



Am I Good Enough?

**Understanding the Basic
Doctrines of Salvation**

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PREFACE

There is a deep need in Christian circles to grasp the importance of **grace**. Many are deprived of the joy that could be theirs because they are still trying to somehow **earn** God's love. They continually ask themselves, "**Am I good enough** to be saved, or to earn God's favor?" I also see a need to comprehend the **full benefits** of our salvation in Christ.

These Bible studies cover some of the most basic doctrines of the Christian faith, focusing on grace. The purpose is to make some very profound biblical doctrines easy to understand.

I would like to thank Erika O'Shee for the line drawings, Sue Yarbrough for the other graphics, and especially my wife, Angélica, for encouraging me to write the lessons, and for helping to edit them.

The *New International Version* was used where the Bible is quoted.

May God's GRACE abound in deepening the faith of many people through the study of these lessons!

Is God like a light bulb to you?

"Do you believe in God?," I finally dared to ask my friend, after years of being afraid of his answer. He had never recovered his faith since the class he took in philosophy. The professor declared that he would try to convince us all that God did not exist, and he apparently succeeded with my friend.

"What do you mean? What kind of God?"

"A personal God, you know, one who answers prayers," I explained.

"God has never answered any of my prayers. I have seen just as many answers by praying to the light bulb on the ceiling!"

I would have preferred a dagger in my stomach. It saddened me deeply, because I realized that he didn't know God. Although he had grown up in a Christian family, and had attended church twice every Sunday for his whole life, he didn't have a personal relationship with the Lord.

For many people, God seems far away and impersonal. They feel just as close to a light bulb. How about you?

These lessons will show you that the Bible reveals a God who loves us, relates to us, hears us, speaks to us, and takes care of us. Nothing is more important than developing a personal relationship with God.

God may seem like an impersonal "force" to some. Deists believed that God created the universe and left it running like a huge machine. Pantheists and animists believe that everything in the universe is divine, including plants, animals and rocks, yet their kind of God is not someone you can relate to personally. Others believe that the only real existence is the material world.

But the Bible tells us that God is a person with whom we can communicate. Even in eternity before the creation of the world, God lived in loving harmony among the three persons of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now He also enjoys His own creation, especially the people that He has made.

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LESSON

1

WHAT IS GRACE?



Where are you in the manger scene?

The following anecdote from a popular Italian novel is an allegory of many peoples' religious experience:

"In the entrance to the school, the sisters had built a large manger scene, which remained standing all year long. There was Jesus in the stable with his father, his mother, an ox and a little donkey, and all around there were mountains and cliffs made of cardboard and rock, where only a flock of little sheep lived. Every one of them represented a student, and depending on his conduct each day, was moved closer or farther away from Jesus.

"Every morning, before going to class, we would pass by the manger, and they made us look to see our position. On the other side of the stable there was a very steep cliff, and that's where the bad girls were put, with two legs suspended over the edge. From six years of age until ten, I lived conditioned by the position of my little sheep. I don't need to tell you that I hardly every moved from the edge of the cliff." [1]

Is this the way you feel sometimes? If so, there is good news for you! Jesus loves you! He doesn't just push you toward the edge of the cliff and leave you hanging! There is no grace in that perspective! Instead, He goes to bring you back! He is the Good Shepherd who goes out to find the one who is lost and carries him back on His shoulders. God is the Father who receives the prodigal son with open arms and celebrates with a party!

You may sense that you have offended God so often or so severely that there is no hope for you. But please don't underestimate the love of God! If you ask Him, He will forgive you. Jesus died on the cross for us! What more could He do to show His love?

Where are you in the manger scene?

[1] Translated by the author from the Spanish version, *Donde el corazón te lleve* [Where Your Heart Leads You] Susana Tamara (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Atlántida, 1995), pp. 66-67.

For Previous Reflection:

a. Do you think God loves you? Why?

b. How would you define "grace"?

Read Romans 4:1-5.

1. According to verse 3, why was Abraham accepted as righteous before God?

2. According to verse four, can you call it *grace* when someone receives a salary for the work he has done? Why?

GRACE IS:

UNMERITED FAVOR

What we want to emphasize in this series of Bible studies is that *God saves people by grace*. That is, man does not *deserve* eternal life, but God *gives* it to him because *He loves him in spite of his sin*.

