



DENVER SIZEMORE

SOUND
DOCTRINE

THE FOUNDATION
OF THE FAITH

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Preface

Many church leaders have predicted that the church in the twenty-first century will be “more Biblically illiterate than it is in the twentieth century.” My question is, Why? Many reply that this generation will not accept basic Bible doctrine. They demand to be entertained, amused, and have the “ears tickled.”

If that be true, then we need to warn them as Hosea did Israel, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). Knowledge of God’s Word! Instead of allowing the present culture to dictate our teaching, we should cry out like Amos did when he said,

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD,
“When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for

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bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11).

This book is written with the confidence that soon people will be seeking God's Word. I have written from an apologetic viewpoint. Giving the student some reasons "why" he should believe these doctrines. My hope is that they will find help in learning God's Truth — and some reasons for believing it.

It would be impossible to list all the people who have assisted me in writing and publishing this book. But I would like to mention those generous brethren who provided the funds to pay for the first printing. Our sincere thanks to: Fred and Madonna Smith, the CWF and Mission Fund of Englewood Christian Church, Ken White, Alva and Juanita Sizemore, James and Irene Duffey, Maurice and Marietta Ingle, Allan and Celia Thames, Lawrence and Sandra Vierling, Wayne and Brenda Boswell, Wade and Cammie Hall, Paul and LaVue Vandecars.

Many thanks go to Helen (my wife of 54 years), for her many hours of typing the manuscript, for her constant words of encouragement, and for sharing the joy when "it" was FINALLY completed!

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LESSON 1

Amazing Grace

- I. The Importance of Grace
- II. The Meaning and Use of the Word "Grace"
 - A. Meaning of "grace"
 - B. Varied use of the term "grace" in the Bible
- III. God's Common Grace
 - A. God provides material blessings for all men
 - B. Purpose for God's "Common Grace"
- IV. God's Saving Grace
 - A. What is His "saving" grace?
 - B. God's grace is received through faith
 - C. God's grace is universal — potentially
- V. Saved by Grace — for Good Works
 - A. Good works — a natural result of grace
 - B. Grace does not eliminate obedience to Christ

- VI. God's Sustaining Grace
 - A. Grace gives the power to live and serve God
 - B. Grace sustains the Christian in adversity
- VII. Continuing in the Grace of God
 - A. Grace is not necessarily a permanent state
 - B. Future grace

I. The Importance of Grace

Grace characterizes God's revelation from beginning to end. The word occurs in the Greek text of the New Testament some 170 times. Paul uses the term about 100 times in his writings. He uses it both as a salutation and a benediction. Every one of Paul's letters begins and ends with the word "grace." The Jewish greeting was *shalom* — peace. The Greek greeting was *charis* — grace. Paul uses both of them.

E.L. Russell writes, "Grace is from the greatest Person offering with love His greatest possessions and providing His greatest power to persons with whom He does not need to share." (*Restoration Herald*, Feb. 1983, p. 6).

The source of grace is God, the Father, who is "the God of all Grace" (1 Pet. 5:10); and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "full of grace" (Rom. 1:7; John 1:14). The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29), and "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17; 1 Cor. 1:4). This indicates the great importance of Grace!

II. The Meaning and Use of the Word "Grace"

Grace, like love, is so deep in meaning that it cannot be fully defined. But its use in the Bible reveals some of the richness of its meaning. For example:

A. *The meaning of "grace."* The word "grace" (*charis*) comes from the Greek verb *chairō*, meaning "rejoice, be glad" or "that which afforded pleasure or caused favorable regard." Grace in the New Testament is used:

1. for God's favorable attitude toward the Virgin Mary: "thou hast found favor (grace) with God" (Luke 1:30).

2. for the beauty or gracefulness of a person — "and Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor (grace) with God and men" (Luke 2:52, ASV).

3. to express good will or kindness of a master to a slave such as Pharaoh's grace or favor shown to Joseph (Acts 7:10).

4. to describe the offering of the Macedonian brethren to the churches of Judea (II Cor. 8:1). Also to describe the thanksgivings of those who received the gifts (II Cor. 9:11). It is interesting to note that the words "grace" and "gratitude" come from the same Greek word.

We see its meaning in the modern use of the term. Most life insurance policies provide for an extension of time in case one fails to pay the premium when it is due. That 30-day extension is called a "grace period." In most Christian homes, someone gives thanks for the food or "says grace" before they eat. Further meaning can be gleaned from the:

B. *Varied use of the term "grace" in the Bible:*

1. When we pray, we go to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16).

2. When we serve, it is according to the measure of grace (I Cor. 15:10).

3. When we give, we are abounding in grace (II Cor. 8:7).

4. When we obey the gospel, it is the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24).

5. When we endure suffering, it is due to the sufficiency of grace (II Cor. 12:9).

6. The last message from God in the Bible is, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21, KJV).

Because of these and other uses of the word, Dr. Kenneth S. Weust says of grace: "It is hardly too much to say that the mind of God has in no word uttered itself and all that was in His heart more distinctly than in this" (*Treasures from the Greek New Testament*, p. 15).

III. God's Common Grace

The term "common grace" is used when referring to the "goodness of God" to all mankind. This means that God blesses all men in some areas regardless of their relationship to Him.

A. God provides material blessings for all men. Jesus said that God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45, ASV). He adds, "for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil" (Luke 6:35, ASV). David concludes that "Jehovah is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9, ASV).

Paul told the pagans at Lystra that God "left not himself without witness [evidence of His being], in that he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17, ASV). This is why men who reject God and turn to idols "are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20, ASV). Note that

this goodness was given to all men without regard to their relationship to Him.

B. Purpose for God's "Common Grace." His purpose is that all men may come to know Him, repent of their sins and turn to Him for forgiveness. Paul writes, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4, ASV). It is not God's will "that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9, ASV). This is the reason for His "Common Grace."

IV. God's Saving Grace

A. What is His "saving" grace?

1. *Grace defined.* The best known and highest use of the term "grace," *charis*, is in reference to God's saving grace. It has been defined as "unmerited favor," "something we need but do not deserve," and God's "undeserved favor toward sinful man, whereby, He has provided for man's redemption through the sacrificial death of His Son Jesus Christ."

2. *Grace exemplified.* The best example of Grace is found in Romans 5:6-11. Paul describes man's hopeless condition. He was helpless, "ungodly," a "sinner," and an "enemy" of God! (vv. 6-10, NASB). Since his crimes were against God, other men could not save him, and neither could he save himself. Into this desperate situation came God and His Son Jesus.

The Father planned man's escape and Jesus carried it out. Jesus took man's place, dying for his sins, paying the penalty for them. Through His death He made possible

the forgiveness of man's sins and his reconciliation with God whom he had offended, thereby, saving man "from the wrath of God" (v. 9, ASV). Man deserved punishment, but God gave him pardon. *This is grace!*

Paul elaborates, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:4-5, NASB). Paul stresses that it was God's "rich mercy" and "great love" that caused Him to extend forgiveness to man, "according to the riches of His grace!" (Eph. 1:7, NASB).

B. God's grace is received through faith. Grace is an "umbrella" word that covers everything that God has done, is doing, and will yet do for us. Faith is also an "umbrella" word that covers everything that man must do for God to be saved, keep saved, and please Him.

In Ephesians 2:8, Paul states, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (NASB). The word "it," refers to the gift of "salvation."

This salvation, Paul says, is "not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:9, RSV). But it is a gift from God that man receives by faith. *This is GRACE!*

There are two reasons why salvation must be a gift: (1) Man, in his weakness, could never live a perfect life nor do enough good deeds to earn salvation. (See Jesus' parable in Matt. 18:23-24). (2) Only the blood of Christ can wash away sin. Good deeds are unable to do that (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:22; I Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 1:5). We meet that blood when we believe and obey the gospel and by God's grace are forgiven (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). What Grace provides, Faith accepts!

C. *God's grace is universal — potentially.* The glorious good news is that “where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly” (Rom. 5:20, ASV). Paul tells Titus, “The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men . . .” (Titus 2:11, ASV). Some deny that the gospel is for all men, “Grace in its effective outworking and outreach avails only for elect individuals, those human beings whom in His sovereignty, God has predestinated from all eternity to be the recipients of His mercy” (*Grace Unlimited*, p. 25).

But the Scriptures say that God desires “all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4, ASV). “Not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9, ASV; cf. I Tim. 2:6; I John 2:2; John 1:29; Heb. 2:9). Notice the “alls”! God’s grace is universal in that it has the potential to save all men. But in actuality its universality depends upon man’s acceptance of God’s gift of grace. The last message Jesus sent to earth was, “The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth, say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17, KJV). God’s grace is for all who will believe and obey (Rev. 22:17, KJV). His grace is for the “whosoever will,” not the “whosoever won’t!”

V. *Saved by Grace for Good Works*

A. *Good works — a natural result of grace.* In Ephesians, Paul says one is saved “by grace” (2:5), “through faith” (2:8), “for good works” (2:10). He makes clear that good works cannot earn or merit salvation (Rom. 4:4,5; 11:6). But he is very careful to make plain that good

works naturally result from grace and are required by grace. In Titus 2:11-14, Paul states that Jesus died for us that He might "purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works" (v. 14).

"For though Paul rejected "works" as a condition of salvation, no one more firmly demanded them as a consequence of it" (Hunter, *Introduction to New Testament Theology*, p. 94). "Good works can never earn salvation; but there is something radically wrong if salvation does not produce good works" (Myron Taylor).

Jesus emphasized "bearing fruit" in John 15. He says, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; and so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8, ASV). "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:2, NASB).

B. Grace does not eliminate obedience to Christ. Some hold that if one is saved by grace, then obedience in baptism is not necessary to salvation (Matt. 28:19). They hold that baptism is a "work" whereby those who do it are trying to earn salvation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Peter told the 3000 on Pentecost to "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38, KJV). Paul was baptized to "wash away" his sins (Acts 22:16). Yet both men insisted that we are saved "by grace"! (Acts 15:11; Eph. 2:8). They saw no conflict between being saved by grace and being obedient to the faith.

It is true that we can do nothing to earn salvation. It is false that we do nothing in reference to salvation. Philipians 2:12-13 says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

One significant result of an understanding of the biblical doctrine of the grace of God is that it places obedience in its proper perspective. Obedience ceases to be a work of merit and becomes what God intended it to be — a response of faith (Eubanks).

Also some people seem to think that grace eliminates the necessity to repent when we sin as a Christian. That somehow God just overlooks and excuses our sins. But grace is seen in God's provision for forgiveness, and His willingness to forgive when we genuinely turn from sin. Grace does not mean that God ignores or condones our sins. God's Word still says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap!" (Gal. 6:7). Paul adds that when Christ returns He will punish those who "obey *not* the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thess. 1:8-9, ASV). Grace is received when one believes *and* obeys the gospel.

VI. God's Sustaining Grace

A. *Grace gives the power to live and serve God.* Grace is not only the means by which God saves us (Titus 2:11), it is also the sustaining power that enables us to persevere in the Christian life.

Hebrews 13:9 says that the heart is "strengthened by grace." Paul writes Timothy, "Thou therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 2:1). Paul prays, "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word" (II Thess. 2:16-17).

Paul pens a beautiful testimony to grace and how it had saved and sustained him, though a past persecutor of Christ's church. He says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Cor. 15:10, ASV; cf. Eph. 3:8; Rom. 1:5; 12:2; 15:15).

God's grace had saved him, and commissioned him to preach the gospel. It motivated him to hard work and gave him the power to fulfill his mission in life for God (Phil. 4:13). God's grace can do the same for us. Oh, the surpassing "riches of His grace!" (Eph. 1:7; 2:7, ASV).

B. Grace sustains the Christian in adversity. Paul had been given the marvelous experience in Paradise (II Cor. 12:1f). But because of its greatness, he was given a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble. Three times Paul begged the Lord to remove it. But God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12:9, NIV). God meant that He would not remove the thorn but would give him the power to endure it.

With this sustaining grace, Paul said he now gloried in his weaknesses, "that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (II Cor. 12:9). With Christ's power (sustaining grace) he now was "content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, . . . for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor. 12:10, NASB). With God's grace to sustain us we can sing,

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

VII. *Continuing in the Grace of God*

A. *Grace is not necessarily a permanent state.* Some teach that "once in grace, always in grace." This is not necessarily so. It can be. It should be. God wants it to be permanent. *But* God does not force us to obey the gospel, nor does He force us to remain in Christ! We may choose to go or stay! God made us that way. It is called "free will."

1. *God has provided ample power to enable us to remain in Christ — in grace.* In Romans 8:31-39, Paul eloquently argues his case that no outside person or power can separate us from the love of Christ: (1) The disasters of the world do not, rather, they tend to bring one closer (Rom. 8:35-36). (2) Nothing in the course of life or death can do it (Rom 8:38). (3) Nothing in the expanses of space, no persons or powers whether earthly or heavenly, nothing in the whole universe can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:38-39). Against all these "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us!" (Rom. 8:37, NIV). That is reassuring!

PLEASE NOTE — Paul here is *not* discussing what man, a free moral agent, may do himself. The Christian, if he so chooses, can remove himself from Christ's love — grace. But no one else can. Notice the following scriptures:

2. *Warnings of falling away from God.* Jesus said, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away (cuts off). . . . If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up: and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:2,6). A branch cannot be cut off unless it has first been in the vine. Jesus said, if it does not remain in

the vine it is cut off. The abiding or going depends on the branch — the Christian.

I Cor. 9:26-27 — Notice Paul's concern about being disqualified from the race. Other Scriptures that warn of the possibility of leaving the faith are: I Timothy 1:18-19; 4:1; 6:10; Hebrews 6:4-6; II Peter 1:20-21; 3:17-18.

Galatians 5:2-4 is a powerful warning against turning from Christ and falling from grace. Paul says that the Galatian Christians who turned from the gospel to circumcision and the Law for salvation — "to be justified" — would find that (1) Christ would be of "no profit, benefit" to them in life or in death, in time or in eternity (5:2). (2) They would be severed from Christ (5:4). (3) They would have "fallen away from grace!" (5:4). W.E. Vine writes: "How then could they be saved to whom Christ was of no advantage, who had been severed from Christ, who had fallen away from grace?" (*New Testament Words*, p. 243).

R.C. Sproul writes: "God's grace is not infinite. God is infinite and God is gracious. We experience the grace of an infinite God, but grace is not infinite. God sets limits to His patience and forbearance. He warns us over and over again that someday the ax will fall and His judgment will be poured out" (R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, p. 168).

3. *One must meet God's conditions to remain in grace.* Hebrews 3:12-14 is an earnest plea to remain faithful to Christ. It warns against "an evil, unbelieving heart" that may cause one to fall away from God. It exhorts Christians to encourage one another against the deceitfulness of sin. And then reminds that we will share in Christ, eternally, if we hold fast to our faith "to the end."

The Word teaches us to: a. continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43), b. stand in grace (Rom. 5:2), c. be strong in the grace of Christ (II Tim. 2:1), and d. grow in the grace of Christ (II Pet. 3:18).

God wants us to be saved, but He does not force us against our will to remain in Him. God does not force us to become a Christian; He does not force us to remain one! It is our decision. Jesus' plea is, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

B. *Future grace.* The Christian can say with the poet, Robert Browning, "Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be." The grace that God gives us in this life is called "Amazing, Wonderful, Marvelous." But "future" grace will be even more glorious.

When we were saved, God raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Paul says this was done "in order that in *the ages to come* He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7, NASB). Peter says, "Set your hope fully upon the *grace that is coming to you* at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:13, RSV).

Regarding this "future grace," Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18, NASB).

The term "revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:13) refers to His second coming. (See I Pet. 1:7; 4:13; II Thess. 1:7; Luke 17:30.) Paul's term "ages to come" in contrast with this present age, speaks of eternity with God. "This verse carries the contrast a step further, depicting the future as an unending series of "ages" in which God will

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show to His saints “the incomparable riches of His grace” (Boles, *Ephesians*, p. 225).

We can only guess at the full extent of this “future grace.” But we know some of what it will include:

1. We will be fully adopted as His sons (Rom. 8:23,19).

2. We will receive our new bodies (II Cor. 5:1-4; Phil. 3:20-21; cf. I Cor. 15:51-53).

3. We will occupy our new home (John 14:1-3).

4. God and Christ will dwell with us in a personal way, similar to the Garden of Eden (Rev. 21:1-4).

“God was not content to show or demonstrate His grace in one great act alone; He will do this forever” (Boles, *Ephesians*, p. 225).

Small wonder that Paul describes the riches of His grace with the word, “exceeding” (KJV), “immeasurable” (RSV), “surpassing” (NASB), and “incomparable” (NIV). It is impossible to describe the wonderful “riches of His grace” that God has in store for His people!

One day at a Bible Conference in Northfield, Massachusetts, D.L. Moody asked the blind hymn writer, Fanny Crosby, to give a personal testimony. She first hesitated, then quietly rose and said, “There is one hymn I have written which has never been published. I call it my soul’s poem. Sometimes when I’m troubled, I repeat it to myself, for it brings comfort to my heart.”

She then recited while many wept:

Someday the silver cord will break,
and I no more as now shall sing;
But, oh, the joy when I shall wake
within the palace of the King!

And I shall see Him face to face,
and tell the story —*saved by grace!*"

At the age of 95, Fanny Crosby passed into glory and saw the face of Jesus. What a glorious day!

AMAZING GRACE

1. Paul used the word "grace" about _____ times in his writings, both as a _____ and a _____
2. The word "grace" in the New Testament is used to describe various things. List three:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
3. What is "common grace"? _____
What is God's purpose for it? _____
4. Define God's "saving grace." _____
5. Grace is best exemplified in what acts of God?

6. What is meant by "limited grace"? _____
7. Explain why there is no conflict between "being saved by grace" and being baptized. _____

8. Give two reasons why it is impossible to be saved without grace.

9. Explain why grace is not necessarily a permanent state.

LESSON 2

Truth

- I. Truth Defined
- II. The Source or Origin of Truth
 - A. God is "The God of Truth"
 - B. Jesus is "The Truth"
- III. The Truth Revealed
 - A. God reveals Himself through Jesus
 - B. The Holy Spirit — Revealer of Truth
 - C. The Bible — God's Written Truth
 - D. God reveals Himself through nature
- IV. The Loss of Truth in Modern Times
 - A. All truth is relative
 - B. The Poverty of Relativism
 - C. Toleration and truth
- V. Christianity Does Offer Absolute Truth

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- A. Evidence for absolute truth
- B. Blessings of believing and obeying truth
- VI. The Danger of Rejecting God's Truth
 - A. The danger of trading the truth for a lie.
 - B. To deny Truth is to risk God's wrath
 - C. No hope of salvation if the Truth is rejected
- VII. The Church — "The Pillar and Ground of the Truth"
 - A. The truth preserved
 - B. The truth proclaimed

I. Truth Defined

The concept of truth fills the Scriptures. The word "truth" is used 235 times in the Bible (KJV). The dictionary defines truth as "genuineness, veracity, integrity." Truth is also "that which conforms to reality or fact," that which is in accordance with what is, what has been, or what will be.

The importance of "truth" is seen in these Scriptures: 1) we are to love the truth (II Thess. 2:10), 2) we are to walk in the truth (II John 4; III John 4), 3) God desires truth in the heart (Ps. 51:6), 4) we are to worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23), 5) we are to speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), and 6) "buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23, KJV). Truth is precious! We must hold fast to it! (Titus 1:9).

This study will examine what God's Word says about the priceless virtue called Truth.

II. The Source or Origin of Truth

A. God is "The God of Truth" (Ps. 31:15). Twice in Isaiah 65:16, Jehovah is called "the God of truth." Exodus

34:6 says He abounds in "lovingkindness and truth" (NASB). Paul exclaims "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11:33, KJV). God says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9, NASB).

God possesses all knowledge and wisdom. The Bible says, "His understanding is infinite"; God "knows all things"; if we ask for wisdom, He "gives to all men generously"; "His understanding no one can fathom" (Ps. 147:5; I John 3:20; Jas. 1:5, NASB; Isa. 40:28, NIV). God is the source of Truth!

B. *Jesus is "the Truth" (John 14:6)*. Since Jesus is God's "only begotten Son," He is also the source of truth (John 3:16). In fact, Jesus said, "I am the Truth" (John 14:6). As God incarnate, He is "truth embodied . . . the key of all truth, and in Himself a revelation of *all* truth needful to lift men to God" (B.W. Johnson, *John*, p. 218). When Jesus said He was "the Truth," He does not claim to be just one truth or one reality among many, but to be the Ultimate Reality. Supreme Truth! (Colson, *The Body*, p. 158).

III. The Truth Revealed

A. *God reveals Himself through Jesus*. Jesus is not only "the Truth," but He is the chief means God used to reveal Himself to man. Hebrews 1:1-2 says that "God . . . in these last days has spoken to us in [by] His Son." John writes, "And the Word [Jesus] became flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came

through Jesus Christ" (John 1:14,17, ASV). In reply to Philip's request, "Show us the Father," Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father!" (John 14:8-9,7, NASB).

This is true because Jesus is the "radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Heb. 1:3, NASB; cf. John 1:18; Col. 1:15).

B. *The Holy Spirit — Revealer of Truth.* The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). He is a source of truth and a revealer of truth. Jesus said, "When He, the spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you [apostles] into *all the truth*" (John 16:13, NASB). He also said, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you *all* things, and bring to your remembrance *all* that I said to you" (John 14:26, NASB).

Jesus had taught the apostles for nearly three years. When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, He empowered them to recall Jesus' teachings. He also taught them what Jesus had lacked time to teach (John 16:12-13). Thus the apostles received all the truth Jesus had for them. We need no further revelations since we have all we need in the New Testament — the apostles' teaching.

C. *The Bible — God's Written Truth.* The truth that God sent to man was then written down in permanent form. This made it readily available to all people in all times. The writing, however, was not left to the faulty memories of men, but was supervised by the Holy Spirit. We call this "inspiration." He thus guaranteed the accuracy and the adequacy of His Word. (See John 14:26; II Pet. 1:19-21; II Sam. 23:2; II Tim. 3:16-17). This is reassuring!

Jesus said, "Thy *word* is Truth" (John 17:17). Paul said when the Christians received the gospel, they "accepted it

not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the *Word of God*" (I Thess. 2:13, NIV). We, like the first Christians, are confident the Bible is God's Word — God's Truth!

It is also sufficient for all our needs. John Greenleaf Whittier expressed this thought poetically in "Miriam."

We search the world for truth; we cull
The good, the pure, the beautiful
From graven stone and written scroll
From all old flower-fields of the soul;
And weary seekers of the best,
We come back laden from our quest,
To find that all the sages said
Is in the BOOK our mothers read!

D. God reveals Himself through nature. God does use other means to make Himself known to man, like His created universe. Paul discusses this in Romans 1:19-20; Acts 17:24-29. This is called "general" revelation, since it is available to all mankind, and the knowledge is general in nature. From creation we can learn that God *is*, and that He is powerful (Rom. 1:20), but we cannot ascertain His character nor His plan of redemption. We need the Bible to tell us that.

IV. The Loss of Truth in Modern Times

We have been studying what the Bible says about truth. Let us now look at how the world views truth. Some alarming trends have developed during the twentieth century. Arthur Holmes states that modern man has lost the Judæo-Christian worldview. The problem, as he sees it, is that not only do many not believe Christianity to be true, but they no longer believe in truth! "An ade-

quate conception of truth itself is largely lost," he says (Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth*, p. 4).

Charles Colson writes, "Postmodernism . . . has tossed out the very notion of universal truth. Today we can no longer simply defend our faith as Truth, we must first defend the very concept of transcendent, universal truth" (*Christianity Today*, 6/20/94, p. 80).

Modern man's concern is not whether something is "right" but does it make one "feel good"; not is it "true" but does it "work." The 1960s adage, "If it feels good, do it," has been updated for the 1990s, "If it works, do it."

The prevailing worldview today is that:

A. *All truth is relative.* Since before Christ, men have debated whether truth is relative or absolute. Relativism was made popular in this century by scholars such as William James, John Dewey, and others. Since the 1940s, relativism has penetrated every facet of our society. Pilate's question is still with us, "What is truth?" (John 18:38).

1. *Relativism's central theme.* It teaches that truth is changeable; there are no abiding, timeless truths or absolute moral norms. Each act is to be evaluated in the context of the culture in which it appears. No act is to be judged true or false, good or bad, on the basis of some overall criterion, like the Bible. What is right or true to one person or culture, may not be to another. Each person or group must decide. There are no universal, absolute standards. Anything can be right under the "proper" situation: murder, incest, adultery, lying, etc. Right and wrong is determined by how something "turns out." Under relativism the *end* always justifies the means! Obviously, the distinction between true and false, good and bad has been blurred! *This is dangerous!*

2. *Relativism and Christianity.* Relativism has also invaded the religious world. In the name of "religious pluralism," it teaches that Christianity is only one of a number of acceptable religions which offer a system of helpful beliefs. However, *none are superior to the others!* "Respect cultural diversity" is the sacred slogan today. Toleration is the greatest virtue. You may choose Buddha, Mohammed, or Christ. It makes no difference since all are equally valid according to relativism. We have come from the idea that "every man has a right to his own opinion" to the absurd position that "every opinion is equally right!" Sadly, this false doctrine has invaded the church. A 1991 George Barna poll revealed that 67 percent of the American people believe there is no such thing as absolute truth. Many of these are church members. This is frightening to have so many Christians doubt or reject God's truth.

B. *The Poverty of Relativism.* A major weakness in the theory of relativism is that it provides no foundation on which to base one's morals or virtues. Dr. Francis Schaeffer tells of sharing a platform with former cabinet member and urban leader, John Gardner. Mr. Gardner was speaking to college students on the need to restore values to our culture. He gave a fervent plea to the young people. When he had finished, he opened the meeting for questions. After a long pause, a Harvard student asked, "On what do you build your values?!" Gardner, usually articulate and learned, paused, looked down, and in some pain, said, "I do not know!" How very sad!

When one turns from God and His Word, he has no firm foundation on which to base his values. As Dr. Schaeffer once said, "Modern man has both feet firmly plant-

ed in midair!" (Colson, *The Body*, p. 165). Small wonder that modern man is so uncertain and fearful of life.

C. Toleration and Truth. "Respect cultural diversity" is the sacred slogan of the "politically correct" today. As a result, the only stable virtue left in this relativistic age is "unbridled tolerance," which means that any and all doctrines, if sincerely held, are equally valid. With these people "there are no absolutes except the absolute that there can be *no absolutes!*" (Colson, *One Body*, p. 171).

How does the Christian, who believes there are spiritual absolutes, respond to this? What is the relation between truth and tolerance? The answer: We are tolerant with people, but not with God's eternal truths!

In Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4), He portrays His love for people and for truth. In talking with her, He crossed all kinds of cultural boundaries: 1) He was a man who shouldn't have been talking with a woman; 2) He was a Jew who should not have been involved with a Samaritan; 3) He was a religious teacher — rabbi — who shouldn't have been seen with a "sinner." Yet He crossed all these barriers to talk to her, to include her in His world. He was very tolerant with her but not with the truth. He did not say, "I'm okay and you're okay." He did not say, "All truths are equal." He told her the truth about her sordid life. "Loving truth, He did not let the situation prevent Him from saying what was true. Loving the woman, He did not let the world prevent Him from acting on the basis of that love." Should we not do the same?

Paul makes this clear in his writings. In matters of opinion, he urges great patience and tolerance. See Romans 14 & I Corinthians 8 for his discussion on eating

certain foods and observing special days. First Corinthians 9:19-23 reveals his practice of tolerance as regards opinions.

But in dealing with basic truth he was unbending, adamant, unmovable! Concerning the gospel of Christ he says in Galatians 1:8, "Even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, *let him be accursed!*" For emphasis, he repeats, "I say again . . . *let him be accursed!*" (Gal. 1:9, NASB).

When the Judaizers tried to force circumcision on the Gentiles, believing they were not saved by the gospel, Paul said, "We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you!" (Gal. 2:5, NIV). We may be tolerant and forbearing with people, *but not with essential beliefs!* We should be tolerant with opinions, *but not with truth!* With it we must *stand firm*, even though some would call us *intolerant!*

V. Christianity Does Offer Absolute Truth

A. *Evidence for absolute truth* "To say that truth is absolute rather than relative means that it is unchanging and universally the same" (Holmes, *All Truth*, p. 37) For example:

1. *Nature provides examples of unchanging truths.* The multiplication table points to an absolute — 2+2 always equals 4, never 3 or 5. The North Star is always at the same place to guide the nocturnal traveler. The earth travels 595,000,000 miles in its annual trip around the sun. The time to make that trip has never been known to vary as much as a second. Without these constants in our phys-

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ical world, the astronauts would never have reached the moon! Nature has many evidences of unchanging truths.

2. *Logical reasoning points to unchanging values.* A college professor was lecturing on absolutes. To prove his point he said, "I tell you there are absolutes in this world. And I am going to fail any student who does not agree with me!" One student, highly incensed, stormed from the classroom shouting, "That's not fair!" The teacher smiled and said, "Thank you, my friend, for proving my point." You see, the student had appealed to a universal belief that some things are "fair" and some are "unfair." If there are no absolutes, where did that conviction originate?

