each one according to his deeds."<sup>30</sup> "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."<sup>31</sup>

## God is Love

This attribute is absolutely important. Imagine what a fearsome thing it would be for God to be all-powerful and all-knowing, if he did not love us! What would it be like if he were holy and righteous, but did not love us? Along with his absolute power and holiness, God loves us.<sup>32</sup> God blesses his creation in general.<sup>33</sup> He especially blesses humanity with the good things of life and he designed the world as a place where they could live in joy.<sup>34</sup> For those who love and serve him, he turns every detail of life into a blessing.<sup>35</sup> His grace, mercy, patience, and peace bless us because of his love.<sup>36</sup>

"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."<sup>37</sup> In spite of our sin and rebellion, he reaches out to us in mercy, inviting us to come to him through Jesus, whom he has provided as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.<sup>38</sup> At the cross God shows us his heart, which overflows with love and pity for us. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."<sup>39</sup> God loves all people, without being influenced by their race, natural abilities, or earthly status, and offers forgiveness to all.<sup>40</sup>

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**"You have made us  
for yourself, O Lord,  
and our hearts are  
restless until they  
find their rest in you."**

**Augustine of Hippo**

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- 29 Psalm 19:9
  - 30 Romans 2:6
  - 31 Romans 14:10
  - 32 Read Luke 18:19; Psalm 119:68.
  - 33 Genesis 1:22, 28
  - 34 Psalm 8:4-6; Psalm 23; Psalm 36:5-10; and Psalm 103
  - 35 Romans 8:28
  - 36 Read Exodus 34:6; Ephesians 1:7, 2:4-5.
  - 37 John 3:16
  - 38 1 John 2:2
  - 39 1 John 4:10
  - 40 Read Romans 2:11; James 2:1-5.

Therefore, God wants us to love all people and be willing to forgive any who do us wrong. Love and forgiveness are marks of the children of God.<sup>41</sup>

God made us in his image. Though we are finite and he is infinite, we are more like him than anything else in his creation. He designed us so that we can know him, worship him, and love him. He has made us for himself, and as Augustine reminds us, we shall never be at rest until we find our rest in him. In contrast to God, everything earthly is unimportant, and only he is worthy of our complete devotion. It is impossible to find lasting satisfaction anywhere but in God. By his grace we can be redeemed and made able to worship him above all things, trust in him as our Heavenly Father, and do his will in every area of our lives.

*Note to class leader: The following section of information ("God is Sovereign") could be explained by a member of the class.*

## God is Sovereign

God has both absolute power and absolute authority. As ruler of the universe, he is able to accomplish whatever he chooses.<sup>42</sup>

He does all things according to his own will, not needing to submit to anyone else.<sup>43</sup> Whatever he decides to do will certainly happen, for there is nobody who can stop him and no situation that can make it impossible for him.<sup>44</sup> He controls the actions of earthly rulers whenever he wants.<sup>45</sup>

But God has given people the ability to make choices. They can choose among things that are good, but they can also choose between good and evil. They can choose to obey God or to disobey him. The very first people he created made a choice to sin. Every person since then has made choices, and though some have made some good choices, all have also sinned.

If God is the Lord over all, how does he accomplish his will in a world where billions of creatures are making choices of their own?

It is the will of God that his creatures make real choices. That means that he will not make all of their choices for them. It also means that there must be real consequences to what they do; otherwise, they would not be making real choices. If God somehow controlled

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41 Read Matthew 5:43-45.

42 Psalm 115:3, 135:5-6

43 Ephesians 1:11

44 Read Isaiah 46:9-11.

45 Genesis 50:20; Acts 4:27-28

the results of a person's actions so that no evil could result, then he would be taking from that person the possibility of choosing evil.

The justice of God is true justice, because he will be judging people for their voluntary actions.<sup>46</sup> If God controlled all actions, it would not make sense for him to give punishments and rewards.

God desires that people choose what is right, but most of all he desires that they make real choices. That is why the world is as it is. The world is a complicated mixture of the good things from God, the results of good human actions, the results of bad human actions, and the good that God brings even from bad human actions.

We see God's priorities in the plan of salvation. He offers salvation to all and desires that all be saved. He gives each person the power to respond to the gospel, but does not force the response. That's why invitations and persuasion are used throughout Scripture.<sup>47</sup> God offers people a choice and describes to them the consequences.

We preach the gospel in full confidence that every person can be saved. Our mission is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in persuading people to submit to God.<sup>48</sup>

» Read the "Statement of Beliefs" together at least two times.

## STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

There is one God, who created the universe and is Lord of all. He is an eternal, unchanging Spirit. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and present everywhere. He is absolutely holy in his character and righteous in all that he does. He blesses his creation and loves every person, offering forgiveness and relationship with himself.

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46 Read Revelation 20:12-13.

47 Isaiah 1:18; Joshua 24:15; Revelation 3:20; Isaiah 55:1; Deuteronomy 30:15, 19; Ezekiel 18:31

48 Read 2 Corinthians 5:11.

## LESSON 2 ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Passage Assignment:** Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Isaiah 46
  - Proverbs 9:10
  - Psalm 139:1-4
  - Revelation 4:9-11
  - Jonah 1:3
2. **Test:** You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 2. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. **Teaching Assignment:** Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

## LESSON 2 TEST

1. What is a man's most important characteristic?
2. What is the most serious error possible?
3. What is Scripture's first lesson about God?
4. Name the attribute of God that matches each statement:
  - We cannot describe what God looks like:
  - God has always existed:
  - God is not an impersonal force:
  - God's nature will always be the same:
  - God can do whatever he chooses:
  - God sees everything:
  - God sent his Son so we could have mercy:
  - God has three persons in his nature:
  - God has absolute moral perfection:
  - God's actions are always fair and just:

## LESSON 3

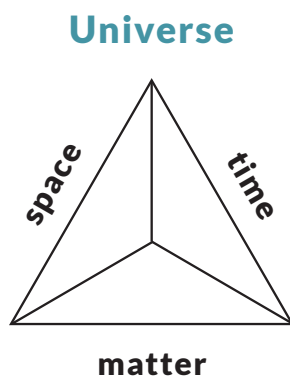
# THE TRINITY

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - How the universe is an illustration of the nature of the Trinity.
  - The biblical foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity.
  - Why the doctrine of the Trinity is a foundation of the gospel.
  - The structure of relationships within the Trinity.
  - How the Trinity gives an example for human relationships.
  - How our belief in the Trinity guides our worship.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about the Trinity.
2. The student will avoid common errors people have made in trying to explain the Trinity.

» Read John 14 together. Discuss how this passage shows that God is a Trinity.

Many people have been confused by the doctrine of the Trinity because it says that God is three in one sense, yet one in another sense.



But when we look at the universe we see another example of three in one. The universe has three aspects – space, time, and matter. Without any one of those three, there would not be a universe.

Each of those three also consists of three aspects.

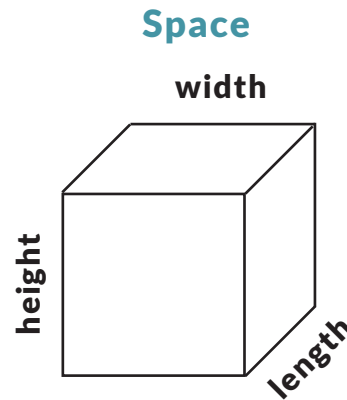
**Space** consists of length, width, and height: three in one. Without any one of those dimensions, there would be no space.

**Time** consists of past, present, and future: three in one. Without any one of those aspects, there would be no time.

**Matter** consists of *energy* in *motion* producing *phenomena*: three in one. If there were no energy, there could be no motion or phenomena. If there were no motion, there would be no energy or phenomena. If there were no phenomena, it would be because there was no energy or motion.

It seems that the universe is designed on the pattern of three in one. Maybe God purposely gave the universe a design that illustrates his own nature.

So what does the Bible teach about the Trinity? It clearly affirms the existence of *three* distinct Persons that are all identified as the *one* God of the universe. This is not a contradiction because we are not saying that God is both one person and three persons. Neither are we saying that God is both one God and three Gods. We are saying that God is one in essence and three in person. Just as the one universe exists as space, time, and matter, the one God exists as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



## BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE TRINITY

**Premise A: There is only one God.**

Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4).

For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is none like me (Isaiah 46:9).

**Premise B: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all identified as God in Scripture.**

...God the Father... (Galatians 1:1).

...the Word was God... The Word became flesh (John 1:1, 14).

...why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men but to God (Acts 5:3-4).

**Premise C:** These three each relate to one another and to the world as distinct Persons.

» How do we know that they are three persons and not just one in different roles?

In Mark 1:10-11, Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, and a voice from Heaven says, “You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” We see here that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could not be the same person; they are acting in different roles at the same time.

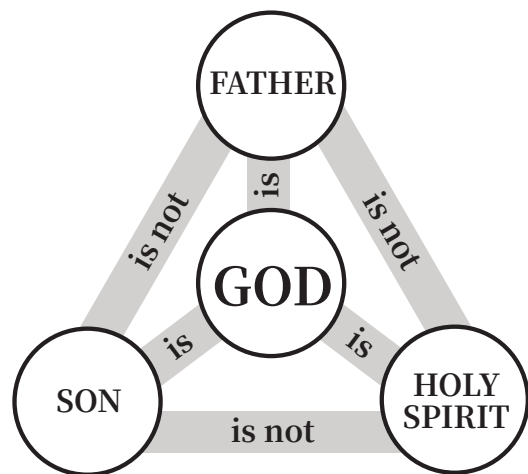
Toward the end of his ministry, Jesus said he would ask the Father to send to us “*another* Helper” — the Holy Spirit (John 15:26). Do you see the three distinct persons involved in this request?

If you read through John 14-17, you find many references to interaction between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Conclusion:** The one true God of the Bible has revealed himself to exist in three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one in nature, but three in Person.

So, although the word *Trinity* does not appear in the Bible, the doctrine of the Trinity is based on clear Scriptural statements. The term *Trinity* is a term we use to summarize all that the Bible teaches about this doctrine.

This biblical doctrine has been taught by the church since the apostles. Here is a diagram that the church has used over the centuries to describe the Trinity.



## THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY IS ESSENTIAL

» Why does it matter whether or not a person believes in the Trinity?

The doctrine of the Trinity underlies key teachings that are essential to the gospel. For example, some of those who deny the Trinity deny that Jesus is God. But if the Jesus you believe in is not God, you don’t have a Jesus who can save you!

If we deny that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct, we deny God his natural personal or relational characteristics. For instance, God would not be a loving God from all eternity if he had to wait until he created in order to love anyone. But if God is more than one person, these Persons could love each other from all eternity. It is important

to believe in this relational God (who exists in self-giving love) because it affects the way we relate to one another, as well as to God.

Perhaps the most serious part is that we must worship God. People who deny the Trinity usually deny that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are God, so they do not worship them. The worst mistake a person can make is to either worship someone who is not God, or fail to worship someone who is God.

## THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT ARE *PERSONS* LIVING IN RELATIONSHIP

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each possess personhood and have always lived in personal relationship with each other. We call them persons because they live in relationship with one another. They love one another, give to one another, talk to one another, and live for one another. This shows that they are *Persons*.

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**“The origin and cause of our redemption is the love of God the Father, who willed to redeem us by the blood of his own Son; the grace of the Son, who freely took our curse upon him, and imparts his blessing and merits to us; and the Holy Spirit, who communicates the love of the Father and the grace of the Son to our hearts.”**

**John Wesley**

“Letter to William Law”

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## Structure in the Trinity

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always existed in a structure of relationships. The Father is the Head, then the Son, then the Spirit. These three eternal and equal Persons have positions of authority based on their relationships with each other. This structure of authority is reflected in the **family** and in the **church**. Like the members of the Trinity, all the members of a family or a church have equal value, but not all have the same position of authority.

## The Son's relationship to his Father

How does the Son relate to the Father? Jesus said that the Father had granted him as Son “to have life in himself,” just “as the Father has life in himself.”<sup>1</sup> From all eternity the Son has been the Father’s “only begotten Son.”<sup>2</sup> The Son is eternally self-existent as God, and is of the same nature as the Father, yet his existence is from the Father. Eternally, the

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1 John 5:26

2 John 3:16

Son has related to the Father as a Son, and the Father has related to the Son as a Father, though not in a physical sense.

Since the Son has eternally related to the Father as a Son, he is eternally submissive to the Father. He functions in a subordinate role. This is why Jesus said, “My Father is greater than I.”<sup>3</sup>

Though Jesus has a lower position of authority than the Father has, he is equal to the Father in his nature. He is to be worshipped and glorified on the same level as the Father. Jesus said that all should honor him “just as they honor the Father.”<sup>4</sup>

### The Holy Spirit’s relationship to the Father and Son

In John 15:26, Jesus said that he would *send* to us the Holy Spirit, “which *proceeds* from the Father.” Though the Spirit proceeds from the Father, he is equal to the Father and the Son, and is to be equally honored. Keep in mind that this proceeding and sending is happening between three Persons living in loving relationship with each other.

### Submission without inferiority

Jesus said “I and the Father are one,” talking about their identical natures, yet he said that he always obeyed the Father.

The authority and submission in the Trinity do not mean that one member is more important than another. Authority does not mean that one member is greater in nature than the others.

We see illustrations of authority and equality in human life. The members of a family are all equal in nature as humans, and they are all equally valuable persons in the image of God, yet authority is important for the functioning of the family. The same could be said for other positions of human leadership.

### Protecting the Unity of God

The three persons of the Trinity are not to be considered separate individuals. The unity of their being means that they are of the same essence *and* that the three persons permeate one another, indwell one another, and share their attributes with one another. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit experience mutual indwelling in a way that humans could not.

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3 John 14:28

4 John 5:23

We humans are persons *and* individual beings. God is three persons, yet only one being. To help protect the biblical concept of the unity of God, we do not speak of the members of the Trinity as separate, but as distinct. We don't speak of them as people, but as persons.

## WE REFLECT GOD'S PERSONHOOD AND RELATIONS

God made us in his image as persons — having the capacity to relate to one another and to God. We have a mind, a will, and emotions for the purpose of relationship.

### Individually We Are Incomplete

After God created Adam, he said, "It is not good that man should be alone."<sup>5</sup> Then he made Eve. Adam was incomplete without Eve because, without her, he didn't have another human to relate to. In fact, one scripture suggests that Adam and Eve *together* reflected God's image: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them."<sup>6</sup> There seems to be something about the relationship between Adam and Eve that made them together reflect the image of God more than Adam would have by himself.

Think what that means for us. We are not functioning as whole persons unless we are in relationship with others, as the persons of the Trinity are. That doesn't mean we have to be married (in heaven, no one will be married, yet we will still be persons), but we do need to have fellowship with others.

### Relating to Reflect the Image of God

There is a wonderful comparison between the nature of God and the nature of the church. Within both God and the church, there is unity and diversity. According to 1 Corinthians 12, the body of Christ is a unity composed of many parts functioning together for a purpose. Can you see how the body of Christ reflects the image of God? Paul expected all the various members of the church to grow together as one in Christ. Paul prayed that we would:

Grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

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5      Genesis 2:18

6      Genesis 1:27

All of us should use our gifts and abilities to help each other grow in the unity of Christ. God desires that we reflect his relational nature by helping each other grow in grace. Spiritual growth occurs in community, in close, committed fellowship with other believers. This reflects the social nature of God.

If the members of the Trinity have for eternity lived in self-giving love for each other, we should live in loving relationships with others. We were made in the image of God as social, relational beings, so we should focus on others rather than ourselves. We should emphasize community more than our individuality. God will bless us as we try to reflect his triune image in our relationships with others.

## TRINITARIAN WORSHIP

Trinitarian worship recognizes that we come to the Father with the aid of the Spirit and on the basis of the atoning work of the Son. As Trinitarians, we are to pray to the Father, in the Spirit, through the Son.

An important goal of worship is for us to enter the love relationship that the members of the Trinity have for each other. Think of the love that exists between the Father and the Son. Think of what Christ did on the cross so that we could experience that love. The Father and Son live in wonderful communion with each other, and because of the Son's atoning work, the Spirit is able to help us participate in that fervent love relationship.

As Trinitarians, we not only pray to the Father, in the Spirit, through the Son, but we also pray to the Father, to the Son, and to the Spirit. Each of the members of the Trinity is to be adored, and glorified, for they are all God and must be equally honored. Trinitarian worship brings glory to each member of the Trinity equally, recognizing the role each plays in our salvation.

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**“Almighty and everlasting God, you have given us your servants grace by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the divine Majesty to worship the unity. Keep us steadfast in this faith, that we may evermore be defended from all adversaries: through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”**

*Book of Common Prayer*

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*Note to class leader: A member of the class could be selected to explain the following block of information ("Errors to Avoid: Theories about the Trinity").*

## ERRORS TO AVOID: THEORIES ABOUT THE TRINITY

We do not understand why a seed grows in the dirt, or how a brain works, or how forces keep the stars in their places. Scientists observe what happens, but they cannot explain why and how it happens. It does not make sense for a person to reject the doctrine of the Trinity because he cannot fully explain it. Every doctrine about God is beyond our explanation. For example, nobody can explain how God can be everywhere and know all things. The facts of the Trinity are not illogical, but they are beyond human experience and terms. A fish in the sea, even if he were intelligent, could never understand what it is like to be human, even if it were explained to him.

The fact of the Trinity is that there is one God existing in three persons identical in nature and equal in deity. People have tried to explain this, but they often lose an important part. Below are some examples of errors. Each error is called by a name, but they have been taught under many different names.

**Modalism** is the idea that God is really one person who has taken different roles. In this theory, in heaven God was the Father, on the earth he was Jesus, and now he speaks to us as the Holy Spirit. But throughout the chapters of John 14-16, Jesus' words describe interaction among himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. This description would not make sense if they were not three distinct persons.

**Tritheism** is the idea that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are separate beings. In this theory, there may be differences in their nature. For example the Father might be the one who wants to judge, but the Son wants to show mercy. This idea contradicts the biblical doctrine that there is only one God.

**Subordinationism** is the idea that one person of the Trinity is inferior to another. A person who believes this idea thinks of the Father as being God, and the Son and Holy Spirit as lesser beings. He may deny the personhood of the Spirit, and think of the Son as being a special man that God used. This error causes people to not worship the Son and Holy Spirit as God, and can lead to a false gospel.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

## STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

God is a Trinity, one God in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The three are different in role, but identical in nature and equal in attributes of divinity and worthy of worship.

## LESSON 3 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Passage Assignment: Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Hebrews 1:1-3, 8
  - Colossians 1:12-19
  - Ephesians 1:17-23
  - John 15:26
  - John 17:1-5
2. Test: You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 3. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. Teaching Assignment: Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

### LESSON 3 TEST

1. How does the universe illustrate the nature of God?
2. What three biblical premises are the foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity?
3. What is the structure of the relationships within the Trinity?
4. What are some human relationships that should reflect the relationships of the Trinity?
5. What does it mean to worship as a Trinitarian?
6. What is the error of modalism?
7. What is the error of tritheism?
8. What is the error of subordinationism?

# LESSON 4

# HUMANITY

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - How we know that the image of God in humanity is not physical likeness.
  - Eight characteristics of the image of God in humanity.
  - That people are specially designed for relationship with God.
  - The sense in which people have free will.
  - That people have infinite value beyond their practical value in earthly life.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about humanity.
2. The student will understand that he cannot be fulfilled as a person without a relationship with God.

» Read Psalm 8 together. What does this passage tell us about man?

» What are the things that are alike about every person in the world?

Think about what gives us our identity. What does it really mean to be a human being?

The starting place is Genesis 1:26. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.’” There is something about our nature that is like God. We are not God, but there is something that separates us from the rest of the animal world and makes us unique. In Psalm 8:5, the writer rejoices that we have been made “a little lower than the angels” and have been “crowned with glory and honor.”

God gave humans special responsibility to manage the earth and the creatures that live on it.<sup>1</sup> People are supposed to manage the earth carefully to avoid the loss of living species, use resources wisely, and leave the earth in good condition for future generations.

This high view of humankind is certainly better for our self-respect than is the doctrine of evolution! In evolution there is no special significance to human life, no purpose, no meaning, nothing special about being a human.

According to some ancient myths, people were made by accident, with no purpose, and not loved by any creator. But the Bible teaches that we are a special creation in the “image of God.” What does that mean?

- » How do we know that the image of God in humans does not mean physical likeness?

The image of God in humans does not mean physical likeness.

1. **God is a spirit.** Solomon realized that all of heaven and earth could not contain God.<sup>2</sup> God could show himself with whatever appearance he would choose, but there is not one appearance that looks like God. That’s one reason we are not supposed to make images of God to worship.
2. **To make images of God looking like a man is called idolatry.**<sup>3</sup>
3. **Humanity is physically designed for life on the earth,** with legs for walking, hands to move things, and sight and hearing for perception. God designed us for life on the earth. But God lives in the whole universe. He can create and move things by his Word. He does not have any of our limitations. There is no reason to think that he has a human physical form.

## ELEMENTS OF THE IMAGE OF GOD GIVEN TO HUMANITY

- » What are some of the characteristics of man that reflect the image of God?

Theologians have thought much about what it means that man is in the image of God, and most agree about the following qualities.

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1 Read Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:5-6.

2 1 Kings 8:27

3 Read Romans 1:23.

## Creative Instinct

We have a creative instinct that grows out of God's image in us. Our Creator has made us to be creative! Sometimes animals have been trained to make marks that people called art. But that is very different from art produced by a person who is expressing an idea. Ancient drawings have been found on caves. We don't know much about the people who drew them, but nobody doubts that they were made by people and not by animals.

Creativity is also revealed in music. Music has a marvelous capacity to express our thoughts and feelings. The ability to communicate ideas through music comes from this image of God within us.

## Ability to Think

The ability to think is yet another "God-like" capacity. Animals also have brains, but from all we can tell, animals' brain activity does not rise above the level of basic instinct and intuition. Only human beings are capable of analyzing, evaluating, and reflecting, then communicating persuasively.

Not only can we think, we can even think about thinking. We can analyze thought processes. Not only can we think, *we can think about thinking*.

## Communication Ability

Humans have communication ability. It is demonstrated by the use of language, where ideas are put into sounds or symbols that other people understand. Animals such as dogs and birds may "communicate" through sounds, but nothing even close to the complexity of human language is known among the animals. Animals have ways of threatening others, claiming territory, or sharing food, but they do not have discussions about the meaning of life.

Communication ability depends on the ability to think and reason. Animals cannot say words, but even if they could, they would not have much to say.

## Social Nature

Humans have a social nature. We are designed to interact with other people, making commitments to others and depending on others. We begin life completely dependent on others, and it takes many years for a child to become an adult. That is because relationships are important to God.

God has designed human life so that people have to work together and maintain relationships for their daily needs to be met. Even if a person could get things such as food

and shelter without anybody's help, he would have important needs that are only met in relationship with others. The social nature of man reflects the nature of God. God is a Trinity, and is eternally in relationship.

