

Personal Revival

Teacher's Manual

Personal Revival is a devotional life course designed to help new or immature Christians improve communion with Christ, be led by God, increase faith and believe that are what Scripture says they are.

In practice, this course helps believers discipline themselves in the first two "means of grace," the Word and prayer. It helps them understand some of the dynamics involved in subjective experiences Christians have the Holy Spirit.

The teacher's goal is to see the students hearing from God personally, being led by him and growing in faith through these disciplines.

The entire course is based on the presupposition that God speaks subjectively and personally today by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace.

Course Outline

1. TURN UP THE VOLUME (How to have a quiet time)
 - a. The value of a quiet time
 - i. How do we get better? Looking to Christ
 - ii. Means of grace
 - b. Dynamics of a quiet time
 - i. In the morning
 - ii. Mainly in the New Testament
 - iii. Not a Bible study
 - iv. Do not use commentaries
 - c. Keeping a spiritual diary
2. OOPS! (Using, not abusing the Bible)
3. THE KEY AT THE DOOR (Prayer)
4. TRUE NORTH (Divine guidance)
5. SENSIBLE FAITH (Growing in faith)
 - a. What faith is and is not
 - b. How to increase it
 - c. Applying God's promises
6. WHO ON EARTH AM I? (Our identity in Christ)
 - a. Sinners or saints?
 - b. Positive comes first
 - c. Why this is true: Our union with Christ
 - d. New Testament metaphors for our status

7. Christian repentance
 - a. Why we repent
 - b. When we repent
 - c. What repentance is not
 - d. How we know repentance is not taking place
 - e. Wrong approaches to repentance

Instructions to the Teacher

Christians have subjective experiences from the Holy Spirit. We are 'led by the Spirit',¹ and have 'the witness of the Spirit'². The internal nature of these makes them difficult to describe.

The teacher will try to concretize these so the student can learn to hear from God personally via the means of grace, be led by God and grow in faith. This course assumes Christians in this dispensation can hear from God personally and subjectively through the Word, prayer and fellowship, without falling into mysticism or extra-biblical revelation.

Reformed pitfalls

Reformed teachers correctly reject extra-biblical revelation practiced by some groups. This may cause a negative reaction to the idea of subjective spiritual experiences. The Bible, however, makes it clear that Christians should expect Spirit-initiated experiences through which we have communion with God. By establishing a few biblical parameters, Christians can enjoy walking in the Spirit without the dangers of extra-biblical revelations and the errors that proceed from them.

Some tend to relate more to sound doctrine than to Christ. Doctrine is not God. Others relate to the church as their primary means of spiritual nourishment while lacking the personal disciplines of Bible reading and prayer. The church is not God. Our, 'communion' is with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ,³ and this is principally subjective.

A key goal of the course is to help Christians appreciate their identity as saints with remnants of corruption rather than as totally depraved sinners.

The teacher's goal is to bring the student into a vibrant communion with the Lord, without mysticism, legalism or similar pitfalls, along with a new confidence in his walk with God.

¹ Rom.8:14,16

² WCF Ch.1, Art.5

³ I Jn. 1:3

Lesson One: TURN UP THE VOLUME (How to hear from God through a quiet time)

Goal: By the end of this lesson, the student will understand the overall goals and purposes of the course. The teacher may use the material above under "Introduction to the Teacher." The student will also have understood the importance and dynamics of a personal quiet time for applying the principle means of grace, the Word of God.

Materials: One-page course outline for the students// A skeleton outline of Lesson One for taking notes.

Procedure: The teacher will explain the purpose of the course, showing enthusiasm for learning to hear from God personally. He will explain in his own words the introductory material. Then he will pass out the student's course outline and answer any questions before beginning the study.

Teacher's Notes for Lesson One

What is a quiet time?

A quiet time is a period of time in the morning dedicated to communion with God through the Word and prayer.

Show here how various men of God throughout history had a morning quiet time as a habit of life. Ps..5:5; 63:1; 88:13; Dan.6:10; Mk.1:35

The value of a quiet time

I like to **use the texts** below, showing how the Spirit speaks to believers. [The teacher can distribute these texts either on a separate sheet, or simply refer to some of them as part of the introduction to the class.]