3. *The Bible teaches absolute truth.* The Bible says that God is absolute — unchanging. God says, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is *no God.*" He also said, "For I, the LORD, do not change" (Isa. 45:5; Mal. 3:6, NASB).

Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever." Jesus is unchanging!

Isaiah wrote, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever!" Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Isa. 40:8; Matt. 24:35, NASB). Jesus said that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). He is saying that it never fails; it is forever sure and true! (Rom. 3:4).

The prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament "were convinced that God's revelation, of which they were the vehicles and custodians, was true. True in an absolute sense. It was not merely true to them; it was not merely true in their time; it was not true approximately. What God had done was true universally,

absolutely, and enduringly!" (Wells, *No Place for Truth*, pp. 259-260). The One who said, "I am the truth," said also, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). *He surely knew!*

B. Blessings of believing and obeying Truth.

1. *Forgiveness and freedom.* A guilty conscience is a distressing companion when one is burdened by sin. But Peter says that we "purify" the soul when we obey the "truth," and thereby remove the guilt and the sin (I Pet. 1:22). What a blessing!

Also, knowing and obeying the "truth of the gospel" brings freedom (Gal. 2:5; 5:1). Freedom from sin, freedom from the Law, and freedom from the fear of life and death (Gal. 5:1; II Cor. 5:1-2). Some think that obedience to God's Word is a state of bondage. "But truth does not enslave; it liberates." Jesus promised, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32, NASB).

2. *Walking in truth brings confidence and peace.* To some, "relative truth" may appear as a convenient arrangement; "Whatever I deem as right is right." But to others it is a source of despair. It is like traveling on a long journey with no road map; or sailing on a boundless sea with no compass! Jeremiah says, "O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (10:23, ASV). *We need help from God!*

For instance,

To be lost without knowing the way out; to face death without knowing how to escape its sting; to sense the certainty of judgment without knowing forgiveness — could anything be more agonizing? And the pain is only slightly relieved when the only solutions we have are subjective opinions and the relative conclusions of the moment.

This is why it is such an indescribable blessing to have the Bible as our source of truth. It is like a solid rock in the midst of quicksand. It is a firm foundation for hope and trust and assurance! (Cottrell, *His Truth*, p. 14)

Paul writes, "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist" (Eph. 6:14, NIV; cf. Isa. 11:5). In Jesus' day, the worker, runner, or soldier "girded himself" when ready for the task. It was a symbol of readiness for service. The girdle kept the parts of clothing or armor in place and prevented any entangling (cf. Heb. 12:1).

Truth preserves a man from being entangled with sin, or "carried about by every wind of doctrine . . ." (Eph. 4:14, NASB). "It makes the soul sincere, firm, constant, and always on guard. A man who has no consistent views of truth, is just the man for the adversary successfully to assail" (Albert Barnes, "Ephesians," *Notes on the New Testament*, p. 128).

It is truly a blessing to have the truth of the Scriptures to guide us each day and all the way!

VI. The Danger of Rejecting God's Truth

Whether the Bible is "relative" or "absolute" truth is a serious matter. The skepticism concerning truth results from a loss of faith in God as the "ultimate truth" and a rejection of Scripture as God's revealed, absolute truth. Here are some dangers in this rejection:

A. *The danger of trading the truth for a lie.* Paul lamented those in his day who exchanged the God of glory for images of animals, birds, and reptiles. He said, while "professing to be wise, they became fools!" Because "They exchanged the *truth* of God for a *lie*, and worshiped and

served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:22,25, NASB). God for idols — what a bargain! Paul states that one who does that is "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

Man is inherently religious. He does not remain a spiritual vacuum. When he leaves one god, he creates or accepts another. Today, we see educated people reject the simple truth of Christ for absurd and inane beliefs. Some will deny the gospel and turn to Satanism, astrology, the occult, etc. How sad! The price of denying God's truth!

B. *To deny truth is to risk God's wrath.* Paul writes, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the *truth* in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18, NASB).

Why would anyone reject God's truth? Paul says that when the "lawless one" comes, many will be deceived and perish. He explains, "They perish because they refused to *love the truth* and so be saved" (II Thess. 2:10, NIV). A second reason they did not believe was that they "delighted in wickedness" more than the truth (II Thess. 2:12, NIV). Some people are lost because they love their *sins* more than they love *salvation*! If one is to find truth, he must desire to know it, and be willing to accept it, for God does not force His truths upon us (cf. John 7:17). This is why God's wrath looms over the one who denies and suppresses His truths and prefers his sins and "unrighteousness."

In Romans 1, Paul describes the grim fate of those who prefer sin to truth. Three times he pronounces the solemn words, "God gave them up!" (Rom. 1:24,26,28, ASV). A.T. Robertson says these words sound like "clods falling on the caskct!" God's wrath falling on the sinner who rejects God's truths!

C. *No hope of salvation if the truth is rejected.* Paul speaks of "the word of truth, the gospel," and "the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5; Gal. 2:5,14, NASB). It is this gospel that "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth . . ." (Rom. 1:16, ASV).

When we believe and obey this gospel, we are forgiven — saved. When we refuse to obey it, we are lost. Jesus said, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36, ASV). Paul adds that when Jesus returns with his mighty angels, "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (II Thess. 1:7-8, NIV).

Thankfully, we need not suffer His wrath. At great cost God has provided a way of escape. At Calvary, while we were steeped in sin, God showed His love for us — Jesus died and paid the penalty for our sin, and provided salvation for all who accept it. Paul adds, "having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him" (Rom. 5:9, NASB). *To God be the glory, great things He has done!*

VII. *The Church — "The Pillar and Ground of the Truth"*

A. *The truth preserved.* Paul told Timothy that "the church of the living God" is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). A pillar is a column supporting the weight of a building. Ground means a "support" or "foundation" which undergirds the building.

"In other words, God has established His church in the world . . . to hold up the truth as a pillar supports a roof;

and to keep it unshaken as a firm foundation supports a building" (C.C. Crawford, *The Restoration Plea*, p. 182).

The truth of God, the everlasting gospel, given to save the world, was entrusted to the church — to be preserved, to be defended, and to be transmitted to future times. Without the support and steadiness given divine truth, by the church, it would long ago have vanished from the earth.

When the church believes, obeys, and lives the truth, then the *truth is preserved!*

B. *The truth proclaimed.* Jesus commanded the New Testament Church to "preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15-16), "Make disciples . . . baptizing them" (Matt. 28:19-20), and proclaim repentance and forgiveness "in His name to all the nations" (Luke 24:47). Timothy was told to take Paul's teaching and entrust it "to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2, NASB). The Gospel Truth is for every one, and it must be preached until *all* have heard it!!

When it came to the gospel, the New Testament Christians were firm and unyielding. Today, they would be called intolerant and dogmatic. However, they were not intolerant of people but only of sin and error! They were inflexible on the truth of the gospel. They believed Jesus when He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; *no man cometh to the father but by [through] me*" (John 14:6, KJV). They agreed with Peter who said, "There is salvation in no one else" — except Jesus! (Acts 4:12).

Concerning Jesus and the gospel, they "offered no compromise; brooked no opposition. With the apostles, it was Christ or nothing . . ." (C.C. Crawford, *The Restoration Plea*, pp. 189-190).

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It was this steadfast loyalty to Christ and Christianity which gave them the power to conquer in their day. That same loyalty will make the Lord's church victorious today. It is not easy to stand for truth — *but stand we must!*

Remember the words of James Russell Lowell"

Though the cause of evil prosper,
 Yet 'tis truth alone is strong.
Truth forever on the scaffold;
 Wrong forever on the throne.
Yet that scaffold sways the future
 And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
 Keeping watch above His own.
 — "The Present Crisis"

TRUTH

1. Define truth. _____

2. What is the source of truth? _____
3. Through what means has God revealed Himself and His truth to man? _____

4. What alarming worldview concerning truth has developed in the 20th century? _____
5. What is meant by the statement: "All truth is relative"?

6. What is meant by "absolute truth"? _____

7. List some proof for absolute truth. _____

8. What are some blessings of standing on the truths of God's Word? _____

9. Explain how the church is the "pillar and ground of the truth." _____

LESSON 3

Hope — The Anchor of the Soul

- I. The Importance of Hope
 - A. Hope is a prominent theme in the Bible.
 - B. Hope is important in our daily lives
- II. Basis or Ground for the Christian's Hope
 - A. False hope — Wrong foundation
 - B. True hope — Right foundation
- III. Metaphors Descriptive of the Christian's Hope
 - A. Hope Is the Christian's Refuge — Shelter
 - B. Hope Is the Christian's Anchor
 - 1. The Christian's hope is "sure and steadfast."
 - 2. The Christian's hope "enters within the veil."
- IV. For What Should the Christian Hope?
 - A. Hope for the resurrection from the dead
 - B. Hope for full or complete salvation

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C. Hope for eternal life

D. Hope for seeing and sharing God's glory

V. The Need for Hope Today

A. The tragedy of a life "without hope"

B. The blessings of a life "with hope"

It is often said, "Where there's life, there's hope." Alexander Pope wrote, "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." Hope is a key element in our natural and our spiritual lives.

What is hope? Webster defines it as, "Desire with expectation of obtaining what is desired, or belief that it is obtainable." The New Testament word for hope refers to "a favorable and confident expectation." The Hebrew word means "to wait with confidence."

Hope includes "the happy anticipation of good." It is coupled with faith, with trust, and has to do with the future and the unseen (Heb. 11:1; Ps. 71:5; Rom. 8:24-25).

William Barclay writes: "Hope is characteristically the Christian virtue and it is something which for the non-Christian is impossible (Eph. 2:12). Only the Christian can hope to cope with life. And only the Christian can regard death with serenity and equanimity" (*New Testament Words*, p. 73).

I. The Importance of Hope

A. *Hope is a prominent theme in the Bible.* The word "hope" appears 129 times in the Bible (KJV). Its importance is seen in that: a) God is called "the God of hope" (Rom. 15:13); b.) Jesus is called "Christ Jesus our hope"

(I Tim. 1:1); c) Christians are to rejoice “in hope” (Rom. 12:12); d) hope “does not disappoint us,” or put us to shame (Rom. 5:5); e) “we are saved by hope” (Rom 8:24, KJV); and f) we are to be ready always to give “ a reason concerning the hope” that is in us (I Pet. 3:15, ASV).

Hope is one of the three great pillars of the Christian faith, along with faith and love (I Cor. 13:13). It is one of the sevenfold truths of Christianity — one of the seven basics of Christian unity (Eph. 4:3-6). Hope is called: “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13), the “good hope” (II Thess. 2:16), “a living hope” (I Pet. 1:3), and “a better hope,” both “sure and steadfast” (Heb. 7:19; 6:19). Truly a doctrine worth studying!

B. Hope is important in our daily lives. Charles Sawyer writes: “Of all the forces that make for a better world, none is so indispensable, none so powerful as hope.” In all of life’s endeavors, hope plays a vital part. The farmer plants and harvests “in hope” of sharing in the crops (I Cor. 9:10). The student studies hard hoping that it will equip him for a fruitful life. We marry and establish homes in hope of children and a rich life together.

It is “hope” that sustains us in financial crises, physical sickness, family calamities, and death. Hope that tomorrow will bring a brighter day! It is this “hope in the future” that brings “joy in the present”!

II. The Basis or Ground for the Christian’s Hope.

A. False hope — Wrong foundation. Some people have hope but it is based on a fraudulent foundation — it rests on sand not on Rock! (Matt. 7). Some hope is mere wishful thinking. In former times a girl might have a well-

filled "hope chest," only to find it an empty dream! The hope had no sure basis.

Many today reject Christ and His gospel, and risk their eternal souls on some futile hope with no foundation. When facing death they often find themselves yearning for some ray of hope beyond the horizon. A classic example of this was the case of Robert G. Ingersoll.

Ingersoll, who had spent his life denouncing Christianity and scoffing at the Bible, was asked to speak at the funeral of his brother, Ebon Clark Ingersoll. As he gazed on the silent form of his brother, tears filled his eyes and he bowed his head on the casket and wept. With a struggle, he regained his composure and spoke these memorable words:

"Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word; but in the night of death *Hope sees a star* and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing!" (Quoted by Carl Ketcherside, *Simple Trusting Faith*, p. 54).

The "star" and the "rustling wing" revealed the deep longing of his heart for life, and for some word of hope from beyond the grave. *How sad that he had spent his life rejecting the one sure foundation that would have given him "hope" — Jesus and the gospel!*

B. True hope — Right foundation. The Christian's hope is based on:

1. *God and his promises.* Psalm 146:5: Blessed is the one "whose hope is in the LORD his God." Jeremiah 17:7:

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD." Paul said, "We have put our hope in the living God" (I Tim. 4:10, NIV).

Romans 10:11 states that anyone who "trusts in Him will never be put to shame" or "be disappointed." Because God's promises are sure, Joshua said, "Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed: *all came to pass*" (Josh. 21:45). F.F. Bruce says, "A hope which fails of realization does make one ashamed, but the hope based on the promise of God is assured of fulfillment" (Bruce, *Romans*, p. 123).

2. *Jesus and the gospel.* Paul speaks of "Christ Jesus, who is our hope" (I Tim. 1:1). Colossians 1:27: "Christ in you, the *hope of glory*" We in Christ, Christ in us is our hope. Paul urges the Christians to "continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard" (Col. 1:23, NASB).

In Jesus' death, He paid the penalty for sin, thereby freeing us from its guilt (I Pet. 2:24; Rom. 8:1-2). In His resurrection, He "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:10, ASV). Peter states that through "His great mercy" God "has caused us to be born again to a *living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3, NASB). Jesus confirmed this when He said, "Because I live, you shall live also" (John 14:19, NASB). *The gospel — a sure basis for our hope!* We sing with Edward Mote:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

Sound Doctrine

But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the Solid Rock, I stand:
All other ground is sinking sand!

III. Metaphors Descriptive of the Christian's Hope

The Scriptures have a number of terms describing the Christian's hope. Here are two.

A. *Hope is the Christian's refuge — shelter.* In Hebrews 6:17-18, we read, "In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of his purpose, interposed [confirmed] with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us" (NASB).

There were two places in the Old Testament where a person could flee for refuge from the avenger:

1. *The altar in the temple* (Exod. 21:12-14; I Kgs. 1:50-53). He would take hold of the horns on the altar. If innocent he could be spared. If guilty, he would be killed (I Kgs. 2:28-34).

2. *The six cities of refuge* (Num. 35:9-28). If a person by accident killed someone, he could flee to one of these cities and there find refuge from the avenger until he could have a fair trial.

Hebrews 6:18 pictures our hope as a refuge from the storms of life and the "coming wrath," as we grasp the "hope of eternal life" offered in the gospel (Titus 1:2).

B. *Hope is the Christian's anchor for the soul.* A second metaphor is found in Hebrews 6:19, "This hope we have as an *anchor* of the soul." "This figure does not occur else-

where in the Bible, but in the Greek and Roman classics, and also on ancient coins, an anchor is often used as an emblem of hope" (Robert Milligan, *Hebrews*, p. 187).

The anchor became a symbol of hope for Christians in the first and second centuries. They placed it on their jewelry, tombstones, etc. Anchors on ships were used to secure them during storms and to keep them safe in harbors, to prevent shipwreck (I Tim. 1:19). Large ships carried two or more. The ship carrying Paul had at least four (Acts 27:29).

1. *The Christian's hope is "sure and steadfast"* (Heb. 6:19). This "anchor of hope" will not slip or lose its grip. It is "firm and secure" (NIV). As long as we hold firmly to our hope in Christ our "soul ship" will ride the seas of life into that eternal harbor — our "Haven of Rest."

Though the angry surges roll
On my tempest driven soul,
I am peaceful, for I know,
Wildly though the winds my blow,
I've an anchor safe and sure
That can ever more endure,
And it holds. My anchor holds!

2. *The Christian's hope "enters within the veil."* Hebrews 6:19-20 states, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us." This veil refers to the one in the temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The veil was symbolic of death and the Holy of Holies was symbolic of heaven. Hebrews says that our "hope-anchor" reaches into heaven where Jesus has already

gone, as our "forerunner." There, as our High Priest, "to appear in the presence of God for us," to make atonement for our sins (Heb. 9:23-24).

While Christ is there and our hope in Him is steadfast, there is no danger. Delitzsch writes, "The iron anchor of the seaman is cast downward into the deep of the sea, but the hope-anchor of the Christian is thrown upward into the deep of heaven, and passing through the super-celestial waters, finds there its ground and fast holding" (Milligan, *Hebrews*, p. 188).

Hope, like a heavenly sky hook, goes into heaven and takes hold of the throne of God. This is why hope, the anchor of our souls, holds us steady and secure. It is as secure as God Himself!

IV. For What Should the Christian Hope?

A. Hope for the resurrection from the dead. Paul states that he had "suffered the loss of all things," to "gain Christ," and the righteousness that came through Him. For he desired above all to "attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:8-11, NASB). This was the hope of Israel (Acts 24:15-16), and of all mankind. In fact, Paul said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Cor. 15:19, KJV).

The Christian now, because of Christ's resurrection, eagerly anticipates his own resurrection when Jesus returns (I Thess. 4:16-17). This great fact is memorialized in the act of baptism. Baptism points two ways — backward to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and forward to the glorious resurrection of the believer. As A.T. Robertson wrote: "Baptism is a picture of the past

and of the present, and a prophecy of the future. The matchless preacher of the new life in Christ!"

B. Hope for full or complete salvation. When we believe and obey the gospel, we are saved - from all past sins. But we cannot at this time see our final and complete salvation until we enter into eternal life. Paul refers to this as "the hope of salvation" (I Thess. 5:8, ASV). He says, "We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23, NIV).

In the New Testament, salvation is referred to in three tenses: the past, the present, and the future.

1. *It is a "past event"* when, by the grace of God, we obeyed the gospel and received forgiveness for all past sins (Rom. 8:24; Mark 16:16).

2. *It is a "present experience"* as we grow and mature in Christ, and work out our salvation with fear and trembling (II Pet. 3:18; II Cor. 5:17; Phil. 2:12).

3. *It is a "future hope"* that we long for and work toward throughout our lives (Rom. 8:23; 13:11; I Thess. 5:8).

Full salvation includes an adoption and a redemption:

a. *Our full "adoption as sons"* (Rom. 8:23). We became sons of God when we believed and were baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). This "adoption" Paul refers to in Rom. 8:23 is the final resurrection when we "will be publicly and universally acknowledged as the sons of God" (Bruce, *Romans*, p. 171; Lard, *Romans*, p. 274).

b. *The redemption of the body.* This is when we receive our new spiritual bodies made in the likeness of Christ's glorified body (Phil. 3:20-21). This is the "inheritance," which is "reserved in heaven" for us. It is the "salvation

ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:4-5, NASB). These are two very important factors of complete salvation.

C. Hope for eternal life. One of Paul's reasons for being a Christian was "in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago" (Titus 1:2; cf. 3:7). The rich young ruler asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life (mark 10:17). Man wants to live eternally. Now in Christ Jesus he can! (Rom. 6:23; Heb. 5:9; John 3:16).

D. Hope for seeing and sharing God's glory. Paul said, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2). Through sin, man has fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). But now, in Christ, we will not only see the "glory of God," but we will share that glory!

Jesus prayed that His apostles would be with Him and see His glory (John 17:24). Peter, James, and John saw some of His glory at the Transfiguration (Matt. 19:2; Luke 9:29). Paul saw Christ's glory on the Damascus Road (Acts 26:13).

Paul wrote: "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4, NASB). John states that "when He appears, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is" (I John 3:2, NIV).

Part of our glory will be that:

1. *We will have a body like "His glorious body"* (Phil. 3:21). Our new bodies will be: imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (I Cor. 15:42f).

2. *We will have a glorious home* (John 14:1-3). More details of our heavenly home are given in Revelation 21-22.

3. *We will wear a crown of "glory"* (I Pet. 5:1,4,10). Surely Paul was right when he said, "The sufferings of

this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us!" (Rom. 8:18, NASB).

V. The Need for Hope Today

A. *The tragedy of life "without hope."* Our world needs many things. Hope is certainly near the top of the list. Many are like the Gentiles Paul writes about "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). The former is a result of the latter.

Before Christ came, the Gentiles were in God's world but had no true knowledge of Him. They had some evidence of His favor and love, but no hope of spending eternity with Him! This is true of all sinners who know not God. They are "Christless, Godless, Hopeless."

After a demonstration in Los Angeles, a sign was left at the Federal Building on Wilshire Boulevard which read: "There is no hope without pot!" Apparently, the only hope they had experienced was in the fanciful world induced by pot! How sad that their sign did not read, "There is no hope without God." Same number of words, same number of letters, but worlds apart in meaning! There is a shortage of hope in our world!

Dante, in his "Inferno" wrote that over the Gates of Hell are inscribed these words, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!" This is true for "those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (II Thess. 1:8, NIV).

But because of a loving God there is "good news" for lost mankind! Here is the "Rest of the Story."

B. *The blessings of a life "with hope."* Victor Hugo wrote, "The word that God writes on the brow of every

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man is hope." Jesus came and by His great mercy, "we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3, RSV). Before Jesus ascended back to heaven He told His apostles, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2,3, NASB). *HOPE!*

From the southern end of Africa extends a long cape which for centuries was considered a fatal barrier to all navigators. Whoever was caught in its swirling waters went down to a watery grave. It was called the Cape of Storms. Finally a bold explorer sailed around it and opened for Europe and the world a new route to the East Indies. It is now known as the Cape of Good Hope.

So also there jutted out into the sea of life the black Cape of Death, and all who sailed beyond it seemed to be gone forever. But Jesus sailed through this dark and awful cape and emerged "alive forevermore" on the other side (Rev. 1:18). He thus changed it into the Cape of Good Hope through the "hope of the Gospel" (Col. 1:23).

1. Some of the blessings of hope.

a. Joy and Peace. Paul prays, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13, NASB). Joy and peace are blessings that God gives us as we exercise hope in Him. He wants us to "abound in hope" and through the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to do so.

b. Hope produces "perseverance, endurance." Romans 8:25, "But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it" (NASB). We hope for what

is in the future, perhaps a distant future. It may take time to obtain the object of our hope. But sincere hope combined with genuine faith will persevere and "wait eagerly for it." Jesus tells of a servant who lost faith in his master's return and stopped looking for it. He began to live wickedly. To his dismay the master returned and punished him severely. He lost his endurance when he lost his faith and hope.

c. Hope motivates purity of life. John writes, "We know that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every one who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure" (I John 3:2-3, RSV). Peter echoes this thought in II Peter 4:11,14. Hope is a great incentive for holy living.

d. Hope brings confidence. Paul constantly encouraged the early Christians not to "lose heart" in their service to Christ (Gal. 6:9; Eph. 3:13; II Cor. 4:1). Discouragement, lack of confidence, can devastate a weak Christian. Paul states that God loves us and "by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope" (II Thess. 2:16, NIV). That "good hope" tells us not to "lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary" (Gal. 6:9, NASB).

A firm belief in God's promises gives the hope that sustains us through all of life's trials. In Paul's eloquent appeal in II Cor. 4:7-8, he concludes that this "momentary, light affliction" was not worth comparing to the eternal glory awaiting him. This hope brought confidence and comfort!

Alexander Campbell debated Robert Owen in 1828 on the subject of the existence of God. In preparation for the debate, Mr. Owen visited Mr. Campbell at his home

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in Bethany, Virginia, now West Virginia. Mr. Owen had spent his life denying God, Christ, and the inspiration of the Bible.

In one of their excursions about the farm, they came to Mr. Campbell's family burying-ground when Mr. Owen stopped and addressing himself to Mr. Campbell said,

"There is one advantage I have over the Christian: I am not afraid to die. Most Christians have fear in death, but if some few items of my business were settled, I should be perfectly willing to die at any moment."

"Well," answered Mr. Campbell, "you say you have no fear in death, have you any *hope* in death?"

After a solemn pause, Mr. Owen replied that he did not!

"Then," rejoined Mr. Campbell (pointing to an ox standing nearby), "you are on a level with that brute. He has fed till he is satisfied, and stands in the shade whisking off the flies, and has *neither hope nor fear in death.*" (Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, Vol. 1, p. 242).

William Barclay writes, "The Christian hope is not simply a trembling, hesitant hope that perhaps the promises of God may be true. It is the confident expectation that they cannot be anything else than true!" (*New Testament Words*, p. 76).

An unknown poet wrote:

Sometimes on the Rock, I tremble,
Faint of heart and weak of knee;
But the steadfast Rock of Ages
Never trembles under me!"

HOPE — THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL

1. What is hope? _____
2. Hope is one of the pillars of the Christian faith. The other two are _____ and _____.
3. The Christian's hope is based on:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
4. Explain the purpose for the six cities of refuge. See Numbers 35:9-28.

5. Explain how hope is like an anchor.
List two facts about the Christian anchor. _____
and _____
6. Our full salvation includes these two blessings (see Rom. 8:23):
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
7. When the Christian shares God's glory, it will include:
 - a. Philippians 3:21 _____
 - b. John 14:1-3 _____
 - c. I Peter 5:1,4; Revelation 2:10 _____
8. List some blessings of "hope."
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

LESSON 4

The Plan of Redemption

- I. The Origin and Reason for the Plan of Redemption
 - A. The Origin of the Plan
 - B. The Reason for the Plan
- II. The Unfolding of God's Plan of Redemption
 - A. God begins preparation for man's redemption
 - B. The Law — Used to prepare Israel for Christ
 - C. Old Testament types and prophets — Foretell Christ's coming and death
- III. The Completion of the Plan of Redemption
 - A. Christ's death and God's Plan
 - B. Climax of Plan — The Cross and Resurrection
 - C. The Divine and Human Sides of Redemption
- IV. Efforts to Change the Plan of Salvation
 - A. Attempts to "add to" the Plan

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- B. Schemes to remove the “blood” from the gospel
- C. Efforts to take “baptism” from the gospel plan
- D. Substitutes for the Plan
- E. Eliminating Jesus from the Plan

Various names have been used to describe God’s Plan of Redemption, such as: “the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13), “the word of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:19), and the “Scheme of Redemption.” All refer to God’s purpose to save mankind.

The primary meaning of the word “redeem” is to “buy back.” In the Old Testament the word “redeem” was used when a slave was bought back and set free, or when a piece of land was redeemed (Lev. 25:48-49; Ruth 4:1-4).

I. The Origin and the Reason for the Plan of Redemption

A. *The Origin.* The Plan for redeeming man was created in heaven by God “before the foundation of the world” (I Pet. 1:19-20; Eph. 1:4; Matt. 25:34). God had decided to make man in His image (Gen. 1:26; 5:1). He undoubtedly knew that man would fall, so the “remedy” was already planned before man was created. The remedy was the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7).

B. *The Reason.* Sin was the reason God prepared the Plan. Adam and Eve sinned in Eden. Man has continued to sin since then (Rom. 3:23). Jesus said, “Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34). In the New Testament men are declared to be in bondage — the Jews to the Law (Gal. 4:3; Rom. 7:1); the Gentiles to idols (Gal. 4:8; I Cor. 12:2), and all men to sin (Rom. 6:16-17).

God's purpose in the Plan was to release man from this bondage through the gospel (Rom. 6:17-18).

II. The Unfolding of God's Plan of Redemption

A. God begins preparation for man's redemption. When man sinned in Eden, God was ready. He immediately began to implement His Plan.

1. *He predicted the coming of the Messiah* (Gen. 3:15).

2. *He chose Abraham to head up His "chosen people"* and gave him the Promise that through his seed the Savior would come (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18).

3. *God gave the Law to Moses and Israel at Sinai* (Exod. 20).

B. The Law — used to prepare Israel for Christ.

1. *God used the Law to define or reveal sin.* Paul said, "Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin," and "I would not have known what sin was except through the Law" (Rom. 3:20; 7:7, NIV). Through the Law God placed a magnifying glass on sin so that man could clearly see and recognize it.

2. *The Law revealed the extent and enormity of sin.* Paul said that the Law, which was good, brought death in order that "sin might become exceeding sinful" (Rom. 7:13, ASV). Sin was now seen in its true nature!

3. *The Law proved to man that he was powerless to keep all the laws of God.* It convinced him that he *needed* a Savior (Gal. 3:19). Thus, the Law prepared Israel for Christ!

C. Old Testament types and prophets — foretell Christ's coming and death.

1. *As God "unfolded" His Plan,* He filled the Old Testament with types or shadows that prefigured the real

events in the New Testament, for example, the animals sacrificed in the Temple worship, the blood sprinkled on the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat. All these taught that it took a death, blood, to atone for sin. Other types foreshadowed Christ: the offering of Isaac (Gen. 22), the Passover lamb in Egypt (Exod. 12), Moses and Melchizedek (Acts 3:22-23; Heb. 5:5-6), all point to Jesus.

2. *The Prophets foretold His coming.* From Moses to Malachi the prophets Prophesied the coming of the Redeemer — over 300 predictions in the Old Testament of Christ. On the road to Emmaus, Luke says Jesus taught the two, "Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). By type and by prophecy, the Old Testament prepared Israel for Christ.

III. The Completion of the Plan of Redemption

A. *Christ's death and God's Plan.* After centuries of preparation God completes His Plan. Paul states "when the fulness of time came, God sent forth his Son . . . that he might redeem them that were under the law . . ." (Gal. 4:4-5, ASV). Christ achieved this redemption when he "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity" (Titus 2:14, ASV). Peter explains, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (I Pet. 2:24).