Human relationships have many problems. Because of the problems, some people think they need to be more independent. They want to live without depending on anyone. To live alone is not the solution and is not the life that God designed for us. Instead, he gave us principles for living in relationship, and the problems come when we don't follow God's design.

## Moral Sense

We have a moral sense that is part of our nature. Something in us tells us that some actions are right and some are wrong.<sup>4</sup> It tells us when it is right to follow a desire and when we should not. Adam and Eve were created holy and perfectly able to follow God's will.

Because humanity has fallen into sin and damaged that basic moral perception, it is not completely accurate, but there still remains within each of us the capacity to understand the concepts of right and wrong.

Because we have a moral sense, we have a sense of duty to do right, and are guilty if we commit sin. We are not like the animals, who follow their natural instincts without a sense of guilt.

## Free Will

Free will, or the ability to choose, is characteristic of human beings. In contrast, the choices of animals are on the level of momentary impulse and instinct. Animals do not make careful, thought-out decisions that consider the ethics or practical results of their actions. Human beings have the ability to make meaningful, life-altering choices.<sup>5</sup>

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**"Man was made in the image of God, holy as he that created him is holy. As God is love, so man, living in love, lived in God, and God in him. He was pure, as God is pure, from every spot of sin. He knew no evil, but was inwardly and outwardly sinless. He 'loved the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and soul, and strength.'"**

**John Wesley**

(In the sermon "Justification by Faith")

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4 Read Romans 1:20, 2:15.

5 Read Joshua 24:15.

» Why is free will an important aspect of humanity?

Because we make real choices, we are accountable to God. He will judge sin and reward righteousness.<sup>6</sup>

Because we are born with a sinful nature, we do not naturally exercise our free will in a way that honors God. A person is by nature a “slave to sin,”<sup>7</sup> unable to do right, but the grace of God reaches to each person, giving him the desire and ability to respond to the gospel. That is why a person can make the choice to repent and believe the gospel.<sup>8</sup>

## Immortality

Immortality is an essential quality of the image of God. There was a time when we did not exist, but each person will exist forever from the time he is born. We are not only physical beings, but we are also spirits that will live forever, and even our bodies will be resurrected in an eternal form.<sup>9</sup> God created each of us for an eternal purpose. Immortality makes our choices eternally significant because we will live forever in either heaven or hell.

## Ability to Love

The ability to love is part of the image of God. Among animals, relationships are very limited, and controlled mostly by instinct. The other characteristics are important for this one. Love would not mean much if we did not have the ability to communicate, the ability to choose and make commitments to those that we love, and the ability to respond with understanding when we receive love from others.

Human love is expressed in joy from a relationship, making and keeping promises, sacrificial giving and serving, and forgiveness. All of these are expressions of the love of God.

## Capacity for Worship

A very important characteristic is our capacity for worship. Think of your favorite hymns or worship choruses. We sing, “Our God Is an Awesome God.” “How Great Thou Art” is a timeless hymn of intense worship. The Psalmist exclaimed, “Bless the Lord, O my soul! And all that is within me, bless His holy name!”<sup>10</sup> These expressions are possible because “the image of God” in us recognizes and responds to the God in whose image we are made!

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6 Revelation 20:12-13

7 Read Romans 6:16-17; Ephesians 2:1-3.

8 Read Mark 1:15.

9 Read 1 Corinthians 15:16-22, 52-54.

10 Psalm 103:1

## THE PURPOSE OF THE IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY

It is good to stop and think about why God made us in his image. Why are we so different from the rest of creation? The answer is that we are specially designed to be in relationship with God and to worship him.

The Bible tells us that creation in general brings glory to God. We see the greatness of God in the things he has made. But other creatures glorify God without understanding. They cannot understand what God is like because they do not have a nature that can relate to him.

We can admire the infinite creativity of God because we have some creativity. We can worship his holiness and righteousness because we have a sense of right and wrong. We can be awed by his infinite love because we have the capacity to love.

The better we know God, not just in intellectual knowledge but in relationship, the more we love and worship him. We find joy and fulfillment in a relationship with God, because he designed us for this relationship.

## OTHER IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

### All Human Beings Have the Image of God

There are people who because of mental limitations cannot reason, express themselves creatively, or exercise free will. The image of God is created in them, but it may not be fulfilled in their earthly lives.

### Every Human Life Has Eternal and Infinite Value

Sometimes we notice a person's practical value, things like his intelligence, education, talents, or strength. But every person has a value that is more important than his practical value, because he is in the image of God. That's why every person deserves respect as a human being, even if he lacks the things that give people practical value, and even if he is a wicked person. The image of God is also the reason that every child is valuable to God, and abortion is a terrible sin.

### Angels Are Also Unique in Creation

They have high intelligence, reasoning ability, communication ability, and capacity for worship. They therefore have some aspects of the image of God and are called the "sons

of God” in Scripture.<sup>11</sup> We are presently inferior to angels in power,<sup>12</sup> yet they serve us.<sup>13</sup> In eternity, we will be higher in position than angels,<sup>14</sup> and will rule with Christ. This implies that humans are made more completely in the image of God than angels.

## The World Is Not in Its Original Form

Imagine a beautiful painting, created by a gifted artist. Imagine that the painting has been thrown on the floor, and people have walked on it with muddy shoes. If you look at the painting, you can still see the great talent that made it, yet the painting is not like it was when the artist first finished it. Creation is like that. It is not exactly like what God intended it to be, but his glory is still seen.

## Sin Has Distorted the “God-Like” Capacities in People

Artistic expression can reveal a wicked heart and can be a tool of Satan, even though the gift itself comes from God. But because of the intervention of grace, sin has not completely obliterated the image of God within us. By grace the image of God in us can be renewed, developed, and expressed for the glory of our Creator!<sup>15</sup>

## The Image of God in Us Is the Most Important Thing about Us

The image of God in us make it possible for us to respond to the Gospel. Our moral sense makes it possible for grace to awaken our conscience and convict us of sin. Free will restored by grace working in us makes it possible for us to “choose whom we will serve.” Through our creative instincts we can bring glory and honor to God. Using reason, we can understand something of God and his ways. The search to understand God turns into worship as we become increasingly aware of the absolute awesomeness of our Creator who has so graciously “crowned us with glory and honor!”

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11 Job 1:6

12 Psalm 8:5

13 Hebrews 1:14

14 Read 1 Corinthians 6:3.

15 Read Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:22-24; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

## ERROR TO AVOID

Sometimes people think that relationship with God has significance only for life after death. They think that if a person lives a good life on earth, it does not make much difference whether he is a Christian or not. But if we understand that the nature of humanity is designed for relationship with God, we realize that a person's life is mostly wasted if he does not know God. We need the Spirit of God within us, guiding us, fulfilling our potential, and giving the eternal perspective on all that we do.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

## STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Humans are created in the image of God for the purpose of loving and worshipping God. God designed us to be able to fulfil their purpose with abilities to think, communicate, and love. A person has a moral sense, a personal will, and an immortal spirit. God's grace gives a person the power to make free decisions. Every human life has eternal and infinite value.

## LESSON 4 ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Passage Assignment:** Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - James 1:12-15
  - Romans 6:12-23
  - 1 Thessalonians 5:23
  - Romans 8:22-26
  - Joshua 24:14-18
  - Genesis 3:1-6
  - Ephesians 2:1-9
2. **Test:** You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 4. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. **Teaching Assignment:** Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.



## LESSON 5

# SIN

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - Why it is important to understand sin.
  - That sin was possible because of free will and not as something God made.
  - The definition and description of inherited depravity.
  - The biblical concept of willful sin.
  - The definition of human error and the right attitude toward the process of Christian maturity.
  - The definition of human infirmity and its distinction from sin.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about sin.
2. The student will understand conversion better by having a clear definition of willful sin.

» Read Genesis 3 together. What does this passage tell us about sin?

### WHY WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND SIN

» Why do we need to understand sin?

1. **We must understand sin to understand the condition of the world.** The Bible tells us that sin is the cause of human suffering. It was by sin that death came into the world.<sup>1</sup> Because of the curse of sin, there is sickness, aging, and pain. Sinful acts such as lying, stealing, murder, adultery, fighting, drunkenness, and oppression have filled the world with suffering. Actions of sin come from sin in the heart, such as hate, lust, covetousness, pride, and selfishness.

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1 Read Romans 5:12.

2. **We must understand sin to understand God's priorities in the world.** God has responded to humanity's sin with grace and salvation. That's why sin must be carefully defined.
3. **We must understand sin to understand grace and salvation.**
4. **We must understand sin to understand holiness.** Sinfulness is the opposite of holiness. It is opposed to devotion to God. For a person to be holy and devoted to God, he must be separated from sin.

## THE ORIGIN OF SIN

God's creation was perfect, and everything he made was without defect. When God finished creation, he saw that it was good.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we know that sin was not God's fault.

Adam and Eve were in relationship with God, they desired to please God and had the ability to do everything that is right. Satan came to tempt Eve to do wrong. By this we know that sin already existed in the universe. Satan had already fallen into sin. But sin had not yet entered humanity or the part of creation that was under their authority.

Adam and Eve had free will. Sin was possible because they were able to make a real choice. They chose to break God's law, and that was the beginning of human sin. Sin is not a thing that God created.

The first act of sin separated humanity from God. Sin also corrupted the nature of humanity.<sup>3</sup> All children born afterward would have this corrupted nature and would commit acts of sin.<sup>4</sup>

Sin brought a curse on all creation.<sup>5</sup> Life was changed because of sin. Pain, aging, and death began.<sup>6</sup> Work and survival became difficult. Human relationships were filled with

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**"The mind of man  
in this state is dark,  
destitute of the saving  
knowledge of God, and  
according to the Apostle,  
incapable of those things  
which belong to the  
Spirit of God."**

**James Arminius**

*Twenty-Five Public Disputations,  
"Disputation 11"*

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2 Genesis 1:31

3 Read Psalm 51:5.

4 Read Romans 5:12, 14, 18-19.

5 Genesis 3:16-19

6 Read 1 Corinthians 15:22.

conflict. As years passed and people multiplied, the results of sin multiplied beyond what Adam and Eve could have imagined.

## INHERITED DEPRAVITY

- » How would you describe the sinful nature that people are born with?

Inherited depravity is the corruption of man's moral nature that inclines him toward sin from birth. It is sometimes called "original sin." It is the sinful nature with which we are born because of Adam's sin.

All people have this tendency toward wickedness from birth.<sup>7</sup> A person's nature is already distorted by a sinful tendency when he is born. A person begins to commit sin as soon as he begins making choices. The sinful tendency is not something he learns from his environment.

David said that he was shaped in iniquity and conceived in sin.<sup>8</sup> He did not mean that his mother had done something wrong. He meant that when a baby is being formed in the womb, his nature is already corrupted by sin.

Because of the corrupted nature, the image of God in people is damaged. Every person is born with a will that is self-centered and bent toward sin.<sup>9</sup> Our wills are not free to choose right unless God gives us the desire and strength.<sup>10</sup>

Inherited depravity motivates inward sins such as pride, envy, hatred, and unforgiveness. It also motivates actions of sin.

People naturally have an attitude of rebellion toward God's authority and are angry at his law. Sinners will be judged not only for their acts of sin but for their attitude of rebellion against God.<sup>11</sup>

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**"Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, is 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually?' Admit this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are but a Heathen still."**

**John Wesley**

"The Doctrine of Original Sin."

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7 Read Psalm 58:3.

8 Read Psalm 51:5.

9 Philippians 3:19

10 Read Romans 6:16-17.

11 Read Jude 15.

The person with a sinful nature is naturally self-centered. He wants to assert his own will rather than trust the authority of God and others. He wants to satisfy his own desires rather than please God. He has confidence in himself and does not want to depend on God. His own success is more important to him than the glory of God.

People do not accurately discern right from wrong, because their minds are darkened.<sup>12</sup> By nature they follow the direction of the rebellious world, the control of Satan, and their own sinful desires; and they bring themselves under the wrath of God.<sup>13</sup> Their natural tendency is toward sin every moment.<sup>14</sup>

The extent of inherited depravity is described in theology as total depravity. Without the difference that God's grace makes, man would be able to do nothing good, or even to desire to do good. He would be unable to repent or to seek God.<sup>15</sup> He is described as "dead in trespasses and sins."<sup>16</sup>

It is important to know how God's grace responds to inherited depravity. First, the power of God comes with the gospel message, giving the person who is lost the desire and ability to respond to the gospel.<sup>17</sup> Then, when a person is saved, he is delivered from the control of sin.<sup>18</sup> However, the influence of inherited depravity continues in a new Christian.

The influence of inherited depravity in a Christian shows in several ways.

1. The new Christian will sometimes struggle with his own will during temptation.
2. The new Christian will feel wrong motives that he must resist.
3. The new Christian will have wrong reactions and attitudes that happen before he realizes them.

The new Christian must be encouraged so that he does not give up his faith. He may doubt that he is saved because he still has a struggle with wrong motives.

A pastor must have patience with new Christians. He must realize that they will not be consistent Christians in all that they say and do. They may not immediately see their problem. They need to be encouraged to pray for the cleansing of inherited depravity, but they will need time to understand.

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12 Read Ephesians 4:17-18.

13 Read Ephesians 2:2-3

14 Genesis 6:5

15 Read John 6:44.

16 Ephesians 2:1

17 Read Romans 1:16.

18 Romans 6:11-14

## WILLFUL SIN

» What is willful sin?

Willful sin is purposeful violation of the known will of God.<sup>19</sup> It is when a person chooses to do what he knows is wrong or to not do what he knows is right.

The nature of sin has led every person except Jesus to commit actions of sin.<sup>20</sup> There is no person who has been righteous all of his life.<sup>21</sup>

In Romans 3:10-19, we have a description of those who follow their own nature without the difference made by grace. It is a life marked by rebellion, hate, and destruction.

There are some unconverted people who do not seem to be wicked. They do not seem to do destructive, harmful sins against others. But those people are sinners also, because they are choosing to live their own way instead of obeying God. The Bible says that people are like sheep that have gone their own way.<sup>22</sup>

For a person to claim the right to choose his own way and deny his Creator the right to direct him is the essence of sin. It is rebellion against the authority of God. This was the sin of Adam and Eve, the first people, when they were tempted to be their own gods. At the final judgment, sinners will be judged for their actions of sin and condemned to the lake of fire.<sup>23</sup>

A sinner who repents and believes the gospel begins to live in victory over willful sin. If he does give in to temptation and commit sin, he can repent of it and be forgiven, but the normal life of a believer is victory over sin.<sup>24</sup>

## UNINTENTIONAL VIOLATIONS

A person sometimes violates God's Word by accident or in ignorance.

In Leviticus 4:2-3, we see that a person needed to make a sacrifice when he realized he had done something wrong. Because the death of Christ takes the place of all of the Old Testament sacrifices, we know that Christians are redeemed from unintentional violations.

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19 Read 1 John 3:4; James 4:17.

20 Read Romans 3:23.

21 Read 1 John 1:10.

22 Isaiah 53:6

23 Revelation 20:12-14

24 Read 1 John 2:1-6, 3:3-10.

These may be called sins in the sense that they fall short of God's absolute standard, but they are not what the Bible ordinarily calls sin. A person who call them sin may find it difficult to distinguish human errors from willful violations of God's law. He may have a wrong sense of human responsibility.

God has condemned willful violations, but not human errors. These are inevitable as long as our understanding is limited. They do not break our relationship with God because they do not conflict with our love for God. God said that complete love for him fulfills what he requires of us.<sup>25</sup> We are not accountable for what we do not know.<sup>26</sup>

As we walk in the light [according to the truth we know], we are cleansed from all sin.<sup>27</sup> We do not need to fear that unknown violations will break our relationship with God because we are trusting in Christ's atonement.

Leviticus shows that when we realize we have unintentionally done something wrong we should repent, ask God's forgiveness, and correct our life to be what God wants.

As we study God's Word, follow the Holy Spirit, fellowship with other believers, and grow in maturity, we should be changing the behaviors that unintentionally violate God's will.

» Why should we want to know and do God's will better?

There are some reasons why we should want to understand God's will better and follow it completely:

1. We do not want to do anything that displeases God,
2. There are bad consequences to wrongdoing even if it is unintentional,
3. We need to be good examples as Christians, and
4. If we try to avoid God's will, we are guilty of intentional sin.

As we grow in our understanding of God's will, we occasionally recognize wrongdoing in our lives. If we recognize that something we are doing is wrong, but choose to do it anyway, it is no longer merely an error from ignorance. If we refuse to change, that wrongdoing becomes a willful sin.

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25 Read Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:8-10.

26 Read James 4:17.

27 Read 1 John 1:7.

## INFIRMITY

Infirmities are physical or mental limitations or deficiencies. Every person has human infirmity. Because of the fall of Adam into sin, and the decline of humanity through continued sin, we are mentally, physically, and emotionally weaker than God designed us to be.

We know that infirmity is not sin because even Jesus had infirmity, but he had no sin.<sup>28</sup> Jesus took on limitations of humanity in the incarnation, and was tempted in every way that we are tempted. The Scripture tells us that he hungered, grew tired, and suffered pain. Though Jesus took on human limitations, he never did anything that displeased the Father, because he was guided by his divine nature and by the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul rejoiced that his infirmity was an opportunity for God's power to be shown, but we know that he was not talking about sin, because he would not have rejoiced about sin continuing in his life.<sup>29</sup>

We will have infirmity as long as we are in the mortal body. The limitations of our understanding make human errors inevitable. Infirmity does not cause willful sin. If we choose to sin, we are guilty and cannot blame our human nature. God does not judge us for being human, but for setting our wills against him.

- » Why is it important to distinguish willful sin from unintentional violations?

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28 Read Hebrews 4:15.

29 Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

### **ERROR TO AVOID: AN UNCLEAR DEFINITION OF WILLFUL SIN**

Some people put willful sin, inherited depravity, unintentional violations, and infirmity all together, and call it “sin” with no distinctions.

A sinner repents when he is sorry enough for his sins to be willing to quit them. That means he repents of willful sin, because that is what will change by God’s power.

If we distinguish willful sin from the other categories, we can understand what it means to say that a believer has victory over sin. People who do not distinguish the categories do not believe that victory over sin is possible.

Scriptural descriptions of salvation make sense only with these distinctions between aspects of the human condition. To understand salvation, we must properly define sin.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

### **STATEMENT OF BELIEFS**

Sin originated from the free decision of the first-created people to disobey God. All people except Jesus have inherited the depravity of Adam and are also guilty of actions of sin. Human errors may violate God’s law but do not break our relationship with God. Every sinner will be eternally condemned if he does not find God’s forgiveness before the final judgment.

## LESSON 5 ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Passage Assignment:** Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Galatians 5:16-21
  - Ephesians 5:1-8
  - Titus 1:10-16
  - James 4:1-4
  - 2 Peter 2:9-17
  - Romans 1:21-32
  - Romans 3:10-20
2. **Test:** You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 5. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. **Teaching Assignment:** Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

## LESSON 5 TEST

1. What are four reasons why we need to understand what sin is?
2. How do we know that sin was not God's fault?
3. Give a one-sentence definition of each of the following: inherited depravity, willful sin, unintentional violations, and infirmities.

*Inherited depravity* is

*Willful sin* is

*Unintentional violations* are

*Infirmities* are

4. Why should we want to understand and do God's will better?

5. How do we know that infirmity is not sin?

# LESSON 6

## SPIRITS

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - Some details about the nature of angels.
  - The involvement of angels in the life of the believer.
  - The fall of Satan and other evil spirits.
  - The spiritual conflict that exists in the spirit world.
  - The ultimate victory of God and believers over evil powers.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about spirits.
2. The student will avoid the wrong kind of interest in the spirit world.

» Read Matthew 4:1-11 together. What does this passage tell us about evil spirits?

When people talk about angels, the first question is, “What do angels look like?” Many artists have tried to describe them.

» What do angels look like?

Do angels have wings? The seraphim that Isaiah saw had six wings.<sup>1</sup> The image of the cherubim that God told Moses to put on the Ark of the Covenant had wings.<sup>2</sup> The cherubim that Ezekiel saw had four wings.<sup>3</sup>

We don’t know that angels in general have wings. They do not need wings for travel, because they are spirits and travel at speeds far greater than flying with wings. As spirits, they also would not have physical bodies. For angels, wings are unnecessary.

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1     Isaiah 6:2

2     Exodus 25:20

3     Ezekiel 1:6, 10:15

Contrary to much of the art we see, the Bible never describes angels as looking like women or children. They have appeared in male form, but do not have gender in the human sense. They do not have anything like a marriage relationship or family network.<sup>4</sup> Each is individually created.

Angels are usually invisible to people, but they can appear when there is a purpose for it. Sometimes when an angel appeared, people thought at first that he was an ordinary man.<sup>5</sup> At other times angels appeared with such radiance that people would fall on the ground in fear.<sup>6</sup> When an angel appeared to someone, he usually started with the words "Fear not."<sup>7</sup>

Angels are spirits,<sup>8</sup> but we should not think of them as less real because of that. The Bible implies that spirits are more powerful than anything physical.<sup>9</sup>

Angels are called the sons of God<sup>10</sup> and have something of the nature of God, but not the same way that humans do. Angels are far superior to humans in power and intelligence now, but humans will someday be above angels.<sup>11</sup>

The creation of angels is not mentioned in Genesis. They were created before the earth and celebrated when they saw God creating it.<sup>12</sup>

Angels are immortal.<sup>13</sup> The fact that they were created before the earth means that all angels have lived for thousands of years and have observed all of human history.

Angels have personality. They can speak and have conversation.<sup>14</sup> They worship God, which means they can understand something of his nature and can respond to it with awe.<sup>15</sup> They rejoice when a sinner repents, which shows that they have emotions.<sup>16</sup> They

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4 Read Matthew 22:30.

5 Genesis 19:1-2

6 Matthew 28:2-4

7 Read Luke 1:13, 1:30, 2:10.

8 Hebrews 1:14. Demons are also called spirits in Matthew 8:16, 12:45; Acts 19:12; and others.

9 Read Isaiah 31:3.

10 Job 1:6

11 Read 1 Corinthians 6:3.

12 Job 38:4-7

13 Luke 20:36

14 Luke 1:18-20

15 Hebrews 1:6

16 Read Luke 15:10.

are intensely interested in understanding the plan of salvation, which shows that they have intellectual capacity.<sup>17</sup> They celebrated at the announcement of Jesus' birth.<sup>18</sup>

Angels are not all alike, because there are some called cherubim and seraphim. There are also levels of angels, for the Bible speaks both of angels and at least one archangel, and mentions "the devil and his angels." There is a system of authority structure among them, referred to as thrones, dominions, and principalities.<sup>19</sup>

In Jewish and Christian tradition much has been written about angels, going far beyond what we know from Scripture.

Not much is revealed in Scripture about the differences between angels. The term *archangel* is used only twice in the Bible. Michael is called an archangel, and there will be the voice of an archangel at the return of Jesus.<sup>20</sup> The term *archangel* literally means "chief angel." We don't know how many archangels exist.