John 10:27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Rom. 8:14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Rom. 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Rom. 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

1John 5:9 We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son.

1John 5:10 Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart.

Explain what is an analogy. (This is like that, therefore this.) God has created our minds to think by comparing one thing with another. That's why he gave us stories. The Spirit leads us to biblical principles and shows us the relationship between the principle and ourselves. We make the connection.

Hearing from God is when the Spirit makes a comparison between what is in the Word and our own circumstances. That is an analogy. It is subjective, involving the whole man. This avoids mysticism because God does not bypass our intellect.

How do we get better? Looking to Christ is the only way. The process is called sanctification. Later on you will deal with false ways people try to get better, such as legalism or seeking special experiences. A good text for teaching us to look to Christ alone is Heb.12:2— *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.*

Means of grace. Explain that God has given us practical means to look to Jesus; The Word, prayer and fellowship.

Dynamics of a quiet time

During the course, we instruct the students that they should have their quiet time **in the morning**, mainly in the New Testament.

They may not use commentaries or study notes. The purpose is not a Bible study. It is for hearing from God.

You may use some of the verses below to show that men of God throughout history had a kind of quiet time. Ps.5:5; 63:1; 88:13; Dan.6:10; Mk.1:35. The points in common were: They did it in the morning. It was habitual.

Explain the basic elements of a quiet time: Prayer, praise, confession and reading the Word. The order may vary according to personal taste.

Keeping a truth book

We require students to get a notebook. Every day, they should write the date, the text of scripture they feel God has spoken to them through and the application. Mention to the students that in the next class, we will have volunteers who share with the class something they heard from God during the week.

Lesson Two: OOPS! (Using without abusing the Bible)

Goal: By the end of the lesson, the student will know the difference between applicable principles from scripture, versus reading into the text his own desires.

Materials: The dynamic, 'Right Way vs. Wrong Way'

Procedure:

1. Review lesson one, explaining the purpose of a quiet time is to hear from God, not principally self-instruction in religious ideas.
2. Ask for two volunteers to share what God has said to them during the week.
3. Explain the danger of reading into the text something not there, based on our own wishful thinking. To avoid this, we follow certain rules, listed in the lesson.

Give out the dynamic, 'Right Way vs. Wrong Way'. You may have them divide into groups of two or three.

Teacher's Notes for Lesson Two

1. Explain the difference between extra-biblical revelation and intra-biblical inspiration.

The main point: We must not read into the text anything not intended by the writer. This adds to scripture and is an abuse of God's word.

2. It is an abuse of scripture to
 - a. Give a meaning to the text different from the plain intent of the writer.
 - b. Oblige others to accept our application of the text to their own situation, as though a principle were the same as a law.
 - c. Use a personal application as a justification for a doctrine.
3. It is legitimate to
 - a. Apply the godly principle in the text, including historical narratives, as the writer intended.
 - b. Apply a promise to oneself if consistent with the context and common sense.
4. Do the class dynamic here: "Use vs. Abuse of Scripture"

Class Dynamic for Lesson Two

1. A young man in missionary training, seeking God's will about which field to go to, found the name, "Barzilai" in 2 Samuel 17:27. Because of the similarity between this name and the word "Brazil", he decided this was evidence that God was calling him to that country.

Use _____ Abuse _____
Why?

2. A young man was reading the Bible while seeking the will of God about a possible marriage. He found the story of Jesus healing Peter's mother in law. From this he concluded that he ought to marry.

Use _____ Abuse _____
Why?

3. A lady had been complaining about the ministry of the pastor and the elders in his church. While he was reading James Chapter 3, she found the statement, "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. She concluded that God was speaking to here about her misuse of the tongue.

Use _____ Abuse _____
Why?

4. A missionary was praying and fasting about evangelizing a neighboring province in which no church existed. He was struck by the statement of the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor.10:16, "...to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you." From this he began to consider that God was guiding him to evangelize in that province.

Use _____ Abuse _____
Why?

Lesson Three: THE KEY AT THE DOOR (Prayer)

Goal: Help believers learn biblical prayer; to whom we pray, on what authority, for what.

Materials: Student's notes

Procedure: This lesson is more like a Bible study than the proceeding. The teacher needs to cover the basics of prayer, without going too deeply into it. The idea is to get them to do it, not understand it in detail.