3. Which of the following illustrations shows what grace is?

- _____ a. A father tells his son that he will buy him a bicycle if he gets good grades in school. The boy makes a big effort and gets the reward.
- _____ b. Just before Christmas a father finds out that his son has made bad grades at school. He is sad about that, but decides to buy him a bicycle for Christmas anyway, just to show that he loves him.

To receive something *by grace* is the opposite of *earning* something.

4. According to Romans 4:5, how can one be considered righteous before God?

Read Ephesians 2:8-9.

5. According to this passage, how can we be saved?

6. Why does God offer salvation as a free gift, according to this text?

7. Salvation is received "by grace." That is, we can have eternal life

because of God's U _____ F _____.

Imagine standing in heaven at the foot of God's throne: How would it seem if someone said, "I'm glad you recognized that I was a good person and let me come to heaven," or "I knew I was right about Christianity! It's a good thing I was smart enough to realize it was the true religion!"? Both of these comments betray an arrogant attitude because the person thinks he did something to *deserve* eternal life.



My friend, ***your eternal life depends on understanding that salvation is by grace, not by works!*** You cannot be saved if you think you can somehow *earn* eternal life. The Lord offers salvation as a gift; it cannot be purchased! Imagine that a young man worked hard and saved for several months to be able to give his girlfriend a beautiful diamond engagement ring. How would he feel if she offered to *pay* for it? Wouldn't that make him feel bad? Imagine how the Lord feels when He has done something much greater for us, and we fail to comprehend the wonder of His love. He sent His Son to win our salvation by His death on the cross, and sometimes we still try to pay for it ourselves! Our sin is too great to earn our own salvation anyway. Our best deeds and our most noble intentions are completely unworthy of persuading God to save us. The only way to obtain eternal life is for the Lord Himself to *give* it to us.

REVIEW

1. What is "grace?" _____
2. The opposite of receiving something by grace is to E_____ it.
3. Why does God offer salvation by grace?

4. How does God feel when we try to *earn* our salvation?

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does knowing that God loves you by grace make you feel more sure of His love? Why?
2. Sometimes we feel a little humiliated when we have to accept help and can't return the favor. Why do we feel that way? Do you think that for the same reason some people have a hard time accepting the fact that our salvation is by grace?

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9.

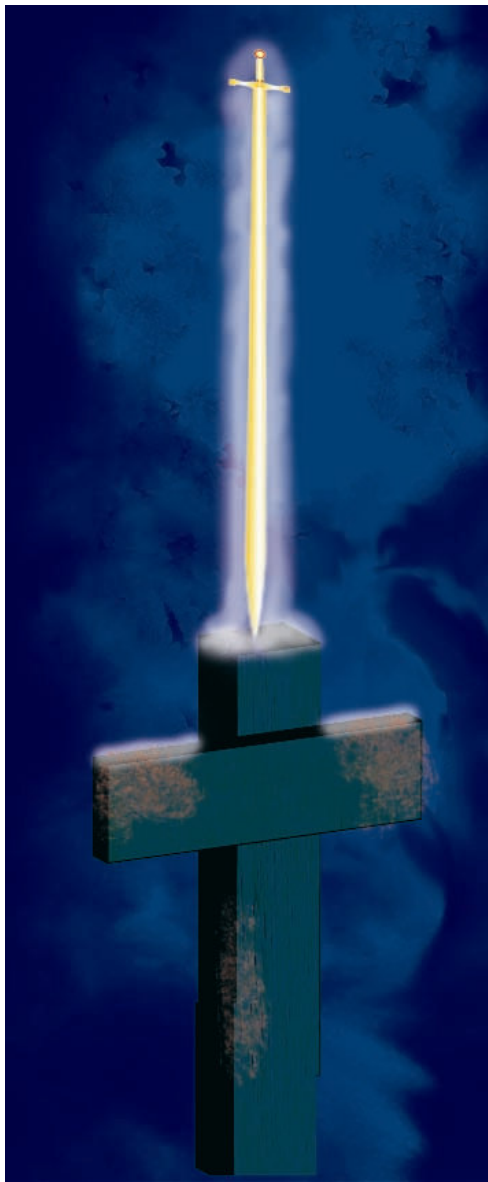
ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Unmerited favor.
2. Earn.
3. So that nobody can boast.
4. He is offended.

LESSON

2

GOD'S JUSTICE AND MERCY



Jesus the Reservoir

"The heart of Christ became like a reservoir in the midst of the mountains.