Seraphim are mentioned in the Bible only in Isaiah 6. They had six wings. Other than their wings, they may have looked somewhat human, because they had hands, feet, and faces.

Cherubim and a flaming sword were placed at the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were put out.<sup>21</sup> This was to make the garden unapproachable. Ezekiel's description of the cherubim that he saw is very different from any other creature we know of. They had four wings, four faces that were all different, several hands, a radiance like fire, flashes of lightning, and lightning speed.<sup>22</sup>

Images of two cherubim were placed on the ends of the Ark of the Covenant, with the Mercy Seat between them. At least eight times in the Bible God is called the One who is between the cherubim.<sup>23</sup> This identified him as the God of Israel who was worshipped in the temple, and also showed that he was unapproachable except in the ways he directed.

The power and majesty of God is seen in the kind of servants he has. The cherubim are such creatures that a person seeing one might think that he is seeing God, and be inclined to worship it, yet it is only a servant of God.

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17 Read 1 Peter 1:12.

18 Luke 2:13-14

19 Read Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 6:12.

20 Jude 9; 1 Thessalonians 4:16

21 Genesis 3:24

22 Ezekiel 1:5-14, 10:15

23 Psalm 99:1; Isaiah 37:16; 1 Kings 19:15

The fact that God is attended by so many angels shows his majesty. The Apostle John saw a crowd of angels around the throne of God that he expressed as “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.”<sup>24</sup>

The power of an angel is not unlimited, for we read that one was delayed by conflict when carrying the message for Daniel.<sup>25</sup> Yet God can give them as much power as they need for whatever task he gives to them, such as the time when one killed 185,000 soldiers.<sup>26</sup>

Angels are apparently assigned responsibilities. The Bible tells us they are sent to serve those who receive salvation.<sup>27</sup> Angels surround and protect the people who serve God.<sup>28</sup> We can assume that many angels are present with us all the time. Jesus said that children have angels assigned to them.<sup>29</sup> The archangel Michael is called the prince that defends the nation of Israel.<sup>30</sup>

The Bible never says that we are to pray to angels. It never even says we are to try to communicate with them. They are not mediators between us and God. There is a warning about people who worship angels and get involved in things in the spirit world that they do not really understand.<sup>31</sup> If we try to get involved with angels in a way that God does not want, evil spirits will respond to us instead of God's angels.

## SATAN AND FALLEN ANGELS

» What is the origin of evil spirits?

Evil spirits are angels who rebelled against God. This happened before the creation of man, and the Bible does not reveal much about it.

All angels were originally created good and holy, and the Bible calls them the “holy angels.”<sup>32</sup> Satan was the leader of a rebellion, and one third of the angels followed him.<sup>33</sup> Jude speaks of the angels that left their first position.<sup>34</sup> They have already been condemned by the judgment of God.<sup>35</sup>

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24 Revelation 5:11

25 Read Daniel 10:12-13.

26 2 Kings 19:35

27 Read Hebrews 1:14.

28 Psalm 34:7

29 Read Matthew 18:10.

30 Daniel 12:1

31 Read Colossians 2:18.

32 Matthew 25:31

33 Revelation 12:4

34 Jude 6

35 Read John 16:11; 2 Peter 2:4.

There are two passages in the prophets that might refer to the fall of Satan (Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:12-19). Each passage talks about a human, earthly king, then seems to say things that are talking about more than a human king. They may be comparing the fall of a king to the fall of Satan.

It seems that Satan became proud and wanted to become independent of God. The Apostle Paul warned that a person could become proud and fall into the same condemnation as the devil.<sup>36</sup> This was the same temptation that the devil offered to Adam and Eve when he said, “You will be like gods.” It is the temptation to reject God’s authority and become your own god.

» What are some things we know about Satan?

Satan still leads the rebellion against God. He is called the “prince and power of the air.”<sup>37</sup> Satan is called the “ruler of this world,” because the people of this world are mostly in rebellion against God.<sup>38</sup> He claims ownership of the kingdoms of the world, giving them temporarily to whomever he chooses.<sup>39</sup> He blinds the minds of sinners to keep them from accepting the gospel.<sup>40</sup> Sinners are truly his prisoners.<sup>41</sup> He takes the Word of God out of people’s minds so it will not have effect.<sup>42</sup> He put into the hearts of Ananias and Saphira the plan to lie to the church and to the Holy Spirit,<sup>43</sup> and entered Judas with the desire to betray Jesus.<sup>44</sup> He invents wrong religious doctrines, which God’s Word calls “doctrines of devils” and encourages people to teach them.<sup>45</sup>

Satan hates God and therefore hates man, who is created in the image of God and is the object of God’s greatest favors. He seeks to bring as many people as possible under the same condemnation that he has received by influencing them to rebel against God.

Those who consciously serve Satan are the most deceived people in the world, for they are in a rebellion that cannot succeed, and they are serving a master who hates them and is interested only in destroying them. He makes promises that he knows he cannot fulfill.

Others follow Satan unconsciously when they choose to live in sin. That is why he devotes much time and energy to temptation and deception. He wants to cause people to reject

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36 Read 1 Timothy 3:6.

37 Ephesians 2:2

38 John 12:31

39 Luke 4:4-6

40 Read 2 Corinthians 4:4.

41 2 Timothy 2:26

42 Read Mark 4:15.

43 Acts 5:3

44 Luke 22:3

45 Read 1 Timothy 4:1.

faith in God, making idols of created things instead of worshipping God. His temptations are deceptions, because he really has nothing to offer but perversions of what God has created. The devil has created no joys or pleasures; God created them all. The devil can only offer pleasures in abused forms that are out of the will of God.

Certain evil spirits apparently focus on specific geographical areas or groups of people. Just as the angel Michael was called the prince that defends Israel, there were evil spirits that were called the princes of Persia and Grecia.<sup>46</sup> Certain spirits became the gods of nations.

Satan desires worship.<sup>47</sup> Evil spirits work through false religions. The Bible tells us that when people worship idols they are worshipping demons.<sup>48</sup> Demons respond to the worship of people who do not know what they are worshipping. Just like the worshipper of God becomes more like God and delights in holiness, the worshipper of evil spirits becomes more evil and delights in evil. Perhaps the worst form of worship that has ever occurred was when people sacrificed their own children to demons.<sup>49</sup>

Satan and other demons try to take full control of people's minds and behavior. This is called "demon possession." Some people have yielded themselves consciously to this kind of possession; perhaps others have allowed it without realizing what they were doing. Some people have gone step by step into this condition, thinking that they were acquiring powers to use for their own purposes. A person so possessed becomes a slave of evil spirits, impelled to self-destruction, and suffering horrible torments of mind and emotions.<sup>50</sup> Only Jesus can deliver a person from this bondage.

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**"Satan makes himself master of the heart, the eyes, and the tongue of the sinner. His heart he fills with the love of sin; his eyes he blinds so he does not see the guilt and the perdition that awaits him; and his tongue he hinders from prayer."**

**Adam Clarke**

*Christian Theology,*  
"Good and Bad Angels"

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46 Daniel 10:13, 20

47 Read Matthew 4:9.

48 Read Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Corinthians 10:20-21.

49 Read Psalm 106:37.

50 Read Mark 5:2-5.

## GOD'S VICTORY

In countries where the gospel has been widely preached, the activity of evil spirits is usually disguised. Ironically, it is in these “civilized” countries that people are the most secular, ridiculing anything supernatural and denying the existence of spirits. In such an environment, evil spirits do not act openly, for if they terrified people who have heard the gospel, many of those people would turn to God for deliverance and protection.

In countries where the gospel is little known, evil spirits operate openly. The people there do not know that they can turn to Christ for deliverance, so the powers of demons intimidate them and bring them into submission. They serve the spirits, not willingly and joyfully, but fearfully. The gospel comes as a wonderful message of deliverance and freedom.

Because of the constant attack of the devil, we are in a spiritual warfare. We are warned to remember that our warfare is in the spirit world and not against physical enemies.<sup>51</sup> We are told to take on the spiritual armor, so we can protect ourselves.<sup>52</sup> We can be confident of victory, because the devil cannot resist the power of God that is in us, and when we resist the devil, he will run from us.<sup>53</sup>

» Is the devil the opposite of God?

The devil has power far beyond what humans have in their present, mortal state. However, his power is nothing compared to God's. He should not be thought of as opposite to God, as if he is equal in power. Some philosophers think that the forces for good and evil in the world are equal. That is far from the truth. Satan is not present everywhere, does not know all things, and makes mistakes. God is the Creator of spirits, and they cannot defeat him. When the time of man's probation is finished, all evil spirits will be judged, confined, and punished, along with sinful men.

The defeat of Satan was promised long ago. God promised to send a Savior to crush the head of the serpent.<sup>54</sup> Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and give us victory

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**“The devil cannot conquer you if you continue to resist. Strong as he is, God never permits him to conquer the man who continues to resist him. He cannot force the human will.”**

**Adam Clarke**

*Christian Theology,*  
"Good and Bad Angels"

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51 Read Ephesians 6:12.

52 Ephesians 6:13

53 James 4:7

54 Genesis 3:15

over sin.<sup>55</sup> Jesus, by his death and resurrection, does not allow Satan to have power over death.<sup>56</sup> The final and eternal destiny of Satan and the other evil spirits is the lake of fire.<sup>57</sup>

Already God puts limits on what Satan can do.<sup>58</sup> That means that we don't have to live in fear of what Satan may do to us. Nothing can happen unless God allows it, and he knows what we can handle.

Not only are we defended against Satan's attack, we have power to advance God's kingdom against the kingdom of Satan. Jesus gave power to his disciples, not just to the apostles, to cast out evil spirits.<sup>59</sup> As we preach the gospel, God gives power to his truth, and delivers from Satan those who respond to the gospel.

*Note to class leader: A member of the class could be selected to explain the following block of information ("Error to Avoid: The Wrong Kind of Interest in the Spirit World").*

### **ERROR TO AVOID: THE WRONG KIND OF INTEREST IN THE SPIRIT WORLD**

Some people become fascinated with the spirit world. They begin to study angels and may try to interact with them. The Bible never tells us to pray to angels or to try to have a relationship with them. The Bible warns us not to worship them or to try to know more than we are able to understand (Colossians 2:18).

It's even more dangerous if a person becomes too interested in evil spirits. Some people become fascinated by their power and the things they do. There are games that interact with spirits. There are methods people use to get information from spirits. We are never to be involved with evil spirits except to resist them by the power of God.

Some people have developed complex and detailed explanations of the spirit world and how it works. However, God has revealed in the Bible all we need to know about the spirit world.

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55 Read 1 John 3:8.

56 Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 1:18

57 Read Matthew 25:41.

58 Job 1:12, 2:6

59 Read Luke 10:17.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

## STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

God created all spirits. The holy angels worship God and protect believers. Angels are immortal, personal beings who can speak, worship, and reason. They have made moral choices. Satan and other angels fell into sin and are enemies of God and man. God limits the power of Satan and has condemned him to eternal punishment.

## LESSON 6 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Passage Assignment: Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - 1 Peter 5:8-9
  - Acts 12:7-11
  - Matthew 12:43-45
  - 2 Corinthians 11:13-15
  - Luke 8:27-35
2. Test: You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 6. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. Teaching Assignment: Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

**LESSON 6 TEST**

1. When were angels created?
2. How long do angels live?
3. How do we know that angels do not usually have physical bodies?
4. What are some reasons we know that angels have personality?
5. What are some different words in the Bible that refer to angels?
6. What is something that angels do for believers?
7. What is the origin of evil spirits?
8. What is an idol worshipper truly worshipping?
9. What is the final destiny of Satan and other evil spirits?

# LESSON 7

# CHRIST

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - What it means that Jesus is Messiah.
  - The statement of faith in the phrase “Lord Jesus Christ.”
  - The evidence for and the importance of the humanity of Jesus.
  - The evidence for and the importance of the deity of Jesus.
  - The sufficiency of the death of Christ for the forgiveness of sin.
  - The importance of the resurrection to the Christian faith.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about Christ.
2. The student will learn what people of some other religions say about Christ.

» Read Revelation 5:11-14 together. What does this passage tell us about Jesus?

## FALSE CHRISTS

The Bible predicts that in the last days, false christs and false prophets will deceive many. Many people are putting their faith in false or imaginary christs who cannot save them. You might meet two of these false christs, introduced to you by the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

### The Mormons' Jesus

If a Mormon ever knocks on your door, he will bring a Jesus who is the spirit-brother of Lucifer. This Jesus is one of the billions of spirit-babies that our “Heavenly Father” and our “Heavenly Mother” brought into this universe. According to the Mormons, when Jesus lived on earth, he had several wives, one of whom was Mary Magdalene. After his death and resurrection, he went to America to preach to the Indians.

## The Jehovah's Witnesses' Jesus

The Jehovah's Witnesses will tell you that Jesus is Michael the Archangel, the first created being, who became a man and died on a stake instead of a cross. He was raised as a spirit-creature, becoming Michael the Archangel again, while his body was dissolved into gases.

## THE REAL JESUS

I'm sure you recognize that these cultists have a Jesus different from the Jesus of the Bible, but can you describe the true, biblical Jesus? A lot of Americans can't. A recent survey showed that though 80% of Americans would call Jesus the Son of God, only 40% believed that He was God, and only 40% believed He was sinless. This shows that millions of people have a mental concept of a false Christ, one who cannot save them.

It is important for you to be certain of your beliefs about Jesus so that you are not deceived, and so you can introduce him to others.

*For more information about what other religions teach about Jesus, see the block at the end of the lesson entitled "What Other Religions Say."*

## Jesus the Messiah

» What are some biblical predictions about the Messiah?

The four gospels present Jesus as Israel's expected Messiah. Several things were predicted of the Messiah. He would be a descendant of King David and therefore be qualified to be king. He would save his people from oppression and bondage. He would be specially anointed by God to accomplish his mission. The word *Messiah* means "Anointed One."

Some of the most important details about the Messiah in the Old Testament were not explained clearly until the New Testament was written. His priority was to deliver his people from sin.<sup>1</sup> His kingdom was not earth-based, but spiritual and heavenly,<sup>2</sup> though eventually his kingdom will cover the whole earth.<sup>3</sup>

The word *Messiah* was a Hebrew word. The Greek equivalent is *Christos*, where we get the word *Christ*. To use the phrase "Jesus Christ" is to make the statement that Jesus is the Messiah.

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1 Read Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:74-75.

2 Read John 18:36.

3 Philippians 2:10-11; Revelation 19:11-16; Revelation 20:6

## Jesus is Lord

The early church used the term *Lord* to say that Jesus is the supreme power. When they said “Jesus is Lord,” they were saying that he is the Lord of all, the Creator and God of the universe. This statement of faith distinguished Christians, because only Christians believed that the man Jesus who had walked on the earth was also the one God over all.

The words “Lord Jesus Christ” are making a great statement. They are saying that Jesus is the Messiah and that he is also God. All three words are in Philippians 2:10-11. Those verses tell us that the time will come when everyone in the world will have to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

## Three Special Days

Our basic beliefs about Jesus could be divided into three categories, connected to three special days.

## WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS BECAUSE OF THE INCARNATION

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus to a virgin mother, for Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> Though Jesus was human because he was born of a woman, he was also God himself, the Creator of the world he entered. This is amazing but true: while Jesus was a baby, his mother Mary held the one who had created her.

The term *Son of God* is used of believers and of angels,<sup>5</sup> but Jesus is the Son of God in a unique way.<sup>6</sup> He is the only being that completely shares the nature of the Father. He is so completely the image of the Father that he is God just as the Father is.<sup>7</sup>

God’s nature and human nature came together in the person of Jesus. This is called the *incarnation*, which means God taking on human flesh, becoming a man. Jesus is the only one who could be our Savior because he is the only person in the universe who is both man and God.

## Jesus is a Man

It is not hard to recognize the Jesus of the New Testament as truly human. He was conceived in a mother’s womb, grew up, learned, and developed as a person.<sup>8</sup> He got tired,

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4 Read Luke 1:34-35.

5 John 1:12; Job 1:6

6 John 3:16

7 Read Hebrews 1:2-3.

8 Read Luke 2:52.

slept, was tempted, and did almost everything that humans do, except sin. He even died. He truly identified with the human race by becoming one of us.<sup>9</sup>

» Why is it important that Jesus is a man?

Because Jesus is a man:

1. He could suffer and die as a sacrifice.
2. His righteous life can take the place of our sinful life. The first Adam represented all humanity when he sinned and became separated from God. This brought death on all people. Jesus lived a sinless life and fulfilled all of God's requirements. He gives eternal life to all who identify with him. He is called the last Adam in Scripture.<sup>10</sup>
3. He can be our priest who represents us to God. As our mediator, he does not just communicate for us, he truly represents us. It was necessary for him to be a man to make reconciliation between us and God.<sup>11</sup> His role as priest provides an eternal salvation.<sup>12</sup> The humanity of Jesus is an essential part of the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

*For further biblical evidence that Jesus was a man, see the block "Scriptural Proof of Jesus' Humanity" near the end of this lesson.*

## Jesus is God

### Jesus claimed to be God.

The Jesus of the Bible is not simply a human, however. He is also the one infinite (limitless) God of the universe. Jesus made this claim himself. He said, "I and my Father are one."<sup>14</sup> When he said this, the Jews started to stone him because they understood him to be saying that he was equal to God. Did Jesus tell them, "No, you misunderstood Me. I am not really God!"? No, Jesus accepted their interpretation of his words. He taught that he was equal to God the Father.

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**"As the Father uses  
this expression I  
AM, so also does  
Christ, for it signifies  
continuous being,  
not affected by time."**

**John Chrysostom**

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9 Read John 1:14.

10 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45-49; Romans 5:17-19

11 Read Hebrews 2:17.

12 Hebrews 10:5-7

13 Read 1 John 5:1.

14 John 10:30

When Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I AM,”<sup>15</sup> he was claiming to be the I AM of Exodus 3:14, the self-existent God of the universe.<sup>16</sup> The Jews tried to stone Him for this claim also.<sup>17</sup>

### Jesus performed divine acts while on earth.

Jesus performed divine acts while he was on the earth. He gave eternal life.<sup>18</sup> He forgave sins.<sup>19</sup> These are things that only God can do.

When Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic, he healed the man to prove that he had “power on earth to forgive sins.”<sup>20</sup> One action was proof of the other, making it clear that Jesus had not performed the miracle of healing as simply a prophet anointed by God. Jesus had the divine authority and power both to forgive and to heal.

Jesus also resurrected Lazarus after saying, “I am the Resurrection and the Life.”<sup>21</sup> This was another divine action accompanied by a divine claim. Only God can rightfully claim to *be* the “Resurrection” because it is only the power of God that can raise anyone from the dead. Jesus claimed to be this “Life-giver” and then gave Lazarus life, showing that he was who he claimed to be. In this event, Jesus clearly distinguished himself from other prophets and the apostles who raised people from the dead by the power of God. None of these claimed to have the power in themselves to do the miracles. They were simply instruments of God. In John 5:21, Jesus said that he raises the dead just as the Father raises the dead.

When Jesus performed his miracles, he “manifested his glory,”<sup>22</sup> the “glory as of the only be-

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**“I believe... in one Lord  
Jesus Christ, the only  
begotten Son of God;  
begotten of His Father  
before all worlds, God  
of God, Light of Light,  
Very God of Very God,  
begotten, not made;  
being of one substance  
with the Father; by whom  
all things were made.”**

Nicene Creed

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- 15 John 8:58
  - 16 Exodus 3:14
  - 17 John 8:59
  - 18 Read John 10:28.
  - 19 Mark 2:10
  - 20 Mark 2:10-12
  - 21 John 11:25
  - 22 John 2:11

gotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”<sup>23</sup> These miracles were demonstrations of God the Son’s glorious power, proving he was divine.

### Jesus is Creator and Sustainer.

According to the Apostles John and Paul, Jesus created everything and holds everything together, and everything exists for him.<sup>24</sup> Surely this could not be said of anyone but God.

» Why is it important for us to know that Jesus is God?

Because Jesus is God

1. His sacrificial death is of infinite value — enough for forgiveness of the sins of the world.
2. He has the power to save us; he is the way, the truth, and the life.
3. We should worship him as we worship the Father.

If we fail to see Jesus as God, we will not honor him as God, which is something Jesus says we must do. He said that “all should honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.”<sup>25</sup> We can’t be saved if we don’t honor both the Father and the Son as God.

Christianity is based not only on the teachings and actions of Jesus, but on the unique person of Jesus. He is not just the teacher of the message of salvation. He is himself the Savior, and only he — the God-man — could have been the Savior.

*For further biblical evidence that Jesus is God, see the block “Scriptural Proof of Jesus’ Deity” near the end of this lesson.*

### Jesus is One Person

Though Jesus has all of the nature of God and all of the nature of man, he is not two persons combined. The two natures form one person in him, in perfect harmony. Jesus is the one God-man, and every action of Jesus has to be understood in light of his full humanity and full deity. The church has always taught that the two natures in Jesus cannot be separated from one another, yet they are not mixed in a way that causes either nature to lose its characteristics.<sup>26</sup>

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23 John 1:14

24 Read John 1:3; Colossians 1:17.

25 John 5:23

26 The Chalcedonian Creed (A.D. 451) says that the two natures of Christ are unchanging, indivisible, inseparable, and unconfused.

It may be helpful to compare the nature of Jesus to the nature of the Holy Scriptures. Like Jesus, the Bible is fully divine and fully human. Being a human book, it has the characteristics of any other human book, except that it is without mistake. Being divine, it shows characteristics that no other book could. In the same way, Jesus shows both human and divine qualities. The fact that the Bible shows divine characteristics does not make it any less of a human book. Likewise, the fact that Jesus operates in his deity doesn't make him any less human. And the fact that Jesus operates in his humanity doesn't make him any less divine.

## Common Errors of Doctrine

The most common errors of doctrine people make when they talk about Christ are these:

1. Denying that Jesus is God
2. Denying that Jesus is man
3. Minimizing either his deity or humanity as if it is unimportant
4. Denying the unity of Christ's person

Any of these errors is a denial of the incarnation. The incarnation was necessary for our salvation, so if a person denies the incarnation he will end with a false gospel and false path to salvation.

*Note to class leader: A member of the class could be selected to explain the following block of information ("What Other Religions Say").*

## WHAT OTHER RELIGIONS SAY

Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus was a man. They believe he was the greatest man who ever lived, but still just a man. That's why they don't believe that his death is a sufficient sacrifice for our salvation. They have a gospel of salvation by works. They claim to be Christians, but they are a different religion.

Mormons believe that Jesus was originally a spirit created by God, like a brother to Lucifer. He was sent to be born on earth as the man Jesus. Mormons do not believe that Jesus is God.

Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet sent by God. They do not believe that he is God or that there is a Trinity. They do not believe that he was crucified or that he rose from the dead.

Hindus and Buddhists believe that Jesus was a holy man who did miracles. He is not important to their religion. They do not believe in a God who is Creator and Lord, so they do not believe that Jesus is the incarnation of God.