When a slave was redeemed, it required a "redeemer" and a "ransom." Christ our redeemer paid the ransom for our release. The ransom was His own life. He came to earth "to give His life a 'ransom for many'" (Mark 10:45). Man was in captivity. He could not break the grip of sin.

Jesus paid the price so man could go free. Under grace, "Sin shall not be your master" (Rom. 6:14, NIV).

Christ paid a costly price for our freedom — His own blood (Acts 20:28; Heb. 9:12; 5:7-9; 12:2-3). "Christ redeemed us from the 'curse of the law' having become a curse for us . . ." (Gal. 3:13). He bore the curse (penalty) that would have rested on us!

President Harry Truman was asked to speak at a rally to raise funds to help the children of a White House guard who had been killed protecting the president. With great feeling, Mr. Truman said, "You can't imagine how a man feels when someone else dies for him!" *The Christian can!*

Christ's redemption provided the means of saving people in all ages. It reaches the past. Christ "has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant" (Heb. 9:15, NIV). Israel had their sacrifices but they did not remove sin, since "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). But the cross of Christ did provide forgiveness for those under the Law who had offered the sacrifices God commanded.

It has been said, "The blood of Calvary flows backward as well as forward." *All sins are forgiven through Christ — before and since the cross.*

B. Climax of Plan — The Cross and Resurrection. The Cross and the Resurrection completed the Plan of Redemption. Paul states it concisely of Christ "who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25, ASV). At the Cross, the ransom was paid, the curse removed; Christ had atoned for His people's sins. Christ was raised up to guarantee their jus-

tification or innocence. The resurrection forever revealed God's acceptance of His Son's sacrifice and atoning work.

C. *The divine and human sides of Redemption.* God's part of redemption has been completed. To receive this salvation, though, man must do his part. Jesus gave the conditions for receiving salvation. The apostles repeated them in Acts.

Jesus commanded sinners to: 1) believe — trust in Him as Lord and Savior (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:36), 2) repent and forsake their sins (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38), 3) confess Jesus as God's Son and their Savior (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10) 4) be baptized into Christ (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:26-27), and they would receive forgiveness. This is man's part in receiving this gift of grace.

IV. Efforts to Change the Plan of Salvation

A. *Attempts to "add to" the Plan.* The Judaizers in the New Testament taught that the gospel was insufficient to save. One needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses, as well as obey the gospel, to be saved (Acts 15:1,5). This was false, since the New Testament clearly states that the gospel and the gospel alone saves (Rom. 1:16; Acts 4:12). But it took a top-level conference led by the Holy Spirit and the apostles to settle the matter (Acts 15:6-29; Gal. 2:1-10). Seventh Day Adventists teach similar doctrine today.

B. *Schemes to remove the "blood" from the gospel.* Years ago some "liberal" churches removed from their hymn books the songs that referred to "blood." They considered them vulgar — "slaughterhouse religion." Yet Paul states that "In Him [Christ] we have redemption *through*

His blood" (Eph. 1:7). Hebrews 9:22 adds that "without" the shedding of blood there is *no* forgiveness." Peter almost fell into Satan's trap when he tried to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross. He did not understand — no blood, no forgiveness! (Matt. 16:21-23).

C. *Efforts to take "baptism" from the gospel plan.* There have been consistent efforts to remove baptism from the conversion process. Jesus gave the terms for receiving salvation. Baptism is one of them (Matt. 28:19). Some today deny that baptism is a part of that plan. They view it more as an option than an essential part of conversion — *not* necessary for forgiveness.

It is ironic that many who once believed that baptism is "for the forgiveness" of sins (Acts 2:38) now say it is not. While others who have not believed this, now are saying that it is part of Christ's salvation plan.

For instance, Dr. George R. Beasley-Murray, well-known Baptist scholar of Great Britain and author of the book *Baptism in the New Testament*, was interviewed by John A. Owston in 1990. One of the questions asked Dr. Beasley-Murray was "Would you view baptism as a part of conversion?"

Dr. Beasley-Murray replied,

"Oh, very definitely. The easiest way I find I can represent this among Baptists is that baptism is the 'completion' of conversion, and that in the New Testament the two, baptism and conversion, are never separated.

Once one realizes that baptism and conversion are inseparably kept together, then one can appreciate how it is that Paul can say, 'All you who were baptized into Christ did put on Christ' ("An Interview with a British Baptist," *Christian Standard* [Nov. 11, 1990], p. 5.)

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Jesus commanded baptism and made it part of the “new birth” of conversion (John 3:3-5; Mark 16:16). The Spirit-led apostles commanded and taught it as a condition for forgiveness (Acts 2:38). In eight cases of conversion in Acts, baptism is mentioned in each one as part of the process. *It seems highly dangerous to contradict Jesus and the apostles, and reduce their command to an option or a nonessential! Let’s not tamper with the Plan of Redemption.*

D. Substitutes for the Plan. Some would substitute the so-called “Sinner’s Prayer,” or the charge to “receive Jesus into your heart” for Jesus’ commands to the sinner (Mark 16:16). The only time in Acts an alien sinner is told to pray was when Ananias told Saul, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16). In other words, “Pray as you obey.” Don’t substitute praying for obeying!

It is well to remember that the prooftext used for the “receive Jesus” statement, Rev. 3:20, *does not refer to the “alien” sinner.* Rather, Jesus is speaking to the church at Laodicea, to Christians, seeking admission to their lives (Rev. 3:13).

E. Eliminating Jesus from the Plan. Perhaps the most disturbing trend yet is the idea that even Jesus himself is *not* necessary to salvation! David Neff writes, “Research shows that a significant portion of those who say they are ‘born again’ may have good feelings about Jesus and attend church, but according to pollster George Barna, nearly 30 percent of them say that all ‘good people’ will go to heaven, whether or not they have *embraced Jesus Christ.* another 10 percent just ‘don’t know’” (*Christianity Today*, 1994). As God’s “redeemed ones,” may we hold fast to our “Redeemer” and the one *sure* hope of heaven!

GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION

1. The primary meaning of the word "redeem" is _____.
2. The New Testament declares mankind to be in bondage.
 - a. The Jews to _____
 - b. The Gentiles to _____
 - c. All men to _____
3. The Law was used to prepare Israel for Christ. List 3 ways this was done.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
4. As God "unfolded" His plan, He filled the Old Testament with types depicting New Testament realities. List 3.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
5. The climax of God's Plan of Redemption was when Jesus was _____.
6. The Old Testament has over _____ prophecies of Jesus, the Messiah.
7. When a slave was redeemed, it required a _____ and a _____. Jesus was both (Gal. 4:5; Mark 10:45).
8. Discuss the divine and human sides of redemption.

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9. Explain two efforts to change the Plan of Salvation.

LESSON 5

Understanding Suffering

- I. The Problem of Pain and Evil
 - A. The problem explained
 - B. Pain — God's Warning System
 - C. Clarifying Some Words
- II. How Major Religions Explain Suffering
 - A. Judaism
 - B. Hinduism
 - C. Buddhism
 - D. Islam
- III. Some Causes or Reasons for Suffering
 - A. The natural universe — its orderly government
 - B. Man's freedom of choice — free will
 - C. Sin — the major cause of suffering
- IV. Suffering for Christ's Sake

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- A. Pain and suffering — normal in the Christian life
 - B. The Christian is in a war — between Good and Evil
 - C. Our response and reward — when suffering for Christ
- V. Some Benefits of Suffering
- A. Not all adversity brings benefits
 - B. Suffering as education
 - C. Some spiritual benefits through suffering
- VI. God Has Not Removed Evil and Pain — But He Came to Share It!
- A. Through suffering Jesus became our merciful High Priest
 - B. God provided a cure for sin and suffering

Pain and suffering are universal. It began in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:14-24). Suffering has affected men, in one way or another, ever since. We cause others pain by being born, in life we often inflict or receive pain, and in death most people die in pain.

Human suffering is not only universal, but is very complex. There are no easy answers why a particular affliction comes, nor why it affects any certain person. But this study should help gain a better understanding of the problem of evil and suffering in the world.

The modern Stoic's solution is to "Grin and bear it." Apathetic approach. Playboys or Hedonists can see no worthwhile purpose for suffering. "The Hedonist seeks by every diversion to escape suffering as long as possible and then await the cure by death." That's why suicides are so frequent. Ernest Hemingway wrote, "Death is the sovereign

remedy for all our misfortunes" (Wood, *Understanding Suffering*, p. 18).

There is a better approach to suffering than that. We will examine the Christian approach to pain and evil later.

I. The Problem of Pain and Evil

A. The problem explained. In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis states the problem concisely: "If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both" (p. 26).

Goodness and omnipotence are both attributes of God (Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:17-18). Yet because of evil and suffering they seem to contradict each other. Some assume that if God were good, He would not allow us to suffer. If He were all powerful He could prevent it. Why does He not? Is He too weak or too evil to do it?

One author illustrated the dilemma in this triangle:

GOD IS GOOD

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

EVIL EXISTS

If any two of these points are true, the third seems necessarily false. If God is Good and Omnipotent, Evil should not exist. If God is Omnipotent and Evil exists, then He could not be Good. If God is Good and Evil exists, the He must not be strong enough to remove the Evil. This has been called the "Inconsistent Triad."

The Christian sees another solution to this seeming problem. The rest of this study will deal with that solution.

B. Pain — God's warning system. Not all pain is bad. God has placed in the human body sensory nerves and pain receptors. These are vital to the welfare of the body. Pain serves to warn us that something is wrong inside of us. A headache may signal us to slow down, relax. A pain in the abdomen may mean there is an infection or an organ is damaged. Message: Seek help!

Pain can warn one to cease contact with something that is hurting the body. A man lost the feeling in his right arm. He would touch a hot stove, and not realize it until he saw the burn on his hand. He had to be extremely careful lest he cut his hand or arm and bleed to death before he realized it. His life was a nightmare because he lacked this warning system to help him.

C. Clarifying some words. It will help to explain some words used in this problem of pain. What do men mean and what does God mean when they use the words: omnipotent, good, and happy?

1. *What does it mean that "God is omnipotent"?* "Omnipotence" means "power to do all, or everything." C.S. Lewis comments, "His Omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible."

If we say that "God can give a man free will and at the same time withhold free will from Him," we have said nothing but nonsense! The second part contradicts the first part. They are two mutually exclusive alternatives. God can do anything that is possible to do, but not those things which are self-contradictory and intrinsically impossible to do.

2. *What do the words "good" and "happy" mean?* It is said if God were good, He would make us happy. Some use the word "good" to refer to that which is kindly, virtuous, just, righteous. God is Good. In fact He's the only one who is completely "Good," Jesus said (Matt. 19:17). Others use the word "good" referring to what they "enjoy doing."

"Happy" to some means to enjoy pleasure or good, a relief from pain, feeling cheerful, pleasant, and contented. To those who hold these definitions as the only meanings, life becomes a frantic search for that which makes them feel good. They seek only activities they enjoy doing and nothing else!

God, however, does not see health and happiness as the supreme good. Above all else God wants us to be Christlike. The good He seeks to bring out of every circumstance is that each of us might be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29, NASB).

"This is the good with which God is first of all concerned. He wants us to think like Christ, love like Christ, care like Christ, obey like Christ, and sacrifice like Christ" (Wood, *Understanding Suffering*, p. 17).

II. How Major Religions Explain Suffering

A. Judaism. Their main explanation is that men suffer because they sin. All suffering is caused by sin. This was the belief of Job's three so-called friends (Job 2:11-13) who urged him to confess his sin and repent. They believed "piety pays" and perversity punishes." The disciples seemingly had this in mind when they asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he

should be born blind?" (John 9:2, NASB). Jesus answered, "Neither." He implied there are other reasons for suffering besides sin.

B. Hinduism. Its answer is that the evils men suffer today are a result of the misdeeds in some previous existence. Blindness, bereavement, hunger, disaster and pain are all the merited punishments of wrongs done in a former life. This is the Hindu "doctrine of Karma" and is associated with the belief in Reincarnation or Transmigration of the soul.

This doctrine expresses the idea that a man must "reap what he sows." Every action carries with it its own penalty — can't separate the two. This offers no real relief for the suffering one.

C. Buddhism. Buddhism arose as a revolt against the doctrine of Karma in Hinduism. The thought of the endless repetition of reincarnation became so distasteful to Buddha, so contradictory and self-destroying, that he turned to a way of life in which evil could be forgotten or ignored.

His answer to the problem of evil was the extinction of desire. Evil resides in desire, and deliverance from evil must lie in the escape from or in death to desire. Cultivate the death of desire as the ultimate good. When one reaches a level of "no desires" he has reached Nirvana — the Buddhist heaven.

D. Islam. Islam has an answer for evil, but it carries little hope for the sufferer. Islam believes that evil, like good, comes as Allah dictates. Everything comes from him — good and bad. A rather forbidding fatalism rules at all levels. Real hope is unknown. When the man whose house has burned or the woman dying of cancer asks, "Why?" the answer is the same, "Allah willed it."

There is no real comfort or hope in any of these explanations! As Christians, we may not know all the reasons for adversity, but we know some. Plus, the Bible promises us help in coping with it! Look at some reasons for adversity in our lives.

III. Some Causes or Reasons for Suffering

A. The natural universe — its orderly government. God is the supreme authority in the world. When He created it, He established certain laws by which to govern it. When we obey these laws, life is pleasant, and when we disobey them, we suffer.

Sometimes the laws of nature seem to work against us. For instance, a window washer falls from his twenty-story-high scaffold to his death on the street below. He has broken the "law of gravity." An electrician forgets and grabs a naked wire carrying high voltage. He usually pays for the mistake with his life. A fire gets out of control and burns a house or a forest. Pressure builds up in the earth and a volcano erupts and men suffer.

Yet if God suspended the laws He created so that these tragedies did not occur, any kind of normal life for us would not be possible. The world would exist in chaos . . . We need to remember that the laws that sometimes lead to man's suffering are most often the sources of his blessings" (Kay Moll, *Blue and White*, Mar.-April, 1977, p. 2).

The story is told of a mother who pleaded with the stationmaster to hold the train another fifteen minutes in order for her husband to arrive. Their son was dying and the only chance to see him alive was to catch this train.

The stationmaster explained he could not possibly delay the departure for to do so might cause more serious problems for other people trying to make connections throughout the system.

It is true that this physical universe is at times a cause of much suffering. But we receive greater benefits from a world He governs by orderly rules, than we would from one based on whim and caprice. We trust God to know and give us the best. We think He has!

B. *Man's freedom of choice — free will.* When God created man, He made him in His image with the gift of free will. This freedom of choice has been called “the dubious privilege,” for often we suffer because of the choices we make. God could have made us with free will, or have made us like puppets. There were risks both ways. If He gave us free will, it meant that we could reject Him and His will. If we had no freedom to choose, then we would serve Him, but it would not be freely given out of love.

1. *Man's use of free will resulted in sin.* God took the risk and gave Adam and Eve the freedom to choose. But free will is meaningless unless one has a chance to use it. God needed to know if they would obey Him or not. So He gave them a “loyalty test” — an opportunity to exercise this freedom — in the case of the forbidden fruit. With help from Satan, they chose to disobey God and to eat! They failed to use their free will wisely. They disobeyed a positive command of God.

2. *Man's free will limits God.* Why doesn't God do something? When adversity strikes, this is the question many people ask. They forget that God limited His power over man by granting him free will. They forget that much of our adversity is our own fault. We drink too

much alcohol, drive too fast, wreck the car and kill ourselves or someone else. We break our marriage vows and wreck our home. Husband and wife suffer, the children suffer, their parents suffer, and their friends suffer. Why? Bad decisions!

What can God do? Presumably He could rescind the gift of free will and reduce us to robots and eliminate the pain of bad decisions. Or He could permit us to continue to choose, and experience both the joy and the sorrow of being free moral agents. God has chosen the latter.

Two men were walking through the slums of a large city. One of the men was a Christian, the other an atheist. As they looked upon the squalor, the filth, the sin, and disease that abounded everywhere, the atheist turned to the Christian and said, "If there is a God, He can't be much of a God, or He wouldn't allow conditions like this to exist."

The atheist was a barber. He ran a highly respectable shop in the city. As they walked on, they met a man who was shaggy and unkempt. His hair grew down the back of his neck and fell over his ears, and whiskers, which were tobacco-stained and filthy, covered his face.

The Christian turned to the atheist and said, "You couldn't be much of a barber. If you were, you wouldn't let a man like that go around with all that dirty hair all over his head and face."

The barber was indignant. He said, "Can I help it if that man would rather be dirty than clean? I have a good shop. I offer my services. If he would come to me, I could make a decent looking man out of him!"

Precisely! God faces the same problem. Jesus cried over Jerusalem, and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that

killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own brood under her wings, and *ye would not!* Behold, your house is left unto you *desolate!*" (Luke 13:34-35, ASV).

3. God's "permissive will" and "purposeful will." God does not willfully bring disease or calamity on us. The worst we can say is that He "permits" it to happen. He has a "purposeful" will, the things He definitely wants to happen. And He has a "permissive" will, the things He allows but does not cause or want to happen. Take for example, God and divorce (Matt. 19:1-8). Jesus said that God permitted it, but this is not what He desired. It was like "making a choice between two evils." It was better than the alternative. All of us have to make decisions like that occasionally.

C. *Sin — The major cause of suffering.* God warned Adam and Eve that the penalty for their sin would be death (Gen. 2:17). He also informed them that sin brought suffering.

Sin brought suffering to Eve through the pain of bearing children (Gen. 3:16). Sin brought suffering to Adam as he toiled to provide a living for his family (Gen. 3:19). The earth suffered from the curse placed upon it (Gen. 3:18; cf. Rom. 8:19-22). Finally, the serpent was made to suffer for his part in the fall of man (Gen. 3:14-15). Everyone and everything suffered when sin entered the world.

Sin has continued to leave a trail of tears from that time until now. Someone has said, "The history of our race is that of a funeral march from the cradle to the grave, to the music of the widow's sigh and the orphan's

cry. If all the tears shed from first to last were gathered into one volume, they would make a new ocean deeper than the Atlantic and broader than the Pacific. Were all the broken hearts from Eden to Gethsemane, and thence on to the present time, gathered together, there would be a new mountain range vaster than the Andes and higher than the Himalayas."

Unfortunately, we suffer for the sins of others as well as for our own. It is understandable that we should suffer for our own sins but less logical that we suffer for the sins of others. Yet the Bible says that children suffer for their father's iniquity (Num. 14:18; Exod. 34:7). We see also that a carload of teens may suffer because of the sin of a drunk driver. Whole nations have suffered because of the sin and greed of one man.

Why does this happen to innocent people? We don't fully know. But consider this: The same scripture that tells us the sins of parents affect the children to "the third and fourth generations of those who hate God" also says that He blesses the children for a thousand generations of parents who "love Him and keep His commandments" (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 7:9). The good we receive from godly parents can far outweigh the bad from ungodly parents — 3 to 4 vs. 1000. This is probably true of blessings we receive from other good people.

Why does God allow us to suffer for the sins of others? All of us who live on this spaceship, earth, influence others about us for good and for evil. We are surely blessed more by the good than we are hurt by the evil. He may leave the good people with the bad so the righteous can influence the lost toward God and the gospel, even though they may suffer in the process. (See Matt. 13:24-30,36-43).

IV. *Suffering for Christ's Sake*

A. *Pain and suffering normal in the Christian life.*

Jesus warned His apostles that as He had been persecuted, they would be persecuted also (John 16:1-3).

Jesus said of Paul, "I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16).

Peter advised the Christians not to think of the painful trials they were enduring as "something strange," but rather something to be expected! Suffering is part of the Christian life (I Pet. 4:12-13).

Paul wrote, "Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12, ASV).

Jesus warns, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). Suffering is part of the Christian life!

B. *The Christian is in a war — between good and evil.*

This war began in heaven when Satan rebelled against God. When man was created, it continued on earth. (See Jude 6; Rev. 1:9; II Pet. 2:4; Eph. 6:11-12.) People are hurt in physical warfare, and they are hurt in this spiritual warfare.

1. *We're aliens in a hostile world* (John 15:18-19), a world in which God permits Satan, "the prince of this world," to rule over us for now (John 12:31; 16:11). He is constantly opposing God's people trying to destroy them (I Pet. 5:8-9; II Cor. 2:11; 4:4; I Tim. 3:6; 5:15; Job 1; Luke 13:16). Satan causes Christians much suffering and pain.

2. *Living godly in a sinful world brings opposition.* One might ask, "Why is that true?" It is true because a righteous life is a rebuke to an unrighteous one. The sinner

sees the difference in his and the godly one's lifestyle and feels a silent rebuke. Consequently he reacts against the one whose life exposes his evil deeds. Look at Jesus, the supreme holy One, persecuted and abused unmercifully.

Jesus explains why: "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light . . . for fear that his deeds will be exposed: (John 3:19-20, NIV).

When a Christian is slandered or abused, he often asks, "What did I do wrong?" Maybe nothing but standing for truth and opposing sin. The guilty one's abuse is his reaction since the other's stand had rebuked his sinful actions. Remember, "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps" (I Pet. 2:21, NIV).

C. Our response and reward — when suffering for Christ.

1. *The Christian's response to suffering.* Peter advises those who suffer according to the will of God to entrust, or commit, themselves to their faithful Creator and then continue to do good or right (I Pet. 4:19).

When we face trials and testings for the sake of Christ, James says that we should "consider it all joy . . . knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (Jas. 1:2-3, NASB). In a similar vein, Paul writes, "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance" (Rom. 5:3, NIV; cf. Col. 1:24; Phil. 2:17).

Jesus taught that when we are "persecuted for the sake of righteousness" and "men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me" you should "rejoice, and be glad . . ." (Matt. 5:10-12, NASB).

Sound Doctrine

Peter admonishes the brethren to strive never to suffer as an evildoer or thief, "But if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed,; but let him glorify God in this name!" (1 Pet. 4:16, ASV). It is an honor to wear Christ's name. Live courageously and glorify God in that name, Peter says.

2. *The Christian's reward for suffering for Christ.* Hebrews 6:10 reminds us that God will not forget our work and love for Him. He will reward us. Peter stresses that as we "are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy!" (1 Pet. 4:13, ASV; cf. 1 John 3:2).

Jesus informs the disciples to suffer faithfully, for "theirs is the kingdom," here and now, and in heaven their reward is "great!" (Matt. 5:10-12).

Paul notes that as children of God, we are "heirs of God and fellow-heirs [joint heirs] with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him!" (Rom. 8:17, NASB). Paul adds this note of encouragement, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Rom. 8:18, NASB). What a glorious blessing for the redeemed to anticipate!

Second Corinthians 4:17-18 draws a striking contrast between:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. "Suffering" "troubles" here (v. 17) | "Glory" there (v. 17) |
| 2. Affliction "momentary" (vv. 17-18) | "eternal" glory (vv. 17-18) |
| 3. Troubles are "light" (v. 17) | Glory is heavy ("weighty") (v. 17) |
| 4. Things "seen" temporary (v. 18) | Things "not seen" eternal (v. 18) |

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him!" (II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:10).

V. Some Benefits of Suffering

It is hard to see benefits when enduring pain. It is easier for the Christian to see who believes that God will work for good in all things for those who love and serve Him (Rom. 8:28). Before naming the benefits we should consider this:

A. *Not all adversity brings benefits.* It is well to state at the beginning of this study that not all suffering brings benefits. Suffering can bring disaster to certain people. Jesus illustrated this in the Parable of the Soils (Sower) (Matt. 13:3-23).

As the seed was scattered, some fell on rocky soil — shallow soil on top of a rock. The seed sprang up, but when the sun came out the plants withered and died "because they had no root" (Matt. 13:6). The hot sun represented "trouble or persecution" which withered the plants (Matt. 13:21, NIV). "This shallow, rock-covered soil represents those who are deficient in tenacity or purpose. . . . Any opposition, slight or severe, makes them partial or total apostates. As sunlight strengthens the healthy plant, but withers the sickly, ill-rooted one, so tribulation establishes real faith, but destroys its counterfeit" (McGarvey and Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel*, p. 334).

Trials and testings reveal the quality or strength of a soul. A storm does not blow down a bridge. It reveals the poor material and construction of the bridge. A strong wind roared up the Pacific coastline of the U.S. some years ago. It left one large bridge in shambles. Farther on

it hit another one with equal force, but it stood. The difference? The poor quality of the first and the excellent quality of the second. The storm merely revealed the strength of the two bridges. Tribulation reveals the strength and quality of our lives. Or the lack thereof. This is the point of Jesus' story of the Two Builders in Matt. 7:24-27.

Whether suffering helps or hurts depends on the quality of the soul and its response to the pain. Here are some benefits to the one standing on the rock — Christ Jesus.

B. *Suffering as education.* "Life is a school and suffering is one of the instructors" (Woods, *Understanding Suffering*, p. 53). Pain brings a perspective to life that can be gained in no other way. Robert B. Hamilton writes:

I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser,
For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!

Man seems to learn more from his mistakes and disasters than he does from his blessings and accomplishments. It doesn't need to be that way, but usually is. The child who is warned against touching a hot stove could avoid being burned if he heeded. But he is usually convinced when he touches it. The same is true of the son or daughter who is warned against the evils of alcohol, sexual promiscuity, or stealing. Frequently, they are convinced only when they have tried it and found to their deep sorrow that the warning was true!

C. Some spiritual benefits through suffering.

1. *Adversity can teach us humility and reliance upon God.* The Apostle Paul wrote, "Because of the surpassing greatness there was given me a thorn in the flesh . . ." (II Cor. 12:7, NASB).

Sickness, failures, can make us realize our own weakness and need for God's strength and healing. This is what happened to Paul. He pleaded three times for God to remove the "thorn." But God said, "No, but I will give you the grace to endure it" (paraphrased). Then God added, "My power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12:9).

Then Paul realized that his strength lay in Christ, not in himself! He says, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (II Cor. 12:9, NASB). When we are made aware of our own frailty and seek God's power, then we are truly strong in His service!

"The humiliation of ill-health may humble us under His almighty hand. The loss of friends and loved ones may lead us to 'the friend that sticketh closer than a brother' (Prov. 18:24). All forms of adversity, when rightly borne, may be used. They become stepping-stones toward success rather than stumbling-blocks toward defeat" (Elbridge B. Linn). Adversity can teach us humility, reliance upon God, and obedience to His will.

C.H. Spurgeon understood this and wrote,

Stars may be seen from the bottom of a deep well that cannot be discerned from the top of a mountain; so are many things learned in adversity which the prosperous man dreams not of. We need affliction as the trees need winter, that we may collect sap and nourishment for our future blossoms and fruit. Sorrow is necessary for the soul as medicine is for the body.

Sound Doctrine

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown" (*Our Daily Bread*, n.d.).

2. *Adversity motivates one to pray.* It has been said, "Trouble is the school of prayer." Here almost prayerless Christians are taught to pray. Sadly, many pray very little, except in times of adversity. We would all admit that our prayers are more frequent and fervent in times of need or distress.

I am sure the prophet Jeremiah prayed regularly. But note the fervency of his prayers for the sinning people of Judah in Jeremiah 8:18-22 and 9:1). Note the all-night prayer meeting by the church in Jerusalem for Peter, Acts 12:5. Adversity encourages prayer!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

Eyes that the preacher could not school
By wayside graves are raised;
And lips say, "God be merciful"
Than ne'er said, "God be praised!"

The saying during World War II that "there are no atheists in foxholes" is no doubt true in most crises!

3. *Suffering produces compassion for other sufferers.* Those who have passed through similar circumstances can truly sympathize/empathize with another in trouble. True compassion is when we know what they are experiencing and can feel their hurt with them. Suffering helps us gain that rare Christian virtue, compassion.

Jesus became our "merciful and faithful High Priest" because He was tempted and tried in every way as we are, yet without sin. Having suffered Himself, He is able to help those today who are enduring trials and suffering

Understanding Suffering

(Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15-16). As our compassionate Lord, He is constantly interceding for us (Rom. 8:34).

This poem illustrates this fact about Jesus:

Christ Jesus was born in a stable,
A birthplace of humblest degree,
So that no one could say,
"I am poorer, more lacking in comforts than He."

His mother in swaddling clothes wrapped Him,
The wardrobe of One, the Divine,
That no one could say of His raiment,
"Christ's garments were better than mine."

His home and His comforts were borrowed —
No pillow for resting His head!
But He lived, and He suffered and sorrowed
To give us true comforts instead.

God uses distress and grief to prepare us to comfort others. Paul writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies [compassion] and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (II Cor. 1:3-4, NASB).

A recovering alcoholic is better able to empathize and help another alcoholic because "he has been there." The same is true of a former gambler, homeless person, or one who has lost his job, or his life's mate. They usually have more genuine and knowledgeable compassion with the one who suffers.

4. *Suffering can produce patience/endurance and hope.* James says that patience grows in trials. "knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance [patience]

(Jas. 1:3, NASB). Paul states, "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance" — patience, steadfastness (Rom. 5:3, NIV). This testing of our faith produces perseverance, proven character and hope. Many are the spiritual benefits that suffering can bring if we trust in God and hold fast to Him.

5. *Pain helps us resist the sin and pleasures of this world.* King David understood this. He wrote, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Thy word." "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes" (Ps. 119:17,67, NASB).