Do not forget that before each lesson, one or two volunteers will share what God has given them out of the Word that week. This helps the teacher verify if the students are learning spiritual disciplines.

Teacher's Notes for Lesson Three

1. Why we pray
 - a. It's a primary means of communion with God
 - b. It works— "prayer equals results"— 'learn this well because there will be a test.'
 - c. Phil. 4:8 it helps us avoid worry and negative thinking.
 - d. It helps avoid temptations- pray that you not enter into temptation.

2. Why we lack discipline in prayer
 - a. We feel unsure. *Rom. 8:26* *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.* No experts in this. The Holy Spirit is our translator so we do it anyway.
 - b. Discipline needed here as with Bible reading.
 - c. It rarely seems to work right away.
 - i. Luke 18, parable of unjust judge.
 - ii. Mt.7:7- Ask, seek, knock
 - iii. "God is Latin." (A favorite saying of missionaries in Latin America. It seems he always arrives later than we think he ought to, sometimes at the last possible moment.)

3. Biblical format
 - a. When asking for things

Explain here that we pray to the Father in the name of Jesus. Use Jn.16:23-28 & Mt. 6:9— Lord's prayer starts with 'Our Father...' Not 'dear Jesus.'

Clarify it is not wrong to pray directly to Jesus when requesting things. This is not, however, what Jesus himself instructed us to do. Jesus came to bring us to the Father. 1Pet.3:18 Our communion with God is first with the Father. 1Jn.1:4 Many Christians pray directly to Jesus and then finish the prayer 'in Jesus' name.' This makes little sense.

b. When worshiping

Worship is a different matter. We worship each member of the Trinity separately or collectively.

Worship of God (as one entity)— Mt. 4:10

Worship of the Father— Jn.4:21

Worship of Jesus—Mt. 28:9

4. Why in Jesus' name alone?

[The teacher needs to evaluate the spiritual level of his students and how much time he may need to spend on it. Among former Catholics this point is vital and takes up a lot of time. For some students, this may be old hat, so the teacher can brush over it.]

a. Prayer is improper without it. Jn.16:23-28;

b. On the grounds of the authority of Jesus, not our degree of obedience. [Deal here with a bit of phariseeism in the heart of all of us. We tend to want to get things because we have been good.] Heb.4:16— Our boldness to approach the Father is based on the high-priestly status of Jesus, not our degree of obedience.

c. God requires absolute perfection. Therefore we need a perfect mediator. 1Ti.2:5; Heb.4:16; Jn.14:6

5. Pray for what? Priorities and motives

a. God's interests come first. Mt.6:33. We pray for what **he** wants.

b. Deal here with the priorities and motives issue, James 4:3.

Lesson Four: TRUE NORTH (Divine guidance)

Goal: Help students understand the principles of divine guidance. By the end of the lesson the student should understand:

1. Guidance is a product of one's communion with God and this communion is by applying the means of grace, starting with a personal quiet time.
2. Guidance is associated with our grasp of the essence of divine wisdom and therefore does not bypass the intellect.
3. Guidance is involved with evidence.

Materials: Student Notes// Smallings' Article on guidance as a handout. Available from web site, <http://www.smallings.com/LitEng/Essays/GuidedByGod.html>

Procedure: Though the handout covers the same material, there is no substitute for a teacher explaining the essence in class. The handout is therefore a supplement.

Teacher's Notes for Lesson Four

1. Wisdom: The foundation stone of guidance, Eph.5:17 & James 3:17

The following is the way I proceed. The teacher may adjust this material according to personal taste.

I like to start with Eph.5:17 to show that divine guidance in this dispensation is involved with 'understanding' and not being 'unwise.' Wisdom and understanding are the foundation stones for us today, not mystical revelations. Though we do not exclude mystical experiences as means of guidance, these are the not ordinary ways God works.

The army has a term for the usual way of doing things: S.O.P., "Standard Operating Procedure." In battle, S.O.P. often goes out the window. Likewise, God has his standard procedures with us, but there may be exceptions.