## WE CELEBRATE GOOD FRIDAY BECAUSE OF THE ATONEMENT

Good Friday is the day that Jesus was crucified. On this dreadful and wonderful day, Jesus took our sins to the cross. He died as a sacrifice for our sins so that we can be forgiven.

### A Sacrifice Was Necessary

A sacrifice had to be made in order for God to forgive us and still be just and holy. This principle was taught in the Old Testament by the sacrifices God required.<sup>27</sup> If God simply forgave sin without a basis, it would indicate that he is not just and that sin is not very serious. But nobody could look at Jesus' death by crucifixion and say that sin is not serious. His sacrifice provided the basis for our forgiveness.

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27 Hebrews 9:22

## Only Jesus Could Be a Sufficient Sacrifice

» Why is Jesus the only one who could be the sacrifice for sins?

The justice of God and the seriousness of sin required a greater sacrifice than any created thing.<sup>28</sup> We have sinned against an infinite God, which brings upon us infinite guilt. That is why only Jesus could be the sacrifice. He was qualified because he is God and because he is man. Because of his deity, he was sinless, and his sacrifice had infinite value. Because of his humanity, he could represent us and die in our place.

## The Blood of Jesus Represents His Sacrificial Death

God taught people about the atonement by instituting sacrifices. The priests killed animals and offered their blood to represent their death. The book of Hebrews says that without blood there was no remission of sins.<sup>29</sup>

God commanded them to treat blood in a special way because it represented the life of the creature.<sup>30</sup> To “shed blood” meant to kill.<sup>31</sup> Blood being used in the temple meant that an animal had been killed.

The death of Christ was the ultimate sacrifice that made salvation available for everyone in all times.<sup>32</sup> He presented his blood in heaven representing his sacrificial death.<sup>33</sup> The blood of Jesus provides us salvation because he died as a sacrifice so we can be saved.

Why did Jesus die on the cross instead of some other way? In Old Testament times, for a person to be hanged on a tree was a sign of the curse of God.<sup>34</sup> The Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus took the curse of God upon himself by being crucified on a tree.

## Jesus Brought God and Man Together

Jesus came to reconcile two separated parties — God and man. As the mediator, Jesus had to represent both parties at the same time. As God, he represented God to man. As man, He represented man to God. By fully representing both sides, Jesus brought man and God together. He did what each side had to do to bring about reconciliation.

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28 Read Hebrews 10:4.

29 Hebrews 9:18-22

30 Leviticus 17:11, 14

31 Genesis 9:5-6

32 Read Hebrews 10:4, 12.

33 Read Hebrews 9:12, 24.

34 Deuteronomy 21:23

## WE CELEBRATE EASTER BECAUSE OF THE RESURRECTION

There are many traditional ways to celebrate Easter, but many people don't realize the meaning of the things they are doing, and they may not know what is important about Jesus' resurrection. Jesus arose from the grave on Easter morning, the third day after he was crucified. He showed that he had power over sin, death, and the devil. He not only took our death, but conquered it with life. Because he was victorious, we can be too!

### Jesus Arose Bodily

Jesus once said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Though the Jews thought he was referring to the temple that Herod built, John's Gospel explains that Jesus was actually referring to his body.<sup>35</sup> All the Gospels record the fact that Jesus' tomb was empty three days after he was buried in it. Jesus showed himself to the disciples after his resurrection, saying, "Handle me, and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."<sup>36</sup> He was proving that he had physically risen from the dead.

» What difference would it make if Jesus did not rise from the dead?

1. **Jesus' bodily resurrection demonstrated his total victory over sin and death.**<sup>37</sup>
2. **Jesus' bodily resurrection proved that he was who he claimed to be.**<sup>38</sup> Thus it also proved the gospel. People who deny that Jesus rose from the dead also deny the gospel.<sup>39</sup>
3. **Jesus' resurrection gives us the assurance that we will also be raised from the dead.** Jesus promised that he would raise the dead. That promise would be unbelievable unless he himself arose.<sup>40</sup> We will be raised to have bodies like Jesus' glorified body.<sup>41</sup>

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35 John 2:19-21

36 Luke 24:39

37 Read Revelation 1:17-18; Colossians 2:14-15.

38 John 2:18-21; Matthew 17:22-23

39 Read 1 Corinthians 15:17.

40 John 5:28-29

41 Read 1 John 3:2.

## Jesus Is Still Human

The resurrection shows us that the incarnation is permanent. Jesus will always be human as well as divine. Jesus, still the God-man, now intercedes for us with the Father,<sup>42</sup> and will someday return to take us to heaven.<sup>43</sup>

## WE YIELD TO JESUS BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE DID

As believers, we live in daily relationship with Christ. He is not only a person of history, and not only God who is in heaven, but he is present with us. He promised to be with his disciples always.<sup>44</sup>

He is present in a special way in the church. He is the head of the church, and the church is called his body.<sup>45</sup> He guides the church, holds it together, and provides for it.<sup>46</sup>

A person who accepts the truths we just shared about Jesus should respond to that truth with faith and obedience. You can help others to become believers with a prayer like the one below.

Father, I thank you for loving me enough to send your Son Jesus into the world for my sake. I believe that Jesus is the sinless God-man who died and rose again so I could be forgiven for my sins and be restored to a relationship with you. I am very sorry for all the sins I have committed. I know my sins nailed Jesus to the cross. Right now I turn away from everything I know is wrong, and I receive Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Lead me from now on. I am going to live for you forever! Thank you for forgiving me. I love you. Amen.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

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42 Romans 8:34

43 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

44 Matthew 28:20

45 Ephesians 1:22-23

46 Read Colossians 2:19.

## STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Jesus is the Messiah and Lord of all, the Son of God born of a virgin, with all of human nature and all of divine nature in one person. He lived a sinless life and died as a sacrifice so that our sins can be forgiven. He rose from the dead and will raise all believers when he returns. His kingdom is universal and without end.

## LESSON 7 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Passage Assignment: Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Mark 1:1-12
  - John 5:19-26
  - John 6:44-51
  - John 8:51-59
  - Revelation 1:12-18
  - Acts 2:22-36
2. Test: You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 7. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. Teaching Assignment: Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

*Note to class leader: The following two sections of information ("Scriptural Proof of Jesus' Humanity" and "Scriptural Proof of Jesus' Deity") are optional. The class can cover them if they want further biblical proof for these points.*

## SCRIPTURAL PROOF OF JESUS' HUMANITY

- Jesus was a descendant of Eve (Genesis 3:15), the seed of Abraham (Genesis 22:18 – compare to Acts 3:25), born from a woman (Galatians 4:4), born from Mary (Matthew 1:21-25), called the Son of Man (Matthew 13:37), and went through ordinary maturation process (Luke 2:40, 52).
- When he came back to his home town to visit, the reaction of the people shows that his childhood was normal (Matthew 13:54-56).
- He had a body in order to obey as a human should (Hebrews 10:5-9); he became flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14); he was made just like us so that he could suffer like us (Hebrews 2:10-18); he was perfected through suffering (Hebrews 2:9-10); and he was subject to human temptations (Hebrews 4:15).
- He took the form of man (Philippians 2:6-8).
- He was the eternal Word of God, and was made flesh and lived on earth (John 1:14).
- The humanity of Jesus is an essential statement of the Christian faith (1 John 1:14, 4:2-3).

## SCRIPTURAL PROOF OF JESUS' DEITY

There are three ways Jesus is proved to be God:

1. He is called God.
2. He is shown to have attributes of God.
3. He is shown in the roles of God.

### Jesus Is Called God

- John 1:1, 14, says that the eternal Word was God.
- John 12:41 tells us that Isaiah saw Jesus.
- Acts 20:28 says that the church of God was purchased with his own blood.
- Romans 9:5 said that Christ came, who is God blessed forever.
- Titus 2:13 refers to him as our God and Savior Jesus Christ.
- Isaiah 7:14 says that his name means "God with us."
- Isaiah 9:6 says that his name shall be called Mighty God.

- 1 Timothy 3:16 says that God was revealed in the flesh, preached, and received into glory.
- In John 10:30, 33, Jesus said he was the same as the Father.
- In John 5:17-18, the Jews knew that he said he was equal with God.
- In John 14:9 he said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father."
- In John 20:28, Thomas saw his wounds and said, "My Lord and my God," and Jesus blessed those who believe.
- In John 8:58, he called himself I AM, and the Jews knew it was a claim to be God.
- In Revelation 1:8, 11, 17-18, he claimed to be the First and the Last, and Isaiah 44:6 shows this is a term for God.
- Hebrews 1:2-3 tells us that he is the complete image of the Father.
- In Hebrews 1:8, he is addressed as God.

## Jesus Has the Attributes of God

- **Present everywhere.** In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said that he was present wherever two or three believers were together. In Matthew 28:20, he promised to be with the believers always.
- **All-powerful.** Hebrews 1:3 says that he holds everything up by His power. Philipians 3:21 says that he subdues everything to himself.
- **Eternal.** Hebrews 13:8 tells us that he is eternally the same. Hebrews 1:12 also says that he is the same forever, and is a quotation of Psalm 102:25-27 about God.
- **All-knowing.** John 2:24-25 tells us that he knew all people, and knew what was in their hearts. In John 10:15, he claimed to know the Father the same as the Father knew him.

## Jesus Has the Roles of God

- Jesus is the Creator (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:10).
- Jesus forgave sin (Luke 5:20-24; Mark 2:10, 7:48).
- Jesus will be judge at the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
- Jesus is worshipped like the Father is (John 5:22-23; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:12-13).

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

## LESSON 7 TEST

1. What was the priority of the Messiah?
2. What did the early church mean when they said “Jesus is Lord”?
3. How is Jesus uniquely the Son of God?
4. What does it mean that Jesus is an incarnation?
5. Why is it important that Jesus is a man? (Three reasons)
6. Why is it important for us to realize that Jesus is God?
7. Why was a sacrifice needed?
8. Why did Jesus die on a cross instead of some other way?
9. What is the significance of Jesus’ resurrection?



# LESSON 8

# SALVATION

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - Why the cross is an offense to many people.
  - The condition of the sinner.
  - The necessity of the atonement for forgiveness.
  - The meaning of repentance.
  - The elements of saving faith.
  - Why the atonement is sufficient for all people and all sin.
  - The basis of personal assurance of salvation.
  - The redemption of creation in general.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about salvation.
2. The student will understand the error of religion without repentance.

» Read Psalm 85 together. What does this passage tell us about salvation?

## THE CROSS

The most important Christian symbol is the cross. The cross represents the event that is the center of all history. It represents the difference between the Christian faith and all others.

The cross is a mystery to many people. They do not understand why Jesus died. Even if they hear that he died because he loves us and wants to save us, they don't understand why it needed to happen. They ask, "If God wanted to forgive us, why couldn't he just do it?"

Confusion about the cross started from the beginning, when the first Christians began to preach the gospel.<sup>1</sup> The Jews thought that God would show himself in power. They thought the salvation they needed was deliverance from oppression, but the cross seemed to show weakness and failure.

The Greeks thought that God would show himself in wisdom. They thought the salvation they needed was explanation about how to get the best out of life, but the cross seemed to be foolishness and failure.

- » Why are some people offended by the cross?

The cross is an offense to many people. Many people are willing to be religious. They are willing to believe certain things, practice religious customs, and get advice. But they are angry at the idea that they are such sinners that the cross was necessary for their forgiveness. They think God should not object to their actions or character. The cross offends them because it means that they are sinners who need forgiveness.

To understand the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, we must understand that the condition of sinful man and the holy nature of God caused a great dilemma. We must understand why the atonement made it possible for God to forgive.

## THE HUMAN CONDITION

Because of the sin of Adam, every person is already separated from God when he is born.<sup>2</sup> That means that each person is self-centered and goes his own way.

As soon as a person begins to make choices, he begins committing sin. **Every sinner is guilty of many acts of sin.**<sup>3</sup>

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**“How a sinner may be justified before God is a question of importance to every man, for there can be no true peace or secure joy while we are enemies of God, either in time or in eternity. Yet how little has this important question been understood! What confused ideas many have had about it!”**

**John Wesley**

(In the sermon entitled  
“Justification by Faith”)

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1 Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-23.

2 Romans 5:12

3 Read Romans 3:23.

Sin is a violation of God's law.<sup>4</sup> Because God is absolutely just, he does not excuse sin, and every person will be judged for what he has done.<sup>5</sup> There is no question about any person's guilt or the judgment he deserves. Every sinner is already condemned.<sup>6</sup>

**The sinner is the enemy of God.**<sup>7</sup> A sinner cannot come into relationship with God unless his offenses against God can be removed.

The sinner is also in a condition that makes him unfit for a relationship with God. **The sinner is corrupt in his desires.**<sup>8</sup> Because he is a slave to sin, **the sinner is powerless to change his condition.**<sup>9</sup>

So what is the salvation the sinner needs? Because the sinner is guilty, salvation means forgiveness. Because he is the enemy of God, salvation means reconciliation. Because he is corrupt, salvation means cleansing. Because he is powerless, salvation means deliverance. These are only a few of the aspects of the salvation that the sinner needs.

## THE DILEMMA

Man could not pay for his own sin. One reason is that everything we have already belongs to God anyway. A more important reason is that sin is against an infinite God, and there is nothing of infinite value available for man to pay.

There was absolutely nothing that man could do about his need; therefore, no requirement could be set for man that would accomplish salvation.<sup>10</sup> If it had been possible for man to accomplish his own salvation, it would not have been necessary for Jesus to die on the cross.<sup>11</sup>

» If God wanted to forgive, why didn't he simply forgive without the cross?

Because God is holy, he must judge according to truth and justice.<sup>12</sup> The term *atonement* refers to the fact that Jesus' sacrifice is the way for us to be reconciled to God.

Imagine if the sacrifice of Christ had not happened. What if God simply forgave sins without the atonement?

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4 1 John 3:4; James 2:10-11

5 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12-13

6 Read John 3:18-19.

7 Romans 5:10

8 Ephesians 2:3

9 Read Romans 5:20, 7:23.

10 Read Galatians 3:21.

11 Read Galatians 2:21.

12 Romans 2:5-6

If God forgave sin without the atonement, it would seem that sin is unimportant. It would seem that God is unjust, and even unholy. It would seem that in God's eyes there is little difference between a person doing right and a person doing wrong.

If forgiveness were without atonement, God could not be worshipped as the just and holy God that he is. Forgiveness without atonement would ultimately dishonor God instead of honoring him, so that could not be done.

But God is loving and wants to forgive. He did not want to leave all humanity in a sinful condition, to be eternally lost, even though it was what they deserved.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross provided the sacrifice of infinite value that was needed. Jesus qualified (1) by being sinless<sup>13</sup> (perfect and not needing salvation himself), and (2) by being both God and man.

The atonement provides what is needed as a basis for forgiveness. Now God can forgive the person who repents and believes his promise. Nobody who understands the sacrifice on the cross can think that sin is not serious to God.

The atonement provides a way that a just God can count as righteous the sinner who believes the promise.<sup>14</sup> Romans 3:20-26 gives a logical explanation of how the atonement works.

The Bible tells us that the means of salvation God provided is absolutely the only way. If a person rejects salvation by grace through faith in Christ, he cannot be saved.<sup>15</sup>

This is why it is important to know the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, received by faith alone. Salvation is by grace alone because there is nothing we can do to earn it or deserve it. It is by faith alone because there is nothing we can do to accomplish it. We can only believe God's promise.

» Who makes the first step toward a person's salvation, God or the person himself?

## THE FIRST GRACE

God has taken the first steps toward bringing the sinner to salvation. He showed his willingness to forgive by providing the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Now God's grace reaches into the heart of the sinner, convicting him of his sins and causing him to desire

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13 2 Corinthians 5:21

14 Read Romans 3:26.

15 Read Mark 16:15-16; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 2:3.

forgiveness.<sup>16</sup> The sinner would be powerless to leave his sins without God's help.<sup>17</sup> God gives the sinner the ability to respond to the gospel. If a person is not saved, it is not because he had no grace, but because he would not respond to the grace that God gave him.

Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, and God wants every person to be saved.<sup>18</sup> God's grace gives every person the ability to respond, but he does not force anyone. That is why God calls upon the sinner to choose to repent and believe.<sup>19</sup>

## REPENTANCE

» What is repentance?

Repentance means that a sinner sees himself as guilty and deserving punishment, and that he is willing to quit his sins.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

Repentance does not mean that a sinner must correct his life and make himself righteous before God will forgive him. That is impossible, but the sinner must be willing for God to deliver him from his sins.

» Salvation is received by grace, so why is repentance necessary for salvation?

Faith is the only requirement for forgiveness, but faith for salvation cannot exist without repentance. If a person is unwilling to repent, he does not want to be saved from sin.

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**A beautiful passage describing God's grace was written many years before the event of the atonement occurred. It is Psalm 85. It describes how God forgives sin. It talks about his anger being ended. Then it comes to a very interesting statement. It says "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." This is a wonderful picture of salvation through the atonement. Without the atonement, the mercy of God would be limited by the truth that we are guilty. The righteousness of God would make us his enemies instead of allowing peace.**

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16 Read Titus 2:11; John 1:9; Romans 1:20.

17 John 6:44

18 Read 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 4:10.

19 Mark 1:15

If God forgave the people who continue in sin and do not repent, that would dishonor him as the righteous judge of the earth. Repentance is necessary, because if a person does not repent, he is not admitting the evil of sin. If he doesn't see why he should quit sinning, then he doesn't see why he needs forgiveness.

If a person has not seen himself as truly guilty, without excuse, and deserving punishment, he has not repented. If he admits that he is a sinner but wants a religion that will allow him to continue sinning, he has not repented, because he wants to keep doing what made him guilty.

## SAVING FAITH

» If a person has saving faith, what does that mean that he believes?

### 1. He sees that he can do nothing to justify himself.

For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

He realizes that nothing he can do (works) will make him deserve to be saved, even partially.

### 2. He believes that the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for his forgiveness.

And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

*Propitiation* means the sacrifice that makes our forgiveness possible. Nothing is necessary in addition to Christ's sacrifice for our forgiveness.

### 3. He believes that God forgives him on the condition of faith alone.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

If he thinks there are other conditions, he expects to be saved partly by works instead of completely by grace.

## ASSURANCE

» How can a person know for sure that he is saved?

Some people depend on their feelings, but feelings are changeable and can be misleading.

The Bible tells us that we can know for sure that we are saved. We can have confidence that God has accepted us. We don't have to live in fear, because God's Spirit assures us that we are adopted children of God.<sup>20</sup>

This assurance is so complete that we do not have to fear the Judgment Day.<sup>21</sup> Some people say they hope they will be accepted into heaven, but we can have a better assurance than that. It is not enough to believe that salvation is offered to humanity in general; a person must know that he himself is saved.

A changed life is evidence that a person is saved, but that evidence does not exist at the first moment. Results of salvation have not had time to appear. Therefore, at the time of repentance, a changed life is not the basis of assurance.

The believer can be sure of his salvation by knowing that he has followed the scriptural way to salvation. If one has truly repented and believed as the Bible directs, he has the right to believe that God forgives him. When one repents and believes, God gives the witness of his Spirit that he has become the child of God.

If a person tries to feel that he is saved when he has not really repented, he will become confused and might deceive himself.

If a person (1) truly repents, (2) trusts God's promise in Scripture, and (3) receives the witness of the Spirit, he will not be deceived. This assurance is based on God's Word, which is absolutely reliable. God always keeps his promises.

## 10 WORDS FOR ASPECTS OF SALVATION

**Reconciliation:** This word means that ones who have been enemies have made peace again. In salvation, we make peace with God.<sup>22</sup>

**Expiation:** This word means that a record has been cleared. In salvation, our record of sins is erased.<sup>23</sup>

**Propitiation:** This word refers to something that was given to turn away someone's anger. In salvation, Jesus' sacrifice turns away the righteous anger of God that was against us.<sup>24</sup>

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20 Romans 8:15-16

21 Read 1 John 4:17.

22 Read 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 5:1. (These verses talk about both justification and reconciliation).

23 Read Hebrews 8:12.

24 Read 1 John 2:2.

**Deliverance:** This word means that someone is rescued from another's power. In salvation, we are taken from the power of Satan and sin.<sup>25</sup>

**Redemption:** This word means that a price was paid so that someone can be free. In salvation, Jesus' death is the price so that we are free from the bondage and penalty of sin.<sup>26</sup>

**Justification:** This word means that someone is declared righteous, or innocent. In salvation, a guilty sinner is counted righteous because Jesus suffered in his place.<sup>27</sup>

**Sanctification:** This word means someone is made holy. In salvation, a sinner is changed into a holy child of God.<sup>28</sup>

**Adoption:** This word means someone becomes the legal child of another. In salvation we become the children of God.<sup>29</sup>

**Regeneration/New Birth:** This word means someone starts life again. In salvation the believer begins a new life.<sup>30</sup>

**Sealing:** This word means something is marked to show who owns it. In salvation, the Holy Spirit in us identifies us as someone that belongs to God.<sup>31</sup>

*Note to class leader: A member of the class could be selected to explain the following block of information ("Error to Avoid: Religion without Repentance").*

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25 Read Luke 1:74; Romans 6:6, 12-18.

26 Read Ephesians 1:7; Titus 2:14.

27 Read 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 5:1. (These verses talk about both justification and reconciliation.)

28 Many of the epistles refer to the believers as "holy ones." (Read Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, Philippians 1:1.)

29 Read John 1:12; Romans 8:15.

30 Read Ephesians 2:1; John 7:38-39; Galatians 4:29; John 3:5.

31 Read Ephesians 1:13.

### **ERROR TO AVOID: RELIGION WITHOUT REPENTANCE**

There's a type of person who easily thinks that he is saved when he hears that salvation is by grace through faith. He hasn't truly repented, because he didn't see that he needed to. He never saw himself as a sinner deserving God's judgment. He thinks that grace means that he can go his own way. Because he accepts the truth of Christianity, he thinks he is a Christian, though he has had no transformation. He never surrendered his own self will; instead, he accepted God as a part of his life, and still lives mostly according to his own will. This is not the beginning of a saving relationship with God, according to the scriptural description.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

### **STATEMENT OF BELIEFS**

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ provide atonement for the sins of the world. Every person is guilty of sin and powerless to save himself. Every sinner who repents can receive God's grace by faith. The believer is forgiven and delivered from sin's power and punishment. The Holy Spirit changes the believer from a sinner into a holy worshipper of God. There is no other means of salvation. Creation in general is redeemed and will ultimately be restored by God.

## LESSON 8 ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Passage Assignment:** Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Ephesians 2:1-10
  - Isaiah 1:11-18
  - Psalm 51
  - Romans 8:19-25
  - Romans 3:20-26
2. **Test:** You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 8. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. **Teaching Assignment:** Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

*Note to class leader: The following two sections of information ("Salvation in the Old Testament" and "The Salvation of All Creation") are optional. The class can cover them if members are interested in these topics.*

## SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, God provided a system of worship with sacrifices. The sacrifices did not provide salvation the same way that Jesus' death did. The Bible tells us that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin."<sup>1</sup> So why were sacrifices offered? They were forms of worship that symbolized the sacrifice of Christ that was in the future.<sup>2</sup>

That doesn't mean that salvation was unavailable until New Testament times. When the Apostle Paul explained the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, he gave the examples of Abraham and David to show that it was not a new idea.<sup>3</sup> Jesus said that Nico-

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1 Hebrews 10:4

2 Hebrews 10:1

3 Romans 4:1-8

demus should already know about the new birth because he was a teacher of the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> Paul told Timothy that the Old Testament scriptures would make him wise about salvation.<sup>5</sup> So the gospel was available in the Old Testament.