C.S. Lewis writes, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (*The Problem of Pain*, p. 93). This is what David was saying. Man becomes so enamored with sin that he becomes deaf to God's pleadings. God has to shout to get our attention. If your child is about to step in front of a speeding truck, you would not whisper to him, you would shout at the top of your voice because you loved him and wanted to save him from hurt or death. God is the same way.

Suffering also helps wean us from this life and causes us to focus on the Father's house (John 14:1-3). Paul's trials helped him to say, "I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better" (Phil. 1:23, NASB). He added that "to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

Paul writes the Colossian Christians, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things"

(Col. 3:1-2, NIV). Suffering makes sin easier to resist and the joys of heaven more attractive.

***VI. God Has Not Removed Evil and Pain —
But He Came to Share It!***

A. Through suffering Jesus became our merciful High Priest. God did not take away all the suffering in this life, *but* He did come down to earth in the Person of His Son to share it with us.

He humbled Himself by becoming a man and living in a human body (Phil. 2:5-8). He did that so He could better understand our pains, trials, hardships, and weaknesses — physical and spiritual. This enabled Him to better empathize with us and intercede for us (Heb. 2:14; Rom. 8:34). Hebrews 2:18 states, “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (NIV).

Hebrews 2:14 adds, “He too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death . . . the devil” (NIV). The Scriptures state that Jesus was made “perfect, [complete, mature] through suffering” to become the “author of their salvation” (Heb. 2:10). Hebrews 5:8-9 continues, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (NIV).

Jesus, our High Priest, who experienced suffering, is now able to understand and comfort us in our troubles (Heb. 2:17; 4:15-16; 5:10).

B. God provided a cure for sin and suffering. Though we often blame God when we suffer, for His seeming

indifference, the truth is that God is deeply concerned and has been working from the beginning to remove evil and pain from our lives.

1. *The cure for sin — the gospel.* It is called the “gospel of Christ” (I Cor. 9:12; Gal. 1:7; Phil. 1:27), for Jesus made possible the forgiveness of sin through His death on the cross (I Pet. 2:24; Heb. 9:26; I Cor. 15:3-4).

This plan of salvation was in the mind of God before Adam and Eve sinned. Jesus is called “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” or “slain from the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8, KJV, NIV). As God evicted Adam and Eve from Eden, He gave them the veiled promise of a Redeemer (Gen. 3:15). His plan was ready! It took many years to fulfill it, but God was working all the time (Gal. 4:4-5; Titus 1:2-3).

Paul summed up the whole story in II Timothy 1:9-10. He begins by saying that God saved us and called us to a holy life because of His purpose and grace. He continues, “This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (NIV). The gospel erases all sin and evil from those who believe and obey it (Acts 6:7; 2:38; cf. II Thess. 1:8).

God’s cure for sin included these blessings:

- a. Man was a sinner needing forgiveness. The gospel provided this (I Cor. 15:2; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5).
- b. Man was alienated from God. Jesus reconciled him to God by removing the enmity — sin (II Cor. 5:18-21).

c. Man was under the wrath of God. He was ungodly, an enemy, a sinner, and powerless to save himself (Rom. 5:6-10). Jesus forgave his sins, reconciled him to God and provided the power to save him from the wrath of God (Rom. 5:9-11).

2. *God will end all suffering through the gospel.* Those obedient to the gospel will see the end of suffering — not on earth but in heaven. Revelation 21:1-4 gives a beautiful picture of life in heaven: God will wipe every tear from the eyes of the redeemed — no more mourning or crying. There will be no more pain, no more death. Those who have washed their robes “in the blood of the Lamb” will never be hungry or thirsty. The sun will not beat on them — no scorching heat. “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:16-17, NIV).

Two reasons why suffering is ended are: There is no death in heaven and no sin. These are two major causes of tears and pain on earth. The redeemed will have a new spiritual body with no pain and no death (Phi. 3:20-21; I Cor. 15:42-44).

In heaven we will understand how God has worked through the ages to abolish suffering. For all eternity we can rejoice in the goodness of our loving Father, and wonderful Savior.

To summarize, God has not seen fit to explain all His actions toward mankind, except by inference, “This is My will for you.” In Romans 8:28 Paul tells us that God is always working for our good. We must continue to trust Him to do the best for us, regardless of the outcome.

Sound Doctrine

The noted Bible scholar, Paul Little, wrote that often the supreme test of faith for the Christian relates to the question “whether or not God is good. In the face of tragedy, only trust in His character will carry us through” (*Christianity Today*, August, 1975).

UNDERSTANDING SUFFERING

1. State clearly the "problem of pain." _____

2. How is pain man's "warning system"? _____

3. How does Hinduism explain the presence of suffering?

4. How is man's "free will" a source of pain? _____

5. Explain how living a godly life can bring suffering.

6. How does Jesus say we should respond to suffering for His sake? _____

7. What are some spiritual benefits we may learn from suffering? _____

8. God has not removed pain and evil, but He did what?

9. When will all pain and suffering cease?

LESSON 6

Peace — Beyond Understanding

- I. What This Peace Is Not
 - A. Not a political peace
 - B. Not a cessation of personal troubles
- II. What Is the Peace That Passes Understanding?
 - A. It is a "peace" that comes from God.
 - B. This "peace" is a gift from Christ.
 - C. This peace is found only in Christ and is a result of His death at Calvary
 - D. It is a peace in the midst of trouble
- III. Some Steps toward Peace
 - A. "Do not be anxious about anything"
 - B. Pray about everything!
 - C. Be thankful for everything!

Peace is a universal desire of man. Politicians talk about it, authors write about it, and people pray for it. We form leagues of nations, sign lengthy peace agreements, but peace does not come. Like ancient Israel, we cry, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace!" (Jer. 6:14, KJV).

When the Apollo 11 landed on the moon, astronauts Armstrong and Aldrin deposited a plaque with the motto: "We come in peace for all mankind." We want peace.

Peace is a major theme of the Bible. It is mentioned 429 times, by one man's count. It is mentioned 88 times in the New Testament, in every book except First John. Each of Paul's thirteen letters begins with a salutation of "peace."

Further, God is called "the God of peace" (Rom. 15:33).

Jesus is called "the Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Peace is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), the gospel is "the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15), and Christians are to "pursue peace with all men" (Heb. 12:14, NASB; Ps. 34:14).

In Philippians 4:7, Paul speaks of a peace "which transcends [or surpasses] all understanding" (NIV), which the Christian may have. This sounds appealing. Let us examine it.

I. What This Peace Is Not

Two reasons why man does not obtain this peace is that he is looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place. The Scriptures indicate that this peace:

A. *Is not a political peace.* Much of the writing and praying today is for peace between nations. The New Testament does not promise this until Christ returns. From

Matthew 24:6 to Revelation 20:8, it speaks of wars to the end. Secular history would confirm this. The twentieth century has been labelled “The Century of Wars” — two world wars and scores of lesser ones. It is not a political peace.

B. *Is not a cessation of personal troubles.* The ancient philosophers’ idea of peace was “absence of pain in the body or trouble in the mind” (Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit*, p. 84). God has not promised man that kind of peace. In John 16:1-4, Jesus warned the apostles of the many trials and persecutions that waited them. In John 16:33, He said, “In Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble” (NIV). To the early Christians, Paul said, “Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22, NASB). For a list of Paul’s sufferings, see II Corinthians 6:4-5; 11:23-28.

Being a Christian does not isolate us from the troubles common to most people. However, Christ has promised to be with us and to sustain, strengthen, and comfort us in all our trials (Matt. 28:20; I Cor. 10:13; Heb. 2:17-18). In Christ we have the power to overcome them, not to avoid them. The Psalmist wrote, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Ps. 34:19).

II. What Is the Peace That Passes Understanding?

A. *It is a “peace” that comes from God.* Philippians 4:7 calls it “the peace of God.” Second John 3 says this peace comes “from God the Father” (cf. Rom. 1:7; II Thess. 1:2). It comes not from man, or from circumstances, but from God. It is the possession of the righteous, not the

wicked. Isaiah writes, "The wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest . . . There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked" (Isa. 57:20-21, RSV).

B. This "peace" is a gift from Christ. When Israel enjoyed peace in the nation, they regarded it as a gift from God (Lev. 26:6; Ps. 29:11). As the "Prince of peace" and the "Lord of Peace," Jesus grants us the priceless gift of Peace (Isa. 9:6; II Thess. 3:16).

Jesus told His apostles in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (NASB). Comforting words!

Matthew Henry in his commentary writes: "When Christ was about to leave this world, He made His will."

He committed His soul to His Father, He bequeathed His body to Joseph of Arimathea.

His clothes fell to the soldiers. He entrusted His mother to the care of John. His peace He left to His disciples.

"In the last analysis, peace is not something which a man achieves, but something which a man accepts" (Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit*, p. 84). Peace is a gift from Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and the Father, the God of Peace.

C. This peace is found only in Christ and is a result of His death at Calvary. Jesus said, "In me you may have peace" (John 16:33, NASB). Paul writes, "The peace of God . . . shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7, NASB).

Paul uses a military metaphor to describe the activity of God's peace in our hearts. It will "guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). "Providing protection against the enemy, as a garrison does" (Vine, *New Testament Words*, Vol. 2, p. 183). Peter uses the word

to describe the security of the Christian to the end (I Pet. 1:5). When we truly trust God, His peace provides security against all fears, doubts, and cares. The Philippians, living in a Roman colony, a garrison town, would be familiar with the sight of the sentry maintaining his watch. Paul says the “peace of God” provides such security.

Regarding Christ’s death Paul said, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses . . .” (Eph. 1:7, NASB).

Colossians 1:19-20a: “It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fulness [of deity] to dwell in Him [Jesus], and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross . . .” (NASB).

Romans 5:1: “Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (ASV).

When we obeyed the gospel we were redeemed, forgiven, reconciled, and justified. This brought us “peace with God,” because by His death Jesus had removed the enmity between God and man — *sin!* (Rom. 5:1).

When we receive the Holy spirit (Acts 2:38), He brings the “peace of God” — which is the serenity, the tranquility, the contentment the Christian enjoys in Christ (Phil. 4:7).

D. It is a peace in the midst of trouble. How often have we marvelled at the courage and peace of Christian martyrs, like Stephen, as they faced death. We read with admiration the calmness of Paul during the terrible storm on his voyage to Rome (Acts 27).

Most of us are at peace when the sun is shining, when we have friends, comforts, health, and wealth. These result from favorable circumstances. This peace is different. It is seen most clearly during the storms of life. That’s

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why the man of the world does not understand it. Victor Hugo expressed this thought concisely when he wrote:

On a limb that swings
Sits a bird that sings
Knowing he has wings!

When we truly trust God's precious promises, He will calm our troubled spirits and ease our worried minds. In Deuteronomy 33:25-27 are three promises I find helpful:

- 1) And as thy days, so shall they strength be."
- 2) "The eternal God is thy refuge."
- 3) "And underneath are the everlasting arms" (KJV).

These can be our "wings" to carry us through troubled times.

Mrs. M.M. (Elijah) Goodwin of Indiana wrote:

While autumn mourns her falling leaves,
And God calls for His ripened sheaves;
While storms are beating on my head,
And every joy of earth is fled;
Faith whispers, "This is promised thee,
'As is thy day, thy strength shall be."

III. Some Steps toward Peace

Even though God is the power that produces this peace in our lives, Paul suggests three steps we can take to enable the Spirit to do this (Phil. 4:5-6, NIV).

A. "***Do not be anxious about anything.***" Paul speaks of "a distrustful anxiety" about things. Unusual concern betrays a lack of trust in God's care (see Matt. 6:25-34).

In Philippians 4:5, Paul gives a reason for Christian serenity, "The Lord is near." a) Near in "space" — near in

fellowship with His people (see Matt. 28:20; I Pet. 3:12), b) near in “time” — Paul’s mind is ever on the Lord’s return. This may be his thought here.

B. Pray about everything! Paul uses three words for prayer in verse 6: formal prayer, supplication/petition, and requests. Rather than worrying, Paul suggests praying. Peter exhorts us to “cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you” (I Pet. 5:7, NIV). An important step toward peace! The songwriter reminds us: “O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do *not* carry, Everything to God in prayer!”

C. Be thankful for everything! Counting our blessings is a healthful exercise. Seeing how many we have makes us grateful, increases our love for God, and reduces needless worry. At least it should! Paul says, “In everythig give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thess. 5:18, NASB).

Guy King writes, “Our positive blessings, so numerous; our negative blessings, no less — for remember that every misery we haven’t got is a mercy we have got!” (King, *Joy Way*, p. 112).

If we keep our minds steadfastly on God, trusting Him for everything, He will give us this “perfect” peace He has promised! (Isa. 26:3).

One day seventeen centuries ago (A.D. 250), a middle-aged man was sitting in a garden near the city of Carthage in northern Africa. The man’s name was Cyprian, and he was writing a letter to a friend, Donatus.

This seems a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden under the shadow of these vines. But if I climbed some great mountain and looked out

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over the wide lands, you know very well what I should see. Brigands on the high roads, pirates on the seas, in the amphitheaters men murdered to please applauding crowds, under all roofs misery and selfishness. It is really a bad world, Donatus — an incredibly bad world. Yet in the midst of it I have found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians — and I am one of them.

Colossians 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."

PEACE — BEYOND UNDERSTANDING

1. This peace is not what type of peace? _____
2. Describe the peace that is beyond our understanding.

3. What is the source of this wonderful peace? _____
4. Explain the difference between the peace "with" God and the peace "of" God. _____

5. Jesus obtained this peace for us through what act of His? _____
6. What are some steps the Christian can take to receive this peace? _____

LESSON 7

The Resurrection of Christ

- I. Introduction
- II. The Resurrection of Christ Was Predicted
 - A. By the Old Testament prophets
 - B. Jesus predicted His own resurrection
- III. The Evidence for Christ's Resurrection
 - A. The tomb was empty
 - B. The grave clothes were undisturbed
 - C. The Lord was seen — His appearances
 - D. The disciples were changed
- IV. The Consequences — If Christ Did or Did Not Rise from the Grave
 - A. The Dark Road — If Christ had not been raised
 - B. Dawn on a Dark Road — But Christ has been raised!

V. Other Evidences for the Resurrection of Christ

A. The Church

B. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

C. Lord's Day

I. Introduction

F.E. Marsh writes: "The resurrection of Christ is the heart of Christianity, that which makes it pulsate with the life of God. It is the keystone to the arch of Truth, which holds all the faith of the Gospel together. It is the foundation of the church. It is the mainspring of Christian activity. It is the link which unites all believers." An eloquent and true statement.

But some do not believe the dead are raised. For example: Judaism does not believe that Jesus rose from the grave. Some Jews do believe in a resurrection of the dead. Their belief is based on Scriptures such as Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:19; Job 19:25-27, which seem to refer to a resurrection. Jesus pointed out to the Sadducees that Exodus 3:5,6 teaches a resurrection (Matt. 22:31-32). But they reject the strongest proof for it — the resurrection of Jesus.

Buddhism does not believe in a bodily resurrection from the dead. Their main concern is about life here and now, and how to live it.

Islam believes in a resurrection, but not on the basis of Jesus' resurrection. They do not believe in Jesus' death, much less His resurrection.

Some pagan religions believe in a life after death, but it is a survival of the spirit, not of the body. They deny any bodily resurrection like the New Testament teaches.

Even some so-called Christians deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Paul, however, declares that belief in Jesus' resurrection is a requirement for being saved, for being a Christian! (Rom. 10:9). Belief in Jesus' resurrection is a distinctive Christian belief.

II. The Resurrection of Christ Was Predicted

A. By the Old Testament prophets. As Peter noted on Pentecost, Psalm 16:8-11 is the clearest prediction of Jesus' resurrection. Peter quotes it in Acts 2:25-28 and explains that David is not talking of himself because David had died and his tomb was still there in Jerusalem (Acts 2:29). Psalm 16 speaks of the Messiah, David's promised descendant.

David prophesied that Jesus' soul would not be left in Hades, the abode of the dead, nor would His body undergo decay, which means that Jesus' soul and body would be raised again to life (Ps. 16:8-11).

While preaching in the synagogue at Antioch, Paul quotes Psalms 2 and 16 as predicting Jesus' resurrection (Acts 13:32-38). These were written about one thousand years before the event occurred.

B. Jesus predicted His own resurrection. "Jesus Himself never predicted His death without adding that He would rise, and described His coming resurrection as a 'sign' [an attesting miracle]." (Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p. 47).

The first reference to His resurrection was given in a veiled statement calling His body a temple that, if destroyed, would be raised up (John 2:18-22). After He was raised, the disciples understood His meaning (John 2:22).

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In Matthew 12:38-40, when the Jews asked for a "sign" of who He was, He said that the only sign He would give was the "sign of the prophet Jonah." "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39-40, NIV).

It is significant that Jesus staked the future of the gospel and His church upon the fulfillment of His prediction regarding His resurrection! It was also the one great sign of Who He was (Rom. 1:4). He did this because the resurrection of Christ is not peripheral, but central to our faith. It is not secondary, but primary. Emil Brunner asserts, "On the resurrection everything else depends" (*Letter to the Romans*, p. 131). Jesus thought so too!

After the apostles made the Good Confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:16), Jesus began to speak more clearly and more often of His coming death and resurrection (see Matt. 16:21; 17:9,22-23; 20:18,19; 26:32; 27:63). Two reasons can be cited for this: 1) He must prepare them for this momentous event. 2) After two years spent with Him, they are better able to understand and cope with this shocking revelation. Of course they still did not fully understand about the resurrection until it happened (see Mark 9:31-32; Mark 16:9-13; John 20:8-9).

III. The Evidence for Christ's Resurrection

Christianity is an historical faith based on facts or events which took place in time and space — events that could be examined by those living at the time they occurred (I Cor. 15:6).

Luke states that Jesus “showed Himself alive after His passion [death, suffering] by many infallible proofs [convincing proofs]” (Acts 1:3, KJV). God was not content to give just a few, but gave the apostles many convincing, persuasive proofs that Jesus was ALIVE!

Wilbur Smith states that the resurrection of Christ involves four basic factors which the world must consider if they are to know the truth about Jesus.

1) There was a person on this earth during the first century of our era named Jesus of Nazareth.

2) This person died on a cross during the time that Pontius Pilate ruled Palestine. The Roman soldiers who executed Him said He was dead. Pilate officially declared Him dead and released Him to be buried (Mark 15:42-45).

3) Jesus’ body was taken from the cross and placed in Joseph’s new tomb on Friday evening (Matt. 27:59-60).

4) On Sunday morning the tomb was empty! (Luke 24:1-6).

This study will examine four evidences of the resurrection.

A. *The tomb was empty.*

1. *This fact was confirmed by:*

a. Mary Magdalene who was the first to visit the tomb (John 20:2, 11-13)

b. The women who brought spices (Luke 23:55-56; 24:1-3)

c. Peter and John (John 20:3-9)

d. The angel at the tomb (Luke 24:4-9; Matt. 28:5-7)

The clear statement of the angel was “He is not here, for *He has risen*, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying” (Matt. 28:6, NASB).

2. *No one denied that the tomb was empty.* The actions of His enemies proved they believed it was. The guard at the tomb stood like dead men and then fled the scene. The descent of the angel, the removal of the stone, etc., must have been terrifying to paralyze them with such fear (Matt. 28:4,11).

The Jewish leaders were so convinced by the guard's report that they made no investigation to determine its truth. Rather, they gave them much money to tell the lie that the disciples stole the body while they slept (Matt. 28:11-15) — an obvious admission that they believed the tomb to be empty!

No one in New Testament times denied the tomb was empty. Nor has anyone since that time denied it was. What they have done is to create theories to try to explain away the empty tomb.

3. *Theory — The disciples stole the body of Jesus.* These false explanations have taken various forms. Some speculate that Joseph of Arimathea removed the body. Or that the Roman or Jewish authorities had it removed. There is absolutely no evidence to support these theories in the New Testament.

Perhaps the most persistent theory is the one the Jews used to cover their embarrassment at having lost the body. That is: "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep" (Matt. 28:13).

The weakness of this theory is obvious. Question: How did the guard know the disciples stole the body if they were asleep? Also, at this time, the disciples did not believe that He would rise again. See John 20:9; Mark 16:11. So why steal the body? What would be the motive for it?

A final thought: The disciples could not have stolen the body even if they had wanted to. The Roman guard would have prevented it. The disciples were not trained to fight; they were fishermen, tax collectors, etc. These trained, hardened soldiers would have slaughtered them. There is no evidence whatsoever for this theory.

The tomb was empty — “There are only two alternatives: Either His body was taken from the grave by human hands or else by superhuman power! The evidence points clearly to the latter!

Let us repeat: No one denied that the tomb was empty. John R.W. Stott said that the silence of Christ’s enemies “is as eloquent a proof of the resurrection as the apostles’ witness.” He is risen, as Jesus foretold He would be (Mark 9:31).

The tomb in the garden is empty today,
The guards in confusion have fled;
An angel from Heaven the stone rolled away
And Jesus no longer is dead.

Sing Hallelujah, for Jesus is living
Death has been vanquished, so no longer grieve;
Sing Hallelujah, for Jesus is giving
Life unto all who His grace will receive.

B. *The graveclothes were undisturbed.* The same Gospels that tell us that Christ’s body was gone tell us that the graveclothes had not gone. John’s gospel emphasizes this.

1. *When Mary Magdalene returned from the tomb* and told Peter that the body of Jesus was missing, he and John ran to the tomb to investigate. After Peter enters the tomb, then John also goes in. He writes, “Then entered in

therefore the other disciple also, who had first come to the tomb, and he *saw* and *believed*" (John 20:8, NASB).

What did John see that caused him to believe? The story suggests that it was the graveclothes, but not just the clothes, but the way they were lying that convinced him (John 20:6-8). What did John see?

He says that he beheld "the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth, which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself" (John 20:6-7, NASB).

Let us notice three facts. a) The clothes were *there*. If a thief had taken the body, he would have seized it and fled. What possible reason would a thief have had for removing and leaving the clothes? These graveclothes were complicated and difficult to remove.

Merrill Tenney writes:

According to Jewish custom the body was usually washed and straightened and bandaged tightly from the armpits to the ankles in strips of linen cloth about a foot wide. Aromatic spices, often of gummy consistency, were placed between the wrappings or folds. They served partially as a preservative and partially as a cement to glue the cloth wrappings into a solid covering. When the body was thus encased, a square piece of cloth was wrapped around the head and tied under the chin to keep the lower jaw from sagging (*The Reality of the Resurrection*, p. 117).

2. *They were undisturbed*. John writes that the linen wrappings that had been around the body were lying in one place. But the cloth that was around the head was in another place with some space between. The idea seems to be that they were in the same position they had been on Jesus' body except the body was gone. It was as though

His body had passed through the clothes, as it was later to pass through doors, leaving them undisturbed (John 20:19,26). Once the body, which was the support, was removed, the graveclothes just collapsed where they lay. The graveclothes were heavy — about 75 pounds (Greek: 100 litras) of spices had been used (John 19:39).

3. *It seems clear that the graveclothes were left as a witness to the resurrection.* The way they were lying and the words of the angel suggest that. The angel told the women, "He is not here; for he is risen, even as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:6, ASV). John Stott writes, "They had been neither touched nor folded nor manipulated by any human being. They were like a discarded chrysalis, from which the butterfly has emerged" (*Basic Christianity*, p. 53). The angel asked the women to look at the empty tomb and be convinced that the Lord was risen (Matt. 28:6; Mark 16:6). They surely saw the clothes and were impressed as Peter was (Luke 24:12) and like John was when "He saw [them] . . . and believed" (John 20:8).

C. *The Lord was seen — His appearances.* One of the strongest evidences for the resurrection is the appearances of Jesus after He was raised. This was the definite plan of God, Peter said. "God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen" (Acts 10:40, NIV).

1. *Eye-witness evidence of Jesus.* The main responsibility of the apostles was to present evidence that proved Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God. They were empowered to do this by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses . . ." (Acts 1:8, NIV). Paul implies that the resurrection was the supreme proof of

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His identity. He says that Jesus was declared "to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4, ASV).

This is why it was necessary for an apostle to have seen the Lord after His resurrection (Acts 1:22; I Cor. 9:1). This enabled him to give eye-witness testimony concerning Jesus; firsthand, not secondhand testimony, and not hearsay evidence. Peter said, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact!" (Acts 2:32, NIV; cf. Acts 3:15; 4:33; 5:31; I Pet. 5:1; Luke 24:48; I Cor. 9:1; Acts 13:30-31).

Peter called the witnesses "chosen," selected by God (Acts 10:40-41). Why appear to selected people? It is obvious that God chose the ones who knew Him the best, not casual acquaintances. If the police want to identify a body, they look for someone who knew the person intimately. They can better identify the dead person. Less likely to be deceived. God wanted the best witnesses to identify the risen Christ!

2. *The number and nature of the appearances.* Usually the number is set at ten or eleven, plus Paul. The appearances seem to have been in this order:

To Mary Magdalene, John 20:14; Mark 16:9

To the women returning from the sepulchre, Matthew 28:9

To Peter, Luke 24:34; I Cor. 15:5

To two disciples on the way to Emmaus, Luke 24:13-33

To ten apostles, Thomas absent, Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-24

To eleven apostles, Thomas present, John 20:26-29

To seven apostles by the Sea of Galilee, John 21:1-23

To 500 Plus, I Corinthians 15:6

To James, I Corinthians 15:7

To the eleven apostles in Galilee, Matthew 28:16-20.

To the apostles at the ascension, Acts 1:3-12

To Paul, Acts 9:3-6; I Corinthians 15:8

3. *The times and purposes of His appearances.*

a. Times. Jesus appeared to the apostles/disciples for a period of 40 days (Acts 1:3). He was seen at all hours of the day: early morning at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-4); mid-morning in Joseph's garden (John 13:10-18); evening on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34); and night in a closed room with the disciples (John 20:19; Luke 24:33).

b. Purposes. The main purpose was to convince His disciples that He was alive, which was the supreme proof that He was the Messiah, the Son of God (Rom. 1:4; Matt. 12:38-40). All His appearances had definite objectives. "Whether Jesus wanted to reclaim Peter, dispel Thomas's doubts, dry Mary's tears, or give extensive teaching to the Eleven, He made each occasion purposeful" (Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, pp. 133-134).

Luke describes His 40-day ministry like this: "He appeared to them [apostles] over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3, NIV). Jesus never revealed Himself just to shock or surprise or to evoke amazement or applause. They were not fleeting appearances, but "prolonged interviews." They were teaching sessions concerning the Kingdom of God — no doubt designed to prepare the apostles to establish and lead His church. The teaching of Thomas may be typical of His appearances (John 20:26-29).

Very likely Jesus instructed the apostles to select a successor to Judas as we see in Acts 1:15-26. He had much to tell them. It was a busy forty days for our Lord.

4. *False explanations of the appearances.* In an effort to refute the resurrection, skeptics have devised theories to explain away the evidence of the appearances. They submit that they were: a) the inventions of the disciples or b) hallucinations.

a. The appearances — invented by the disciples. Bible scholars show that they could not be invented. First, the narratives are too simple, artless, and natural to be contrived. They lack the strained, exaggerated, unnatural character of most false or invented stories. They are graphic and contain detail touches that suggest eyewitness accounts. "The stories of the race to the tomb and of the walk to Emmaus are too vivid and real to have been invented" (Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p. 54).

An invented story would have "eliminated, or at least watered down, the doubts and fears of the apostles" (Ibid.). The Gospels do neither. They reveal clearly the struggle they had to believe that Jesus was alive. This theory calls into question either the integrity or the intelligence of the apostles, or both.

b. Appearances — hallucinations of the disciples. The appearances were not hallucinations either. "A hallucination is the 'apparent perception of an external object when no such object is present'" (Ibid., p. 55). This is usually associated with people who are highly imaginative or neurotic. They tend to see things and hear voices that others do not see or hear. Normally, the hallucination is a climax to a period of extreme wishful thinking.

They believe they are going to see something, and they greatly desire to see it.

This characteristic is entirely missing from the lives of the apostles. The apostles neither believed in a resurrection nor expected one. For example, John says when he and Peter ran to the tomb, "they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9, NASB). When Mary Magdalene reported that He was alive, "They refused to believe it" (Mark 16:11, NASB). When the women gave the same message, their "words seemed to them like nonsense" (Luke 24:11, NIV).

The apostles were not guilty of wishful thinking, naive credulity, or blind acceptance. They were cautious and skeptical. But it was a healthy skepticism. They wanted to believe only that which was clearly proven. When Christ presented such proof, they believed! And gave their lives showing how firmly they did believe He was alive!

D. The disciples were changed. "Perhaps the transformation of the disciples of Jesus is the greatest evidence of all for the resurrection" (Ibid., p. 57). It is certainly hard to explain if Jesus was *not* raised! Three men illustrate this change: Thomas; James, the Lord's brother; and Peter.

1. *Thomas.* Jesus appeared to the disciples on the evening of resurrection day (John 20:19-20). Thomas, the twin, was not there. "When the other disciples told him that they had seen the Lord, he declared, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it'" (John 20:25, NIV).

A week later the Lord appeared to the disciples again, Thomas being present. Jesus said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand,

and put it into my side; and be not unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27, NASB).