Explain why this is so. Why not guidance by prophets, through dreams and visions as our spiritual S.O.P.? Answer: These were standard in the Old Testament dispensation, Heb.1:1-2. Now, all the people of God have the Spirit and are required to learn wisdom, for themselves as well as for ministry to others. Even if dreams and visions occur today, they are no longer the norm.

Now use James 3:17 to show the characteristics of divine wisdom. To keep it simple, I use only the first two, purity and peace.

At times we are confronted in life with deciding between two options in something important. How do we know which option is from God. Here's a clue: The one that is NOT from God will usually have an element of duplicity in it. Satan can duplicate almost all of the characteristics in James 3:17, except purity.

2. Guidance follows the same general pattern as the means of grace

The Word: What God says in our quiet time.

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Prayer: Answers to prayer are a pretty good indication.

Phil. 4:6-8 —Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Fellowship: In particular, the godly counsel of the church leadership

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

After this, proceed with the 'sign posts.' You can use various illustrations to show the need of more than one 'sign.' I like to use the triangulation idea by which navigation is done. The biblical notion of two or three witnesses works well also. Invent your own illustration if you wish.

3. The Sign Posts (Another way to explain it.)

Refer to Smalling's article for explanation of these.

- a. Sign-post 1: Personal leadings from scripture
- b. Sign-post 2: Inner peace Col. 3:15
- c. Sign-post 3: Godly counsel Heb.13:17
- d. Sign-post 4: Open doors (opportunities)

Lesson Five: Sensible Faith (Growing in faith)

Goal: Most students have misconceptions about faith. Some think it is a mystical experience over which they have no control. Others confuse faith with hope or passivity. The teacher's goal is to correct these misconceptions and define faith properly as simple trust in God's ability to keep his promises. The teacher must also link hearing from God through a quiet time and growth in faith.

Materials: Smalling's article "Faith: How to Make It Grow", on web site.

<http://www.smallings.com/LitEng/Essays/faith.html//>

Teacher's resource: Sermon outline on Growing In Faith, secret URL,

<http://www.smallings.com/secret/FaithSermon.pdf>

Procedure: This class is like a Bible study. I suggest using Romans 4:16-21 to start. In my opinion, it is better to pass out the article after the class, because the students may be tempted to read it while you are teaching.

Teacher's Notes for Lesson Five

1. Defining faith

- a. Sometimes it's fun to give a little diagnostic test at the beginning of the lesson, just to get their attention. All the answers are negative. Following are the true-and-false questions.
 - i. Faith, in and of itself, is an important virtue that deserves great reward.
 - ii. Faith is believing something without evidence.
 - iii. Faith is the basis of our salvation, the reason why God accepts us.
 - iv. Faith is a spiritual force we manipulate to produce whatever we need.
 - v. Faith is a spiritual experience to help us feel better about ourselves.
- b. Explain Rom.4:18-21

The best definition of biblical faith, in my opinion, is Rom.4:21 *being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

This shows that faith is ultimately the strong conviction, *fully persuaded*, of an ability of God, *to do what he had promised.*

At this point, you as a teacher must make it emphatically clear that faith is not faith unless associated with a promise of God. With a promise from God, we have faith, but not mere hope. God's promises turn hope into faith.

Paul uses the example of Abraham who hoped to have a son. But when the promise came, he had something solid to stand on.

How do we get promises from God, applied personally to us? From the Word, via our quiet time. This is what changes mere hope into faith.

Here is where you show the link between their quiet time and growing in faith.

2. Counterfeit faith

People often use the word 'faith' when they should be using other words. Show here how faith is often counterfeited and may lead to disappointment.

a. Faith is rational, not a disregard of evidence

Biblical faith does not mean 'believing something without evidence or contrary to evidence'. This is the world's definition, normally assumed as Christian. Explain this is not a Judeo-Christian definition. Romans One shows us clear evidence of the existence of God and his attributes. Romans Four then gives us evidence to stand on, i.e., promises from God.

Reason comes into play here when we evaluate God's power in creation and deduce the obvious. If God can create a universe, he can surely keep a promise.

Bible faith has three components: Data, reason and trust.