There were some in Old Testament times who understood grace. They didn't know the details of the atonement or how it would work, but they believed that God was providing a basis for forgiveness. The sacrifices were the form for expressing that faith, just as we have forms of worship today (for example, the Lord's Supper). The sacrifices were worthless if they did not come with faith and obedience, just as our forms of worship are worthless if they are not expressions of a heart and life that are submitted to God. Psalm 51 and Isaiah 11:1-18 show that repentance and faith were important during Old Testament times.

## THE SALVATION OF ALL CREATION

When the first people sinned, a curse came on all creation.<sup>6</sup> When salvation is completed, creation will be restored.

Salvation begins with spiritual renewal. Believers are saved from sin, and they live in God's blessings. However, they have not yet experienced deliverance from the physical aspects of the curse of sin. They still have bodies that age and die.

Nature is still under the curse of sin. We have not seen the world the way God originally created it. We see nature that is full of harmful creatures and creatures in conflict with each other. In our world, many creatures must die for others to live.

The time is coming when all creation will be renewed.<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:18-25 describes the Christian hope of a world freed from the curse of sin.

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4 John 3:10

5 2 Timothy 3:15

6 Genesis 3:17

7 Revelation 21:1; Hebrews 1:10-12

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

**LESSON 8 TEST**

1. Why is the cross an offense to many people?
2. What are four aspects of the condition of a sinner?
3. Why would forgiveness without atonement dishonor God?
4. What is repentance?
5. If a person has saving faith, what does that mean that he believes?
6. Why did Jesus qualify to be the sacrifice?

7. How can a person know for sure that he is saved?

8. Match the salvation terms with the right phrases:

- |                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| _____ redemption             | A. price paid          |
| _____ sanctification         | B. counted righteous   |
| _____ expiation              | C. identification mark |
| _____ deliverance            | D. peace               |
| _____ sealing                | E. anger turned        |
| _____ reconciliation         | F. clean record        |
| _____ propitiation           | G. rescued             |
| _____ adoption               | H. made holy           |
| _____ regeneration/new birth | I. become son          |
| _____ justification          | J. new life            |



# LESSON 9

## SALVATION ISSUES

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - The privilege and importance of a believer's victory over sin.
  - The grace God provides for victorious living.
  - The spiritual life that comes from relationship with Christ.
  - The scriptural warnings of falling from grace.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about particular salvation issues.
2. The student will have a high expectation of living in victory over sin.

- » Read Romans 6 together. What does this passage tell us about the effects of salvation?

### EVIDENCE OF SALVATION

Personal assurance of salvation is one of the main themes of the epistle of 1 John. John stated his reason for writing this letter; “These things have I written unto you who believe in the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (5:13).

- » What should a person do if he has doubts about whether he is saved?

The apostle knew that there will be times when a believer needs assurance that he is saved. He shows that it is proper for a believer to look for evidence on which to base his assurance. Throughout the epistle, he gave some examples of evidence, saying “this is how we know.”<sup>1</sup> He said that believers could use this evidence to assure their hearts.<sup>2</sup>

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1 1 John 2:3, 5, 29, 3:10, 14, 19, 24, 5:2, 18

2 1 John 1:9

The characteristic of a believer that is most emphasized throughout the epistle of 1 John is victory over sin. The normal state of a believer is a life of freedom from willful sin. The Apostle said, "My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not" (2:1). By this statement, the apostle shows that the believer should live without willful sin, and he says that he is writing to show them the importance of victorious living.

And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1b-2).

Here he recognizes that sin may occur, though it is not necessary. He assures us that if a believer sins, the sacrifice of Christ can atone for that sin. That does not mean that a believer can go back into sin and be forgiven automatically without repentance. The verse simply says that the sacrifice is available, as it is for the whole world. We know that the whole world is not automatically saved. Repentance is necessary for any sin to be forgiven, whether the sinner was once a believer or not. If a believer sins, he must repent for the sake of his relationship with God.

The following verses from 1 John show that the great distinction of a believer is victory over willful sin. The phrases in brackets are added comments.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments [A person disobeying God lacks this evidence]. He that says I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (2:3-4).

Whoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And you know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him there

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**"By sin, I refer here to outward sin, according to the common use of the word: a voluntary transgression of the revealed, written law of God; of any commandment of God, known to be such at the time that it is transgressed. "Whoever is born of God," while he lives in faith and love, and in the spirit of prayer and thanksgiving, not only does not, but cannot, commit sin in this way. As long as he believes in God through Christ, and loves him, and is pouring out his heart before him, he cannot voluntarily transgress any command of God"**

**John Wesley**

"The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God"

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is no sin. Whosoever abides in him sins not. Whosoever sins has neither seen him nor known him (3:4-6).

Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous [Not a person somehow counted righteous while continuing to sin], even as he is righteous. He that commits sin is of the devil, for the devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil (3:7-8).

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God (3:9).

And he that keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in him [If he stops abiding in Christ, he will sin. If he sins, he has stopped abiding in Christ]. And hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us (3:24).

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments [Real love motivates obedience. Disobedience shows a lack of love.] (5:2-3).

For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world [its temptations and spirit]. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith (5:4).

We know that whosoever is born of God sins not; but he that is begotten of God keeps [guards] himself, and that wicked one touches him not (5:18).

- » What distinctive characteristic of a believer is obvious in these verses?

From these verses, it seems obvious that the distinctive characteristic of the believer is that he lives in obedience to God. Victory over sin is a great privilege of the believer.

### A NOTE ON 1 JOHN 1:8

Sometimes people who deny that a believer can live in victory over willful sin quote 1 John 1:8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." But what does it mean to "have sin"? Does it mean that even believers are continuing to commit willful sin? That would not be consistent with the statements in chapter three that are quoted above. How could John have made those statements in chapter three if he had previously said, "Every person, including every believer, continues to commit sin"? That would not make sense.

The context shows the meaning. In verse seven, a cleansing for sin is promised. This cleansing is for those who "walk in the light," which means to walk according to truth, in obedience to God. Those who are now living in obedience to God are cleansed of their past sins by the blood of Christ.

But there may be some people who deny that they have sinned and need cleansing. Those are the ones who say they "have no sin," and "deceive" themselves. They are claiming that they never sinned, or that they solved their sin problem without Christ.

Again in verse nine, forgiveness and cleansing are promised. In verse ten he again says that the ones who say they "have not sinned" are contradicting God himself.

John was writing to correct the error of those who did not think they needed the cleansing and forgiveness provided by Christ—those who thought they did not need to be saved. He was not saying that even believers continue to commit sin, for that would contradict his main emphasis and direct statements in this letter.

### GOD'S GRACE FOR A LIFE OF VICTORY

Living in victory is not always easy because of inherited depravity and human infirmity. Because of these, many people believe that living without committing willful sin is impossible. But God's grace has the answer to both problems.

- » What is inherited depravity?

Inherited depravity is the corruption of man's moral nature that inclines him toward sin from birth. After conversion, a believer struggles with this tendency toward sin. But God provides grace not only for daily victory, but for a cleansing of inherited depravity.<sup>3</sup>

The sinful nature is not a condition that we must live with for our entire earthly life. To live in victory, a believer needs to come to the point when he surrenders his heart to God, with no reservation. At that time, God cleanses his heart so that he can love God completely.

» What is infirmity?

Infirmities are physical or mental limitations or deficiencies. Because of Adam's fall into sin, and the decline of humanity through continued sin, we are mentally, physically, and emotionally weaker than God designed us to be.

Infirmity means that we will make mistakes. We may not know the right thing to do in a situation. We may have wrong opinions about certain classes of people or ethnic groups. Wrong ideas do not automatically get corrected when a person gets saved. Wrong ideas cause wrong actions because if a person is mistaken about what he should do, he will do the wrong thing.

Infirmity may cause a person to struggle for several reasons. Maybe he has not learned how to apply scriptural principles. Maybe he has not developed disciplines that would help him resist his impulses. Maybe he does not have the daily habits that would help keep him strong. Maybe he doesn't understand the importance of walking in the Spirit.

We must not be quick to judge others, because we don't always know when they are sinning willfully. Often people do wrong things because of a lack of knowledge and spiritual maturity.

Did you ever have a temptation that you thought nobody else had ever had? Did you ever wonder if it is really possible to live in complete victory over sin? God has promised enabling grace that more than compensates for our weakness in temptation:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

» What are some things we know from this verse?

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3      1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 John 1:7; Acts 15:9

This verse tells us several important things.

1. Temptation comes because of our humanity. That means that your struggles are not unique to you.
2. God knows our limits. He understands how much we can endure. We don't know how much we can endure, but He does.
3. God limits the temptations that come to us. He wants us to live in victory. According to this verse, victory all the time is possible.
4. God provides what we need for victory. He makes "a way to escape." God intends for us to live in victory. He gives grace for victorious living.

## LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

» Open your Bibles to Romans 8 and look at the verses used in this section.

Romans 8 gives a wonderful description of the work of the Spirit in the believer's life. The Bible tells us that we do not even know how to pray as we should, but the Holy Spirit prays through us.

This chapter tells us how to live a life of victory. We will not be condemned if we follow the Spirit instead of the flesh (verse 1). We can fulfill the righteousness that God expects of us, because the power of the Spirit works in us (verse 4).

If a person is controlled by the sinful nature, he cannot please God (verse 8), is condemned (verse 1), and is judged by God ("die" in verse 13). But by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can end sinful actions (verse 13-14).

## THE URGENCY OF VICTORY OVER SIN

Sometimes questions are asked, such as:

1. Is it really necessary for a Christian to live in victory over sin?
2. What happens to a believer's relationship with God if he yields to temptation?
3. Is it possible for a person to lose salvation after receiving it?

The consensus of the early church was that a person falls from salvation if he willfully rebels against God. Early pastors warned their people to persist in victorious living by faith because the Bible contains many such warnings.

At the time that a sinner is converted, he repents of the sins that he realizes he has been committing. As he lives in relationship with God, he sees other changes he needs to make. These may be actions, habits, entertainments, or words that do not please God. The Bible says, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."<sup>4</sup>

What if a believer decides that he is unwilling to change something that he now sees is wrong? What if he decides to go back to sins that he repented of when he got saved?

Sometimes people say things like this:

- "If eternal life is really eternal, it could never be lost."
- "If we are saved by grace, and not by anything we have done, then surely we cannot lose our salvation by anything we do."
- "The prodigal son was still his father's son, even when he was in the far country in rebellion against his father."
- "Since God has given salvation as a free gift, he would never take it back."

That thinking has made it easy for thousands of people to go back into sin after conversion, thinking that they are secure in their salvation without victory over sin. It is important to understand what the Bible teaches about the security of the believer.

## LIFE IN CHRIST

In John 15:2-10 is the famous metaphor of the vine and branches. It answers some important questions.

How do we abide in Christ? "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love" (verse 10). To stop abiding in Christ would mean that a person stopped obeying him. What happens then?

"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (verse 6). If a person stops obeying, and thereby stops abiding in Christ, he is rejected. The illustration of branches being burned shows complete rejection.

"Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (verse 4). "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away" (verse 2). If we do not abide in Christ by obedience, we cannot bear fruit. Bearing fruit means to live a life that is changed, blessed, and guided by the

grace of God. If a person disobeys God, he separates himself from the flow of life that God provides and can no longer live out God's grace. The one not bearing fruit is rejected.

Salvation is a free gift of grace, but it is not a gift that is possessed apart from relationship with the giver. If Sally gives Willy a book, and it is truly his, Willy can do with it whatever he wants. She wants him to read it, but even if he doesn't, she can't take it back. He may leave it in the rain, or tear it up, or use it for killing bugs. Sally can't take it back, because she gave it to him. Willy's possession of the book does not depend on his relationship with Sally. Even if he becomes Sally's enemy, he still has the book.

The metaphor of the vine shows that salvation is different from a gift that a person can keep without a relationship with the giver. Christ is like a vine that gives us life.<sup>5</sup> Salvation is possessed by means of relationship. The Bible nowhere tells us that we will keep salvation no matter what we do. To be separated from Christ is to be separated from salvation. We maintain this saving relationship by trusting and obeying God.<sup>6</sup>

A modern illustration could be a light bulb and electricity. The bulb has light while the power of electricity is flowing into it. The bulb cannot keep its light if it is separated from its power source. Likewise, we have eternal life by our relationship with Christ. His life flows into us. We do not keep that life if we separate from him.

## SCRIPTURAL WARNINGS

Some people say that there is no way that a name can be taken from the Book of Life after it has been written there. But there is at least one way that a name can be removed:

And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:19).

There are very few people who are guilty of having literally removed part of the book of Revelation. However, the point is made that it is possible for a name to be removed from the Book of Life.

Scripture warns us that a person once saved can lose salvation by being ultimately defeated by sin. "He that overcomes shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life."<sup>7</sup> Many promises are given to the churches in Revelation, and many of them refer to salvation itself (see 2:11), yet all of the promises depend on the believer's overcoming. These were saved people, yet their salvation would be lost if they were overcome by sin.

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5 John 15:6

6 John 15:10

7 Revelation 3:5

At one time, Paul was worried that his converts in Thessalonica might have given up their faith. He said that if that had happened, his labor of evangelizing them would be wasted.<sup>8</sup> This shows that it is possible for a believer to fall from his faith so completely that his original conversion is worthless.

In 2 Peter 2:18-21 we find that there are false teachers who deceive some believers who have “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” These former believers had “known the way of righteousness” but left it. This text says that they would have been better off never to have known the way than to return to a sinful lifestyle. This shows that it is possible for a person to lose his salvation by going back into sin. If it were not possible for a person to lose his salvation, a person could never be worse off than before he was saved.

Sonship can be changed. We were once the child of the devil<sup>9</sup> and children of wrath,<sup>10</sup> but that sonship is changed when we are adopted by God. The prodigal son lost all benefits of sonship while he was alienated from his father. When he returned, his father referred to him as having been dead.<sup>11</sup>

God wants believers to feel secure, but not by basing their feelings on a false assurance that makes them put themselves in real danger. We must not promise believers something God has not promised. He does not promise that we will be safe from losing our salvation no matter what we do. He does promise to guide us and enable us to live in victory over sin. That is enough assurance for us to be free from fear.

Sometimes believers have doubts about their salvation. They may be sure that they were once saved, yet doubt that they are still in a saving relationship with God. The Bible does

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**“He who believes that it is possible for him to fall from the faith, and is afraid he might fall, does not lack the comfort he needs, nor is he tormented with anxiety of mind. For it is enough to give comfort and exclude worry, when he knows that he will not fall from the faith through force of Satan, of sin, or of the world, or weakness of his flesh, unless he willingly yields to temptation and neglects to live out his salvation in a conscientious way.”**

**James Arminius**

(Abridged from *Certain Articles*,  
“On the Assurance of Salvation.”)

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8 1 Thessalonians 3:5

9 John 8:44

10 Ephesians 2:2

11 Luke 15:32

not leave us in doubt on this important question. It is God's will that the believer be so sure of his salvation that he would have "boldness in the day of judgment,"<sup>12</sup> not wondering whether or not he will pass God's examination.

When a believer has doubts, he should not simply ignore them because he is certain that he was once saved. It is appropriate to "examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith."<sup>13</sup> If a person knows that he was saved by following the scriptural steps to salvation, and that he is abiding in Christ by walking in an obedient relationship with him, he can be sure that he has spiritual life.

*Note to class leader: Various members of the class could be selected to explain the information in the two blocks ("Error to Avoid: Low Expectations" and "Why It Matters") and last section ("Practical Directions for Living in Victory") below.*

## ERROR TO AVOID: LOW EXPECTATIONS

Victory over sin seems impossible to people because of two things: infirmity and inherited depravity. We must remember that God does not condemn us for having human limitations. God gives power by his Spirit so that we can fulfill his will. It is not sin to have infirmity, and no person has to sin because of infirmity.

The influence of inherited depravity continues after conversion, but God provides grace for cleansing. We are not blamed for being born with inherited depravity, but it is our fault if we keep it. So neither infirmity nor inherited depravity should make us lose hope of living in victory.

Through faith in Christ, we are united with him. We identify with him in his death and resurrection, and for us that means death to sin and resurrection to a new life. He is in us, and we are in him. The Christian life is not only that we try to follow his example, doing our best. The Christian life is lived by Christ within us. He had victory over sin when he walked on the earth, and he still lives victoriously in us.

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12 1 John 4:17

13 2 Corinthians 13:5

## WHY IT MATTERS

Sitting on a curb along the street of a great city is a poor woman dressed in rags. Her hair is tangled and matted by filth. Her skin is dirty and grimy. She sits in hopeless despair. Suddenly, there is a great commotion and around a corner rides the great prince of the kingdom with his noblemen. The prince is handsome, strong and kind! As his carriage passes the spot where the dirty woman is sitting, the prince calls out to his driver, "Stop!"

As the carriage comes to a stop, the prince says to his servants, "That woman sitting by the curb is the woman I want to marry!"

Now the scene changes. We look into the palace on the wedding day. What do we see? A filthy woman still dressed in her rags with matted and dirty hair. Around her are her ladies-in-waiting holding the wedding gown, soaps and perfumes, but the bride is not interested in preparing herself for her wedding day. One of the ladies asks, "My lady, don't you want to get ready for the wedding?" The bride answers, "This is the way I looked when he saw me and wanted to marry me, so I guess it doesn't matter what I look like now."

We would be shocked at that attitude. Because the prince loves her, he does not want her to stay in her condition. Because the prince loved her when she was not attractive, she should want to look her best for him.

God loves us when we are sinners, but that doesn't mean that sin doesn't matter. Because he loves us, he wants to change our condition. Because he loves us, we should want to take on the image and character that pleases him.

## PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS FOR LIVING IN VICTORY

Around the world Christian truth is being mixed with superstition. Some teach victory over sin through repetitious prayer, emotional experiences, the rebuke of evil spirits (who are thought to be the cause of certain sins), self-inflicted pain, the wearing of certain charms, the placing of spiritual symbols around the home, or anointing the body with special oil. This is victory through "spiritual magic"!

Some also teach victory over sin too simplistically. They say that the experiences of salvation and Spirit fullness will destroy the power of sin permanently. They fail to emphasize the need for spiritual growth, discipline, and constant watchfulness.

Those who are failing to have consistent victory over the world and sin should sincerely ask themselves the following questions:

**1. Have I truly been born again?**

Have I died to my old life; have I repented and left it behind? Do I have a new life in Christ—new attitudes, new desires, a new appetite for the things of God (2 Corinthians 5:17)? Has Christ come to dwell in my heart through the Holy Spirit? Am I trying through human will power to overcome sin, or am I depending on the power of God dwelling within me (Galatians 2:20)?

**2. Am I hiding God's Word in my heart?**

The Psalmist testified, "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11). We must feed on the Word of God as a newborn baby hungrily feeds on his mother's milk (1 Peter 2:2).

**3. Am I counting myself truly dead to sin and alive to God?**

"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:11). Am I rejecting temptation with confidence that it does not have power over me?

**4. Am I depending on God for victory?**

The apostle John declared that the person who is born into the family of God, "overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." (1 John 5:4). The apostle Paul said that he would never put confidence in anything except the cross of Jesus, for it is through the cross that worldly things lose their power to attract and control me (Galatians 6:14). It is impossible for us to live a consistent life of victory if we forget the source of all righteousness, Jesus.

**5. Am I daily putting on the Lord Jesus by faith and making no allowance at all for sin?**

No matter where we are in our Christian journey, victory is never automatic. I must consciously adopt Jesus' attitude toward sin and follow his example. (Romans 13:14; Ephesians 4:24)

## 6. Am I putting on the spiritual armor of God?

On the battlefield of life many believers are wounded by Satan's fiery darts simply because they've become careless about their spiritual defenses (Ephesians 6:11).

## 7. Am I practicing self-discipline?

No matter how mature we are in our faith there will always be a need for self-discipline. Am I training my body and bringing it under discipline? Natural, God-given appetites (such as the desire for food, sleep, or sex) must be controlled, so they serve the purposes of my newly born soul. Because my body has been marred by sin, its desires are not in balance. The body must not be allowed to rule; it must serve the spirit. Paul said that he disciplined his body and made it obey him, so he would not become a spiritual castaway (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). This discipline is necessary for every Christian.

## 8. Am I living in obedience?

"Walk in the light" is the admonition of the apostle John (1 John 1:7). Because there are many traps, stumbling stones, and dangerous places on the road to heaven we must always walk by the light of the Word of God (Psalm 119:105) and the presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Obedience carries the promise that the blood of Jesus will keep us clean. Walking in darkness leads to stumbling and falling and eventual death for those who refuse to turn back.

» Read the "Statement of Beliefs" together at least two times.

### STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

It is the privilege and duty of every believer to live in victory over sin. The believer has life from the relationship he has with Christ. The believer who rejects the will of God and goes back to sin breaks the saving relationship he has with God. God provides empowering grace, so the believer can overcome every temptation.

## LESSON 9 ASSIGNMENTS

- 1.** Passage Assignment: Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - 2 Peter 1:1-11
  - Hebrews 10:23-39
  - Revelation 3:14-22
  - James 1:21-27
  - Matthew 13:18-23
- 2.** Test: You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 9. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
- 3.** Teaching Assignment: Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

## LESSON 9 TEST

1. What is a main theme of 1 John?
2. What characteristic of a believer does 1 John most emphasize?
3. What four things do we know from 1 Corinthians 10:13?
4. How does a believer continue to abide in Christ?
5. What is necessary for continued salvation?



# LESSON 10

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - The characteristics that show that the Holy Spirit is a person.
  - Biblical evidence for the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit.
  - Why the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit are essential doctrines.
  - The historic and present activity of the Holy Spirit.
  - Practical aspects of the believer's relationship with the Holy Spirit.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about the Holy Spirit.
2. The student will apply some principles about gifts of the Spirit.

» Read Psalm 139 together. Discuss what this passage tells us about the Spirit of God.

Some people think of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force or presence. For instance, a Jehovah's Witness will say something like this: "The holy spirit is not a person and it is not a part of a Trinity. The holy spirit is God's active force that he uses to accomplish his will.... To a certain extent, it can be likened to electricity."<sup>1</sup>

» What is wrong with the Jehovah's Witness's concept of the Holy Spirit?

The Jehovah's Witness sees the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force. Because they do not have a biblical understanding of God, they cannot have the right relationship with him.