When Thomas saw the nail prints in His hands, the spear scar in His side he cried out, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). He was convinced it was Jesus in the very body which had been nailed to the cross. The evidence was too strong to deny. Jesus was risen from the dead! He also believed that Jesus was God come in the flesh, so He confessed Jesus as "My Lord and My God."

No gullible disciple here! He wanted proof, and Jesus gave it to him. Jesus does not rebuke Thomas but gives him clear evidence. Jesus, by His action, says, "Don't blame Thomas, *teach* him!" We should be grateful to Thomas for his honest skepticism. Our faith has a stronger foundation because of the proof Jesus gave Thomas. It was the risen Christ that transformed Thomas! Nothing else could have done it.

2. *James, the Lord's brother.* Throughout Christ's ministry, his brothers were not believers in Him (John 7:5). Yet, in Acts 1:14, "His brothers," and their mother, Mary, were with the apostles praying and waiting for Pentecost. Two of these brothers were James and Jude. James became a leader in the church in Jerusalem, when the apostles began evangelizing abroad (Acts 12:17). Jude wrote the Epistle of Jude. What changed them? The answer seems to be found in I Corinthians 15:7 where Paul says that Jesus appeared to James after the resurrection. Changed!

3. *Peter.* Perhaps the most dramatic change is seen in Peter. After Jesus' arrest, Peter, who truly loved the Lord, followed Him into the court of the high priest. There, out of fear, he allowed a servant girl to frighten him into

denying the Lord. Before the night is over, he denies Jesus two more times! (Mark 14:66-72).

Peter was among the disciples hiding behind locked doors, fearful of the Jews, when Jesus appeared to them on resurrection day (John 20:19, cf. 26). Louis Cassel describes their mental condition like this: "The disciples had fled from the scene of the crucifixion in panic and despair, their hopes crushed, their own lives in peril." Hardly the picture of "world conquerors"!

But look at the apostles seven weeks later in the temple in Jerusalem! Peter stands before thousands of Jews, boldly preaching,

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. *But God raised him from the dead* (Acts 2:22-24, NIV).

Fearlessly, Peter accuses them of being murderers and confidently states that Jesus is alive! Also, he thunders that Jesus is *now* seated at the "right hand of God," and has "poured forth this which you both see and hear [the Holy Spirit]" (Acts 2:33).

Later when the Sadducees arrested Peter and John for preaching "in Jesus the resurrection from the death" (Acts 4:2), they boldly condemn the Jews for crucifying Jesus "whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 4:10). The Sanhedrin forbade the apostles to preach any more in Jesus' name, but they continued to preach. When rearrested and charged to stop preaching, Peter and the apostles bluntly

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answered, "We must obey God rather than man!" (Acts 5:29, NASB). Of course, they were severely beaten, but they left the court "rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name!" (Acts 5:41, NASB). What courage and conviction!

What changed these "fearful" men into "fearless" men? Especially Peter. We suggest these things:

a. Jesus' appearance to Peter (and the apostles) after the resurrection (I Cor. 15:5; Luke 24:33,34)

b. The empty tomb which Peter and John saw (John 20:8,9)

c. Peter saw the same evidence of Jesus' body that Thomas did (John 20:26-28)

d. Of course, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which the apostles received on Pentecost was a major factor in the change (Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4).

Josh McDowell quotes this summary: "On the day of the crucifixion they were filled with sadness; on the first day of the week with gladness. At the crucifixion they were hopeless; on the first day of the week their hearts glowed with certainty and hope. When the message of the resurrection first came, they were incredulous and hard to be convinced, but once they became assured, they never doubted again" (Quoted by Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, p. 237).

The apostles were changed! Only the risen Lord could have wrought this change!

Luke records that Jesus "showed Himself alive . . . by many infallible [convincing] proofs" during the 40 days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3, KJV). We believe they are convincing!

IV. The Consequences — If Christ Did or Did Not Rise from the Grave (I Cor. 15:12-23)

A. *The dark road — Christ has not been raised* (I Cor. 15:12-19). False doctrine — There is no resurrection from the dead (I Cor. 15:12). Some in Corinth believed this. In an effort to correct this teaching, Paul examines the consequences of this on their salvation. This false teaching would mean:

1. *That Christ has not been raised* (I Cor. 15:13). If there is no resurrection, then, obviously, the news of Jesus' resurrection is false.

2. *That the apostles' preaching is "vain, useless, empty"* (I Cor. 15:14). Paul has just set forth the salient points in the gospel message. They are the Christ "died for our sins . . . He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3-4, NASB). If the dead are not raised, then there is *no* "Good News" for our sins! Our message has no content, no substance. In fact, it is a lie!

3. *That their faith is also "vain or meaningless"* (v. 14). "If that gospel was a sham, then so was the faith it produced" (Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 210). The validity of their faith depended on the veracity of the gospel they believed.

4. *That "you are still in your sins"* (I Cor. 15:17). If the gospel, "the power of God for salvation," is untrue, then it did not bring forgiveness of sins when you obeyed it. Paul has just pointed out that "Christ died for our sins" (15:3). But if men are still in their sins, then Jesus' death has availed nothing. "Christ dead without resurrection would be a condemned, not a justified, Christ. How

could He justify others?" (Godet, quoted in Morris, *ibid.*, p. 211). What a dark picture Paul is painting!

5. *Finally, that those who have died in Christ "have perished"!* (I Cor. 15:18-19). Christians died with the hope that they were going to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23). Death was a "gain" (Phil. 1:21). They did not mourn as those "who have no hope" (I Thess. 4:13, NASB). For they firmly believed that the Lord would raise them from the dead (I Thess. 4:16).

But if the dead are not raised then this is a mirage. If our hope in Christ is only for this world, we are deluded, creatures to be "pitied" (I Cor. 15:19). How dismal this life would be, if Christ has not been raised!!

B. Dawn on a dark road — Christ has been raised! (I Cor. 15:20-23). Paul has presented the gloomy condition of man if there is no resurrection (I Cor. 15:12-19). Then in verse 20 he bursts forth, like a sunrise on a mountain road, with these words, "*But now Christ has been raised from the dead . . .*" (NASB), God's "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2), rising to bring heavenly light and hope to a lost world.

All the bleak consequences that Paul describes in I Corinthians 15:12-19 no longer exist. For Christ is risen indeed! New blessings, new consequences prevail! Here are some of them.

1. *Christ is risen — never to die again!* When Paul wrote, "Christ has been raised," he used the perfect tense to express the verb "to rise" in verse 20. The perfect means that something has happened in the past and the effects remain in the present. This points to Christ's continuing state — the abiding results of the event. Not only

did the crucified Jesus come back to life, but now He sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for His church!

Romans 6:9 confirms this, "For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again" (NIV). Lazarus, the widow's son, and others who were raised, died again. Jesus will not die again. In this the resurrection of Christ differs from all others in the Bible.

If the way of the cross had stopped at the cross,
We would only have known defeat;
If the Christ of the cross had stayed in the tomb,
His work would have been incomplete.

But the way of the cross never stops at the cross;
The way of the cross leads on
To the victorious grace in the heavenly place
Where the risen Lord has gone.

2. *When Jesus arose, He completed the gospel plan of salvation.* Paul stated that Jesus "was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25, ASV). "Christ was 'delivered up' to atone for His people's sins and was raised up to guarantee their justification" (Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 119). Thus the gospel was completed for saving sinful man, for the power or efficacy of His death depended upon His resurrection.

Also, Jesus' resurrection revealed God's acceptance of his Son's vicarious, atoning work. When God raised Jesus, He placed His stamp of approval on Him and His work.

3. *Christ's resurrection assured the Christian's resurrection.* In I Corinthians 15:20 Paul called Jesus "the first fruits of those who are asleep." The term "first fruits: refers to the first sheaf of the harvest that was brought to the temple and offered (Lev. 23:10-11). It was a thank offering

to God for the harvest. The first sheaf represented Jesus — the first to rise from the dead never to die again.

The term “first fruits” implies later fruits. This later fruit will be when Christ returns and the “dead in Christ will rise” and join the living saints. Then they will welcome their returning Lord (I Thess. 4:13-18). This will be the completed harvest of souls (see II Cor. 4:14).

First Corinthians 15:22 states, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive” (NASB). Paul writes that Christ is the first to rise, “after that those who are Christ’s at His coming” (v. 23). Charles Hodge sees in the reference to first fruits the idea that “the resurrection of Christ is a pledge and proof of the resurrection of His people” (Morris, *The First Epistle*, p. 213).

Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies” (John 11:15, NASB).

4. *Christ wrested from Satan the power of death.* Speaking of Jesus, Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil” (NASB). John expresses the same idea in I John 3:8, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (NASB).

Jesus became a man that through His death He might render powerless Satan’s control over death. The phrase “power of death” is not fully understood. Albert Barnes writes: “I understand this as meaning that the devil was the cause of death in this world. He was the means of its introduction . . . he seduced man from God, and led on the train of woes which result in death” (Barnes, *Notes*, p. 71).

This does not necessarily mean that Satan has the power to inflict death in any particular case. God has the ultimate power of death as we learn from Job 2:4-6. Death is a part of Satan's kingdom. All who follow him suffer death — physical and spiritual — for the "wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Jesus took the sting out of death when He provided a remedy for sin — the gospel (Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:7). He robbed death of its victory when He arose, thus making possible the Christian's victory over death too (I Cor. 15:54-57). Physical death and Satan will be with us until Christ returns. When those "who are Christ's" have been raised, then death will be no more. "For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death" (I Cor. 15:25-26, NASB). Satan and death will both be thrown into the "lake of fire and brimstone" (Rev. 20:10,11-15).

What wonderful consequences or blessings are these because Jesus arose from the dead!

V. Other Evidences for the Resurrection of Christ

A. *The church.* The fact that the church was founded on Pentecost (Acts 2) is evidence of the resurrection. The church was founded on the resurrection, and disproving it would have destroyed the whole Christian movement. However, instead of any such disproof, throughout the first century, Christians were threatened, beaten, flogged, and killed because of their faith. It would have been much simpler to have silenced them by producing Jesus' body, but his was never done (Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p. 50).

What a dramatic scene if, on the Day of Pentecost as Peter is preaching that Jesus is alive, the Jews would have marched in carrying the body of Jesus! It would have stopped the sermon! It would have stopped Christianity, too!

David Strauss, a vigorous opponent of Christianity, admits that the church would have never arisen if the apostles had not had unshaken faith in the reality of Christ's resurrection.

Another scholar adds "that this faith of the apostles would have never arisen unless the resurrection *had been a true historical fact*"! (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, II:629). The presence of the Lord's church today is proof that the resurrection is true!

B. *Baptism and the Lord's Supper.* There is no adequate explanation of the ordinances of Christ without the fact of the resurrection.

Baptism is a drama, depicting the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3-5; I Cor. 15:3-4). If there was no resurrection, then the act of baptism is meaningless.

Baptism also pictures the believer's death to sin, his burial in the watery grave, and his resurrection to a new life (Rom. 6:4-5). This also is false and without meaning if Jesus is still in the tomb. If the resurrection never took place, how can we account for the meaning of baptism?

The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the death of Christ as an atonement for our sins. We are told to eat this memorial feast with hope and expectation of Christ's return (I Cor. 11:26). We are instructed to "wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13, NIV; cf. Acts 2:46). How could there be such joy and hope if Christ be not

raised? Each week as we meet about the table, we are declaring that He is alive!

C. *The Lord's Day.* The Jews observed the seventh day, the Sabbath, as their day of rest worship. This celebrated a) God's resting at the conclusion of creation, and b) the deliverance of Israel from bondage by the Exodus (Gen. 2:13; Deut. 5:15).

The Christians observed the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, in celebration of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). In the early days of the church, most Christians were Jews. Yet they switched to first day worship to celebrate the resurrection. Nothing short of the resurrection could have persuaded them to change.

We conclude with a quote from Alfred Edersheim, the great scholar and Jewish Christian:

The importance of all this cannot be adequately expressed in words. A dead Christ might have been a teacher and wonderworker, and remembered and loved as such. But only a risen and living Christ could be the Savior, the Life and Life-Giver, and as such preached to all men.

And of this most blessed truth we have the fullest and most unquestionable evidence. We can, therefore, implicitly yield ourselves to the impression of these narratives, and, still more, to the realization of that most sacred and blessed fact. This is the foundation of the church, the inscription on the banner of her armies, the strength and comfort of every Christian heart, and the grand hope of humanity! *The Lord is risen indeed!* (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, II:629).

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

1. F.E. Marsh states that the resurrection of Christ is the "heart" of Christianity. List the other 4 metaphors he uses to show the importance of the resurrection.
a. _____ b. _____
c. _____ d. _____
2. The clearest prophecy of Jesus' resurrection in the Old Testament is

3. Christianity is an _____ faith, based on _____ or _____.
4. List the 4 main evidences for the resurrection of Christ.
a. _____ b. _____
c. _____ d. _____
5. Discuss the reasons why the disciples did *not* steal Jesus' body.

6. Why was it so important that an apostle see Jesus after His resurrection? See Acts 1:22; I Cor. 9:1.

7. After the resurrection, the disciples were changed. Discuss what changed them from "fearful" to "fearless" men.

The Resurrection of Christ

8. In I Cor. 15:12-19, Paul lists some consequences if Christ were not raised. List some of these.

9. How do baptism and the Lord's Day help prove that Jesus did rise from the dead?

LESSON 8

Why I Love the Church

Introduction

- A. Some people do not love the church.
- B. What do we mean by the “church”?
- I. We Are Commanded to Love the Church
 - A. Jesus and the apostles taught love for her
 - B. The significance of love
- II. The Gospel Came to Us through the Church
- III. The Church Is God’s Family on Earth
 - A. The church as God’ family.
 - B. The church has faults — but she is to be loved anyway
 - C. I want to love and view the church as Christ does.
- IV. The Church Provides Support and Encouragement

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- A. New Testament teaching on supporting and encouraging
- B. Why this Christian sharing (fellowship) is so important.
- V. The Church Belongs to Christ and He Loves Her
 - A. Evidence of Christ's love for the church — His wife
 - B. I love the church because Christ does
- VI. The Church — Our "Ark of Safety"
 - A. The coming destruction
 - B. Christ will take His people home before the end.

Introduction

We like to sing:

I love Thy Kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thine abode;
The Church our blest Redeemer saved
With His own precious blood.

A. *Some people do not love the church.* Some Christians sing it truthfully. Others do not. Many members love Christ and His church and show it by obeying His commands and serving His church "in deed and in truth" (I John 3:18; John 14:15). Others rarely attend, rarely give, and seldom do any real work to advance the cause of Christ. Their love is mostly in words, not deeds! They expect Christ to save them, but feel little need for the church now.

We should be saddened but not surprised at this because Jesus and the apostles warned of times of a loss of love. Jesus said because of wickedness "the love of

most will grow cold" (Matt. 24:12-13, NIV). In the last days, Paul said, "Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money . . . lovers of pleasure." They will not be "lovers of the good" or "lovers of God" "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (II Tim. 3:1-5, NASB, NIV).

Jesus rebuked the church at Ephesus because they had left their first love (Rev. 2:4). These warnings apply to many in the church today.

B. *What do we mean by the "church"?* Before discussing why one should love the church, let us identify what we mean by the "church." We speak only of Christ's church as described in the New Testament (Matt. 16:18).

1. *The one that He bought "with His own blood" at Calvary* (Acts 20:28, NIV; I Cor. 6:19-20).

2. *The one He said He would build, and did on Pentecost, A.D. 30* (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:1-47; 11:15).

3. *The church built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God* (I Cor. 3:11; Matt. 16:16; Eph. 2:19-22).

4. *The church that requires faith, repentance, confession, and baptism as terms of admission* (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37-38,41; Rom. 10:9-10; 6:3-5).

5. *The church whose faith and doctrine is based only in Christ and His teaching as found in the New Testament* (John 16:12-14; I Cor. 2:2; II Tim. 3:16-17), whose authority is Christ, the head of the church (Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:18).

6. *The church that meets on each Lord's Day for public worship, which consists of prayer and praise, gospel preaching, the Lord's Supper and offering of substance* (Acts 20:7; 2:42; I Cor. 16:2).

7. *The church whose privilege it is to carry the gospel to every person on earth* (Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8).

I love the church because:

I. We Are Commanded to Love the Church

A. Jesus and the apostles taught love for her. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you . . ." (John 13:34, NASB). This command was not new in that no one had commanded love before, for God had in Leviticus 19:18. It was new because of the depth of love that Jesus commanded. It was to be a love like His for His disciples.

Peter wrote, "Honor all men, love the brotherhood" (I Pet. 2:17, NASB). He continues, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (I Pet. 4:8, NIV). In I Peter 1:22, he adds, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart" (NIV).

Paul wrote, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." You show this when you "honor one another above yourselves." This "love must be sincere" (Rom. 12:10,9, NIV). It was Paul who wrote the beautiful hymn of praise for "love" in I Corinthians 13. To love our brethren in the church is to practice the "Queen of the Graces."

As Christians we should love one another for love is the very essence of God. When we love, we reflect the One who "is love" (I John 4:8).

B. The significance of love.

1. *Love is one of the identifying marks of the Christian.* Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35, NIV).

The apostle John adds, "God is love; and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (I John 4:16), NASB).

2. *Obedience with love reveals us as one who knows the Lord.* John writes, "We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands." He adds, "If anyone obeys His word, God's love is truly made complete in Him" (I John 2:3,5, NIV). Our love for God and man is made complete as we obey God's commands. Jesus connected love and obedience when He said, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15, NASB).

3. *Love for our Christian brethren is evidence of the New Birth.* First John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers" (NIV). In I John 4:20, it is stated this way, "If anyone says, 'I love God' yet hates his brother, he is a liar; for anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen!" (NIV). *Strong Doctrine!* (cf. I John 3:10; 4:11,21; Col. 1:4; I Thess. 3:12).

II. The Gospel Came to Us through the Church

The Lord chose His church as the channel or agency through whom the Holy Spirit worked to bring us the gospel of salvation. Jesus gave the command to the apostles and through them to the church (Matt. 28:19-20). The apostles began preaching the gospel on Pentecost (Acts 2). In Acts 8:4, when the church was scattered by persecution, Luke says, "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere *preaching the word*" (KJV). Paul instructed Timothy, "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to

faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2, NASB).

Jesus entrusted the gospel to the church to preserve, defend and transmit it to future generations. Paul wrote that "the church of the Living God" is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15).

The church preserved the truth — the gospel — as it copied, translated, and protected the Old and New Testaments from the first century on. As the church preached the Word, it transmitted it to future generation who needed this saving gospel. Thus, the church became the "pillar and ground of the truth" as it preserved and proclaimed the "truth" from Christ until the present.

Men continued this teaching until someone taught my parents who then taught me. I thank God for the church through whom the saving gospel came to me!

The sole purpose of the church is to "save" souls through preaching the gospel (I Cor. 1:21). The church is God's lighthouse — sending forth the light of salvation to a lost or shipwrecked world. It is God's hospital — where sick and dying people come for healing by the great Physician of their souls.

III. The Church Is God's Family on Earth

It is a privilege to be in God's family on earth — our spiritual family now and in eternity. The New Testament identifies:

A. *The church as God's family.* Paul informs Timothy how one should "conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God" (I Tim. 3:15, NASB). The church is also called "the household of the

faith," God's household," "a people for God's own possession" (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; I Pet. 2:9, NASB; cf. Heb. 3:6; I Pet. 4:17).

God is our heavenly Father, Jesus is in some sense, a brother (cf. Rom. 8:17). All Christians are brothers/sisters in Christ (Matt. 23:8; Gal. 1:2; I Thess. 4:10; Eph. 6:23; II Pet. 3:15).

Blood is what makes one a brother or sister; the blood of the same father flowing in your veins. As God's children, we have all been cleansed by the blood of Christ, and have the same heavenly Father.

B. The church has faults — but she is to be loved anyway. The church has flaws because she is composed of flawed people. There are no blemishes in Christ the Head. Many fail to distinguish between the perfect Christ and the imperfect body. As the family of God, we are children trying to grow and mature into the image of Christ. We are like a hospital where patients go to become healthy and whole. We do not expect children to be faultless nor patients to be in perfect health. We know we're not perfect. But we often expect others to be. Only by God's grace and forgiveness can we mature in Christ and live without sin.

Normally we love our family in spite of their faults. We accept them, stand by them, and regard them with more affection than those outside our home. We should treat our spiritual family the same way.

We admit that all of us can sin and bring shame on the Lord's body. Sadly, this has been happening since the beginning (see the Corinthian letters). This has surely brought great pain to our Lord! But we want Him to love

and forgive us as well as our brethren in the church. So we must love and forgive them, too.

We need to remember that it is the Lord's church and when we publicly malign the church we malign Christ. When we leave the church, we leave Christ, and our spiritual brothers and sisters! When someone sins in our family, we don't broadcast it throughout the community and leave home until it is cleared up. We stay and help the sinning ones to repent. We keep it within the family because we love them! God wants us to do the same with His family, the church.

When Saul and Jonathan were killed, David pleaded with the people, "Tell it not in Gath" (II Sam. 1:20). Why not? Gath was a Philistine city that would rejoice in the death of King Saul. David had ample reason to dislike Saul, for Saul had tried to kill him. But he was thinking of God's "anointed," and God's people, and did not want the heathen to gloat over them.

The world about us love to hear of the latest scandal involving a church leader. They rejoice and say, "See, they're all a bunch of hypocrites!" But of course that is not true. The Lord has millions of faithful Christians, trying hard to live a holy life. But the minority who commit flagrant sins, do disgrace the whole church.

Some say: "I love Christ. But I do not love the church." Lester Shell writes: "To separate Christ from the church would be like severing the head from the body" (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22). Christ is the head of the church. We're to love the head and the body! (I Pet. 1:8,22).

Satan and evil men are working hard to destroy the church (I Pet. 5:8; I Cor. 3:17; Gal. 1:13). We must not help them by spreading the sins of the church before a

critical world. Rather, we should protect its good name, and help it remain holy. Remember that Jesus died to save the church, and sits at the right hand of God now, interceding for her (Rom. 8:34). If we love Christ, we must love his family and help them survive the world's assaults.

True, there are times when because of various conflicts we may need to separate ourselves from one group of Christians, like Paul and Barnabas did in Acts 15:35-41. But like them we should go on working and not forsake the Lord and His church.

When we say to love and help each other, we do not mean to condone and ignore their sins. That would only leave them in their sins. Jesus and the apostles taught that one should express his love by going to them and helping them repent and forsake sin (*read* Gal. 6:1-2; II Thess. 3:13-15; Matt. 8:15-18).

C. I want to love and view the church as Christ does. A story I read may illustrate how Jesus views the church. A young mother was taken to the hospital seriously ill. She was not a member of a local congregation, but had attended one recently and knew the minister's name. He was called and went to see her.

When he entered the room her husband and children were grouped around the bed. They were poorly clad, and unkempt, giving evidence of little money. The mother introduced them proudly to the preacher as her family. But as she viewed them standing by this well-dressed man, she realized they must look rather shabby to him. Soberly, she said, "Oh, I know they don't look like much to you, but *they mean the world to me!*"

Sound Doctrine

This must be the way Jesus looks at His church. Even though we stumble and falter and fail to live up “to the glory of God,” yet, we “mean the world” to Him. For He died for us that He might cleanse us from all sin and might “present her [us] to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:25-27, NIV).

IV. The Church Provides Support and Encouragement

God made man a dependent creature. We in the church are not independent but interdependent. We need help from both God and man. Some out of pride may not accept help. Others, lacking concern, may not give help. For various reasons some churches may lack compassion, that will cause some to lament like David, “No one cares for my soul” (Ps. 142:4, NASB).

But in times of real need, most people respond freely. In my experience most Christians do care about others and will help when the need is presented. Especially, if it is a physical need. When people are hungry, in need of clothing, are sick and hurting or dying, the church is usually the first to respond to those needs. If it is a matter of sin and moral suffering, the church is also there to meet the need. And it should be. That is the way our Lord ministered.

A. New Testament teaching on supporting and encouraging. For example: We are to care for widows and orphans (Acts 6:1-6; Jas. 1:27), support elders who lead and proclaim the Word (I Tim. 5:17-20), pray for one another (I Thess. 1:2; Jas. 5:16; Phil. 1:3-4), weep and rejoice with one another (Rom. 12:15), assist financially the brother in

need (I John 3:17), and do good to all men, especially those of the household of the faith (Gal. 6:10).

Also, we should help the sinning brother overcome his sin (Gal. 6:1-2), and forgive each other their sins (Eph. 4:32). In I Thess. 5:11-15, Paul writes, "Encourage one another, and build up one another." Then lists several ways to do it, concluding with, "seek after that which is good for one another and for all men." Second Corinthians 12:15 expresses the attitude of most New Testament Christians when Paul said, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (ASV). This is New Testament Christian fellowship.

B. *Why this Christian sharing (fellowship) is so important.* This mutual support is needed. As has been said, "A world that despairs, needs a church that cares." Alone the storms of life that blow so hard can topple us. But with the support of Christ and our brothers and sisters we can stand. I am told that the giant redwood trees in California have shallow roots. How can they be so strong with shallow roots? The answer is that these great trees are connected to each other by their roots. As the roots intertwine with each other, they form a network of strength that enables them to withstand the storms. Christians rooted in God and to each other can also stand amidst the storms of life.

I recently saw in a family crisis, the beauty of this sharing demonstrated. Cancer was discovered in one of the daughters which required extensive surgery. The night before the operation, her brother, who is a doctor, left his practice and drove several miles to be with her during this traumatic time. He remained four days until she was safely home. The next day, a sister drove several hours to

be with her sister for five days. Three days later the mother of the girl flew in to care for her and her husband for two weeks. The father, another daughter and the rest of the family offered support and encouragement through phone calls, letters and earnest prayer. This is the way a family should react in times of need. God's family — the church should and often does act the same way!

I have seen this Christian support in my own life. In 1939, I was a poor, struggling student in Bible college. When about to leave, Pres. Lowell Lusby informed me that a ladies' class in Lexington, Kentucky, wanted to support a poor mountain preacher through school. He quipped, "I don't know anyone more from the mountains than you are!" This class of dedicated women was taught by Mrs. Elizabeth Mallory, a devout and capable teacher. For the next three years they assisted me with money, encouragement, and love. Many kept in touch with me as long as they lived. They inspired me to be faithful to God's Word and His church. Thank God for the Service Class of First Christian Church!

There are millions of people around the world who have been encouraged and blessed by the support of other Christians. A preacher was going through some "deep water" in his life. He was near leaving the ministry. One Sunday morning a lady said as she left, "I pray for you daily." The preacher was touched for he did not know the people were praying for him. After several years of effective service, he said he was convinced he would have lost his mind and his ministry were it not for the prayers of these godly people. Thank God for the support and encouragement of the church!

**V. The Church Belongs to Christ —
And He Loves Her.**

Another reason to love the church is because she belongs to Christ and He loves her. In Ephesians, considered by some to be the pinnacle of Paul's writings, Jesus' closeness to the church is stated in these terms:

1) The church is His Body — He is the Head (Eph. 1:22-23)

2) The church is His Family — God is the Father (Eph. 2:19; 3:14-15).

3) The church is His Building — He is the Chief Cornerstone (Eph. 2:19-20)

4) The church is a Holy Temple in which God and Christ dwell (Eph. 2:21-22).

5) The church is His Wife or Bride — He is the husband (Eph. 5:22-23; Rev. 19:7-9)

I love the church because of her close relationship to Christ. In other words, I love her for "Christ's sake."

A. Evidence of Christ's love for the church — His Wife.
Jesus proved His love for the church when:

1. *He died for her.* Ephesians 5:25 states, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (NIV). He died so that He might cleanse her of all sin and "present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkles or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:2, NIV). This, of course, was accomplished by the "blood of His cross" shed on Calvary (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:20). This was Amazing Love!

2. *He nourishes and cherishes the church* (Eph. 5:29). He not only provides physical food to nourish our bodies, but He provides spiritual food for our souls. Jesus

cherishes the church. He considers us to be very valuable and precious and holds us near to His heart. We should begin each day with the song in our hearts, "O, how I love Jesus, because He first loved me!"

3. *He suffers when His body suffers.* When Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, He asked the angry persecutor, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:7, NIV). Saul was hurting the Christians, but Jesus was also feeling the pain. When our spouse or children suffer, we suffer also, because we love them. Jesus suffers with us because He loves us, His church.

B. *I love the church because Christ does.* When we love someone, we tend to love the things they love or own. We often cherish things like clothing, toys, or an animal, because someone we love gave it to us. It's the connection with the loved one that makes it precious.

Once as a teen I visited in the home of a neighbor. As the man showed me some items that he cherished, he picked up an old hymnal. He turned to a certain page that was torn. It was an ordinary page, and I wondered why he treasured it. He explained. Many years before, his wife was holding their small son on her lap as she played the organ. The little boy reached up and grabbed the page and tore it. A short time later, the little boy became sick and died.

That torn page provided a tangible reminder of a loved one now absent from the home. He loved the boy, so he cherished the torn page.

Jesus, who died for us, is not here now in person. But His church is. We can show our love for Christ by loving, serving, and supporting His body, the church.