All the tributary streams of iniquity,
and every drop of the sins of his people,
ran down and gathered into one vast lake,
deep as hell and shoreless as eternity.
All these met, as it were, in Christ's heart,
and he endured them all."
(Charles Spurgeon, 1859)

Jesus the Lightning Rod

Many tall buildings have iron rods on the roof to protect them against dangerous bolts of lightning. Jesus was our "lightning rod." He received the high voltage of God's wrath against sin, and thus saved us from destruction.

For Previous Reflection:

When you think about God, how do you picture Him in your mind? Is He smiling? Is He angry? Describe Him:

INTRODUCTION

There are two incorrect tendencies in the way we think about God: 1. On the one hand we may imagine Him as being too stern, or 2. On the other hand, we may not take Him seriously enough. In the first case we fail to understand His mercy, and in the second case we fail to understand His justice. The Bible teaches us that God is both just and merciful.

Read Romans 1:18.

1. What makes God angry?
-

Read Romans 2:1

2. Do you also deserve God's wrath?
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Read Romans 3:9-20.

3. How does this passage describe mankind?

4. How many people does God consider righteous? _____

5. According to verses 19 and 20, what effect does God's law have on man's heart?

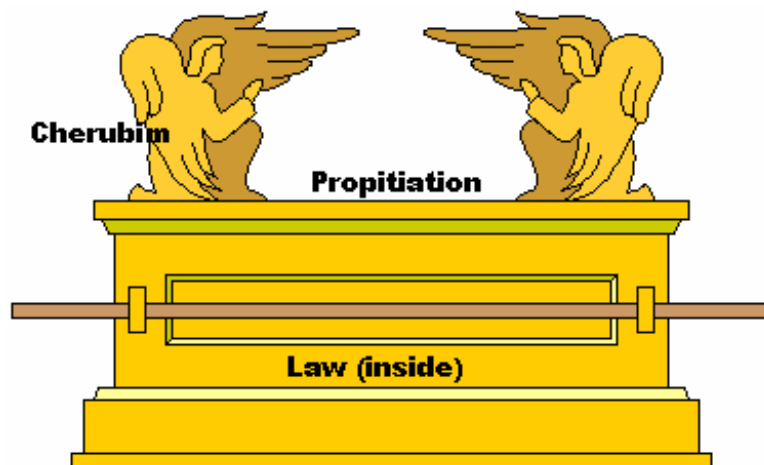
Read Matthew 5:22 and Revelation 21:8.

6. What kind of punishment do we deserve for our sin?

7. Do you believe that you would have to suffer eternal condemnation if it weren't for Jesus Christ?

Read Romans 3:21-26.

In verse 25 a phrase is used to describe Jesus, "a sacrifice of atonement" (in the New International Version). This phrase comes from a word in the Old Testament sometimes translated "atonement" or "propitiation." Israel had a temple where God manifested His presence. The outer room was called the "Holy Place," and the back room was called the "Holiest of Holies." The ark of the covenant was kept in the "Holiest of Holies." It was a wooden box with a copy of God's Law inside, and it had a golden covering on top called the "atonement cover," or the "propitiation." Once a year the high priest entered into the Holiest of Holies to sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed lamb over this "atonement cover." (See Exodus 25:10-22). The act signified the washing away of the sins of God's people. In other words, the killing of the lamb represented the calming of God's wrath. This of course was a symbol of Jesus, the "Lamb of God," whose blood covers our sins.



A *sacrifice of atonement* (or a *propitiation*) is a:

sacrifice which takes away the wrath of God.



JUSTICE

God punishes sin



MERCY

Christ suffers in our place

In Romans 3:21-26 Paul teaches us that this is the way God manifests both His justice and His mercy at the same time. Think about this: If God simply overlooked sin, He wouldn't be just; however, if He chose to pour out His wrath on mankind, He wouldn't be merciful. Thus when He sent Jesus to be punished for our sin, He carried out justice, but He also mercifully provided us an escape from eternal condemnation.

8. How does God show His justice on the cross?

9. How does He show His mercy on the cross?

10. Jesus is called a "Sacrifice of A _____."

(or a "P _____".)

REVIEW

1. In this lesson we studied two aspects of God's character:

His J _____ and His M _____.

2. How many people are considered righteous by God? _____

3. What do we all deserve because of our sin? _____

4. How does God demonstrate His justice and His mercy at the same time?

5. What is a "sacrifice of atonement?" _____

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Has your concept of God changed in any way after studying this lesson? How?

2. What are some practical implications of the fact that God is both just and merciful at the same time? Think of how this should affect your relationship with God and with other people:

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ while we were dead in transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved."