We should not expect to understand all about the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the work of the Spirit is like the wind; you hear it, but you don't know where it came from or where it

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1     *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (New York: The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989)

is going.<sup>2</sup> But there are some things that we can know about the Spirit, and they are important for our relationship with God.

The section of Scripture that gives us the most description of interaction between the Holy Spirit and the church is the book of Acts. There we see a model of how the church at its beginning responded to the Holy Spirit.

1. They honored the Holy Spirit in his deity.<sup>3</sup>
2. They were conscious of the presence, guidance, and activity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>
3. They realized their dependence and responsibility to respond to the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

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**“And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.”**

Nicene Creed, A.D. 325

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In order for us to have that kind of relationship with the Holy Spirit, we must realize that he is a person and that he is God. Then we can look for the principles that guide our relationship with him.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON

The Holy Spirit does not have a physical body like Jesus does, but he *is* a person. A real person has the attributes of personality, which include mind, will, and emotions. Does the Holy Spirit have a will? He distributes spiritual gifts to Christians “as he wills.”<sup>6</sup> Does the Holy Spirit have a mind? He “searches... the deep things of God” and knows them.<sup>7</sup> Does the Holy Spirit have emotions? We are told to “grieve not the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> If the Holy Spirit can be grieved, then he has emotions. Because the Holy Spirit has a mind, a will, and emotions, we know that he is a person.

- » Why is it important for us to know that the Holy Spirit is a person?

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2 John 3:8

3 Read Acts 5:3-4.

4 Read Acts 15:28.

5 Read Acts 4:24, 31.

6 1 Corinthians 12:11

7 1 Corinthians 2:10

8 Ephesians 4:30

If the Holy Spirit were an impersonal force, we could not have a relationship with him. Some people think that the Holy Spirit is just something that stirs their emotions, or a power they try to use.

A person has the capacity to have relationships with others. According to Philippians 2:1, the Spirit is able to have fellowship with us. According to 2 Corinthians 13:14, the Holy Spirit can have communion with us. As one who is able to commune and have fellowship, the Holy Spirit must be a person.

*For further biblical evidence of the personhood of the Holy Spirit, see the block near the end of this lesson entitled “Biblical Evidence for the Personhood of the Holy Spirit.”*

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD

The Holy Spirit is the all-knowing, all-seeing, everywhere-present God. Remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira? Before Ananias was struck dead, Peter told him, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?... You have not lied to men; but to God.”<sup>9</sup> From this, we see that lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God; therefore, the Holy Spirit is God.

The Holy Spirit knows all things. We see in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 that he knows all the things of God. That would take an infinite mind. He inspired the Old Testament scriptures, including prophecy, which would require all knowledge.<sup>10</sup> We are told that the Scriptures are inspired by God,<sup>11</sup> which identifies the Holy Spirit as God.

The Holy Spirit is present everywhere. Psalm 139:7 tells us that there is nowhere a person can go to escape the presence of God’s Spirit. He is present with every believer, because the Bible says if a person does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. The context shows that the Spirit of Christ is the Holy Spirit.

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**“We believe in the Holy Spirit who spoke in the law, and taught by the prophets, and descended to the Jordan, spoke by the Apostles, and lives in the saints; thus we believe in him: that he is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the perfect Spirit, the Spirit Paraclete, uncreated, proceeding from the Father and receiving of the Son, in whom we believe.”**

Creed of Epiphanius, A.D. 374

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9 Acts 5:3-4

10 Read 2 Peter 1:21.

11 2 Timothy 3:16

The Holy Spirit has all power. He does things that only God can do. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.<sup>12</sup> To do that, he would have to have access to every person's conscience and be able to convince their minds of certain truths. He also is able to give every believer inner strength.<sup>13</sup> The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and more.<sup>14</sup> Nothing but divine power could produce this in the life of any person, and especially in every believer everywhere in the world.

We are told in Luke 12:10 that the Holy Spirit can be blasphemed. Only God can be blasphemed. The Holy Spirit is eternal.<sup>15</sup> Our bodies are called the temple of God because the Holy Spirit lives there.<sup>16</sup> From the biblical evidence, we know that the Holy Spirit is God himself, the third Person of the divine Trinity.

» Why is it important for us to believe in the deity of the Holy Spirit?

It is important to believe in the deity of the Holy Spirit so you can give him the honor and respect that he deserves. It would be a serious thing to fail to worship the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is doubtful that someone can be saved while he denies the deity of the one who tries to draw him to salvation.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IS DISTINCT FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON

To say that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and Son does not mean that they are distinct individuals in the same sense as human beings. The members of the Trinity indwell each other and are all the same God, but are distinct enough to talk to each other, love one another, and have true personal relationships with each other and with us.

The Scriptures teach a distinction between the Persons of the Trinity. For example, again and again in John 14-16, Jesus referred to a Helper that he would send when he went back to the Father.<sup>17</sup> This Helper would guide the disciples and teach them. If Jesus and the Holy Spirit were the same Person, Jesus' reference to the Holy Spirit as *another* Helper would not make sense. Jesus must have been referring to *another* Person distinct from himself.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would not speak of himself, but would reveal the things of Christ, that Christ received of the Father.<sup>18</sup> If Jesus and the Father were the same person as the Holy Spirit, that statement would not make sense.

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12 John 16:8

13 Read Ephesians 3:16.

14 Read Galatians 5:22.

15 Hebrews 9:14

16 1 Corinthians 3:16

17 Read John 14:16-17, 26, 15:26, 16:7, 13-15.

18 John 16:13-15

When Jesus was baptized, a voice from Heaven said, "This is my beloved Son," and the Holy Spirit, like a dove, rested upon Jesus.<sup>19</sup> All three members of the Trinity are involved here at the same time, distinct from one another.

As a distinct person, the Holy Spirit has lived in a love relationship with the Father and Son from all eternity. God created us to participate in that relationship. God wants us to enjoy fellowship with him,<sup>20</sup> as each member of the Trinity has enjoyed fellowship with the others from before the beginning of time.<sup>21</sup>

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IS ACTIVE

From the time of Creation, the Holy Spirit was active in the world. He was present and involved as the earth was created.<sup>22</sup> He gave special abilities to people who were called to special work.<sup>23</sup> He gave messages to the prophets.<sup>24</sup> He inspired the Scriptures.<sup>25</sup> During the time of the Old Testament, he worked in the hearts of people, trying to turn them toward God.<sup>26</sup> He offered a work of grace that would make them able to love God with their whole heart.<sup>27</sup>

He is called the Spirit of life. He is the Spirit that created us and gave us life. If he were to withdraw from the world, all life would stop, and man would return to dust.<sup>28</sup>

The New Testament introduced a new aspect of the Holy Spirit's work. John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit.<sup>29</sup> Jesus told his disciples to expect the "Promise of the Father," the baptism of the Holy Spirit that happened at Pentecost.<sup>30</sup> Though many phenomena were seen at that event, Peter later said that the main thing that happened was that their hearts were purified.<sup>31</sup>

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19 Mark 1:10-11

20 1 John 1:4

21 Read John 17:22-23.

22 Genesis 1:3

23 Judges 3:9-10, 15:14-15; Exodus 35:30-31

24 Isaiah 61:1

25 2 Peter 1:21

26 Acts 7:51

27 Read Deuteronomy 30:6.

28 Read Romans 8:2; Job 33:4, 34:14.

29 Matthew 3:11

30 Acts 1:4-5, 8

31 Read Acts 15:8-9.

Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be with them, reminding them of the things Jesus taught and leading them into truth.<sup>32</sup> Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would be another *Paraclete*.<sup>33</sup> This word refers to one who is with us, one who encourages and helps. It can also refer to a representative. The Holy Spirit represents Jesus and reminds us of his words.<sup>34</sup>

» What are some things that the Holy Spirit does?

The work of the Holy Spirit in the world cannot be completely explained, but here is a list of some of his activities.

1. He convicts of sin<sup>35</sup> (Otherwise it would be impossible for a person to realize his need to repent and be forgiven).
2. He regenerates, giving life to the person who was dead in sin.<sup>36</sup>
3. He gives the believer personal assurance that he is saved.<sup>37</sup>
4. He lives in every believer (every saved person has the Holy Spirit).<sup>38</sup>
5. He gives understanding of God's truth.<sup>39</sup>
6. He calls people to special ministry and guides decisions in ministry.<sup>40</sup>
7. He sanctifies the believer, purifying his heart to make him holy.<sup>41</sup>
8. He gives power for living in victory over sin.<sup>42</sup>
9. He gives the fruit of the Spirit in the believer's life.<sup>43</sup>

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32 John 14:26, 16:13

33 John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7

34 The same word is in 1 John 2:1, where Jesus is said to be our representative to the Father.

35 John 16:8; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:5

36 Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:1; John 7:38-39; Galatians 4:29; John 3:5

37 Romans 8:16

38 Acts 2:4; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Romans 8:9

39 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, 13-14; Ephesians 6:17; 2 Corinthians 3:14-17

40 Acts 13:2-4, 15:28, 16:6-10

41 1 Peter 1:2; Acts 15:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23

42 Romans 8:1, 5, 13; Galatians 5:16

43 Galatians 5:22-23

10. He gives gifts of the Spirit for ministry.<sup>44</sup>
11. He gives special anointing of power for ministry.<sup>45</sup>
12. He helps the believer pray according to the will of God.<sup>46</sup>
13. He creates the unity and fellowship of the church.<sup>47</sup>

*Note to class leader: A member of the class could be selected to explain the following block of information ("Some Principles about Gifts of the Spirit").*

### SOME PRINCIPLES ABOUT GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

1. The Spirit works through the different gifts, operations, and administrations (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).
2. Spiritual gifts are distributed according to the will of God, not according to spirituality (1 Corinthians 12:11, 4:7).
3. Every person has some ability given by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7).
4. No certain gift can be expected of every believer (1 Corinthians 12:8-11, 14:30).
5. Gifts should always be used for service to others for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 12:21-22, 25, 1 Peter 4:10-11).

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IS IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BELIEVER

If you are in relationship with God, you are in relationship with the Holy Spirit. It is not possible to know only one person of the Trinity and not the others.<sup>48</sup>

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44 1 Corinthians 12:4-10, 28-30; Romans 12:6-8

45 Acts 1:8, 13:9; Galatians 3:5; 1 Peter 2:12

46 Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 6:18

47 Ephesians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13

48 Read Ephesians 2:18; John 6:44.

A person does not have to understand the doctrine of the Holy Spirit before he can be saved. The disciples did not know much about the Spirit, but Jesus told them that they knew the Spirit and that he was with them already.<sup>49</sup>

Knowing the right doctrine about the Holy Spirit helps us to relate to him the right way and lets him do more in our life. Knowing that he is a person lets us know that we can have a relationship with him. We can talk to him, and he will speak to us. He does not usually speak to us with an audible voice, but he helps understand the will of God and the love of God. If we really want to do God's will, the Holy Spirit will guide us even though we don't always feel it.

Knowing that he is a person means that we do not act as if he were just a force or a feeling. When we worship God we are thinking about who he is and what he is like, not just enjoying a mindless feeling. When we pray we speak intelligently and try to understand what he might show us rather than using words in an impersonal, magical way, like people of other religions do.

Knowing that the Holy Spirit is God should give us an attitude of reverent worship. As we pray and sense his guidance we need to remember that he is the God who loves us, knows us completely, and knows our future. He is also the absolute authority, whom we must obey.

He is with us all the time. The Scripture says that we live in the Spirit and should walk in the Spirit.<sup>50</sup> We should live as if we are in his presence, and not think that we come into his presence only at church. He is not only with us, but he lives within us. That is a reason that we should live a life that is pure and holy.<sup>51</sup>

We must remember that the Spirit's priority is to give us victory over sin and purity in our heart.<sup>52</sup> We should not be praying for other things if we are not letting him accomplish the first priority. Pray in faith that he would cleanse your heart and make you completely holy.<sup>53</sup>

In the struggles of life, he gives us inner strength.<sup>54</sup> He understands us, he understands our situations, and he can give us exactly what we need.

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49 Read John 14:17.

50 Galatians 5:25

51 Read 1 Corinthians 6:19.

52 Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:16; Acts 15:8-9

53 Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

54 Ephesians 3:16

In ministry, we must depend on him to give us guidance, to give power to his Word, and to accomplish spiritual results in the hearts of others. No human ability can substitute for the work of the Spirit.

Even if you have already been filled with the Spirit, you must not forget to keep a relationship with him. The command to be filled with the Spirit is in a Greek verb tense that means continual action.<sup>55</sup> We need to be filled constantly, and it happens through our relationship with him.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

### STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity, fully divine with the Father and Son. He convicts of sin, regenerates and lives in every believer, giving victory over sin and cleansing of the heart. He is the unifying life of the church, which he blesses with the fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts for ministry.

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55 Read Ephesians 5:18.

## LESSON 10 ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Passage Assignment:** Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Acts 1:4-8
  - 1 Corinthians 2:9-16
  - Romans 8:1-14
  - 1 Corinthians 12:1-13
  - Galatians 5:22-26
2. **Test:** You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 10. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. **Teaching Assignment:** Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

*Note to class leader: The following section ("Biblical Evidence for the Personhood of the Holy Spirit") is optional and can be covered if the class feels a need for more biblical evidence for this point.*

## BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE PERSONHOOD OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- In Matthew 28:19, we are told to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which implies that all three have authority.
- 2 Corinthians 13:14 mentions the communion of the Holy Spirit, which implies intelligent communication.
- In Mark 13:11, believers were promised that the Holy Spirit would speak through them in times of persecution.
- In John 14:17, 26, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth who would teach and remind.
- In John 16:7-11, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, which requires intelligent communication.

- John 16:13-15 says that the Holy Spirit will not speak about himself, but about the things of Christ.
- According to 1 Corinthians 12:11, the Holy Spirit chooses how spiritual gifts are to be given.
- He witnesses to our spirits that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16).
- He makes intercession for us to the Father and has a mind that can understand the will of God (Romans 8:26-27).
- According to Ephesians 4:30, he can be grieved; which means that he understands our responses to him and has emotions.
- He can be lied to, which means that he understands communication (Acts 5:3).
- He speaks, gives directions, and has a will that people should follow (Acts 13:2-4).
- He directed the apostles in their missionary journeys and sometimes told them not to go to a place (Acts 16:6).

Some people deny the personhood of the Spirit and say that he is an impersonal force like electricity or gravity. However, it is impossible that an impersonal force would be described like the Bible describes the Holy Spirit. Electricity does not speak and reason; gravity cannot be lied to. A mindless force cannot understand the will of God.

Some people say these scriptures are only personification, speaking of something impersonal as if it is a person without really meaning it. However, Scripture speaks of the Spirit with personal terms, and people responded to him as to a person. In a few places, the Spirit is spoken of figuratively as if he were a substance, like when the Bible says the Spirit will be “poured out” (Acts 2:17). Those should be considered figurative, since the Bible normally speaks of the Spirit as a person.



# LESSON 11

## CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - The holiness of God as the basis for Christian holiness.
  - The significance of holiness for worship and relationship with God.
  - The influence of inherited depravity in a believer's life.
  - The process that brings a believer to sanctification.
  - Biblical examples of experiences of sanctification.
  - A definition of entire sanctification.
  - A biblical concept of the baptism of the Spirit.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about Christian holiness.
2. The student will have faith that God's grace will make him holy in the present world.

- » Read Psalm 119:33-40 together. What does this passage tell us about the way God transforms a believer?

When God began to reveal himself, his first purpose was to show what kind of God he is. God described himself primarily as holy. The Hebrew word for holiness (*kadosh*) occurs more than 600 times in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah often referred to God as "The Holy One of Israel."

The holiness of God was the theme of worship:

Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy.... Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool, for he is holy (Psalm 99:3, 5).

The holiness of God is the basis of his requirement for man. Because he is holy, he calls his worshippers to be holy. He said, "Be holy, because I am holy."<sup>1</sup>

The God of Israel was different from the false gods of the heathen and required a different kind of worship.

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully (Psalm 24:3-4).

The question here is, "Whose worship does God accept?" Apparently, not everyone is accepted as a worshipper of God.

The holiness God expects is not just ceremonial or pretended; it is real holiness. The standard of holiness for God's worshippers is repeated in the New Testament: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."<sup>2</sup> *Conversation* is a word that refers to behavior, conduct, the total lifestyle. God does not ask only that his worshippers be ceremonially holy, or that they be called holy when they really are not. He expects his worshippers to live holy lives.

We are saved by grace, and God accepts us when we are sinners because of the sacrifice of Christ. He accepts us as sinners, but we do not remain sinners. Sin is an offense against God, and we want to please him.

» What are some reasons that holiness is connected to worship?

**Holiness is connected to worship because we love God and want to please him.** God's requirement does not surprise us if we understand what worship really is. We do not worship him because of fear. We do not worship him only because he blesses us.

To worship God is to see that he is the most wonderful being that exists. To worship is to adore him as he is. Worship is to appreciate the characteristics of his nature.

God's nature is essentially holy, so if we really adore God's nature, we will hate sin and impurity, even if we see it in ourselves. **Holiness is connected to worship because we love God and want to be like Him.**

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1      Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:26, 21:8

2      1 Peter 1:15-16

When we first encounter God, sin is the obstacle to our relationship with him. That's why our relationship with God cannot start until we repent, are forgiven, and are given a new heart.

At the same time that we are reconciled to God, we are transformed. Spiritually, we are made new creatures. We are delivered from the power of sin, and we desire to please God. Christian holiness begins when a person is saved.

The Bible teaches us that salvation immediately leads to holy living. "The grace of God that brings salvation" teaches us that "we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."<sup>3</sup> The purpose of salvation is to set us free from sin and make us holy, so we can live in relationship with God.<sup>4</sup>

As we live in relationship with God, we continue to grow in holiness as we understand more of his truth. To "walk in the light" means to continue obeying God as we learn more of his truth.<sup>5</sup> As we better understand what pleases him and what displeases him, we are changed by his truth, and by the power of the Holy Spirit within us. This is an aspect of spiritual growth.

A person who loves God will desire to be completely holy. He does not want to change only his actions. He wants his motives to be completely pure. David prayed that he would be able to live in complete victory over sin, then prayed that his words and even the meditation of his heart would please God.<sup>6</sup>

But there is something else that believers need besides the process of growth in holiness that follows conversion. Believers become conscious of a remaining impurity in their hearts. This is something that cannot be cured by gradual growth. Even though they have been saved and are living in obedience to God, they sometimes feel a tendency within them to turn back to sin.

Inherited depravity is the corruption of man's moral nature that inclines him toward sin from birth. Theologians sometimes call it "original sin," because it is the sinfulness of our nature that we are born with because of Adam's sin.

Every person is born with a will that is self-centered and bent toward sin.<sup>7</sup> Our wills are not free to choose right unless God gives us the desire and strength.<sup>8</sup> Inherited depravity

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3 Titus 2:11-12

4 The purpose of salvation is that we can serve God in holiness every day (Luke 1:74-75). As believers, we are dead to sin and cannot continue in it (Romans 6:2, 11-16).

5 1 John 1:7

6 Psalm 19:12-14. See also Psalm 119:7, 34, 36, 69, 80, and 112.

7 Philippians 3:19

8 Romans 6:16-17

motivates inward sins such as pride, envy, hatred, and unforgiveness. It also motivates actions of sin.

» After a person is saved, does he still have inherited depravity?

A person who is saved is no longer under the control of inherited depravity. If he were still controlled by it, he would be living in sin and not saved. The Bible tells us that a person who is controlled by the “fleshly mind” is condemned.<sup>9</sup> The saved person is not under the control of inherited depravity, and can live in victory over sin by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

But a saved person still has the influence of inherited depravity within him until he is cleansed of it. Paul told the Corinthian believers that they were still “fleshly” and had attitudes like people of the world, even though they had been saved.<sup>11</sup> He even implied that it was normal for a new Christian to be in that condition. He said that to be “fleshly” was to be like a “babe in Christ.”

A believer in this condition loves God, but cannot love God with his whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. He cannot say, like Paul, that he has a single motive to follow the call of God.<sup>12</sup> He knows that some of the meditations of his heart are not acceptable to God.

God does not leave us in this condition. Even in ancient times he made a promise to the people of Israel. He said that he would do a work of grace that would make them able to love him with their whole heart.<sup>13</sup>

David prayed for a work of grace that was beyond forgiveness. He had fallen into sin and realized that it happened because of a problem in his heart. He prayed to God, “I was formed in sin... but you want truth to be inside me.” He knew that sin was in his nature, but believed that God required him to be completely holy. He prayed for a complete cleansing.<sup>14</sup>

Believers in the New Testament were called to another special event after conversion. The Thessalonian believers were wonderful examples of believers who had accepted the gospel, turned from idols, endured persecution, had joy in the Holy Spirit, and were waiting for the return of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Yet something was still lacking in their faith. It was not something that would be provided in a long process or at death, because Paul said it could

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9 Romans 8:6-8, 13

10 Romans 8:1, 9, 13

11 Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-3.

12 Philippians 3:13-15

13 Read Deuteronomy 30:6.

14 Read Psalm 51:5-10.

15 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

happen on his visit to them.<sup>16</sup> He prayed for them to be made holy completely (body, soul, and spirit), so they would found holy at the return of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Jesus' disciples experienced a special work of grace at Pentecost. We know that they were already saved before that time, because Jesus said they were not of the world, that they belonged to him and to the Father, and that their names were written in heaven.<sup>18</sup> They already had the Holy Spirit,<sup>19</sup> but at Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled them and accomplished something special within them. Peter later said that the essential thing that happened was that the Spirit purified their hearts.<sup>20</sup> They urgently needed this cleansing of the heart, even though they were already saved.<sup>21</sup>

This special event that happens to a person already saved can be called "entire sanctification." Entire sanctification is the cleansing of inherited depravity. It is accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the believer at a point after conversion.

The believer receives this work of God by faith. Peter said that their hearts were "purified by faith." The Apostle Paul, after praying for the entire sanctification of the Thessalonian believers, said, "Faithful is he that calls you, who will also do it."<sup>22</sup>

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**"And that unlimited promise which rules through the entire gospel age, 'I will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts,' turns all the commands into promises; including this one, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.' This command is equivalent to a promise, and gives us reason to expect that He will work in us what He requires of us."**

**John Wesley**

(Paraphrased from the sermon "On Perfection")

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16 Read 1 Thessalonians 3:10.

17 Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

18 John 17:14, 9-10; Luke 10:20

19 Read John 14:17.

20 Acts 15:8-9

21 Read Mark 9:33-34; Mark 10:35-41; Luke 9:54-55.

22 1 Thessalonians 5:24

In summary, we say that

1. Inherited depravity remains in the believer after conversion.
2. God calls us to be completely holy.
3. God provides a cleansing of inherited depravity.
4. The believer receives entire sanctification by faith.

Every believer should ask God to show him if he still needs this cleansing of the heart, and then pray in faith for God to sanctify him completely. Every pastor should preach and counsel his people to advance into this grace.