The data refers to the information we already have about God's abilities and character. Reason shows us the connection us and God's promises. Trust means we must stand on the promise regardless of circumstances. (For a fuller explanation of these, you may refer to Chapter Six of Smalling's book, Joyfully Justified, on their web site.)

b. Faith and planning

Some think proceeding in a project without careful planning is faith. That is not faith. This thinking comes from a dualistic assumption about the real world, which puts faith into an upper-story, non-rational category. A good

text against this is Luke 22:35-36, where Jesus sent out the disciples with nothing. Upon their return, he established a new modus operandi, "Now I say to you..."

c. Faith is active, not passive

A good text for this is James 2:18&24

d. Faith is not a matter of temperament, self-confidence or charm

Tele-evangelists or preachers from certain groups may show a brash confidence or great charm. New Christians can be deluded into thinking this is faith, when it may be nothing but personal charm or crowd manipulation techniques.

You may add other elements as you see fit, depending on the needs of the students.

3. Summarize: Faith is dependence on God to keep his promises. How do we get promises? From his Word.

Lesson Six: Who On Earth Am I? (Identity in Christ)

Goal: In this lesson, the teacher will show the student his status before God as a saint with remnants of corruption, rather than a sinner with some degree of grace. This should give a new boldness in prayer and witness.

Materials: Handout— Smalling’s article “Quit Calling Yourself a Sinner” <http://www.smallings.com/LitEng/Essays/quit.htm//> The first half of Ephesians

Procedure: Note: This lesson is extensive may require two or more classes. Its importance justifies this.s

1. Define the problem

Christians may have a negative self-concept because our awakened conscience makes us more aware of our faults and the seriousness of sin. We perceive the remnants of our corruption more clearly than we see Christ.

The world around us considers itself normal and is not. The only normal people on earth are Christians. Yet the world will try to make us feel that we are the abnormal ones. We are the one-eyed men in the valley of the blind.

Certain religious influences may exacerbate this tendency. Converts from Catholicism may have a tough time accepting they are saints before God.

Reformed churches often have an unbalanced emphasis on our sinfulness, while ignoring our positive standing with God. This may be a product of their rejection of Catholic pietism and the self-righteousness of Arminian theology.

A key point the teacher needs to

2. Use Ephesians 1-3 to show our new status in Christ.
3. Show why sin does not identify Christians as sinners

Teacher's Notes for Lesson Six: Who On Earth Am I? (Identity in Christ)

1. What defines us?

This lesson describes the difference between how we view ourselves and how God views us.

Sin does not define us as sinners any more than it condemns us. Likewise, moral excellence does not define us as saints because the righteousness in which we stand is not our own.

An effective way to teach this is to use the first three chapters of Ephesians to list all the things Paul says we are and have in Christ. Around 20 exist. Have the students find them as an exercise, using the first chapter, which has about ten.

Ask some rhetorical questions: "Are you a saint with remnants of corruption, or a sinner with a smattering of grace?" "Do you *feel* like a saint?" Of course they don't. They feel like sinners.

2. The positive comes first

We notice that the first half of Ephesians is positive, the wonderful things we are and have in Christ. The second half starts with an exhortation to live according to that status. Eph.4:1— *I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.* Then follow exhortations. We repent because we do not live according to our high status.

Group exercise here: Have the students divide into small groups and read the first three chapters of Ephesians, gleaning out of these chapters the things Paul says we have and are in Christ. Then have the students share what they found. Encourage them to do their own list and paste it in their Bibles. Do not tell them you have a list already made to hand out if they want it. Tell them that at the end of the class.

3. New Testament metaphors regarding our status before God.

The New Testament makes it clear that our acceptance with God is based on our union with Christ, not our moral excellence. "In Christ" or "into Christ" occurs 93 times in the New Testament. Romans 8:1 is sufficient to show this, without going into it too much.

New believers think they are accepted with God because they are forgiven. This is not quite right. Our union with Christ and his imputed righteousness, is the grounds of our acceptance.

To describe this status, the apostles used a variety of metaphors. You may choose any of these according to the needs of the students and time available.

- a. Dead or alive? —The Apostles John and Paul use this to describe our new identity.
 - Jn.5:24...he has crossed over from death to life.
 - 1John 3:1 We know that we have passed from death to life,
 - Eph.2:1-3— Were dead in sins...now made alive in Christ.

- b. Which kingdom?
 - Col.1:12...in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.
 - Rev. 1:6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father...