Ephesians 2:4,5

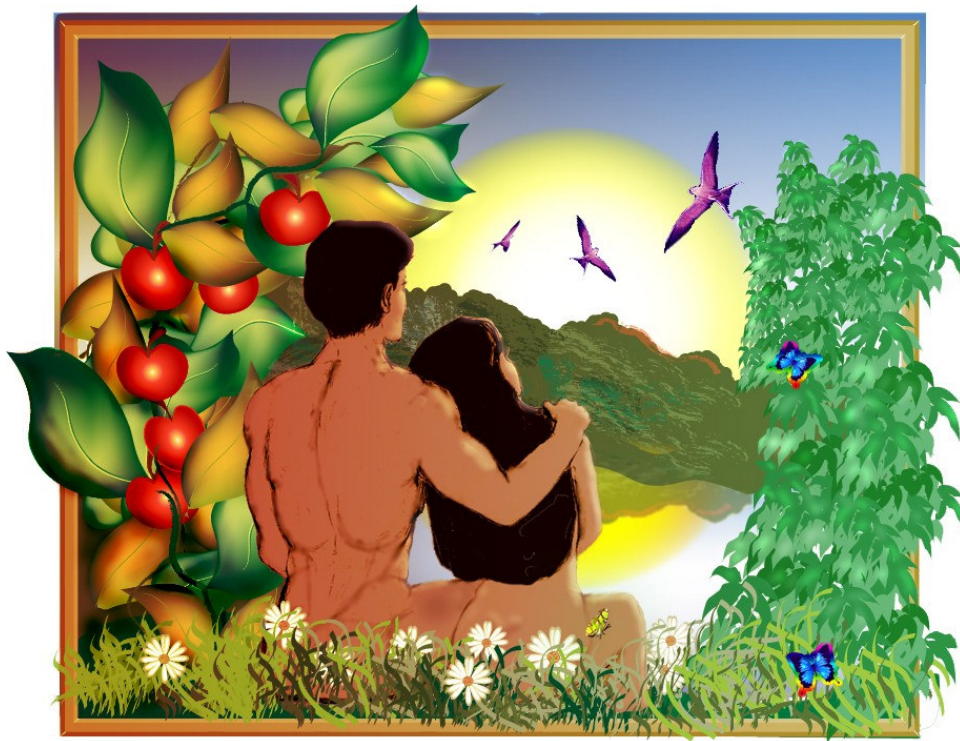
ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Justice and mercy.
2. None.
3. Eternal condemnation. (Hell.)
4. In Jesus' death on the cross, God shows both. He shows His justice by punishing sin in Jesus, and He shows His mercy by saving us. (or some similar answer.)
5. A sacrifice which takes away the wrath of God.

LESSON

3

**THE CREATION;
EVERYTHING IN HARMONY**



Better than Disney World

Two of my favorite places in the world are Southern Chile, and Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

Disney World has some of the most fun things to do, some of the best-kept gardens in the world, and some of the friendliest people to wait on you. Our family will never forget visiting the countries of the world at Epcott Center and riding the waves at Typhoon Lagoon.

Southern Chile is full of volcanoes, lakes, green hills, and the happiest cows in the world! When I go there, my mind and spirit are totally renewed. I forget all my problems, relax before the peaceful scenery, and enjoy the irresistible pasteries, coffee and chocolates

Both of these places give me a small taste of what the Garden of Eden must have been like! But it must have been more wonderful than anything we can experience now, because sin had still not entered the world. Everything was still in harmony, and most important of all, man had a close relationship with God.

For Previous Reflection:

Imagine what the Garden of Eden was like for Adam and Eve. What kind of relationship did they have with each other? With the animals?

INTRODUCTION

The world at times seems full of conflict; there is war, sickness, hunger, all kinds of suffering. Some people blame God, and ask why He allows it to happen. In this lesson, we will see that in the beginning God made everything in perfect harmony.

Read Genesis 1:1 - 2:3.