*Note to class leader: A member of the class could be selected to explain the following section of information ("The Gift of Tongues").*

## THE GIFT OF TONGUES

Christians do not all agree about the gift of tongues. Differences of opinion about tongues may keep us from working together in some forms of ministry but should not cause us to reject someone as a Christian. One doctrine about tongues does hinder fellowship. Some people believe that a person who does not speak in tongues does not have the Holy Spirit, even if there is evidence that he is converted. The following points provide reasons that we should not expect the gift of tongues as evidence of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Bible never says that the gift of tongues is the only evidence of the Holy Spirit. It happened several times in the book of Acts when people were filled with the Spirit. That is not enough to prove that it is the sign always.
2. According to Scripture, it is not a gift that every person should expect, though everyone should be filled with the Holy Spirit. God decides how to distribute the gifts and gives different ones to different people (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). A series of rhetorical questions, all to be answered "no," show that no certain spiritual gift is to be expected of every believer (12:29-30).
3. Every believer has the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9) and therefore can have spiritual gifts. The Corinthians still needed the cleansing of the heart but excelled in spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7, 3:3).
4. According to Scripture, the gift of tongues is not a sign for believers, and therefore does not prove to a believer that he has the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of God's power to unbelievers, through communication of the gospel in a foreign language (1 Corinthians 14:22). To use it for proof of something that it is not given to prove leads to confusion.

5. The gift of tongues is unrelated to the primary need that is met by the filling of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to cleanse the believer and empower for ministry. That purpose is not fulfilled by the gift of tongues in circumstances where that gift is not needed. The work of the Holy Spirit is spiritual victory and anointing for ministry.

We can compare any spiritual experience to what happens when a person is converted. Conversion is promised in Scripture, it happens by faith, the Holy Spirit confirms it, and the believer knows his need is met, without experiencing other phenomena. The same is true of the filling of the Spirit.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

### STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Christian holiness begins when a sinner repents and is transformed by God's grace. The believer grows spiritually as he grows in his understanding of God's will and continues to obey. Entire sanctification is the work of God, sometime after conversion, in which he cleanses the believer of inherited depravity.

## LESSON 11 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Passage Assignment: Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Acts 2:1-18
  - 1 Thessalonians 5:14-24
  - Isaiah 6:1-8
  - Titus 2:11-14
  - 1 Corinthians 10:1-13
2. Test: You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 11. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. Teaching Assignment: Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

## LESSON 11 TEST

1. What is the primary theme of worship?
2. Why is holiness connected to worship?
3. When does Christian holiness begin?
4. What does it mean to walk in the light?
5. What did Paul pray for the Thessalonian believers?
6. What was the most important thing that happened at Pentecost?
7. What is inherited depravity?
8. What is entire sanctification?



# LESSON 12

## THE CHURCH

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - The origin of the church.
  - The church as a living institution.
  - The church as a living, local body.
  - The basis of the unity of the world-wide church.
  - The basis of the unity of the local church.
  - The sacraments of the church.
  - The purposes of the church.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about the church.
2. The student will see his responsibility to commit to a local church.

» Read Ephesians 3:3-10 together. What does this passage tell us about the church?

### THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

During the centuries before the New Testament, the church was a mystery not completely revealed.<sup>1</sup> There were people who experienced God's grace and lived in relationship with Him,<sup>2</sup> but the church had not yet been established.

» When did the church begin?

The life and ministry of Jesus began the church, and it was built on the salvation he provided.<sup>3</sup> The era of the church began on the Day of Pentecost. From that day, the church

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1 Read Ephesians 3:3-10.

2 Romans 4:1-8

3 Matthew 16:16-18

would function in the power of the Holy Spirit, without the physical and visible leadership of Christ on earth.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus gave his disciples authority to spread and establish his doctrines throughout the world<sup>5</sup> and promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth.<sup>6</sup> The church can be called “apostolic” because the teachings of the apostles are the foundational doctrines of the church. Any beliefs that contradict those foundational doctrines should not be called Christian.

The origin of the church is explained by

1. The ministry of Jesus
2. The salvation provided by Christ
3. The event on the Day of Pentecost
4. The development of apostolic doctrine

## THE CHURCH AS A LIVING INSTITUTION

The church is compared to a family in which God is the Father and the members are brothers and sisters.<sup>7</sup> The church is called a nation which does not have any single race or natural origin.<sup>8</sup> The church is compared to a physical body, of which Christ is the head, and the members work together and care for one another.<sup>9</sup>

The Christian is a member of the church. The Bible tells us that just as the church is called the body of Christ, Christians are called members of his flesh and bones.<sup>10</sup> To be separate from the church is to be separate from what Christ is doing on earth. To not respect and love the church is to not respect and love Christ.

As a member of the body, a Christian must not have an attitude of independence from the church. He needs the other members, and they need him.<sup>11</sup> It is wrong for a Christian to live as though he is spiritually self-sufficient without the church.

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4 John 16:7

5 Matthew 28:18-20

6 John 14:26

7 Ephesians 3:15; Galatians 6:10

8 1 Peter 2:9-10

9 1 Corinthians 12:14, 26

10 Ephesians 5:30

11 1 Corinthians 12:21

## THE CHURCH AS A LIVING, LOCAL BODY

There is one universal church, yet the church must also exist locally. The members of the body cannot function unless they are together in one place. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers that they were the body of Christ,<sup>12</sup> which implies that a local church is the body of Christ for that place.

God has designed the local church to be a family of faith, functioning as a body with spiritual gifts, committing human resources and finding divine resources to meet needs of every kind for those in fellowship, demonstrating to the world God's wisdom in every aspect of life, and inviting the unsaved to be converted and enter the family.

Real fellowship includes economics because those in the fellowship share life together and care about one another's needs.<sup>13</sup> The need of a brother or sister in Christ is the responsibility of the church if that member is participating in the life of the church and taking responsibility as much as he is able.

God gives spiritual gifts and special callings for ministry to strengthen and build the local church.<sup>14</sup>

The local church serves its community. The first priority is spiritual, preaching the gospel and defending truth in all issues. The church ministers to material needs in the community, but gives priority to the people who are in the spiritual fellowship of the church.

## THE PERFECTION OF THE CHURCH

Jesus gave himself for the church, to make it holy and without any defect.<sup>15</sup> The church must never condone sin, though it must be ready to forgive. Leaders must be examples of holy living.<sup>16</sup> If a member of the church sins, he must be confronted and removed from fellowship if he does not repent.<sup>17</sup>

» Why is the church imperfect?

The people of the church will not be perfect in every way. Because the church evangelizes, there are people in the congregation who have not yet repented of sin. Even among those who are saved, there will remain inconsistencies in their lives because they do not yet understand how to apply the truth to all the details of their lives. Even among ma-

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12 1 Corinthians 12:27

13 James 2:15-16, 1:27

14 Ephesians 4:11-12

15 Ephesians 5:27

16 1 Timothy 3:2-3

17 1 Corinthians 5:11-13

ture Christians, there may be inconsistencies and wrong attitudes because even a mature Christian is still in a process of spiritual growth. It is part of the work of the church to continually teach and apply the Word of God, bringing people to spiritual maturity.<sup>18</sup>

## DEFINING THE CHURCH

### The Universal Church

A short definition of the universal church is that it is the institution that includes all Christians of all times and places. It is sometimes called the “invisible” church because there is not an earthly organization that administrates the universal church or has the list of its members.

### The Local Church

A short definition of the local church is that it is a group of Christians in a place who join together to fulfill all of the purposes of the church. A group is not a church if they are formed for a more limited purpose.

Here is a more extensive definition of the local church that helps distinguish it from other kinds of groups: “A group of baptized believers banded together for worship, edification, service, fellowship, and outreach; accepting spiritual leadership, willing to minister to all segments of society through the various gifts in the body, and regularly practicing the ordinances.”<sup>19</sup>

## UNITY IN THE CHURCH

### The Unity of the World-Wide Church

There is one church for all places and times. Jesus said, “I will build my church,” not “churches.” The Apostle Paul wrote that there is one body, and one Spirit, and one hope, just as there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.<sup>20</sup>

The early Christian creeds referred to the “catholic Church.” The word “catholic” did not refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the world-wide church that includes all true Christians.

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18 1 Timothy 3:16

19 David Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 127.

20 Ephesians 4:4-6

The unity of the universal church is not in being one organization, under one central administration. That will never happen before the return of Christ. Some people wish it could happen, but apparently it was not God's will because Jesus corrected the disciples when they thought that a person should not do ministry separate from their organization.<sup>21</sup> If Jesus had wanted to have a central administration over all the universal church, he could have stayed on the earth physically to lead it. However, Jesus saw that the diverse work of the Holy Spirit all over the world would not happen as it should if there were a universal headquarters.

- » What is the unity of the universal church based on?

The unity of the universal church is based on

1. The apostolic doctrines
2. A transforming relationship with Christ

Doctrinal unity does not mean that Christians agree on everything, even on all important doctrines. It does mean that they share the essential doctrines about the nature of God and Christ and the essentials of the gospel. Without those, they would not be worshipping the same God or experiencing his grace.

Doctrine is not the only thing needed for Christian unity. Christians share a bond of relationship with one another because of their transforming relationship with Christ. Because they have repented of sin, put their faith in Christ and have the Holy Spirit, they have a special relationship. Christians recognize one another all over the world in spite of being different in everything else.

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**"I believe that Christ, by his apostles, gathered to himself a church, to which he has continually added those who will be saved; that this catholic, or universal church, extending to all nations and all ages, is holy in all its members who have fellowship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."**

**John Wesley**

(Abridged from "A Letter to a Roman Catholic")

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## The Unity of the Local Church

We can accept as a Christian any person who holds the essential Christian doctrines and appears to be in a transforming relationship with Christ. But the doctrinal agreement of the local church must be much more detailed.

A local church is a group of people who are committed to worship together, evangelize, disciple converts and young people, and teach the practical details of the Christian life. For people to accomplish that purpose together, they must agree on many details of doctrine.

For example, maybe a person in a local church tells every young person and new convert to pray for the gift of tongues. But other leaders in that church do not believe that the gift of tongues is promised to every believer. They are worried that people will get into spiritual confusion if they try to experience something that is not God's will. Obviously, these people will not be able to work together in a local church. Even if the leaders consider the person a Christian, they should not allow him to teach harmful doctrines.

A local church needs to agree on doctrines that affect the way they share life together and practice ministry. Therefore, it is not wrong for a church to have a written statement of the doctrines they share. It does not mean that they think anyone who disagrees is not a Christian. The purpose of a written doctrinal statement is to show the doctrines that are necessary for a group of believers to work together.

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**“If your heart is right, as mine is with your heart, then love me with a very tender affection, as a friend that is closer than a brother; as a brother in Christ, a fellow citizen of the New Jerusalem, a fellow soldier engaged in the same battle, under the same Captain of our salvation. Love me as a companion in the kingdom and patient endurance of Jesus, and a joint heir of his glory.”**

**John Wesley**

(Abridged from a sermon, “Catholic Spirit”)

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## THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Jesus gave two sacraments to the church. They could also be called rituals or ceremonies.

Baptism is symbolic of Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>22</sup> Baptism is a testimony that the believer identifies with Christ and has experienced death to sin and new life in Christ. Baptism is not the time when a person becomes a Christian. Baptism is a public testimony that conversion has happened.<sup>23</sup>

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22 Romans 6:3-4

23 John 3:7-8

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus at his last meal with the disciples before his crucifixion.<sup>24</sup> The bread and wine represent the body and blood of Jesus given as a sacrifice for our salvation. Just as we eat food for physical life, we depend on his sacrifice for our spiritual life.<sup>25</sup>

The sacraments can be called “means of grace.” They do not provide grace if they are done without faith and obedience. They are exercises that God has given us, and if done in faith, they are a means of receiving grace from God.

» What are some purposes of the church?

## **SOME PURPOSES OF THE LOCAL CHURCH FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

1. Evangelize (Matthew 28:18-20)
2. Worship as a congregation (1 Corinthians 3:16)
3. Maintain doctrine (1 Timothy 3:15; Jude 3)
4. Support pastors financially (1 Timothy 5:17-18)
5. Send and support missionaries (Acts 13:2-4; Romans 15:24)
6. Help members in need (1 Timothy 5:3)
7. Discipline members who fall into sin (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)
8. Practice baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
9. Disciple believers to maturity (Ephesians 4:12-13)

Most of these things cannot be done by one person acting independently. These purposes depend on cooperation by a group of believers and a structure of leadership.

God calls every believer to commit to a local church and help that church fulfill its purpose in the world. Unless a member serves in the church, he is not fulfilling his purpose as a member of the body of Christ.

*Note to class leader: A member of the class could be selected to explain the following block of information ("Error to Avoid: Spiritual Individualism").*

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24 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

25 John 6:53-58

### **ERROR TO AVOID: SPIRITUAL INDIVIDUALISM**

Some people never really commit to a local church. They want to feel free to attend any church on any Sunday. They cannot help with any of the purposes of the church listed in this lesson because the church cannot depend on them. They do not have relationships that allow spiritual accountability. If all Christians did the same, there would be no churches.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

### **STATEMENT OF BELIEFS**

Christ has built one holy, world-wide church, expressed as the body of Christ in local congregations. The church holds the doctrines of the apostles and defends all truth. The church is the family of God, with fellowship that ministers to all needs. The church worships God, evangelizes the world, and disciples believers.

## LESSON 12 ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Passage Assignment:** Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - 1 Corinthians 12:14-31
  - James 2:1-9
  - Ephesians 4:11-16
  - 1 Corinthians 6:1-8
  - 1 Corinthians 5:1-13
2. **Test:** You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 12. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. **Teaching Assignment:** Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

**LESSON 12 TEST**

1. When did the era of the church begin?
2. Why can the church be called “apostolic”?
3. What are four aspects of the origin of the church?
4. What is a short definition of the universal church?
5. What is a short definition of the local church?
6. What did the term “catholic church” originally mean?
7. What two things are the basis of the world-wide unity of the church?

8. What is the purpose of a written doctrinal statement?
9. List six purposes of the local church.



# LESSON 13

## ETERNAL DESTINY

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - The primary activity of heaven.
  - Characteristics of heaven as revealed in Scripture.
  - Characteristics of eternal punishment revealed in Scripture.
  - Some examples of religions that deny the fact of eternal punishment.
  - The justice of eternal punishment.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about eternal destiny.
2. The student will remember that some actions have eternal consequences that will never be changed.

### PART 1: THE ETERNAL DESTINY OF BELIEVERS

- » Read Revelation 21 together. What does this passage tell us about the future for believers?

All creation exists for the glory of God, but heaven is the central scene of the universe, where God is worshipped at the highest level by the creatures he made in his image.<sup>1</sup> God's glory will be revealed in heaven in such fullness that it will be the light of the city.<sup>2</sup> It is the place where we will so know God that we will "see his face."<sup>3</sup>

Worship is the business of heaven. Joy is the other side of worship. A psalm writer said, "In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."<sup>4</sup> It is

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1 Read Revelation 5:11-14.

2 Revelation 21:23

3 Revelation 22:4

4 Psalm 16:11

fitting that joy and worship are connected. God created us in his image, so that we could understand his nature enough to worship him for who he is. Our emotions, ability to love, and intelligence are given so that we can give God the highest possible worship.

Jesus made these statements to his disciples:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

Jesus' words tell us some things about heaven. The most important thing is that heaven is God's home. Jesus called it his Father's house. Another important fact is that we can someday live there with God.

The promise of heaven should guide the way we live on earth. The person who lives by eternal values will do the most good on earth. The person who expects a heavenly reward has an incentive to endure hardship and strive to accomplish God's will. Jesus says to the one in persecution, "Rejoice, for great is your reward in heaven."<sup>5</sup>

## Characteristics of Heaven

- » What are some details we know about heaven?

Sometimes people on earth cannot buy the home they want, or they may not be able to make their home into all that they want it to be. But God has infinite power and resources, so we know that his home is exactly what he wants it to be. Therefore, heaven is perfectly consistent with the nature of God.

There will be no sin in heaven. All the beings in heaven, whether angels or humans or other creatures, will be completely holy.<sup>6</sup>

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**"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.... Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.... I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others do the same."**

**C. S. Lewis**

*Mere Christianity*

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5 Matthew 5:12

6 Read Revelation 21:8, 27.

Heaven will be free from all of the results of sin, including pain, sorrow, conflicts, and danger.<sup>7</sup> There will be no more of the curse upon creation, including sickness, aging, and death.<sup>8</sup>

The beauty of heaven is beyond description. Details given to us include walls of jasper, gates of pearl, foundations of rare gems, and streets of gold.<sup>9</sup>

## Who and When?

Heaven is prepared for those who repent of sin and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.<sup>10</sup> The Bible tells us that if we live by eternal values, we can invest in an eternal and secure treasure in heaven.<sup>11</sup> Heaven is populated by millions of redeemed people and angels.<sup>12</sup>

When does one go to Heaven? Jesus told the thief dying on the cross that they would be together in paradise that day.<sup>13</sup> Paul said that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, we know that the believer goes to heaven at the time of death. Believers who are still alive at the return of Jesus will go to heaven without passing through death.<sup>15</sup>

## PART 2: THE ETERNAL DESTINY OF UNBELIEVERS

Punishments on earth always end sometime, even if it is at the death of the one being punished. But Jesus described a punishment that is everlasting. He said,

Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.... And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:41, 46).

Jesus and the apostles affirmed that hell, the lake of fire, and eternal punishment exist. In fact, Jesus mentioned hell more than heaven. He warned us to avoid this horrible place. Here are statements from Jesus and the apostles.

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- 7      Read Revelation 21:4.
  - 8      Read Revelation 22:3.
  - 9      Read Revelation 21:18-21.
  - 10     John 3:16
  - 11     Read Matthew 6:20.
  - 12     Revelation 5:8-11
  - 13     Luke 23:43
  - 14     2 Corinthians 5:8
  - 15     Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell (Matthew 5:29-30).

So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:49-50).

Speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus said, "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:33).

And being in torment in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame (Luke 16:23-24).

The Apostle Paul writes that Jesus will be

....revealed from heaven 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 (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment (2 Peter 2:4).

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... anyone not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10, 15 ).

Notice the kind of words used to describe this place: fire, torment, vengeance, destruction, darkness, chains, judgment, crying, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus said that it would be better to gouge out your right eye and cut off your right hand than to be cast into hell with both eye and hand. Jesus was not encouraging the mutilation of the body, but the stopping of any activity that would lead us to sin and hell, no matter how precious it might seem on earth.

- » What are some religions that are wrong in their doctrine about hell?

The Bible tells us that death ends man's probation, and that hell is (1) eternal, (2) irreversible, and (3) agonizing. This biblical truth is rejected by atheists who say there is nothing after death, and by Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Universalists who say there is no hell. The fact that death ends man's probation is denied by Roman Catholics who believe that man's condition may be remedied after death.

There are those who deny the existence of hell because they consider it unjust. They say that if sin took place in a finite space of time, it could not be just for the punishment to be eternal. St. Augustine replied to this objection with the example of criminal law. If a robbery takes place in a few minutes, should one only have a few minutes' punishment? A murder that takes only an instant causes irreparable damage. In Scripture, we see that sin against an eternal and infinite God results in eternal punishment, even though it was committed in a finite lifetime.

» Why is hell eternal?

Hell is eternal because

1. Sin is an offense against an infinite God.
2. The sinner denies God the eternal service owed.
3. We are eternal beings with no other place to go if we choose separation from God.

On earth, we like to be able to change our decisions. It seems too severe that a choice could have eternal consequences. We like to think that there will be a second chance in the future, even if we are making a deliberate choice now. But it is not unreasonable that God would limit our trial period to a lifetime.

Some refuse to believe in hell because they wonder how a loving God could send someone to such an awful place as these verses describe. We must keep in mind that God desires no one to be lost, but that all should come to repentance and salvation. The Bible states this in several places.<sup>16</sup> Those who go to hell have made choices that place them in this horrific

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**“Ultimately the objections to the doctrine of hell must come to this question: ‘What else are you asking God to do?’ To wipe out their past sins and give a fresh start, assisting the difficulty of it with miraculous help? But he has already offered to do so. To forgive them? But they refuse to be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.”**

**C. S. Lewis**

(Paraphrased from *The Problem of Pain*)

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place. No one accidentally stumbles into hell. Those who go have chosen the place by rejecting God, righteousness, and salvation.

Since all that is good comes from God, rejection of God is eventually a rejection of all that is good. Quietness, security from fear and pain, and a comfortable place are good things that only God can provide. Complete separation from God means the lack of everything that is good, and that is hell.

Thank God that through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, his love has made it possible for us to “escape the wrath to come.” Instead of the agonies of hell, we may share in the joy of salvation and wonders of heaven. We choose heaven for our destiny when we choose “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>17</sup>

### **ERROR TO AVOID: FORGETTING ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES**

In earthly life, many decisions do not seem final. With enough time, many mistakes can be corrected. We must remember that many decisions have eternal consequences. After death we will not be able to change the actions that affected our own eternal destiny or the actions that influenced others in their decisions.

- » Read the “Statement of Beliefs” together at least two times.

### **STATEMENT OF BELIEFS**

Every person will exist eternally either in heaven or hell. Heaven is God’s home where believers will live with God, joyfully worshipping him. In heaven is no sin, nor any of the suffering that results from it. Hell is the eternal, irrevocable, and agonizing place of punishment for all who have not been saved from their sins by Christ. Hell is the just punishment for willful sin against an infinite God.

## LESSON 13 ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Passage Assignment:** Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Revelation 22:1-5
  - Revelation 22:10-17
  - Luke 16:19-31
  - Isaiah 5:11-16
  - Matthew 5:27-30
2. **Test:** You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 13. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. **Teaching Assignment:** Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

**LESSON 13 TEST**

1. What is the primary activity of heaven?
2. What are some things that will not be in heaven?
3. Who will go to heaven?
4. When do believers go to heaven?
5. What three things does the Bible tell us about hell?
6. What did Jesus mean that a person should cut off his hand?
7. Why is hell eternal?

# LESSON 14

## FINAL EVENTS

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - Levels of importance in topics about final events.
  - The return of Christ and its meaning for the Christian life.
  - The resurrection of all people and the value of the body.
  - The final judgment of all moral creatures.
  - The eternal kingdom of God.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about final events.
2. The student will know the importance of seeing earthly life from the perspective of eternity.

» Read Daniel 7:9-14 together. What does this passage tell us about the future?

The mark of the beast, the trumpets, the great tribulation, the antichrist, the 1,000 years, the 7 years, the great white throne, the city coming down, the lake of fire – these are subjects in biblical prophecy.

» What issues do you think of in biblical prophecy?

### LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE

Discussions of prophecy often focus on minor questions instead of the major truths. Topics in prophecy are not all equally important. We will not try to cover everything about prophecy in this course.

Sometimes people wonder what the mark of the beast will look like, what country the antichrist will come from, and who the two witnesses will be. These are questions that the Bible does not clearly answer, and arguing about them is not worthwhile.

There are other topics that the Bible explains more. Some examples are whether Jesus will come back at the beginning, middle, or end of the tribulation; and whether or not the millennium is a literal thousand years. However, these doctrines are not essential to the gospel. You should never break fellowship with someone because you disagree with his opinion on one of these questions.