VI. The Church — Our “Ark of Safety”

A. *The coming destruction.* Peter tells us that God desires all men to repent and not perish (II Pet. 3:9). His seeming slowness in sending Jesus is to give man more opportunities to repent. But Peter warns, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (II Pet. 3:10, NASB).

Paul states that the Lord will return with His mighty angels “in flaming fire,” punishing “those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (II Thess. 1:7-8, NASB).

B. *Christ will take His people home before the end.* The good news is that those in Christ, His church, will not go through those terrible times. Before the time of destruction and judgment, Jesus will come and take His people away.

Paul writes, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:16-17, NASB).

Jesus promised the apostles to return and take them to that home He had prepared for them and for us (John 14:1-3).

Before God destroyed the earth with a flood, he instructed Noah to build an ark to save the righteous, Noah and his family. The church which Jesus built is our “ark of safety” from the next destruction.

When we obey the gospel, that puts us "in Christ," according to Galatians 3:26-27 and Romans 6:3. When we are saved, then the Lord adds us to His church (Acts 2:47, lit., "added together," with the other Christians). How do we get into this "ark of safety"? We are saved by the gospel and added by Christ (Acts 2:37-41,47; I Cor. 12:13), like Noah who was saved by believing God's Word and entering the ark.

I love the Lord and His church and plan by God's grace to remain in both! Those who were in Noah's ark were saved. Those in Christ and His church will be saved! "Let brotherly love continue!" (Heb. 13:1, KJV).

For these and many other reasons I shall continue to sing:

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God;
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood,
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family, *the family of God!*

WHY I LOVE THE CHURCH

1. In this lesson, what is meant by the "church"?

2. Love for our Christian brethren is evidence of what?

3. Explain how the gospel came to us through the church.

4. The church is called "God's household" (Eph. 2:19).
What makes one a brother or a sister, in a physical
family or in the church, our spiritual family?

5. Discuss the faulty logic in this statement, "I love Christ,
but not the church." _____
6. How does Christ view the church, even with her
faults?

7. Discuss how the church provides support and encour-
agement. _____
8. In what ways does Christ show His love for the church
(see Eph. 5:25-29; Acts 9:7).

LESSON 9

Life Is in the Blood

- I. Blood and the Human Body
 - A. Blood is the life of the body
 - B. Prominence of blood in the Bible
- II. The Place of Blood in the Old Testament
 - A. The sanctity of blood
 - B. Blood — used to seal or confirm covenants
 - C. Passover — blood used to save firstborn in Egypt
- III. Blood and the Law of Moses
 - A. The Law given and sealed with blood
 - B. Animal sacrifices
 - C. Day of Atonement — Lev. 16:1-34
- IV. Under the Law, What Did the Blood Accomplish?
 - A. It was a yearly reminder of sin
 - B. The Law taught people what sin was, and that it took blood to atone for it

Sound Doctrine

V. The Death of Christ — the Finished Work

- A. The Death of Christ — its importance
- B. Blessings the blood of Christ brings
- C. The Lord's Supper — a constant reminder of the blood

VI. How the Sinner Receives the Benefits of Christ's Blood

- A. The alien sinner
- B. The Christian who sins

"The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls" (Lev. 17:11).

Blood has been viewed as sacred since the beginning of time. Knowing little about it, men often held it in superstitious awe. Primitive religions offered blood sacrifices to control plagues, stop droughts, or appease an angry god. Only in recent times have we learned the true nature of this "river of life" that flows through each of us.

Interestingly, the Bible states facts about blood that only in modern times are fully understood. For example, that the life of the body is in the blood (Lev. 17:11,14). Doctors today know this to be a literal statement as we shall show.

I. Blood and the Human Body

A. *Blood is the life of the body.* God told Moses at Mt. Sinai when He gave him the Law, "The life of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11). Dr. Paul Brand says, "To a surgeon, blood is the emblem of life. That is not just a philosophical or historical concept, but a deeply rooted

awareness. Blood is life. Loss of blood is loss of life" (*Christianity Today*, 3/4/1983, p. 38).

Most adults have five to seven quarts of blood. This vital fluid coursing through our flesh brings food and oxygen to sustain all bodily functions. "As the heart pumps the blood through the network of arteries, capillaries and veins, every cell in the body is continually supplied and cleansed. No part of the flesh can live without being in contact with this throbbing stream of life" (Coleman, *Written in Blood*, p. 18).

Blood not only nourishes the body but it also defends it against germs and diseases. The white cells in the blood are the militia that does this. Blood also manufactures new blood. Millions of blood cells die and are replaced each day. The new ones are produced in the red marrow of the bones. These two functions preserve and continue the life of the body. We can understand the Bible's speaking of "lifeblood" or "blood of your lives" (Gen. 9:5, NASB, KJV). All of this is amazing and can come only from the Creator.

"The blood is so important to every part of the body that if the flow of the blood is shut off from any part for an hour, that part may die. If the supply of blood is shut off from the brain, unconsciousness quickly results, and death occurs within a short time. If the body itself loses more than one third of its blood suddenly, death will result also" (*World Book*, V. 2, p. 843). Truly, "the life of the flesh is in the blood!"

B. Prominence of blood in the Bible. There are 460 references to blood in the Bible. If related concepts such as altar, sacrifices, atonement, etc., were counted, the total would be much higher. The word "blood" occurs in 42

books. Leviticus alone speaks of blood nearly one hundred times. "Of these references, 362 are in the Hebrew and 98 in the Greek . . . the word occurs most often in Leviticus and Ezekiel in the Old Testament, and Hebrews and Revelation in the New Testament" (Coleman, *Written in Blood*, p. 10).

II. The Place of Blood in the Old Testament

A. The sanctity of blood. Throughout the Bible Blood is viewed as sacred. There are several reasons for this attitude. Here are a few.

1. *Blood comes from God and is the life of the body.* Since without blood there is no life, it is natural that it should be regarded with reverence. The person and his blood are closely identified. For instance, murder is described as shedding blood (Gen. 9:6; Num. 35:33). God seems to personify Abel's blood when He says to Cain, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10). Blood is sacred. Only God can make it!

2. *Blood is the means God used to make atonement for sin.* He explains, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls" (Lev. 17:11, ASV). We will discuss this more fully later. But this is another reason for the sanctity of blood.

3. *God forbids man to eat blood.* He is not to treat it as common food or drink. Genesis 9:3-4 says, "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you: I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (NASB). God forbids

the eating of blood because it is sacred. This was under the Patriarchal Age.

Secondly, God forbids the eating of blood under the Mosaic Age. He explains, "The life of every creature is the blood of it; therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off" (RSV) (see Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; Deut. 12:23).

Thirdly, God forbids the eating of blood in the Christian Age. After the Conference on Circumcision in Jerusalem, the apostles and elders sent a letter to the Gentile Christians stating the decision that they did not need to be circumcised in order to be saved. But they did add that they should "abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication" (Acts 15:29, NASB). These prohibitions are repeated in Acts 15:20 and 21:25.

The Jews already abstained from these things. The Gentiles needed extra teaching because (1) they may not have realized that the life of the body was in the blood, and (2) these were things they had practiced in their pagan religions before they became Christians. They needed to give special care to avoid them.

When God forbids something in the Patriarchal, Mosaic and Christian ages, certainly we should avoid them today.

4. *Blood was to be poured out on the ground.* In ancient Israel they not only drained the blood from any beast or fowl before it was eaten, but God also commanded that the blood be poured out on the ground "like water" and covered with dust (Lev. 17:13; Deut. 12:16,23-24; 15:23; cf. Ezek. 24:7). Robert Coleman writes, "Returning the

blood to the earth suggested that life was being given back to God, the Creator of the earth, while covering the blood with dust resembled the burial of a body" (*Written in Blood*, p. 21). Blood was sacred, it must be treated as such!

B. Blood — used to seal or confirm covenants. Blood is a universal symbol of loyalty, faithfulness, or commitment even unto death. The red stripes in Old Glory, or the red star of Communism, signify that those who live under them will give their lives for that for which they stand.

Primitive peoples sealed friendship pacts by cutting their hands and mingling their blood in a handshake. This is reflected in the pact between Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. With this high regard for blood it is natural that it was used to seal or confirm covenants. This is seen throughout the Bible. Here are a few examples:

1. *The covenant concerning Abram's heir and the promise of the holy land.* Abram was old and childless. In Genesis 15:4, God assures Abram that Eliezer "will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your body." Genesis 15:18 says "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land." He then describes the boundaries of the holy land.

In Genesis 15:8-17 the sealing of this covenant is given in the somewhat mysterious ritual of killing the animals and splitting them in two, leaving a passageway between the pieces. After the sun had set, "there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between the pieces" (v. 17). This symbolized that God was entering and confirming the covenant with blood.

2. *The covenant of circumcision.* When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God came to him and promised to make him exceedingly great. Many nations would come from him, and God promised to give to his descendants all the land of Canaan (Gen. 17:1-8). Abraham's part, God said, was to "walk before Me, and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1). God added, "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. . . . You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you" (Gen. 17:10-11, NASB).

This surgery on the male reproductive organ would mean the shedding of blood. This blood confirmed the covenant and left a permanent reminder of the covenant relationship between God and the seed of Abraham. Any male who neglected or refused to be circumcised "shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (Gen. 17:14). God took this seriously.

C. Passover — blood used to save firstborn in Egypt.

1. *The First Passover Feast.* The oldest and most important sacrificial feast of Israel was the Passover. It came at the end of their bitter bondage in Egypt. For over 400 years they had suffered under the lash of the cruel taskmasters. They cried to God for help (Exod. 2:23-25), and He heard them and sent Moses to deliver them (Exod. 6:2-9). When Moses and Aaron arrived and announced their mission, Pharaoh refused to let Israel go. God then brought nine painful plagues upon the land, but he still refused to release the slaves. God then sent Moses to warn Pharaoh of one last terrible plague. Moses said, "Thus says the LORD, 'About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt,

and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die . . .” (Exod. 11:4-5a). From Pharaoh to the slave girl to the cattle, the first-born of each would die, unless God’s people were freed. But Pharaoh refused.

Moses then instructed each Israelite household to choose a lamb, a year-old male without defect, on the tenth day of the month, and on the fourteenth evening to kill it. They were then to dip a hyssop branch in some of the lamb’s blood, sprinkle it on the lintel and sideposts of the front door and go in the house and remain there till morning. Having shed and sprinkled the blood, they now had shelter under it’s protection.

The lamb was roasted and eaten that night, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs — symbolic of their deliverance and the bitterness of their bondage. They ate with clothes and sandals on and with a staff in their hands, ready to depart in the morning. At midnight the Lord smote all the first-born of the Egyptians, but passed over the homes with the blood on the door frames. They were literally saved by the “blood of the lamb.”

The shocked people of Egypt, including Pharaoh, begged the Israelites to leave. They loaded them with silver, gold, and clothing and urged them to hurry saying, “We are all dead men!” (Exod. 12:30-36). And they left for the Promised Land!

From that Day onward, Israel observed the Passover plus the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was the last feast that Jesus observed before He died (Matt. 17; Luke 22).

2. *Christ — the Fulfillment of the Passover.* The New Testament clearly identifies Christ as the fulfillment of the Passover. John the Baptist called Jesus, “The Lamb of

God, who takes away the sin of world!" (I John 1:29, RSV). According to John's chronology Jesus was hanging on the cross at the precise time when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered (John 13:1; 18:28; 19:14). Jesus is identified as the "Lamb" twenty-eight times in the book of Revelation (Rev. 5:6,9; 7:14). Paul declares, "For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" (I Cor. 5:7).

As God used the "lamb" in Egypt to save the obedient first-born, and free all Israel from bondage, so Christ, today, saves those obedient to the gospel and frees them from the bondage to sin (see I Pet. 1:18-19; Rom. 6:17-18).

III. Blood and the Law of Moses

The Law of Moses was a significant development in God's plan of redemption. This tremendous event took place at Mt. Sinai and is recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. This covenant, too, was sealed with blood like the covenant with Abraham.

A. *The Law given and sealed with blood.* After God gave Moses the Law, he came down from the mount "and told the people all the words of the LORD," and they said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exod. 24:3).

Moses then wrote down all these words. The next morning he built an altar at the base of the mountain and sacrificed burnt and peace offerings to God (vv. 4-5). Taking some of the blood he threw it against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. They replied, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" (Exod. 24:6-7). Moses then sprinkled blood on the people and on the book say-

ing, "This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you" (Heb. 9:19-20). God and Israel accepted the covenant (Law) and sealed it with blood.

B. *Animal Sacrifices.* Robert E. Coleman writes, "Official public sacrifices prescribed (annually) by law would number altogether 1,273 (cf. Num. 28, 29). If regularly observed, this would amount to almost 2,000,000 from Moses to Christ, apart from the countless millions of unnumbered individual offerings and additional public sacrifices" (Num. 29:39).

It is true that the sacrifices were often neglected during periods of religious indifference, "still the number of animals slain in sacrifice is staggering to imagine" (*Written in Blood*, p. 30-31).

A special sewer system was constructed in the temple, leading from the brazen altar to the Kidron Valley, just to carry away the blood from these sacrifices.

Naturally one would ask, why all this bloodshed? The answer — most of it was shed to atone for sin. This was especially true of the "sin offering" (Lev. 4:13-35; 6:24-30) and the "trespass offering" (Lev. 5 and 6). But the national offerings for sin came on a special day, the

C. *Day of Atonement* (Lev. 16:1-34). This occurred annually on the tenth day of the seventh month (roughly our October). It was a day to remember the sins of the past year with deep humiliation, fasting, and prayer. It was the most solemn day of the year. The high priest led or supervised the services of the day.

The principal service went like this. The high priest bathed himself in water and put on plain white linen garments (Lev. 16:4). He chose a bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering for himself and for his family. He

chose two goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering for the people of Israel (Lev. 16:3-5; 24).

The high priest killed the bull and took its blood into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for his and his family's sins. After burning incense, a symbol of prayer, he sprinkled the blood on the east side of the mercy seat and in front of it seven times, with his finger (Lev. 16:11-14, NASB).

Returning to the court, he cast lots for the two goats — one for Jehovah and one to be the "scapegoat," lit. "goat of removal." A scarlet cloth was tied to the horn of the goat designated the "scapegoat." A red cloth was tied around the throat of the other — a sign of its fate.

The high priest killed the goat on which the Lord's lot fell. Taking its blood he went into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat and in front of it seven times as he had the blood of the bull (Lev. 16:15). This was to atone for the sins of the nation of Israel.

The high priest also used blood to cleanse the Holy Place, the Altar of Incense, and the Altar of Sacrifice because of the sins of Israel.

Aaron then took the live goat and, placing both hands on his head, confessed all the sins of Israel, figuratively placing them on the scapegoat. He was then led into the wilderness, bearing away "all their iniquities to a solitary land" (Lev. 16:21-22, RSV).

Dr. Victor E. Hoven writes, "There is but one meaning that can be given to this climactic part of the type. The slain goat typified the means of atonement, the live one its effect" (*Shadow and Substance*, p. 102). The "means" is the blood, the "effect" the removal, the carrying away of sin. (See Hebrews 8:12; Micah 7:19; Ps. 103:12.)

IV. Under the Law, What Did the Blood Accomplish?

The New Testament is clear that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4, NASB). Paul writes, “By works of the Law shall no flesh be justified [forgiven]” (Gal. 2:16). What then was accomplished on the Day of Atonement as well as in the regular sin offerings?

A. *It was a yearly reminder of sin.* Hebrews 10:1-2 states that the law was “only a shadow of the good things to come,” not the realities themselves. Animal blood could not erase sin for “the law made nothing perfect” or complete (Heb. 7:19). Why then were these animals sacrificed? The answer, “In these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year” (Heb. 10:3, RSV). They were to remind the people of their sins and roll them forward until the great sacrifice by Christ could be made that would take away sin completely (Heb. 10:12).

B. *The Law taught people what sin was, and that it took blood to atone for it.* Paul states, “I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what it was to covet if the Law had not said, “Do not covet” (Rom. 7:7, NIV). He adds that sin was working through the law to bring death, so that sin might be seen to be “utterly sinful” or “exceeding sinful” (Rom. 7:13, NIV & KJV). The penalty for sin is death. It means the giving of a life— the shedding of blood! How evil sin is!

All the animal who died in the Old Testament taught one thing — “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22, NIV). Even though animal blood was powerless to cleanse the soul of sin, it pointed to “the Lamb of God” who *can* take “away the sin of the

world!" (John 1:29). The ultimate purpose for all the blood in the Old Testament was to prepare the Jews and the world for Christ and Calvary.

V. The Death of Christ — The Finished Work

"But when the fulness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5, ASV).

The time had come to fulfill all the types and the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Christ, and to complete the plan of Redemption which God had planned before man's creation. It was time for God's "Lamb" to die for all mankind that He might redeem them and adopt them as His sons!

A. The death of Christ — its importance. The death of Christ fills the Bible from beginning to end. His death is mentioned directly in the New Testament 175 times. His death and resurrection are mentioned directly in 21 of 27 books of the New Testament. The four Gospels devote, on average, one third of their accounts to the last week of Jesus' life. John devotes almost one-half of his Gospel to it.

Contrast this with the emphasis on the death of noted men today. Daniel Webster: His biography has 863 pages, but only 5 pages deal with his death. Abraham Lincoln: His biography by Nicolay and Hay covers 5,000 pages. But only 25 of them tell of his tragic death by the assassin. In the lives of great men, death is treated as an incident at the end of a career. But with Jesus it is the main event of His life! Why is this true?

Sound Doctrine

The death and resurrection of Christ is the pinnacle of all history. Ralph Earle writes, "Calvary stands at the crossroads of human history. All the divine paths of the past led to it. All the divine paths of the present and future lead from it" (Henry, *Basic Christian Doctrine*, p. 138f). The reason: At Calvary divine love and human sin met. The latter was conquered by the former and man's salvation was made sure by the blood of the Cross!

The significance of the blood of Christ is seen in the words used to describe the benefits of the gospel.

B. Blessings the blood of Christ brings.

1. *The blood of Christ sealed the New Covenant.* The Old Covenant was sealed or confirmed by the blood of animals (Exod. 24). The New Covenant was sealed by the blood of Jesus. When Christ gave the Lord's Supper, He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25, ASV). When one drinks the "fruit of the vine," the "blood of the grape," he is assured that God will keep His promises for the blood of Christ has confirmed it! (Luke 22:18; Deut. 32:14).

In the covenant of circumcision, Abraham used his own blood to seal it (Gen. 17:24). In the Law of Moses, the blood of animals was used (Exod. 24:1-8). But the Christian covenant was sealed with the blood of God's only begotten Son!

2. *Christ, through His death, obtained complete and eternal salvation for all mankind.* Aaron and the priests offered "repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (Heb. 10:11, RSV). "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God" . . . "having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 10:12, RSV; 9:12, NASB).

The gospel then is the "good news" that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3-4, NIV). The key phrase is "died for our sins." Paul said, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Peter wrote, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (Rom. 5:8; I Pet. 2:24, NIV).

It has been said, "The blood of Calvary flows backward as well as forward." Jesse Kellems writes, "Christ's blood was to be shed for the sins of all mankind, hence those of the past as well as those who should live after His coming are cleansed by His blood" (*The Deity of Christ*, p. 112). See Hebrews 9:15 for confirmation of this. God's offer of forgiveness in the Old Testament was a promissory note, dependent on the death of Christ for its redemption. All sin, in all times, has been forgiven through the blood of Christ!

This salvation is described in many ways. For example:

a. Justified. When one believes and obeys the gospel, he is "justified," "declared "innocent," freed from the penalty of sin (Rom. 5:1). Justified is a legal term. As sinners, men stood before God's court guilty, condemned, deserving of death! Jesus took our place — our blame — our penalty (II Cor. 5:21). God then can pronounce us innocent, guiltless. And "since we have now been justified by his blood," we shall "be saved from God's wrath through him" (Rom. 5:9, NIV).

b. Redeemed. The blood of Christ also "redeems" us from the bondage of sin. Paul states, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin" (Eph. 1:7, NIV). Peter says we have been redeemed "with

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the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Pet. 1:19, KJV). Redeemed is a slave market term, describing the process of paying the ransom and freeing a slave from bondage. Jesus our Redeemer, also paid the "ransom" for our freedom. The ransom was His life — His blood! (Titus 2:14; Mark 10:45). Therefore, we sing with Fanny Crosby, "Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb!"

c. Cleansed. The blood of Christ "cleanses" us from all sin. The symbol of blood as a "cleansing" agent appears throughout the Bible. In Leviticus 14, blood was used to cleanse one with leprosy. John says "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Revelation speaks of a multitude who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb" (7:14).

Today we think of blood as a staining agent, not a cleansing one. It is something to scrub off rather than scrub with. We use water for our cleansing. Dr. Paul Brand, however, states that the biblical idea of blood and cleansing agrees precisely with the function of blood in the human body. Blood performs a double function: it provides every cell with nutrients and carries away all waste. It fuels and cleanses!

For example: "No cell lies more than a hair's breadth from a blood capillary . . ." This prevents poisonous by-products from piling up and causing ill effects. Traveling slowly inside these narrow capillaries, the red blood cells "simultaneously release their cargoes of fresh oxygen and absorb waste products (carbon dioxide, urea, and uric

acid). The red cells deliver these potentially hazardous chemicals to organs that can dump them outside the body" (Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, "Blood: The Miracle of Cleansing," *Christianity Today*, 2/18/83, p. 13).

The lungs collect the carbon dioxide and exhale it with each breath. As the blood flows through the kidneys, that marvelous organ filters out many complex chemicals and cleans the blood and restores it to the blood stream. As the blood passes through the liver, it is freed of more waste matter and poisons. The speed and efficiency with which the blood performs its janitorial duties is amazing!

What blood does in the physical realm, the blood of Christ does in the spiritual realm. It saves, it cleanses as it removes sin from our souls and gives us life! *We are truly saved by the blood!*

C. The Lord's Supper — a constant reminder of the blood. Jesus instituted this memorial feast on the night He was betrayed, during the Passover meal (I Cor. 11:23; Mark 14:22).

Its elements consisted of unleavened bread and "the fruit of the vine" (cup) (Mark 14:12,22; Matt. 26:26-29). The bread symbolized His body which was offered as a propitiation for sin; the cup pictured His blood which was shed "for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Both were appropriate reminders of His suffering on the cross.

The cup, containing the "blood of the grape" (Deut. 32:14) is a fitting symbol of the blood of Christ. It was that blood which sealed the new covenant between God and man. The cup also reminds the Christian that in "the blood" is the one source of forgiveness (I John 1:7).

The cup also tells us that in the blood of Christ there is life. As physical life is in the blood of the body (Lev. 17:11), so spiritual and eternal life is in the blood of Christ (John 6:53-57). Death and life come together in this memorial meal. Death to the One who shed it, and life to the one who receives it. Sorrow for the one and joy for the other! Repentance and thanksgiving our response!

As we partake of this love feast each Lord's Day, like the first Christians (Acts 20:7), we renew our covenant with Him and receive spiritual strength and renewal for His service. It is important that we not forsake "our own assembling together" as some do (Heb. 10:25), but come with repentance and thanksgiving in our hearts to worship Him.

VI. How the Sinner Receives the Benefits of Christ's Blood

A. The alien sinner. It is important to know that the blood of Christ can cleanse us from all sin. It is equally important to know where, and in what manner, we meet the blood of Jesus. The New Testament is clear that we appropriate the benefit of His shed blood "by faith." We are to believe on Him as the Christ and our personal Savior, and confess him as such before witnesses (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9-10; Matt. 16:16; Heb. 11:6). We then repent and turn from all sin (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:37-38).

It is logical that we would meet the blood where it was shed — in His death. Romans 6:3-5 makes this clear: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through bap-

tism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4, NASB).

The penitent believer is baptized into Christ's "death," "Buried with Him through baptism," and "baptized into Christ" (vv. 3,4); "united with Him," raised with Him "in the likeness of His resurrection" (vv. 4,5). Here the blood is applied to his sins and he rises to "walk in newness of life" (v. 4). Hebrews 10:22 says: "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of *faith*, having our hearts *sprinkled* clean from an evil conscience and our body *washed with pure water*." Peter says that when we "obey" Christ we are "sprinkled with His blood" (I Pet. 1:2). These Scriptures combine faith, baptism, and blood in the process of coming into Christ and being separated from our sin.

Baptism is not a "work" to earn salvation. "It is rather that divine appointment wherein Almighty God meets the penitent believer with a certificate of pardon!" (Crawford, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 148).

This is what Ananias meant when he met the penitent believer, Saul, and said, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16, NASB). This is how and when the alien sinner meets the blood.

B. *The Christian who sins.* After conversion, Satan still tempts, and Christians do sin. God knew that and provided a way to be forgiven. When Simon sinned, Peter told him to "repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:22, RSV). To have Christ's blood applied to his sins, the Christian is to *repent* of the sin, and *pray* for God's forgiveness.

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John expressed it in these words: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, RSV). The word "confess" would seem to imply a repentance that prompted the confession of sin. This is how we reach the blood as a Christian.

Because of His love for lost mankind, Jesus gave His life to save us. We sing:

Jesus sought me when a stranger
Wandering from the fold of God:
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood!

May we never cease loving and serving Him till we stand before His throne dressed in robes washed and made white "in the blood of the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:14).

LIFE IS IN THE BLOOD

1. Blood not only _____ the body, but also _____ it against _____ and _____. The _____ in the blood are the militia that does the latter.
2. In the Bible, blood is viewed as sacred. Give two reasons why this is true. (Lev. 17:11)
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
3. In the act of circumcision, the blood _____ the covenant. At the first Passover in Egypt, the blood was used to _____ the firstborn.
4. When the Laws was confirmed at Mt. Sinai, the blood was sprinkled on what 3 things? (Exod. 24:1-8; Heb. 9:18-19). _____ , _____ , _____
5. Concerning sin, what was accomplished each year on the Day of Atonement? (Heb. 10:1-4)

6. What did Jesus accomplish in His death at Calvary? (Heb. 9:12,24-28; 10:12)

7. What does this mean: "The blood of Calvary flows backward as well as forward"?

8. Write 3 words that describe our salvation in Christ.

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9. What was God's purpose for giving the Law of Moses?

LESSON 10

Christianity — The One True Faith

Introduction

- I. Salvation by Works — Offered by Non-Christian Religions
 - A. Judaism — salvation by works
 - B. Islam's means of salvation
- II. Salvation by Grace — Offered by Christianity
 - A. Salvation through Christ — a gift *not* a reward
 - B. Works contrasted with grace
 - C. Grace the *One* way
- III. Christianity Is Based on Historical Events — Facts
- IV. Love Is the Basic Principle of Christianity
 - A. Proof that love is that principle
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- V. The Supreme Distinctive — Jesus Is the “Only Begotten” Son of God
 - A. Jesus is divine — a distinctive truth of Christianity
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 - C. More evidence for Jesus’ deity
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- VI. Jesus Is the World’s Only Savior
 - A. He provided the only *cure* for sin
 - B. Salvation’s source is in the nature of God and Jesus
 - C. Testimony for the Saviorhood of Christ
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- VII. Question — If Man Can Be Saved by Any Religion, Why Did Jesus Die?
 - A. Many non-Christian religions available when Jesus died.
 - B. Why did God work so long if Jesus’ death not necessary?
 - C. Why did Jesus suffer so if it was not needed?

Introduction

Christians believe that Christianity is the one true faith; the one sure way to reach God and obtain salvation from sins. This has been true since the day when Jesus established His church in Jerusalem in A.D. 30. Today there is a major challenge to this position.

Our shrinking world has brought together religions, cultures, and races on a scale unprecedented in history. For example, in this jet age we are no more than 24 hours

away from any spot on earth. Nearly 100,000 students from 150 countries of the world come to the United States every year to study in some 2,000 colleges and universities.

Naturally, they bring their cultures and religions with them. As we get to know them and their beliefs, some ask, "Are they not saved by their own beliefs?" Or others bluntly ask, "Is Jesus Christ the *only* way to God?"

From this discussion has come the philosophy known as Religious Pluralism whose cardinal virtue is "tolerance." To them tolerance is the sole absolute truth of our society.

1. *Meaning of tolerance.* The usual definition of tolerance is a willingness to put up with views different from one's own, forbearing, permitting to exist without interference; respecting others' beliefs, without necessarily agreeing with them. The idea that everyone has a right to his own opinion, is what tolerance means to most of us.

But today's new tolerance is vastly different. This new tolerance considers every individual's beliefs, values, lifestyle, and truth claims as equally valid (Josh McDowell/Bob Hostetler, *The New Tolerance*, pp. 22-23). We have moved from the position that "everyone has a right to his own opinions to everyone's opinions are equally right!" The new tolerance teaches that one must go beyond respecting a person's right to his beliefs; one must also praise and endorse that person's beliefs, values, and lifestyle. Anyone failing to do that is called a bigot, intolerant, prejudiced, biased.

2. *What is the Truth?* Obviously, there is a serious difference between the above two views. The solution is not found in how many hold a certain belief or how sincere they are. In religious matters, the basic question is always, "Is it True?"

Sincerely believing something does not make it true. Ask anyone who has picked the wrong bottle from the medicine cabinet in the dark. A nurse may sincerely put carbolic acid instead of silver nitrate in the eyes of a newborn baby. Her sincerity will not save the baby from blindness!