- c. Darkness or light?
 - Acts 26:18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light...

- d. Slave or son?
 - John 8:34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.
 - Gal. 4:6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

- e. Who is your ancestor?
 - Rom.5, the Adam-Christ parallel. We are no longer considered the offspring of Adam, but of Christ.

- f. To what are we joined?
 - Rom.6:5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

- g. Sinner or saint?
 - Eph.1:1&Rom.8:1 cf the rest of the book.

Show that sinning does not define a Christian as a sinner, any more than sin condemns us. Paul calls the Ephesians 'saints' and 'faithful' and then exhorts them to stop doing certain bad things.

[Note: It is not wrong to call ourselves sinners if we are simply admitting our remaining corruption in this life. It is not biblical, however, to take that remaining corruption as our identity before God. Only two verses in the New Testament seem to apply the term 'sinner' to a Christian: James 4:8 & 1Tim. 1:15.]

Use this chart if you think it is useful

Alienated from God	God's household
Dead	Alive
Kingdom of darkness	Kingdom of light
Spirit of Satan	Spirit of Christ
Not people of God	People of God
Unsanctified	Sanctified
Enemy of God	Friend of God
Sinners	Saints

4. Homework

You may give out the "In Christ I Am..." list as homework to attach to their Bible, if you wish. Or, have them create their own list at home.

With formal classes, I require the students to recite this list once a day during the course. Therefore they may earn three points per day: one for reading the Bible, one for writing in their diary and one for reciting this list.

The purpose of reciting this list is because it takes a number of weeks for people to start believing it.

Handout for Lesson Six: Identity in Christ

In Christ I am...

A saint and faithful believer
Blessed with every spiritual blessing
Chosen in Christ
Holy and without blame
Loved by God
Predestined as his child
Adopted by God
The praise of his glory
A trophy of his grace
Redeemed by his blood
Forgiven
Partaker of the riches of his grace
Heir of God

Sealed with the Spirit
Alive in Christ
Seated in Heavenly places
Saved by grace
Created for good works
Heir of the covenant
Access to the Father
Fellow citizen with the saints of God
Member of God's household
God's dwelling place
Bold access to the throne of God
Sealed for redemption
A child of the light
A member of Christ's body

Lesson Seven: Christian Repentance (Change your mind)

Goals: This lesson is about the difference between sinning sinners and sinning saints.

1. Explain that the main reason believers repent is for failing to live up to their new identity in Christ.
2. Teach new believers how to repent biblically, without morbid introspection, legalism or pietism.

Materials: Smalling's essay, "Quit Calling Yourself a Sinner" contains elements useful for this lesson also, if you wish to refer to it. Also, you may use the handout at the end of this lesson, "On Repentance". You may give this as a handout. Or, select a few aspects and discuss them in class. Suggested texts: IJn.1:5-9; Heb.4:16

Procedure: Build upon the previous lesson using Eph.4:1, showing that Christians repent for different reasons than do sinners.

Teacher's Notes for Lesson Seven

1. Why do Christians repent?
 - a. Because we do not live up to our legal status in Christ, as explained in the last lesson. Show that God is no longer our judge, but our Father. Nevertheless he is a 'holy' Father and disciplines us. Heb.12:7-11
 - b. Because we have broken God's law, even though the law cannot condemn us.
 - c. Repentance means 'change your mind'. We always do what we think is in our self-interest. We change our mind about believing that sinning is the best way to meet our needs. (Example: Prodigal son)
2. When do we repent?
 - a. The Holy Spirit may point out through our quiet time something we need to repent of.
 - b. The Holy Spirit may speak through a sermon, an exhortation from a friend or simply by speaking to our conscience.
 - c. During the Lord's Supper. This is a time specifically set aside for Christians to repent individually and corporately.

3. What repentance is not

- a. Feeling sorry. This may exist but is not repentance itself.
- b. Not saying 'I'm sorry.' We can and should say this, but this is not repentance either. Repentance is a change of mind about our conduct and resolving to do things God's way.

4. How we know when repentance is not taking place.

(See handout "On Repentance", below.) The moment we shift blame to something other than our own corruption, we prove we are not repentant. Genesis Three makes that clear. We are all experts at blame shifting and it takes time to unlearn it.