There are some necessary truths in biblical prophecy. These are truths that are so clear that everyone who believes the Bible accepts them. These doctrines affect Christian living and the whole system of Christian doctrine. Let's look at four necessary truths revealed in Biblical prophecy about final events.

## THE PHYSICAL RETURN OF JESUS

Jesus will return visibly to this earth. Though he is spiritually present with believers on the earth now, he will return in his glorified, risen form in the sight of all the earth.<sup>1</sup>

» What are some things that will happen when Jesus returns?

The return of Christ will be the climax of earthly history. The kingdoms of the world will become the kingdoms of Christ. Those who have been faithful to him will be rewarded and honored. Those who have been in rebellion against him will be put down, and he will have power that will overcome all opposition.<sup>2</sup> Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.<sup>3</sup>

Christians who have died will be resurrected to rule with Christ.<sup>4</sup> They and the living believers will rise to meet the Lord when he appears.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus' return is the blessed hope of all Christians.<sup>6</sup> Think of all that his return means to us: the end of persecution, suffering, and sorrow; reunion with saints and Christian loved ones; proof that our faith has not been in vain; the sight of Jesus himself; and entrance into heaven and the fullness of eternal life with God. None of these things depend on the time of his return, but simply on the fact that he will return as he promised.

Jesus said that he would return with power and glory.<sup>7</sup> He promised to come and take his people to live with him.<sup>8</sup> The angels said that he would return in the same way that he

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1 Read Revelation 1:7.

2 Read Matthew 26:64.

3 Philippians 2:10

4 2 Timothy 2:12

5 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

6 Read Titus 2:13.

7 Matthew 24:30

8 John 14:3

had gone up into Heaven.<sup>9</sup> The apostles preached repentance while waiting for Christ to return to establish God's ultimate plan for this world.<sup>10</sup> That Jesus will return to this earth again in power and glory is taught repeatedly in the New Testament.<sup>11</sup>

Though there are signs that will precede the Second Coming, we cannot know exactly when he will return. It is good for believers to always anticipate Jesus' coming and to live accordingly.<sup>12</sup>

» Why is Jesus coming back?

We live in a world where most people are in rebellion against God. The whole creation suffers from the curse of sin. The world will never be made perfect by political action, social reform, improved education, or prosperous economies. Jesus will suddenly enter his creation as the returning king to set it right.

All people are sinners, but if they willingly join God's kingdom now, they can escape the coming judgment. God's kingdom is functioning already among those who repent and believe.<sup>13</sup> That kingdom will come fully and openly at the return of Jesus.

» How should we live because we know Jesus is coming back?

We must remember the priorities of early Christians. We are called to keep our faith and "endure to the end." We are warned not to let pleasures and the things of the world make us forget about the coming.<sup>14</sup> We live according to eternal values since the things of this world will pass away. We are told to "watch," not by gazing at the sky for his appearance, but by staying on guard spiritually so that his coming will not catch us unprepared.<sup>15</sup> We pray for purity and live a pure life because we want to be like him.<sup>16</sup>

Those who live today as though he is not coming will not be ready for his return.<sup>17</sup> Jesus' coming will be like lightning,<sup>18</sup> so sudden that nobody will have time to change anything after he appears.

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9 Acts 1:11

10 Read Acts 3:19-21.

11 I Thessalonians 4:15-16; II Thessalonians 1:7, 10; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7-8; I Peter 1:7, 13; II Peter 1:16, 3:4, 12; I John 2:28

12 Read Mark 13:33-37.

13 Mark 1:14-15, 9:1

14 Luke 21:34-36

15 Mark 13:33-37. The Greek term used for "watch" does not refer to looking for something but to staying on guard.

16 1 John 3:3

17 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 shows that those who are in darkness, living for this world, will be the ones shocked by the return of the Lord. For us, he will not return "as a thief."

18 Matthew 24:27; 1 Corinthians 15:52

We wait for his coming by

1. Keeping eternal priorities
2. Living in purity
3. Guarding ourselves spiritually by prayer

## THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF ALL PEOPLE

We know that the body has eternal value because the Bible teaches the resurrection of all people. The doctrine of the resurrection is necessary.<sup>19</sup> The Apostle Paul explained that to deny the resurrection would be to deny the gospel. If there is no resurrection, then Jesus could not have been raised.<sup>20</sup> If Jesus did not rise from the dead, the gospel cannot be true, and nobody is really saved.<sup>21</sup>

Every person will be resurrected, but not all people at the same time. At the return of Jesus, he will take up all Christians, raising those who have died.<sup>22</sup> Those who died in their sins are not accepted for the first resurrection. They are raised at a later time for judgment.<sup>23</sup>

Christians will be raised in glorified bodies like Jesus.<sup>24</sup> Sinners will be raised in some other form for eternal punishment.<sup>25</sup>

- » If you did not believe that the body will be resurrected, what difference would that make for you?

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**“O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are abolished. Christ is risen, and the demons are cast down. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life is freed. Christ is risen, and the tomb is emptied of the dead: for Christ, being risen from the dead, has become the Leader and Reviver of those who had fallen asleep. To him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.”**

**Chrysostom**

"Easter Homily"

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19 This is shown by the fact that Paul wrote 58 verses (1 Corinthians 15) defending the doctrine of the resurrection.  
 20 1 Corinthians 15:3  
 21 1 Corinthians 15:17  
 22 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 20:6  
 23 Revelation 20:13  
 24 1 John 3:2  
 25 John 5:28-29

The belief that we will someday be resurrected affects our lifestyle. We can see the practical effects of the doctrine by looking at examples of people who deny it. Some people in the Corinthian congregation denied that the human body will be resurrected. Those who believed this error divided into two positions.

Some said, “Since the body will not be raised, the spirit is all that matters. That means that the sins we commit with the body are not serious. We can even commit fornication, because the body is going to be discarded anyway.”<sup>26</sup>

Others said, “Since the body will not be raised, it must be worthless and evil. We should suppress all bodily desires, not eating anything that tastes pleasant or enjoying marriage.”

Both of these errors came from denying the resurrection. The Christian doctrine of the resurrection gives value to the body. Value is shown in that the Christians’ bodies are redeemed, are temples of the Holy Spirit, are members of Christ, and will be resurrected and glorified.<sup>27</sup>

The doctrine of the resurrection is necessary because it means

1. That Jesus rose from the dead.
2. All people will be raised.
3. The body has eternal value.
4. The gospel is true.

## THE JUDGMENT

The Judgment is truly the end for those whose names are not in the Book of Life. It is not the end of their existence, but it is the end of their making choices. The eternity that follows will be unending consequences of decisions that can never be reversed.

The Judgment gives our choices significance beyond their immediate results. Some people think that as long as they can control the results of their actions, there is nothing else to worry about. They want to believe that their sin is not evil if it doesn’t really do any

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26 See 1 Corinthians 6:13-14, where some seemed to have a slogan, “Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods,” meaning that the body is for nothing but indulgence of desires. Paul said, “But God will destroy both it and them,” speaking of judgment for the misuse of the body. He continued, “The body is for the Lord... And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.”

27 Read 1 Corinthians 6:14, 15, 19, 20.

harm. In reality, all sin does harm. But even if it did not bring harm in this life, sin is serious because of the judgment. God's Word says that people will be judged for their works.<sup>28</sup>

At the Judgment some will be sent to eternal punishment and others to eternal reward. Scripture describes one scene of judgment for sinners who are resurrected to face condemnation for their sinful works.<sup>29</sup> There is another judgment for Christians, where they will be rewarded for those works that had worthwhile, lasting results.<sup>30</sup>

The Judgment means that someday sin will be ended. It is hard to imagine a world with no sin, but someday all rebellion against God will be ended.

God does not intend that we live in constant fear, or that fear be our motive for living right. However, consciousness of the judgment ahead gives us a sense of accountability that guides our lives.

We must know about the judgment to understand

1. The significance of sin
2. Our accountability to God
3. The importance of our choices
4. The end of all sin

## GOD'S ETERNAL KINGDOM

According to some philosophies and religions, time goes on forever in cycles, with no beginning or end, and no events that change things forever. But according to the Bible, time has a beginning and a series of events progressing to a conclusion. The Bible describes creation, then the tragic fall of man, then the plan of salvation that God is working out through the centuries of human history.

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**“A thousand years are as one day to the eternal God. Therefore, 'He is longsuffering': He gives us space for repentance, without any inconvenience to himself. In a word, with God time passes neither slower nor swifter than is suitable to him and his economy; nor can there be any reason why it should be necessary for him either to delay or hasten the end of all things.”**

**John Wesley**

*Notes on the New Testament,  
notes on 2 Peter 3*

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28 Read 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 2:6-11.

29 See Revelation 20:11-15.

30 Read 1 Corinthians 3:14-15.

In Genesis we find the beginning of sin. In Revelation sin is excluded from God's eternal city.<sup>31</sup> In Genesis we see the loss of the tree of life and the sentence of death. In Revelation we see restoration of the tree of life, names in the Book of Life, and invitation to a river of the water of life.<sup>32</sup>

The coming of God's complete and eternal kingdom will accomplish God's plan. God has always been the King of his universe, but since the fall of man, most of humanity has been in rebellion against God's kingdom. That will come to a sudden end, and God will rule eternally without a rival. The world will be perfectly as God wants it, just as heaven is.

### ERROR TO AVOID: EARTHLY FOCUS

There is a human tendency to live as though earthly life goes on forever. We try to improve our conditions, solve our problems, and create an environment that makes us content. We need to be like Abraham who was expecting an eternal home while he lived in tents and moved often (Hebrews 11:8-10, 14-16). We need to remember that the things we build, the things we have, and the conditions we create are all temporary. We should work for things that have eternal value.

- » Read the "Statement of Beliefs" together at least two times.

### STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Jesus will return as he promised, resurrecting believers of the past, and taking all believers to reign in his kingdom. Every person will be raised from the dead to face judgment for his works. He will either be granted eternal reward or sentenced to eternal punishment. God's kingdom will come fully, and God will reign eternally.

<sup>31</sup> Revelation 21:27

<sup>32</sup> Revelation 22:1, 2, 19

## LESSON 14 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Passage Assignment: Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Matthew 25:31-46
  - 2 Peter 3:1-14
  - 1 Corinthians 15:51-58
  - Revelation 20:11-15
  - Daniel 2:31-45
2. Test: You will begin the next class with a test over Lesson 14. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. Teaching Assignment: Remember to schedule and report your out-of-class teaching times.





# LESSON 15

## ANCIENT CREEDS

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to explain:
  - The purpose and use of a creed as a statement of beliefs.
  - Some biblical examples of creeds.
  - The origins and content of three historic creeds.
  - Why modern Christians must hold to historic Christianity.
  - A statement of Christian beliefs about the creeds.
2. The student will value the foundational beliefs of the early church as original Christianity.

- » Read 2 John together. What does this passage tell us about the importance of the original doctrines of the church?

### THE ORIGIN OF THE CREEDS

A creed is a summary of essential Christian beliefs. The early church saw the need to summarize biblical doctrine.

- » Why did the church need creeds? Wasn't the Bible enough?

There are always people who claim to believe the Bible, yet teach doctrines that contradict the Bible. The church developed statements of biblical doctrine that distinguished real Christianity from false doctrines.

One of the first statements of doctrine was "Jesus is Lord," which meant that Jesus is God. The words, "Lord Jesus Christ" also made a statement, saying that Jesus is the Messiah (*Christos*) and that he is God. A person who refused to say that Jesus is Lord or use the words Lord Jesus Christ was not a Christian.

Later there were people who claimed to be Christians, but did not believe that Jesus was truly human. That's why in the epistle of 1 John we find the creedal statement, "Whatever spirit confesses not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God."<sup>1</sup> The apostle also said that if a person denies the essential doctrines of Christ, he is sinning and is not of God.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest creed that makes several statements is in 1 Timothy 3:16:

God was revealed in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory.

We don't know all of the issues that the creed in 1 Timothy was dealing with, but it emphasizes the deity and humanity of Jesus when it says God was revealed in the flesh.

These short creedal statements served a purpose. If an early Christian met another person who claimed to believe in Jesus, the Christian could ask, "Do you believe Jesus is Lord?" or "Do you believe that Jesus is God come in the flesh?" If the person said "no," then the Christian knew that the person did not really know or accept what the Bible teaches.

During the first few centuries after Pentecost, the church found it necessary to make clear statements about the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ, and the identity of the Holy Spirit. They established doctrinal standards as a defense against heresy. The creeds were intended to be summaries of the fundamental truths that every Christian believed.

The creeds could not cover every issue, but a person would not have been considered a Christian if he denied anything in those early creeds. They were an attempt to define the Christian faith.

Here are three of the early creeds of the church.

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**"It is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man."**

Athanasian Creed

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1 1 John 4:3

2 2 John 9

## THE APOSTLES' CREED

The Apostle's Creed was not written by the apostles, but it was written in the second century to express the doctrines of the apostles.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of the saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

It seems that this creed was intended to expose the errors of those who denied that Jesus was truly human and virgin born. There were also some who denied that Jesus truly died or that he physically rose from the dead.

Very little is said in the Apostles' Creed about the Holy Spirit. That is not because the church did not know who the Holy Spirit is; it is because heresies about his identity were not yet challenging the church. The term *catholic* simply means "universal" and means that there is one true church. "Forgiveness of sins" implies salvation by grace rather than by works or ritual.

## THE NICENE CREED

The Nicene Creed was established at a church council in 325. Its purpose was to protect the doctrines of the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. A few statements were added at another council in 381. This creed deals with some issues that had not come up before.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of light, Very God of very God, begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he arose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven; and sits on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead: whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets; and I believe in one Catholic and Apostolic Church; I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead; and the life of the world to come. Amen.

- » What are some things that you see in the creed that were not in the Apostles' Creed?

Here we see the statements expanded about all three persons of the Trinity. The full deity of Christ is emphasized in a way to safeguard it against those who claim to believe that Jesus is God, yet minimize his deity. He is eternal ("before all worlds"), not created, and consists of whatever the Father consists of. Jesus is to be called God for the same reasons that the Father is to be called God.

The Holy Spirit is to be worshipped just like the Father and Son, which affirms that he is God.



Athanasius was the leading theologian at the Council at Nicea.

## THE CHALCEDONIAN CREED

The Chalcedonian Creed was written in 451. Its purpose was to protect doctrines of the incarnation of Christ. The wording is not easy to understand. The concern of the writers was to protect the doctrine of the full deity and full humanity of Christ, without either aspect being so minimized as to become meaningless.

At the end the writers stated that they considered these doctrines to be both scriptural and traditional in the church. They were not developing new ideas, but defending what the church had always believed.

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures by no means being taken away by the union, but rather the properties of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the

beginning concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

» Do you see some things especially emphasized in this creed?

The deity of Christ was not something that Jesus had only in heaven but not on earth. The early Christians believed that Jesus was truly God in the flesh. He possessed completely the attributes of God and man together while on earth. They considered this nature of Christ to be his unique qualification as Savior.

## THE CREEDS TODAY

Centuries have passed since the church began. The world has changed in many ways. Many religious beliefs have developed.

Some people think that there are no doctrines that must stay the same. They feel free to believe whatever they want and still call themselves Christians.

» Is it necessary for us to believe the early creeds of the church?

The God of the Bible, described in the early creeds, does not change. The early Christians knew that God saved them in response to their faith in him. These statements about the nature of God and the means of salvation were basic Christianity from the beginning.

That doesn't mean that a person is not saved unless he is right in all of his doctrines. Not all doctrines are necessary for the gospel. A person cannot deny what he knows is true, but he may be mistaken in some things.

The ancient creeds in this lesson talk only about essential doctrines. If a church has a view of God that is different from these essentials, they must also invent a different means of salvation, which is another gospel. If they do that, they should not call themselves Christians because they are inventing a new religion.

Of course every person is free to think what he wants, but if he does not have Christian beliefs, he is not a Christian. He is something else.

In the first few centuries there were not denominations as we have today. There was one church. So the creeds were statements by the

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**"But whatever doctrine is new must be wrong; for the old religion is the only true one; and no doctrine can be right, unless it is the same 'which was from the beginning.'"**

**John Wesley**

(In a sermon entitled  
"On Sin in Believers")

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whole church. Today, churches that respect the authority of the Bible hold the beliefs of the creeds, though they disagree on many other ideas.

The early church knew that relationship with God is the most important thing. They knew that they were saved through their relationship with God. That's why it was so important for them to make sure that they knew what God is like.

The book of Jude warns us that we must defend the faith that was originally delivered to the church.<sup>3</sup> May God anoint his truth as we minister faithfully in preaching the gospel, discipling believers, and training those whom he calls into ministry.

## **ERROR TO AVOID: DENOMINATIONAL EXCLUSIVISM**

A group of churches united into one organization is called a denomination. There are thousands of denominations that claim to be Christian. There are thousands of independent churches that are part of no denomination.

Sometimes denominations begin with evangelism. If there are many converts in a region, and no denomination to take care of them, a new denomination may form. A denomination may begin from the work of a mission organization in a country.

Sometimes a denomination originates with a group of people who believe that an important doctrine is denied or neglected by the church they are in. They start a new denomination with the intention of being doctrinally correct. Over time, they continue to develop their doctrines. Because they understand the Bible differently from other groups of Christians, their doctrines are different from other denominations.

Denominations also develop traditions about the proper form for worship and details of Christian living. Denominations differ from one another in their traditions.

Most Christian denominations do not claim to be the only true church. If an organization claims to be the entire church of God on earth, it should not be trusted.

Unbelievers object to Christianity because of its divisions and variety. Unbelievers think that the various sects of Christianity all contradict one another. Many people of the world think there is no type of unity among Christians.

A denomination or local church that is truly Christian believes the doctrines of the early Christian creeds. This is the doctrinal unity that exists among all Christian organizations. There is great variety on smaller doctrinal issues and tradition, but we should not say that a church is not Christian because of those differences.

### **ERROR TO AVOID: MISUNDERSTANDING PERSONAL CONVICTIONS**

As a Christian lives in relationship with God, he develops his understanding of the truth of the Bible. He will not always come to the same conclusions that others have. As he applies truth to daily life, he will develop rules for himself that will be different from what other Christians do.

As an individual thinks about his beliefs, he should not feel free to reject the essential doctrines of early Christianity unless he is deciding that he is no longer a Christian.

A Christian should also be able to believe the established doctrines of his church. If he believes that the doctrines of his church are wrong, he cannot truly commit to the church as a member.

An individual Christian will be guided by the teachings of his church, but he will have personal convictions that differ even from other members of his church. A personal conviction is not something directly stated in the Bible; it is someone's attempt to apply the Bible's truth to some issue.

Every Christian should honestly apply the Bible's truth to his situations, but he should not be quick to judge others by his own conclusions. It is right for us to expect all Christians to hold the doctrines of the early creeds, and it is right for us to expect church members to hold the doctrines of their church, but it is not right for a Christian to expect others to agree with all of his personal beliefs.

- » Read the "Statement of Beliefs" together at least two times.

## STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Scripture tells us to hold and defend the original doctrines of Christianity. Early Christians stated the beliefs that are essential to the gospel and our relationship with God. Those statements still define essential Christianity.

## LESSON 15 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Passage Assignment: Each student will be assigned one of the passages listed below. Before the next class session, you should read the passage and write a paragraph about what it says about the subject of this lesson.
  - Titus 1:7-14
  - Jude 3-13
  - 1 Timothy 4:1-7
  - 1 Timothy 3:16
  - 1 John 4:1-3, 14-15, and 5:12
2. Test: You will take a test over Lesson 15. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.
3. Teaching Assignment: You should have completed all seven of your out-of-class teaching times. Be sure to report these to the class leader.

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

**LESSON 15 TEST**

1. What is a creed?
2. What were two statements about Jesus necessary for early Christians?
3. What is the first creed in Scripture that gives several statements?
4. What was the purpose of the Apostles' Creed?
5. What was the purpose of the Nicene Creed?
6. What was the purpose of the Chalcedonian Creed?

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# SHEPHERD'S GLOBAL CLASSROOM COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

## **Exploring the Old Testament**

This course teaches the essential content and teachings of the 39 books of the Old Testament.

## **Exploring the New Testament**

This course teaches the essential content and teachings of the 27 books of the New Testament.

## **The Life and Ministry of Jesus**

This course studies the life of Jesus as a model for ministry and leadership in the 21st century.

## **Romans**

This course teaches the theology of salvation and missions as explained in the book of Romans, discussing several issues that have been controversial in the church.

## **Principles of Biblical Interpretation**

This course teaches the principles and methods of interpreting the Bible properly in order to guide our life and relationship with God.

## **Christian Beliefs**

This is a systematic theology course, describing the Christian doctrines about the Bible, God, Man, Sin, Christ, Salvation, Holy Spirit, Church, and Last Things.

## **Eschatology**

This course teaches the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation along with other sections of prophetic scripture and emphasizes essential doctrines such as the return of Christ, the final judgment, and the eternal kingdom of God.

## **Doctrine and Practice of the Holy Life**

This course gives a biblical description of the holy life that God expects and empowers for a Christian.

## **Doctrine and Practice of the Church**

This course explains God's design and plan for the church and biblical subjects such as church membership, baptism, communion, tithe, and spiritual leadership.

## **Church History I**

This course describes how the church fulfilled its mission and protected essential doctrine through the period from the early church to the Reformation.

## **Church History II**

This course describes how the church expanded and faced challenges through the period from the Reformation to modern times.

## **Spiritual Formation**

In this course students learn to have the attitudes of Jesus, to relate to God the way Jesus related to his Father, to humble ourselves as Jesus did, to practice the spiritual and personal disciplines of Jesus, to endure suffering as Jesus did, and to engage in the Christian community (the Church) formed by Jesus.

## **Ministry Leadership**

This course emphasizes Christian character while teaching leaders to guide organizations through the process of discovering values, realizing purpose, sharing vision, setting goals, planning strategy, taking action, and experiencing achievement.

## **Introduction to Christian Communication**

This course teaches the theology of communication, methods for effective speaking, and methods for preparing and presenting biblical sermons.

## **Biblical Evangelism and Discipleship**

This course presents the biblical principles that guide evangelism methods. It describes forms of evangelism and provides lessons to use in discipling new converts.

## **Introduction to Apologetics**

This course teaches the scientific, historical, and philosophical basis for a Christian worldview, and shows how the Christian faith is consistent with reason and reality.

## **World Religions and Cults**

This course gives the evangelical believer an understanding of the teachings and proper responses to eighteen religious groups.

## **Introduction to Christian Worship**

This course explains how worship impacts all aspects of the believer's life and gives principles that should guide individual and congregational practices of worship.

## **Christian Ethics**

This course applies scriptural principles to the use of money, relationships, the environment, relations with the government, human rights, and other areas of practical living.

## **Principles of Christian Counseling**

This course prepares the Christian leader to help people who are struggling with issues relating to sexuality, addiction, abuse, trauma, grief, and others.