It is not true that "it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you sincerely believe it." Hitler's slaughter of five million Jews was based on a sincere view of race supremacy, but he was desperately wrong. What we believe must be *true* in order to be real.

For example, Christianity affirms that the deity, death, and resurrection of Christ are the central facts of the gospel. Islam, on the other hand, denies all three. On this crucial point, one of these mutually contradictory views is wrong. Both cannot be true!

A great deal is said about the similarity of world religions. Many people naively assume that other religions are basically the same as Christianity. Though there are some similarities, the differences far outweigh the similarities.

If Christianity is the one True faith, what is the evidence for it? We will now examine some of that evidence. First, let us contrast the basis of the salvation offered by non-Christian religions with that offered by Christianity.

I. Salvation by Works — Offered by Non-Christian Religions

A. *Judaism — salvation by works.* The Jews in the first century A.D., believed that they were saved by keeping the Law of Moses. They also tried to keep every detail of the oral traditions, too (see Matthew 23).

When Jesus and the apostles taught salvation by grace through faith in Christ (Acts 15:11), many Jews resisted the idea. Not understanding the place of the Law in God's program, they concluded the apostles were trying to destroy the Law. The Judaizers tried to bind the Law of Moses on the Gentile Christians who had obeyed the gospel. This caused a major controversy in the early church (Acts 15; Gal. 1-6). It was serious because in the effort to maintain their idea of salvation by works, the Jews were denying that the gospel was sufficient to save (Gal. 1:6-9; 2:11-14,21).

Paul opposed them vigorously. He wrote to the Gentile brethren, "We who are Jews by birth . . . know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. . . . because by observing the law no one will be justified" (Gal. 2:15-16, NIV). In Ephesians 2:8 he adds, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it [salvation] is the gift of God" (NASB).

B. *Islam's means of salvation.* Those who believe in Islam believe that they are saved by good works. In addition to belief in Allah, one must follow the Five Pillars of Islam, repeat the creed, make a pilgrimage to Mecca (if possible), give alms to the poor pray five times daily, and keep the fast of the month of Ramadan. Hopefully these will save them.

In 1992, while serving as a visiting professor in the Bible College in Salatiga, Indonesia, I had the privilege to attend a Muslim funeral. As we walked home afterward, I asked Dennis Free, the resident missionary, what hope was given to the family of the dead man.

He replied that the typical prayer at a Muslim funeral went like this: "We pray that his good deeds will be found acceptable before God." No real assurance, only the faint hope that his works would be sufficient for admission into heaven, by his own efforts. A rather discouraging prospect.

II. Salvation by Grace — Offered by Christianity

The salvation that Christ offers is by grace, through faith in Him. This salvation comes through obedience to the gospel and is a gift from God. It cannot be earned or deserved. It is received by obedient faith on the basis of God's grace — His unmerited favor (Rom. 1:16; Mark 16:16; Eph. 2:8-10). This is a truth unique to Christianity!

A. Salvation through Christ — a gift not a reward. Paul, in contrasting Adam and Christ, writes this, "For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" (Rom. 5:15, NIV). Paul also writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9, NASB: cf. Rom. 6:23).

Salvation cannot be earned — it must be given!

1. Man, in his weakness, could never live a perfect life nor do enough good deeds to earn salvation (Rom. 8:3-4; see Matt. 18:23-35).

2. Sin is not cleansed by good works but by the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 1:5).

3. Some things are too precious (valuable) to sell, or earn. They must be given. My father, Robert Lee Size-

more, was born in 1882. He lived to be 102 years old. Before he died, he gave me a silver dollar dated 1882. I do not know its worth and have never checked. Because I would never sell it! I can only give it to our son, David, to keep in memory of his grandfather.

The same is true of our salvation. It cost God His Son, and Jesus His life. It is too valuable to be earned. God had to give it for man to be saved (John 3:16; II Tim. 1:8-9; Titus 2:11-14; Rom. 5:1-2; 6:10).

B. Works contrasted with Grace. A majority of the world is trying to earn salvation through works. Notice the differences between that and God's plan:

1. *Law seeks salvation by works of righteousness; grace by "faith, trust" in Jesus Christ.*

2. *Law trusts in "one's own ability" to keep God's commands; grace depends on "Christ and His blood" to save us.*

3. *Law asks, "Have I done enough?" Grace asks, "Am I trusting in my Savior enough?"*

4. *In salvation by law through works — only the worthy could attain it; by grace through faith, the unworthy, undeserving, weak and sinful may attain it. Small wonder that John Newton wrote: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me" (Rom. 5:6-8).*

C. Grace the one way. Jesus and the apostles taught that:

1. *It is impossible to be saved by works.* Listen to Paul, "A man is not justified [declared innocent] by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16, NIV). Paul again, "I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you

could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39, NIV).

Jesus said to the Jews, "I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24, NASB). Their good deeds would not erase sin.

Peter affirms, "We believe that we [Jews] are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they [Gentiles] also are!" (Acts 15:11, NASB). All mankind to be saved through the grace of Christ!

2. *Law was given to reveal man's sinfulness.* It does nothing to cure it. Paul said, "I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet'" (Rom. 7:7, NIV). F.F. Bruce writes, "Because of the universal fact of sin, the way of acceptance with God by reason of our works of righteousness is closed — the notice is clearly worded, 'No Road This Way!'" (Bruce, *Romans*, p. 98).

3. *Grace — Christ provides the power to live a righteous life.* The reason the Law could not save was the inability of man to keep it. One had to keep it perfectly to be saved (Lev. 18:5). It had no power to enable man to keep it. It could only condemn when broken. Grace provides the power to live righteously. Paul said that all he was, and all he had done for God was because of the "grace of God" working in him (I Cor. 15:10). Paul says, "I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13; cf. II Cor. 12:9; Col. 1:11; Eph. 3:16-20).

The weakness of all systems of "works" is this lack of power. But with the gospel, "God's commands have now become God's enablings."

To run and work the law commands
Yet give me neither feet nor hands;
But better news the gospel brings:
It bids me fly, and gives me wings!
(Bruce, *Romans*, p. 162).

III. Christianity Is Based on Historical Events — Facts

Another distinctive of the Christian faith is the fact that it was founded on unique historical events.

It is unmistakably clear from the New Testament that Jesus of Nazareth was proclaimed by the apostles as a divine Savior, and that the very basis of the apostolic message was His death and resurrection . . . that in Jesus, God had intervened in human history in a way which was both sufficient and final, for Christ had died "once for all" for our sins, and had been buried and had risen from the grave on the third day (Heb. 7:27; 9:12,28; 10:10; Rom. 6:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-4) (Anderson, *Christianity and Comparative Religion*, p. 31).

Jesus appeared on earth in time and space. Luke and Matthew date the time of His coming and ministry by the rulers at that time (Matt. 2:1-3; Luke 3:1-2). Jesus was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, was crucified, buried, and arose from the grave in Jerusalem. He ascended from the Mount of Olives (Luke 2:4-7; 4:16; 24:50; Acts 1:12). These are historical places and events.

The gospel was preached fifty days after Jesus' resurrection. Thousands of the Jews present at Pentecost knew of the miracles, of the life and death of Jesus, and saw Him after He arose (see Acts 2:22). Paul states that over 500 saw Him at one time, "most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:6).

The gospel is not a beautiful myth, or the result of some mystical meditation, nor of some mysterious experience, like some pagan religions. It is founded on historical events that happened in specific times and places — events that could be examined for truth or error. There were many eyewitnesses that could testify to their veracity. Neither the Jews, nor Saul of Tarsus, could disprove the resurrection of Christ. The reason? It was true!

“The basic difference between Christianity and the Mysteries [mystery religions] is the historical basis of the one and the mythological character of the others” (Anderson, *Comparative Religions*, p. 37). This historical basis gives a firm foundation for the Christian faith!

IV. Love Is the Basic Principle of Christianity

Another unique feature of Christianity is that love is its basic, fundamental principle. “Fundamental” means, “serving as a foundation or basis.” “Principle” means, “a truth which is general and plain and upon which others are founded; as a principle of government.”

A. Proof that love is that principle.

1. *Other religions speak of love, but it is not the major emphasis.* Not the basic principle of their teaching. Norman Anderson writes, “Although Allah is said to be loving, this aspect of his nature is almost ignored. His supreme attribute of justice is thought to overrule love” (*The World’s Religions*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], p. 79).

Fear seems to be the basic principle, the prime motivation, for most non-Christian religions whereas love is for Christianity.

When we speak of love, we mean *agape*, “intelligent goodwill” (John 3:16; I Cor. 13:1-13). By definition this love is an intelligent, goodwill toward the object of its love. It is an action of the mind and will, not just the emotions. One loves by a deliberate choice.

2. *The New Testament describes the fundamental nature of love.*

a. The greatest commandment: to love God (Mark 12:28-30).

b. The second greatest commandment: to love one’s neighbor (Mark 12:31).

c. Christian love has God for its primary object and expresses itself in implicit obedience to Him (John 14:15,21,23; 15:10; I John 2:3-5; 5:3; II John 6).

d. Supreme example of love — Jesus’ death on the cross (I John 4:9-10; 3:16).

e. Love is proof of being a disciple of Christ (John 13:35).

f. Love is evidence of the new birth (I John 4:7-8).

g. Love is the basis of God’s plan of salvation (Eph. 2:4-5).

h. God shows His love by accepting us as His children (I John 3:1).

i. Love is man’s main response to God (Deut. 6:5; 7-9; Josh. 13:3; 23:11; Matt. 22:35-38).

j. Love is man’s chief response to his fellow man (Matt. 22:39-40). It is also an obligation, a debt (Rom. 13:8).

k. Love should be one’s response to his enemies (Luke 6:27-28,35).

l. Supreme description of it: God is Love! (I John 4:8,16). Love expresses the essential nature of God. He is the embodiment of love.

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m. God pours His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

n. Love is expressed to God and man by action (John 3:16; 14:21; I John 4:9; 3:18).

o. Love describes God's attitude toward His Son (John 17:26).

p. Love depicts God's attitude toward the human race (Rom. 5:8).

q. The key to remaining in Christ is to love and obey Him (John 15:10; 14:23).

r. Love is the "fruit of the Spirit" in the Christian (Gal. 5:22).

B. Love's power to change lives and situations. The power of love to change is seen in the Lord's apostles. James and John were nicknamed the "Sons of Thunder," probably because of their fiery natures. We see some of that nature in John's Epistles (see I John 3:17-18; 1:6,10; II John 10:11). Also we see it when James and John wanted to call down fire on the inhospitable Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56).

However, after years with Jesus, John is best known today as the Apostle of Love, because of his many references to love in his letters.

Saul of Tarsus was the fiery persecutor of Christians, who called himself the "chief of sinners" (I Tim. 1:15). But the Lord and His love changed him so completely that Paul the apostle became perhaps the most powerful worker the Lord had. Love changes people!

The transforming power of love is illustrated in a fable entitled "The Wind and the Sun" (McGuffey, *McGuffey's Third Reader* [American Book Co.], p. 59).

A dispute once arose between the Wind and the Sun as to which was the stronger. To decide the matter, they agreed to try their power on a traveler. The one which should strip him of his cloak was the winner.

The Wind began. He blew a cutting blast, which tore up the mountain oaks by their roots and made the whole forest look like a wreck. But the traveler, who at first could scarcely keep his cloak on his back, ran under a hill for shelter, and buckled his mantle about him more closely.

The wind having tried in vain to remove the man's coat, ceased, and the Sun began. Bursting through a thick cloud, he darted his sultry beams so forcibly upon the traveler's head, that the poor fellow was almost melted.

"This," he said, "is past all bearing. It is so hot, that one might as well be in an oven." So he threw off his cloak, and went into the shade of a tree to cool himself.

The lesson, Prof. McGuffey said, teaches us that gentle means will often succeed where forcible ones will fail. It also illustrates how love will change people where other means will not. Love is powerful. Paul said it was the "greatest" of the virtues (I Cor. 13:13).

We believe this is sufficient to show that love is the basic principle of Christianity and is another reason why Christianity is unique and true, and the source of salvation for all mankind.

V. The Supreme Distinctive — Jesus Is the "Only Begotten" Son of God.

A. That Jesus is divine is a distinctive truth of Christianity. That He is the "only begotten Son of God" is the watershed between Christianity and all other religions. It is the one fact that Christians cannot compromise or surrender and still remain Christian.

This fact is the major difference between Christianity and all other religions. It is the foremost stumbling block to the advocates of "syncretism," those who would blend all religions into one.

B. It is all important who Jesus is. Jesus asked His apostles, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15-16, NIV). Jesus is called God's "only begotten Son" or "one and only" Son five times in the New Testament (John 1:14, 18; 3:16,18; I John 4:9).

1. *The New Testament is clear on the identity of Jesus.* The angel Gabriel told Mary that the baby she would bear would "be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35,32). John the Baptist confirmed His deity (John 1:32-34). The apostle John calls Him, God's "only begotten Son" (John 3:16-18). The Heavenly Father announced to Jesus, "Thou art my beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22; cf. Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Jesus Himself confessed that He was the Son of God (Mark 14:61-62).

2. *Jesus' resurrection proved Him to be the Son of God.* Paul writes that Jesus "through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4, NIV).

During His earthly ministry the Jews asked Him for a sign who He was. He said the only sign He would give was "the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matt. 12:38-40, "three days and three nights," etc.). In other words "Wait until my resurrection and you will know who I am."

God's power was manifest when He raised His Son. Also, His stamp of approval was placed on Jesus and His teaching. The Father shows He was indeed "well-pleased" with His Son (Rom. 6:4; Acts 2:24-27; Matt. 3:17). His

resurrection was the crowning evidence that Jesus was indeed the Son of God as Paul said (Rom. 1:4; cf. Acts 9:20; Col. 1:13-20).

C. More evidence for Jesus' deity is seen in the following ideas.

1. *His exalted positions in God's Kingdom.*

a. He is the only Mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5). Through Him we pray to the Father. Prayers are answered through Him (John 14:6,13-14; Eph. 2:18).

b. He is our only High Priest before God (Heb. 4:14). He offered the sacrifice for sin (Heb. 2:17; 9:11-12; 10:1-12). He is our intercessor at the throne of God now (Rom. 8:34).

c. Jesus is our Prophet — God's spokesman to man in the Christian Age (Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 17:5).

d. He shares God's throne in heaven (Rev. 22:1, 3), "the throne of God and of the Lamb." Revelation 7:17 refers to "the Lamb in the center of the throne," indicating a place of honor.

e. He is our "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16; 17:14).

These exalted positions argue strongly for Jesus' deity!

2. *Jesus' extravagant claims point to His deity.*

The claims that Jesus made for Himself are so incredible that if an ordinary man made them, he would be viewed as insane. But no one has ever considered Jesus insane. Why not? Let's look at some of these claims and see.

a. Jesus claimed preexistence with God before the world was created (John 17:5,24; cf. John 8:58-59).

b. He claimed authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18).

c. He claimed to be able to forgive sins, not just the sins committed against Himself, but the sins of one individual against another (Mark 2:5-7; Luke 7:36-38,48-49). When the scribes heard Him say this, they said, "He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). They were right! Only God can forgive one man's sins against another. But they failed to recognize who Jesus was!

d. Jesus claimed to be the Judge of all men. At His return the dead will be raised and Jesus will judge them (John 5:28-29). Paul refers to the "Judgment-seat of Christ" (II Cor. 5:10). Not only will Jesus be our Judge, but His Words will be the criterion of Judgment (John 12:48). If Jesus is just a man, these claims are shocking! But if He is the Son of God, then they are sober Truth!

Some people say, "I believe that Jesus is a great moral teacher but not the Son of God." C.S. Lewis, Professor at Cambridge University, called this an illogical and absurd position. He said,

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 40-41).

D. Non-Christian religions consider Jesus to be only a man. Most Jews reject Jesus as God's Son today, the same as they did in Jesus' day. It is sad that they reject their Messiah, the Son of the God they love.

Islam also rejects Jesus as God's Son. The idea that Allah would have a son is very offensive to Muslims. Surah 4:171 of the Koran states: "Jesus . . . was only a messenger of Allah Far is it removed from his transcendent majesty that He should have a son!" They believe this would degrade and dishonor Allah. To them, it implies that God had sexual relations with Mary for Jesus to be born. This is abhorrent to them. They fail to understand the work of the Holy Spirit, in Luke 1:34-35.

Buddhism and Hinduism also deny that Jesus is the Son of God. Gandhi insisted: "The soul of religions is one, but is encased in a multitude of forms" He continued, "I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna, or Rama or Mohammed or Zoroaster." Thus implying that they were as divine as He is.

Some think that Christians are bigoted and narrow-minded for insisting that Jesus alone is the Son of God. They believe that if Christians were more flexible, the religious world could be united. "Why bring Jesus Christ into it?" they say. "Why can't we just agree on God?" They believe we are intolerant and arrogant if we insist that one believe on Jesus to be saved.

We believe He is God's Son because Jesus, the Father, and the New Testament teach it. A Christian cannot be faithful to His Lord and affirm anything else! The apostle John clearly states, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (I John 5:12, NIV). Christians would like to be united with all

people, but not if it means giving up one's eternal salvation! (See Acts 4:12.)

VI. Jesus Is the World's Only Savior

Christians believe that Jesus is the world's only Savior. Other faiths believe that *no* single religion teaches the only way to salvation. They teach that all religious paths are reflections of God's love and will somehow lead to God. To think otherwise is to be intolerant and arrogant, according to them.

Being a disciple of Christ can be very costly in certain venues of contemporary culture. Some of the Lord's teachings are extremely offensive, especially in this allegedly pluralistic age. Sadly, Jesus' claim that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life makes politically correct moderns gag! It is the ultimate heresy for secular pluralism (John D. Woodbridge, "Culture War Casualties," *Christianity Today* [3/6/95], pp. 22-25).

Yet, Jesus did say that He was the Only Way to the Father (John 14:6). Paul is adamant when he says there is no other gospel than the one that proclaims Jesus as Savior (Gal. 1:6-8; cf. I Cor. 15:1-4). We believe them!

Who is a savior? A "savior" is "one who saves or delivers; One who saves from evil, destruction, or danger" (Webster).

What did Jesus do to become our Savior?

A. He provided the only cure for sin. Christianity has a clear concept of sin, and a positive cure for it. John writes, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (I John 3:4, NIV). Sin is a breaking of God's law. Two things are needed for the sinner to be forgiven:

The penalty for the sin to be paid, and the sin to be atoned for — forgiven.

The penalty for sin is death. Thus, the giving of a life, the shedding of blood must occur to satisfy God's law (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23; Heb. 9:22,23-26).

1. *Jesus died in our place — for our sins* (Isa. 53:4-6). He shed His blood to pay our penalty and make atonement for our sins. Jesus took our guilt and sin and became a "curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). He did this to redeem us from the penalty and curse of sin. Paul writes, "He [God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:21, NASB).

This made possible man's reconciliation with God against whom he had sinned (I Pet. 2:24; I Cor. 15:1-4; II Cor. 5:14-15,18,19). The good news of this cure was proclaimed through the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:14-16; Acts 8:24-39). His death, plus His resurrection made possible our salvation (Rom. 4:25; I Cor. 15:16-20; Rev. 1:5).

2. *Jesus, by His resurrection, provided complete salvation.* In the resurrection of Christ, the Christian has the assurance of his own resurrection — which is the completion of his salvation (Rom. 4:25). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die" (John 11:25-26, NIV). In I Corinthians 15:20, Jesus is called the "firstfruits" from the dead. He was the first to rise never to die again (Rom. 6:8-9). But others will follow. Those of us who are "dead in Christ" will also rise! (I Thess. 4:16). Jesus is the complete savior; He saves for now and for eternity!

3. *Jesus died to save us from the "wrath of God."* Paul states that while we were ungodly sinners, that "Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified [declared innocent] by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him" (Rom. 5:8-9). Jesus is our Savior because He bore our guilt, paid our penalty, and saved us from the punishment our sins deserved!

B. *Salvation's source is in the nature of God and Jesus.*

1. *In a basic sense God is the Savior of the world.* He is called Savior by Paul in I Timothy 1:1; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4. Jesus and the Father work so closely in saving man that it is like two persons, but one effort. Paul explains how this was done in II Corinthians 5:19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (NASB). And "God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

2. *God's saving work issues from His mercy, love, and grace.* Because of His "great mercy" and "love" for man, He extended His grace to save Him (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:4-7; 2:11; Rom. 3:24). Salvation flows out of grace through the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7).

It is the earnest desire of the Father and the Son that "all men" be saved (I Tim. 2:3-6). Also, "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9, KJV).

C. *Testimony for the Saviorhood of Christ.* Gabriel told Joseph, "You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21, NASB). Jesus stated, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, NASB). He continues, the Son of Man came "to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, NASB).

Jesus is called the “author” of salvation (Heb. 2:10), and the “source of eternal salvation,” to all who “obey Him” (Heb. 5:9). In Christ, redemption and forgiveness are found (Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:7). It is in the name of Jesus that one is justified (I Cor. 6:11). It is through Christ that God saves people (Col. 1:19-20; Acts 13:38-39; II Cor. 5:18-19). The “blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin” (I John 1:7, NIV). To be severed from Christ is to lose all opportunity for salvation (Gal. 5:4).

Speaking of Jesus as Savior, Peter states firmly, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NIV). There was no doubt in the Apostles’ minds that Jesus was the world’s *only* Savior! There should be none in ours!

D. Other religions do not have a Savior like Jesus. Neither, Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, or Zoroaster, died to provide a cure for sin and save their people. Only Jesus did that. Allah did nothing, personally, to save man; nothing that cost him anything like Jehovah did. Nor did the founders of other non-Christian religions. Their disciples are to follow the teachings and commands of their leaders and hope that their works will save them. But they have *no* savior to help them like Jesus does.

E. Stanley Jones, former missionary to India, recounts a conversation he had with an educated Hindu. They were discussing the relative merits of Hinduism and Christianity. Finally, the Hindu replied, “Well, there is one thing that you have that we do not. You have a Savior!” And how thankful we are for Jesus, our Savior!

VII. Question — *If Man Can Be Saved by Any Religion, Why Did Jesus Die?*

Paul pondered this question in Galatians 2:21 as he reasoned with the Galatian Christians who were thinking of leaving Christ and returning to the Law and good works for salvation. Paul concluded that if righteousness comes through works, then "Christ died for nothing," he died "needlessly," "in vain." His death accomplished *no* useful purpose. A waste of His life!

A. *Many non-Christian religions available when Jesus died.* We ask, if one religion is as good as another, why did Jesus die? "Eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and others were firmly established centuries before Christ gave orders for Christians to make disciples of them (Matt. 28:19)" (Hostetler, *The Lookout* [2/21/99], p. 7). Why did Jesus give the Great Commission if they were already saved? If these religions saved them, why did the apostles and thousands of other Christians give their lives to bring them the gospel? The point is, they were not saved, but were lost and needed the gospel. Jesus knew that! And in love He sent them the Truth!

B. *Why did God work so long to provide salvation if not needed?* He began planning man's redemption before the world was created (Eph. 1:4-5; cf. I Pet. 1:20). He continued to work for thousands of years to complete it. At the proper time God sent His Son "to be the Savior of the world" (Gal. 4:4; I John 4:9-10,14). After Jesus' death, God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 6:4; Acts 2:24,32; 5:30,31). After His return to heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit to lead the apostles in preaching the gospel offering

salvation through Christ (Acts 2:33; John 16:12-13; Acts 2:36-38). Why all this work if Jesus' death was unnecessary?

C. *Why did Jesus suffer so if it was not needed?* Jesus endured mental, physical, and spiritual suffering during His life and death. It is impossible to describe all the suffering He bore. Isaiah gave some idea, when he said, "He was pierced through because of our transgressions" and "crushed because of our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5). This is a striking picture of both the physical and the spiritual anguish the Savior experienced for us.

For instance, His back was laid open by the Roman scourge (Matt. 27:26), His head was pierced with a crown of thorns (Matt. 27:29), and His hands and feet were nailed to the cross. Worst of all, He endured God's wrath against sin, being crushed with the weight of our iniquities (Isa. 53:6).

The agonizing experience in Gethsemane reveals the terrible mental and spiritual pain Jesus endured as He faced the cross. It was not so much the physical suffering He dreaded as the pain of bearing the burden of our sins on His pure soul! (1 Pet. 2:24). "And being in agony He was praying very fervently, and His sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44, NASB).

For *what* was Jesus praying? He was praying, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39, NIV). The "cup" was His death for the sins of the world. He was requesting the Father to spare Him, *if* there was another way to save mankind. It is unbelievable that the Father, who loved His Son, would not have spared Him *if* there

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was another way. An earthly father would do that . If man can be saved by these religions, *why did Jesus suffer and die a needless death? It doesn't make sense!*

Jesus prayed for the "cup's" removal three times, but the request was denied. The Father sent an angel to comfort and strengthen His Son, but He did not grant His request because He could not and still save man! Jesus and the Father both wanted to save man, so he prayed, "not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42, NIV).

After Gethsemane, Jesus walked manfully to the cross, with never a faltering step or a backward look. If there was no other way to save humanity, then He willingly and courageously died to save them. We are so thankful for His love, His obedience, and the salvation He purchased at Calvary!

The thorns on His head were worn in my stead
When for me the Savior died.
For the guilt of my sins the nails drove in
When Him they crucified.

When John Newton was getting old, a friend asked him about his most cherished memories. He replied, "My memory is beginning to fade, but I do remember two things: I am a great sinner, and Jesus is a great Savior." *How true!*

CHRISTIANITY — THE ONE TRUE FAITH

1. List some social changes that have occurred in our country that have caused some to doubt that Christ is the only way to God.

2. a. What has been the usual definition of "tolerance"?

b. How does religious pluralism define "tolerance" today?

3. In religious matters, the basic question is always

_____.

4. a. Salvation in other world religions is based on _____.
- b. Christianity offers salvation based on _____.

5. List three reasons why salvation cannot be earned.

6. Write 3 contrasts between "works" and "grace" as concerns salvation.

7. What are the great historical events on which Christianity is based?

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8. a. _____ is the fundamental principle of Christianity.
- b. The basic principle of most other religions is _____.
9. The supreme difference between Christianity and all other religions is the truth that Jesus is _____ .
10. List some evident to prove the answer to question #9.

11. Write proof that Jesus is the world's only Savior.

LESSON 11

Faithfulness — The Virtue of Reliability

- I. Bible Emphasis on Faithfulness
- II Divine Faithfulness
 - A. God is faithful.
 - B. Jesus is faithful.
- III. Every Christian Is to Be Faithful
 - A. We must be faithful to Jesus as Lord and Savior.
 - B. We must be faithful to the Word of Christ.
- IV. The Importance of Faithfulness
 - A. Effectiveness in God's service depends much on this virtue.
 - B. The Faithful will influence others for good.
- V. The Reward for Faithfulness
 - A. The commendation of the Father
 - B. The crown of life

When the word "faithful" is mentioned, it brings to mind the famous geyser in Yellowstone National Park, "Old Faithful." It is not the largest, but it is the most famous. Since its discovery by the write man in 1870, it has spouted on an average of every sixty-five minutes, summer and winter. It shoots a stream of boiling water 120 to 170 feet in the air, and each display lasts about four minutes. It is called "Old Faithful" because it is so regular in its activity.

Faithfulness is a virtue that God and Christ possess, and a quality the Christian must possess to win the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). It is a "fruit" of the spirit (Gal. 5:22).

What is faithfulness? *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defines "faithful" as "firm in adherence to promises or in observance of duty." Some synonyms are "dependable, constant, trustworthy, and loyal." A faithful person is trustworthy and reliable and can be depended upon; his word can be readily accepted.

I. Bible Emphasis on Faithfulness

The word "faithful" and its synonyms are used 136 times in the Bible. The idea is also expressed in other words. For example, the Psalmist said, "I will bless Thee as long as I live"; "I shall call upon Him as long as I live"; "I will sing to the LORD as long as I live" (Ps. 63:4; 116:2; 104:33, NASB). That is faithfulness!

It is the word used to describe God's loyal servants. Moses and Daniel are called "faithful" (Heb. 3:5; Dan. 6:4). Paul thanked Christ for considering him faithful and putting him in His service (I Tim. 1:12). Paul characterized his helpers as "faithful": Timothy, Tychicus, Epa-

phras, and Onesimus (I Cor. 4:17; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:9). Leaders, members husbands, wives — all are to be faithful. The church nor the home can stand unless they are based on loyalty.

II. Divine Faithfulness

A. *God is faithful.* Moses told Israel that Jehovah is “the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and lovingkindness with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations!” (Deut. 7:9, ASV). There are over 60 references in the Bible to the faithfulness of God.

1. *His faithfulness is seen in His creation.* Each time we see the sun rise or set, we are reminded of God’s faithfulness. The seasons testify to His faithfulness. God said, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). *They haven’t!* As we stand on the seashore and watch the tides come in and go out, we are reminded of the faithfulness of God.