5. Traps in repentance

a. Majoring on it

We find little in the New Testament about Christians repenting. This is not the primary focus for the biblical Christian. One would think it should be, considering how much we sin. However, just as sin does not define us as sinners, so repentance is not the primary focus of a Christian.

Our focus is freedom. "It is for freedom Christ has set us free." Ga.5:1 Freedom from what? From condemnation in any sense. Free to do what? Approach God 'with confidence' as a Father not as a judge.

This approach is not to trivialize the seriousness of our remaining corruption. It is to exalt the grace of God through the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Is it wrong to contemplate our remaining corruption? It depends on how much we do it. God provides a time and place to do that once in a while. It is called "The Lord's Supper" which Paul calls a "memorial." This is not something we do every day.

A good illustration: We drive a car by looking forward through the windshield. Once in a while, we glance in the rearview mirror to see where we have been. If we focus mainly on the mirror, we will crash.

b. Looking at the cross from the wrong side

When unregenerate sinners come to Christ, they come as law-breakers before a judge seeking mercy. After we are saved, we come as a child with a problem, to a father.

We have heard people teach, "we always have to go back to the cross." This is confusing. Why go back to a finished work?

No, we do not return to the cross. We *look* back to see why we go forward to the throne room of the Father with confidence. Heb.4:16 *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

c. Thinking we are accumulating guilt if we do not repent constantly.

1 Jn. 1:7...and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

The clause, "*purifies us*", is in the present continuous tense in greek. This means the blood of Jesus "*purifies and keeps on purifying*" from all sin. The Holy Spirit applies forgiveness to us continually and automatically.

If forgiveness in the life of a Christian were not automatic, dependent only on the completed work of the cross, we would spend our time in nothing else but repenting. Positive communion with God would go out the window.

Here the teacher may remind the class of the "purpose of man" as expressed in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "To glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

If we approach our quiet time with a groveling attitude, we neither glorify God nor enjoy him.

A friend said, "If you are not experiencing freedom and fun, then you need to talk to the Lord because you have a problem."⁴

⁴ A comment by Greg Hauenstein, President of Miami International Seminary, Oct, 2004, in the context of a conversation about joyless Christians.

Handout On Repentance

1. How to tell when a person (including yourself) is not truly repentant.
2. Blame shifting:
 - a. The other person: He did such and such and so I reacted such and such. Or, I repent but the reason I sinned is because you did so and so to provoke me.
 - b. The circumstances, caused me to do it. The fact of the case is that the only 'cause' that God recognizes is our own sinful hearts. Another slick way is to indirectly blame God.
 - c. I'm only human. (God made me and so if I sin He is responsible. God is the sinner, not me.)
 - d. Calling sin something else.
 - i. Wrong choice (The fault is really and ultimately a lack of understanding on my part rather than a sinful heart.)
 - ii. Immaturity (The fault is a lack of growth, not my sinful heart. This actually blames *time* for our sin rather than ourselves. Time is not something that I control, therefore the blame is shifted to something that is not me, and I am not therefore responsible.)
 - iii. Misfortune (I *fell* into. Sin was therefore like a hole in the ground that I did not see, i.e., cannot be held responsible for it because I did not put it there. The reality is that was attracted to the hole in the first place because there was something in the hole my heart likes.)
 - iv. A Trial (Calling sinful conduct a trial rather than a sin. The Bible never does this.)
3. Self-pity. Acting like a victim of sin rather than a sinner.
4. Excuse making
5. Trivializing
 - a. The sin I committed is an isolated act non-typical of what is in my heart.
 - b. The consequences are benign and therefore the sin is unimportant. (All sin is important, although not all acts are equally sinful.) *My sin of gossip is not murder...therefore my sin of gossip is trivial.*
6. Generalized confessing. (Asking forgiveness in vague terms for wrong-doing or sin in a very general sense. As in 'I'm sorry I

offended you'; rather than 'I am sorry that I committed the sin of XYZ against you.')

7. What to do when a Christian 'apologizes' to you for offending you in vague terms. Two questions to help both parties see the need of repentance.
8. Exactly what sin did you commit that caused you to ask my forgiveness?
9. Exactly what sin did I commit that provoked you to do that?