2. *God is “faithful” to keep His promises.* Joshua said, “Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; *all came to pass*” (Josh. 21:45, NASB; cf. Josh. 23:14; I Kgs. 8:56). *He still keeps His promises.*

Lamentations 3:22-23 (RSV) summarizes: “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; *great is Thy faithfulness.*”

B. *Jesus is faithful.* More than once the word “faithful” is used to describe Jesus. Second Thessalonians 3:3 says,

"The Lord is faithful" to protect from the evil one. Jesus is the "faithful witness" in Revelation 1:5. *He is "a merciful and faithful high priest . . ."* (Heb. 2:17). Jesus is "faithful" to God (Heb. 3:2,6). Jesus, the rider of the white horse in Revelation 19:11 is called "Faithful and True" (cf. Rev. 3:14). Jesus' promise to His church is "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20, NASB). To be called "faithful" is to wear a title of Jesus Himself.

III. Every Christian Is to Be Faithful

Paul wrote, "Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" — faithful, reliable (I Cor. 4:2, RSV). A steward is one who has been given a trust — a task, a treasure — to care for and use for God. Faithfulness is the key qualification. Paul says it is "required," not just suggested. It is a *must* for the Christian who has been entrusted with the "everlasting gospel" — the message of "salvation"!

In *what* should we be faithful?

A. *We must be faithful to Jesus as Lord and Savior.* We are to "hold fast our confession" (Heb. 4:14, ASV) — the same one Peter made in Matthew 16:16. We are to "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23, NASB). It is our *only* hope of salvation and eternal life (Acts 4:12). Jesus praised the church at Pergamum who held fast to His "name," and did not deny His "faith," even in the face of persecution (Rev. 2:13).

Some Christians today hesitate to say that Jesus is the *only* way to God, the *only* way to salvation (John 14:6). The pressure of our pluralistic society weakens their commitment to Christ. Jesus solemnly warned, "whoever

denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33, RSV). *Let's not risk that ; let's be faithful!*

B. *We must be faithful to the Word of Christ.* Paul told the elders to "hold firm to the sure [faithful] word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute [refute] those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9, RSV). Jesus said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me." "The things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world." "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (John 7:16; 8:26; Matt. 24:35, NASB).

His teaching came from the Father; it is eternal and it is true! And we will be judged by it. "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; *the word* that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day" (John 12:48, RSV).

The Word of the risen Christ is "faithful and true" (Rev. 21:5; 22:6). Trust it — without doubting!

IV. The Importance of Faithfulness

A. *Our effectiveness in God's service depends much on this virtue.* Without it, all other talents and abilities are largely ineffective.

To illustrate: If your car starts one out of three times, do you keep it? If you fail to go to work three or four times a month, does your boss call you faithful? If your freezer cuts off one day each week, do you say, "Oh, well, it works most of the time"? The car, the worker, the freezer would be replaced because they were unreliable. They were not faithful!

The same is true in the church. For instance, there is this “super” teacher who studies his lesson, is articulate, uses apt illustrations, and expounds the Scripture in a clear, interesting manner. The class is thrilled with him. *But every 3 or 4 weeks he’s gone — family reunion, baseball game, hunting trip, etc.* He doesn’t inform the Bible School superintendent or his substitute. Or if he does, it is late Saturday night! So the class flounders through. When “super” teacher returns, he has another great lesson.

Question: How effective will his teaching be? Will the class grow? The answer to both is “not much.” Why? Because he cannot teach? *No! He lacks faithfulness!* The Kingdom is built and sustained by the faithful: the preacher who continues to preach whether brilliant or not; the teacher, who though average is dependable; the elder or deacon who serves faithfully whether convenient or not; the giver whose offering is in the plate every Sunday. These build the kingdom and are effective because *they are faithful*. They are also the ones most richly blessed! Here and hereafter!

B. *The faithful will influence others for good.* James says the unstable man is like the waves of the sea “tossed by the wind” (Jas. 1:6, NASB). He is like the weathervane, spinning in all directions. He will influence others, but it will be adversely, like the 10 spies in Numbers 13 and 14 who brought tragedy to Israel by their faithless stand.

It was July 21, 1861, at the Battle of Bull Run in Manassas, Virginia. It was the first major engagement of the Civil War. The tide of battle had seesawed back and forth most of the morning. About noon the Federal troops captured Matthews Hill, sending the Confederate troops fleeing in confusion. Gen. Bernard E. Bee and his brigade

were among them. As Gen. Bee tried to calm his troops and rally them for the fight, he looked to the top of the next hill where Gen. Thomas J. Jackson and his brigade were facing superior forces and a withering fire, but who were standing firm, yielding no ground.

Gen. Bee called to his troops and said, "Look! There's Jackson standing like a stone wall!" The troops looked. Inspired by his courageous, firm stand, they rallied, rejoined the fight, and the battle was won. Ever after that he was known as Gen. "Stonewall" Jackson; his brigade was called the Stonewall Brigade.

As Christians, if we hope to influence others for Christ, we must remain loyal to Him and His gospel. One father said, "I want to live so my children will know how a Christian should live. I want to die, so they will see how a Christian should die!" If we are to influence our children, our mates, other Christians, a lost world, *we must remain faithful!*

V. The Reward for Faithfulness

God always rewards those who serve Him faithfully. Here are two blessings promised to the Christian who perseveres to the end.

A. *The commendation of the Father.* In the Parable of the Talents, when the servant presented the fruits of his labor, the Master praised him and said, "*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness [or joy]*" (Matt. 25:21, NIV). The servant was "good" because he was "faithful." When the boss, the teacher, our parents praise us for

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some accomplishment, how good it is! Think of receiving such praise and acclaim from our heavenly Father — Lord of lords and King of kings!

One has written:

It matters not what others say
In ridicule or fun;
I want to live that I may hear
Him say to me, "Well done!"

B. *The Crown of Life.* Jesus told the church at Smyrna, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10, NASB). There can be two meanings: 1) Be faithful until death, or 2) be faithful even if you have to die. Both are true. Jesus is talking to potential martyrs. He can say this for He has already experienced death on the Cross for them.

Whatever the cost, the reward — "the crown of life" — will be worth it. It is called the crown of "life" here and in James 1:12. Paul calls it the crown of "righteousness" (II Tim. 4:8), and Peter calls it a "crown of glory" (I Pet. 5:4). Paul says it is "imperishable," in contrast to the perishable crowns worn by athlete victors (I Cor. 9:25, RSV). Peter adds that it will never "fade away" (I Pet. 5:4, NIV).

The crown consists in "life" — eternal life! Jesus states, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7, NIV).

Jesus wore the "crown of thorns" that I might wear the *Crown of Life!* (Matt. 27:29). The Lord does not blame us if we start late. But He will condemn us if we stop early!

May we be faithful for "he who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22b, RSV).

**FAITHFULNESS —
THE VIRTUE OF RELIABILITY**

1. Faithfulness is a virtue that _____ and _____ possess. It is a _____ of the Spirit.
2. Some synonyms for faithfulness are _____, _____, _____, _____.
3. Name three of God's servants in the Bible who are called "faithful." _____, _____, _____.
4. Discuss two ways that God's faithfulness is seen.
_____, _____.
5. Name some ways in which the Christian shows his faithfulness. _____
_____.
6. Discuss two results of faithfulness that show its importance. _____
_____.
7. Write two rewards promised to the "faithful" Christian.
_____.

LESSON 12

The Judgment of God

- I. Bible Teaching on God's Judgment
 - A. Examples of God's judgments in the Bible
 - B. God judges and punishes sinners in various ways
- II. The Wrath of God
 - A. The dual nature of God — love and wrath
 - B. The danger of denying the wrath of God
 - C. The character of God's wrath
 - D. Reasons for God's wrath — His holiness and hatred of sin
- III. The Great Judgment Day
 - A. Some general facts concerning the Day
 - B. God's mercy is seen in the repeated warnings of judgment
 - C. Jesus the Judge on that Day

- IV. The Purposes for the Judgment Day
 - A. Why the Christian is at the Judgment
 - B. Why unbelievers are at the Judgment
- V. Deliverance from God's Wrath

I. Bible Teaching on God's Judgment

J.I. Packer writes, "One cannot imagine that talk of divine judgment was ever very popular, yet the Biblical writers engage in it constantly. One of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigour with which both Testaments emphasize the reality and terror of God's wrath" (*Knowing God*, pp. 134-135).

However, this theme is sadly lacking in preaching today. One famous preacher boasts that he never preaches on sin. To my knowledge he doesn't speak of "judgment" either. One hears much about God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness — that is good. But if we neglect to teach that He is also a God of wrath, we present only a half-truth. Both must be taught!

A. Examples of God's judgments in the Bible.

Abraham, while interceding for Sodom, cried, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25, KJV). Hebrews speaks of "God the Judge of all. . . ." (12:23). God is the Judge of all and His judgments cover all mankind. For instance:

God judged Adam and Eve, casting them out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3).

God judged the corrupt world of Noah's day, sending a flood that washed them away (Gen. 6-8).

God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, destroying them with fire from heaven (Gen. 18-19).

He judged Egypt, Pharaoh, and the cruel taskmasters sending the ten plagues and the waters of the Red Sea (Exod. 7-12, 14).

He judged Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16).

God sent Israel into captivity in Assyria (II Kgs. 17); and Judah to Babylon because of idolatry (II Kgs. 25).

In New Testament times, judgment fell on the Jews when God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed (A.D. 70), for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah (Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24). Also, judgment fell on Ananias and Sapphira for lying to God (Acts 5); on Herod for his pride (Acts 12); and on Elymas for his opposition to the gospel (Acts 13). God does judge and punish evil!

B. God judges and punishes sinners in various ways.

Sometimes He punished men directly from heaven — like the flood, the plagues in Egypt, and Herod Agrippa I (Gen. 6-8; Exod. 7-12; Acts 12:21-23).

At other times God used pagan rulers to punish Israel, like Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon (Ezra 5:12); and the nations of Assyria and Rome.

God also uses orderly government to execute His judgments. Paul says the civil ruler is "God's servant to do you good." But he is also "God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:4, NIV). This is the dual purpose of government: to reward the obedient and punish the disobedient.

However, not all judging is done in this life. Many criminals are never caught and their crimes never punished in this life. Will they ever be punished for their sins? The Scriptures would say, *Yes!* J.I. Packer writes, "The entire New Testament is overshadowed by the certainty of

a coming day of universal judgment The New Testament looks to 'the day of judgment,' 'the day of wrath,' 'the wrath to come'" (*Knowing God*, p. 126; Matt. 10:15; 12:36; II Pet. 2:9; 3:7; Rom. 2:5; I Thess. 1:10) See also Acts 17:31; 24:25; John 5:29; Jude 6; I John 4:17.

Hebrews 9:27 states, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (KJV). The wise person will prepare for that day! This study is about that great "Judgment Day."

II. The Wrath of God

The wrath of God is a very unpopular concept today. It is an outdated idea that only ignorant people believe, some say. Yet, the Bible is filled with it. A.W. Pink writes, "A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to anger, fury, and wrath of God than there are to His love and tenderness" (*The Attributes of God*, p. 75). This fact can be explained by the following characteristics of God.

A. *The dual nature of God — love and wrath.* The love, mercy, and grace of God are marvelous! All Christians are thankful for these attributes of God. But to leave out His wrath is to preach a partial message. He is not just One or the Other; He is both!

Paul expresses it fully in Romans 11:22, "Behold then the goodness and severity of God; toward them that fell, severity; but toward thee, God's goodness" (ASV). Nahum 1:7 says, "The Lord is good." And in 1:2, he says, "The Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath" (NIV). Throughout Scripture we see this duality of God.

A preacher tells of discussing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with a friend. She said, "Well, if that's the way God really is, then I'm not going to believe in Him." Like many, she rebelled against the true God, and desired one that would suit her own desires. If God doesn't act like I think He should, I will not believe in Him. This is rebellion. This is idolatry where the created makes a god to suit his lifestyle. (See Rom. 1:21-24.)

B. *The danger of denying the wrath of God.*

1. *Without it the gospel is meaningless.* One needs to understand the wrath of God for the death of Christ to have meaning. Without it the whole plan of salvation is pointless. His death is absurd if there is no sin. He died for nothing if there is no punishment for sin (Gal. 2:21).

J.I. Packer observes that if one rejects the wrath of God,

We shall not understand the gospel of salvation from wrath, nor the propitiatory achievement of the cross, nor the wonder of the redeeming love of God Nor shall we be able to make head or tail of the book of Revelation; nor will our evangelism have the urgency enjoined by Jude — 'save some, by snatching them out of the fire' (Jude 23). Neither our knowledge of God, nor our service to Him, will be in accord with His Word (*Knowing God*, p. 142).

2. *Reject wrath and soon all of the gospel will be gone!* William Eisenhower suggests, "Once we have given up wrath, can sin, judgment, or the cross be far behind? Without the one, the others lose their meaning Once we have abandoned wrath, the whole Bible becomes unintelligible" ("Sleepers in the Hands of an Angry God," *Lookout*, [3/18/90], p. 6).

We need to accept God as He is — with His love, wrath, mercy, and righteousness. To see God's wrath brings gratitude and appreciation for our salvation. Only as we see the sinner's end can we fully realize what Jesus accomplished at the cross (Heb. 9:26; I Pet. 2:24). "Only he who knows the greatness of wrath will be mastered by the greatness of mercy" (Gustave Stahlin, quoted in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 109).

Richard Niebuhr, sixty years ago, caustically depicted the social-gospel of twisting the Christian message, by teaching "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross . . ." (quoted in Eisenhower, "Sleepers"). When one begins to deny God's wrath, there is no stopping place.

C. *The character of God's wrath.* Many today reject or mute the idea of wrath because they view it as somehow unworthy of God. Man's wrath suggests a loss of self-control, an outburst of anger, caused by wounded pride, or plain bad temper. They assume that God's anger is the same. It is not. We will now examine His wrath.

1. *It is never an impulsive, irritable, immoral act.* God's wrath is not caused by some hurt to His pride or person. Rather, it is a thoughtful and necessary reaction to moral evil. Some of our anger can be called "righteous indignation." But all of God's indignation is "righteous." Jesus' anger was caused by the hard hearts of the Jews; not by any personal hurt or insult to Himself (Mark 3:5; cf. John 2:13-17). Righteous anger should be toward sin — not the sinner.

2. *God's wrath is always judicial.* His wrath is like a judge, administering justice. The judge reaches a guilty or

innocent verdict by investigating the facts of the case in light of the law. The decision may cause the judge much soul-searching and anguish of heart. But in view of the law it is the right one. God's decisions to punish are carried out in much the same way. He examines my actions in light of His Word and then decides to punish or justify. It is a calm, deliberate decision. Not one reached in a moment of high emotion.

It is also a righteous act. Paul tells us that "the day of wrath" is also the day of the "revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). We will know then that "the Judge of all the earth" has done right! (Gen. 18:25).

3. *God's wrath is something men choose for themselves.* Jesus said, "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19, ASV). Men choose darkness rather than light when they love sin more than righteousness.

The three statements in Romans 1:24-28, that God "gave them up!" could sound like harsh, arbitrary acts. But notice the context:

Romans 1:20-24 — God "gave them up" after man had rejected the clear knowledge of God and turned to idols.

Romans 1:25-27 — God gave them up because the women were lusting for women, and men for men. Paul further describes the pagan lifestyle in Ephesians 4:19. They gave "themselves over to sensuality, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more!" (NIV).

Romans 1:28-29 — God gave them up because "they refused to have God in their knowledge" any longer and

"exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25, NASB). *They gave themselves up to sin! God gave them up to judgment!*

J.I. Packer writes, "Nobody stands under the wrath of God save those who have chosen to do so. The essence of God's action in wrath is to give men what they choose, in all its implication; nothing more, and equally nothing less" (*Knowing God*, p. 139).

D. Reasons for God's wrath — His holiness and hatred of sin.

1. *That God is holy is foundational to the Christian faith.* The Bible is filled with this truth. Jehovah thundered from Mount Sinai for Israel to be holy, for He is holy (Lev. 11:44-45). His eyes are "too pure to look on evil" and He "cannot tolerate wrong," Habakkuk said (1:13, NIV). God cannot be tempted by evil nor does He tempt any one (Jas. 1:13).

The tabernacle was divided into two rooms. The first was called the Holy Place, and the inner room, symbolic of God's dwelling, was called the Holy of Holies. On the crown or turban of the High Priest were the words "Holy to the Lord" (Exod. 39:30). God's holiness is so pronounced that the heavenly creatures state it in a threefold manner, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty!" (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). God's name is to be "hallowed" or held "holy," Jesus said (Matt. 6:9).

2. *God's holiness — purity and separation.* God's holiness consists of two parts: One, He is pure in character, in thought and motive. Second, He is separated from sin. He cannot coexist with evil. Our sins separate us from

Him, they hide His face, so that He refuses to hear our prayers (Isa. 59:1-3).

Because of His Holiness, God's wrath is His holy reaction to sin, His moral indignation against evil. To be just or righteous, He must punish sin. A God that ignored or condoned sin would not be a righteous God. His wrath is natural and required if He is to reward the righteous and punish the wicked, which, as a just God, He must do.

If we are to be holy like God, we must have the same attitude. The Psalmist said, "Let those who love the LORD *hate evil*" (Ps. 97:10, NIV). Paul said, "Abhor [hate, loathe] that which is evil; cleave [cling] to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9, ASV). Wrath is the logical reaction to sin. God could not be morally perfect and do otherwise.

3. *God separates Himself from evil.* Cases of God distancing Himself from sin is seen in:

a. Casting Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:21-24).

b. Directing Moses to build a fence around the base of Mt. Sinai, so the people would not touch it when God descended with the Ten Commandments (Exod. 19:10-13).

c. When God gave instructions for building the Tabernacle (later the Temple), He commanded Moses to install a curtain before the Holy of Holies, as a reminder that God was out of reach of sinners. Only the High Priest was allowed beyond the curtain, and that only once a year on the Day of Atonement, carrying the blood of sacrifice for his and Israel's sins (Lev. 16:1-34).

God hates sin (Prov. 6:16-19; Mal. 2:16). Calvary is the evidence. He gave His Son to atone for, and erase, this

awful evil. Sin is certainly a deep and dark stain on the soul of man to require such a stain remover!

III. The Great Judgment Day

A. Some general facts concerning the Day.

1. *Names.* The Scriptures give several names for the Day of Judgment. It is called "the Judgment," (Heb. 9:27); the "day of judgment," (II Pet. 2:9); judgment on the "great Day" (Jude 6); "day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10; 2:16); "day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6); "day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 1:8).

Sometimes these terms refer to the day of judgment (I Cor. 1:8; 5:5 — "day of the Lord"). Other times they apply to the Lord's return (Phil. 1:6; II Cor. 1:14; I Thess. 5:2). Some seem to refer to both great events: His Return and the Judgment. They are obviously closely related.

2. *One or many judgment days?* Some Bible scholars teach that there are at least three judgment days: "The Sheep and Goat Judgment" (Matt. 25:31-46; all the nations, except Jews, will be judged). "Judgment Seat of Christ" (II Cor. 5:10; Christians will be judged); and the "Great White Throne Judgment" (Rev. 20:11-14; the wicked will be judged).

Others hold to *one* final judgment day. Reasons for this are: In Revelation 20:12, John says, "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne" (NIV). The "great and small" refer to *all* the dead. Mankind could be described as the "rich and poor," the "young and old," or "Jews and Gentiles." This would include everyone. That statement "great and small" seems to refer to all people (Acts 10:42).

Albert Barnes writes, "There is no intimation here that it is the wicked dead (only), that are referred to It is the judgment of *all* the dead" ("Revelation," *Notes*, p. 438).

Gareth Reese concludes, "We are convinced that the descriptions called 'The Sheep and Goat Judgments,' the 'Judgment Seat of Christ,' and the 'Great White Throne Judgment' are all descriptions of the same judgment scene" (*Let's Study Prophecy*).

3. *Time of the Judgment Day.* The time of the last judgment is closely associated with the second coming of Christ (I Cor. 4:5; I Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; II Thess. 1:6-10; II Tim. 4:1; I Pet. 1:7; 5:4; Rev. 22:12). Since the time of His coming is uncertain, the time of the judgment is also uncertain (I Thess. 5:2,4). But it seems to follow shortly after the Lord's Return. We must be ready for *both* events at all times (Heb. 10:25; Jas. 5:9; I Pet. 4:5).

4. *The standard or criterion of judgment.* Jesus told the Jews, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; *the word I spoke* is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48, NASB). Jesus explains why His words are so important: "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is *just what the Father has told me to say*" (John 12:49-50, NIV). This is why Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but *My words shall not pass away!*" (Matt. 24:35, NASB). We will be glad we believed and obeyed them for we'll be judged by them on that Day!

B. *God's mercy is seen in the repeated warnings of judgment.* God says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the

wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (Ezek. 33:11, NIV). Peter states in II Peter 3:9, the Lord "is patient [long-suffering] toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (NIV). As evidence of this, God gives repeated warnings before He brings His judgment on man. For example:

1. *The Flood*. Noah is called "a preacher of righteousness" (II Pet. 2:5). It is possible that Noah may have warned the people for 120 years before the flood came (Gen. 6:3). Knowing God's attitude, it was certainly for a long time.

2. *Babylonian Captivity*. God sent prophets to warn Judah of their coming doom if they did not repent of their sins. Jeremiah, especially, pleaded and warned Judah to turn back to God. They burned his written messages from God, threw him into prison, and tried to kill him for warning them! (Jer. 36; 38; 26). The destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, the people was terrible. But the Jews refused to heed God's warnings and turn back to Him.

3. *Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70*. Forty years before it came, Jesus begged the Jews to repent and let Him save them (Matt. 23:37-38). He stood on the Mount of Olives and cried (wailed), pleading with them to heed His warning of destruction (Luke 19:41-44). Their response? They plotted and finally killed Him rather than repent (Luke 19:47-48; Matt. 27:22-25).

God would rather forgive than punish. He only punishes when all else fails to bring men to repentance. God's mercy is wide, but it is not unending. God's patience does finally end, and His wrath is poured out on rebellious men. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31, ASV).

C. Jesus the Judge on that Day.

1. *Biblical proof of this.* Jesus made many claims while on earth. His claim to be the judge of the world is perhaps the most fantastic of all. He tells us in John 5:22, "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son" (NIV). He continues, "He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:27, NASB).

Paul states that God "has fixed [set] a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him [Jesus] from the dead" (Acts 17:31, NASB). Peter agrees saying, "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He [Jesus] is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42, NIV; cf. II Tim. 4:1).

The judge's bench (*bema*) is called the "Judgment Seat of Christ" (II Cor. 5:10). In Romans 14:10, it is called the "Judgment seat of God." From this we conclude that God will judge the world through Christ. Paul states: "God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares" (Rom. 2:15, NIV). The Father and the Son are *one* in judging as they are in all redemptive acts. Jesus, the world's Savior, is also its Judge. His claim to be Judge would be shocking if He were only a man, but if He is the Son of God, then it is sober Truth!

2. *We will be judged as individuals.* Each person will be judged as an individual, not as a nation, or a group. Mothers will not answer for daughters, nor sons for fathers. Peter says that God "judges according to each man's work . . ." (I Pet. 1:17, NASB). Even though II Corinthians 5:10 pictures a mass of humanity before

the judgment seat, they are still judged as individuals ("that each one may receive what is due him").

IV. The Purposes for the Judgment Day

Paul says that "those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, He will give eternal life." But those "who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger" (Rom. 2:7-9, NIV). This is a concise summary of the judgment. For the Christian it will be a blessed time, for the sinner it will be a horrible time.

A. Why the Christian is at the Judgment.

1. *Not to learn whether he is saved or lost.* The eternal destiny of the Christian is settled before He leaves this earth. His salvation depends on what he has done about Jesus and the gospel. Jesus says that the one who has believed in Him and been baptized "will be saved." But those who do not, "will be condemned" (Mark 16:16, NIV; cf. John 8:24). Paul states that those "who do not know God and do not obey the gospel" will be banished from God into eternal punishment (II Thess. 1:8-9).

When we come to die, the supreme question is: "Is my name written in the Lamb's book of life?" — the roster of the redeemed. Speaking of heaven, John says that nothing sinful "shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). When we obey the gospel, we are added to His church and our names are inscribed in the Lamb's "book of life" (Acts 2:47; see Phil. 4:3). The saved will not only have their names written in the "Lamb's book of life," but will also have the names of Jesus and the Father inscribed

on their foreheads! (Rev. 3:12; cf. Rev. 14:1). *Branded as His!*

This is *all important*, because "if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15, NASB; see Rev. 20:12; 3:5; 13:8; 17:8).

Our eternal destiny is settled before we die. Obviously, we must remain "faithful until death" if we would receive the "crown of life" (Rev. 2:10; see Rev. 3:5).

2. *Christians go to judgment to receive rewards.* We go to receive rewards for the deeds we have done on earth. "We do not go to judgment to receive our cup of salvation, but to see how full it is." F.F. Bruce comments, "While salvation in the Bible is according to grace, judgment is always according to works, whether good or bad, for believer and unbeliever alike" (Simpson & Bruce, *Commentary on Ephesians and Colossians*, p. 295; see Rev. 20:12-13; 22:12 — judged by deeds).

We will be judged by our works and our words (II Cor. 5:10; Matt. 12:36-37). These reflect character — one's thoughts and deeds. If they are good, we will be rewarded (I Cor. 3:14). If they are not, we will suffer loss (I Cor. 3:15). By grace we will be saved but "only as one escaping through flames" (I Cor. 3:15). But we will lose the reward we might have had.

Jesus, however, rewards those who labor faithfully and well for Him. He even rewards the "cup of cold water" (Matt. 10:42). The differences in rewards are based on the sort of work each person has done. Some work is like gold and silver, and some is like wood and straw (I Cor. 3:10-15). Paul urges Christians to work with all their

hearts knowing that from Christ we will receive a rich reward (Col. 3:23-25).

Our work may seem small and earthly rewards few. Satan may tempt us to self-pity. But if we work to the best of our ability, and remain faithful to the end, our reward will be great in heaven. "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them" (Heb. 6:10, NIV).

The Scriptures do not state the nature of the reward. It may be the commendation of the Lord, "Well done" (Matt. 25:21). It may be a greater spiritual appreciation of heaven and God's blessings. It is unlikely to be a grander mansion on a hilltop as some think. Whatever its nature, it will be wonderful!

B. Why unbelievers are at the Judgment. Jesus said, "A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:28-29, NIV). This is when Christ will separate the sheep from the goats — the righteous from the unrighteous. Those who have confessed Him before men will now be confessed before the Father. Those who have denied Him, He will also deny (Matt. 10:32-33). When Jesus, the Judge, says "Depart from Me!" these last "shall go away into eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:41,46, ASV).

Those who "loved darkness rather than light"; who refused to believe "on the name of the only begotten Son of God"; who were ashamed of Christ and His words in this adulterous and sinful generation; who refused to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus; but were thieves,

greedy, drunkards, prostitutes, homosexuals and swindlers, will not inherit the Kingdom of God (John 3:19; 3:18; Mark 8:38; II Thess. 1:8; I Cor. 6:9-10). Rather they will hear Jesus say, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

The wicked, unrepentant sinners are at the judgment to receive their final condemnation. What a sad day it will be!

V. Deliverance from God's Wrath

Paul teaches that, in the gospel, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17, NASB). Immediately following he writes: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . ." (Rom. 8:18). Both are revealed from heaven by God.

How can we be delivered from the "wrath of God"? The answer is: The gospel was revealed to rescue us from God's wrath. Paul explains how. "Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him" (Rom. 5:9, NASB).

Whose blood? Ephesians 1:7 says, Jesus' blood. In Romans 3:24-25 Paul speaks of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by His blood.

What is a "propitiation"? It is a sacrifice that averts wrath through expiating sin, and cancelling guilt" (Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 141; see I John 2:2).

What does "justified" mean? It means to be forgiven, declared innocent, and accepted as righteous. This comes

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through faith in Christ and obedience to the gospel (Rom. 5:1; Acts 2:38,41; II Thess. 1:8). When we believe and obey the gospel, our sins are cleansed by the blood of Christ.

Peter pleaded with the Jews on Pentecost to "save yourselves [escape] from this corrupt [perverse] generation!" (Acts 2:40). They responded by accepting His message about Christ and being baptized as Peter had instructed (Acts 2:41). This is how they escaped wrath in that day. It is how we escape wrath today!

To be called a "God-fearing man or woman" was once a compliment. It may or may not be today. Abraham, Joseph, and Job were men who "feared God" (Gen. 22:12; 42:18; Job 1:1,8). Proverbs states that a woman who "fears the LORD is to be praised" (Prov. 31:30, RSV). At the Judgment we'll be glad we feared and revered God and prepared to meet Him! (Amos 4:12). A familiar song offers sober advice:

Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall,
Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all.
Will you not hear His sweet, tender call?
Come unto Me today.

What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be.
Some day your heart will be asking,
What will He do with me?

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

1. What is meant by the “dual nature” of God?

2. Write some examples of God’s wrath in the Bible.

3. Discuss the dangers that result from denying the wrath of God. _____

4. Explain the character or nature of God’s wrath.

5. In Romans 1:20-28, “God gave them up” is stated 3 times. Explain these statements in their contexts.

6. Discuss the reasons for God’s wrath. Is it logical? _____
7. Give some examples in the Old Testament where God separated Himself from evil.

8. What is the standard by which we will be judged at the Final Judgment? _____
9. Who is the Judge at the Final Judgment? _____
10. What is the purpose for the Judgment:
 - a. for the Christian? _____
 - b. for the unbelievers? _____

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Sound Doctrine

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Restoration Herald