1. Name some of the things God created on each day.

Day 1: _____ Day 4: _____

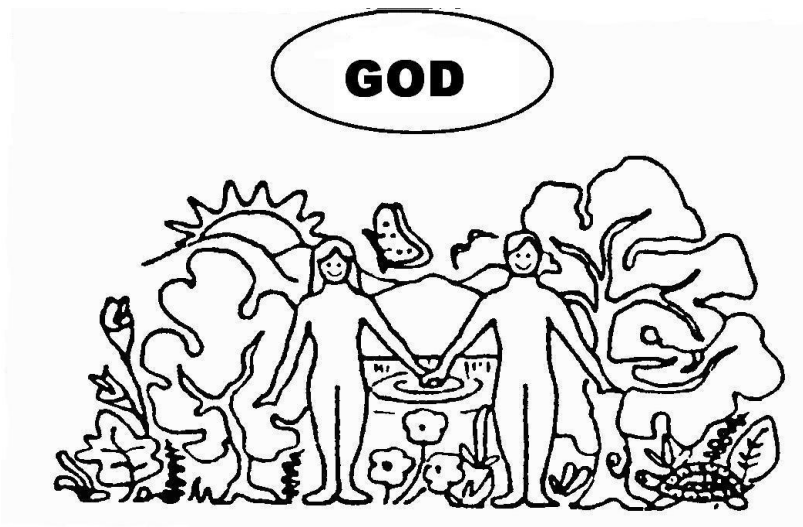
Day 2: _____ Day 5: _____

Day 3: _____ Day 6: _____

2. What phrase is repeated in the following verses?

1:4, 1:12, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25, and 1:31.

This indicates that *everything* God made was good, and that in the beginning there was no conflict in the creation.



From the creation account we can see that:

- a. God is good, because He made everything good.
- b. God is a personal God. He talks, he reasons, he appreciates beauty.
- c. God is powerful. He made all things just by speaking.

3. What else can you learn about God in this passage?:

The fact that God is a personal God implies that:

- a. We can speak to Him (prayer).
- b. He can speak to us (in the Scriptures).
- c. We can love Him and be loved by Him.
- d. He has emotions; He can be happy, sad, angry, joyful.

4. Can you think of some other implications?

We can also learn some important things about man in the creation account:

- a. He is the image of God.
- b. He is male and female.
- c. He was given authority over the earth and the animals.

5. What else can you learn about man in this passage?

To say that man is *the image of God* basically means he is:

similar to God, but not equal.

This means, for example, that man:

- a. is creative.
- b. has emotions.
- c. reasons and makes decisions.
- d. has a sense of humor.
- e. has a sense of right and wrong.
- f. uses language to communicate.
- g. appreciates beauty.

6. Can you think of other aspects of the image of God in man?

REVIEW

1. The main point of this lesson is that God made everything in
H _____.
2. God saw that everything was G _____.
3. We emphasized one aspect of God, that He is a P _____ God.
4. We emphasized one aspect of man, that he is the I _____ of God.
5. This basically means that he is:

FOR DISCUSSION

1. After the fall, is man still the image of God? (see Genesis 9:6)

2. Are only Christians the "image of God," or all people?

3. Can the biblical story of the creation be reconciled with the theory of evolution? What is your opinion?

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"God saw all that He had made, and it was very good...."

Genesis 1:31

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Harmony
2. Good
3. Personal
4. Image
5. Similar to God, but not equal

LESSON
4
THE FALL: SEPARATION



Worse than an atomic bomb

The Fall was worse than an atomic bomb; sin blew all relationships to pieces. Conflict now dominates the creation. Man aches to regain the sense of wholeness, of belonging, of being loved, that he had before the Fall, but he seeks fulfillment in the things of the creation, instead of in the Creator Himself. He longs for the Garden of Eden, but the gate is closed.

Sigmund Freud tried to explain away human guilt, saying that it was just the influence of society that makes us feel guilty. However, the Bible teaches that man has true guilt. Although just *feeling* guilty for something doesn't necessarily mean it is wrong, there really is such a thing as right and wrong. When we sin, we not only have a guilty *conscience*, but we also have a *legal record* in God's heavenly book that deserves punishment.

We don't recognize the gravity of our sin. The problem is not that we do something wrong in the abstract; the problem is that we personally offend a holy God every time we sin in word, thought, or deed.

Remember that He is the all-powerful, all-knowing creator of the universe. If we came face to face with Him, we would tremble, gasp, and throw ourselves before Him.

For Previous Reflection:

Imagine yourself in the place of Adam and Eve after the fall:

1. How were things different from their life before the fall?
2. How did sin affect humanity?
3. How did they feel after God put them out of the Garden of Eden?

INTRODUCTION

We cannot blame God for the problems in the world, because God made everything good. Man himself caused the problems when he sinned. In this lesson we shall analyze the results of the fall.

Read Genesis 2:16-17.

1. What was the only commandment in the Garden of Eden?

Read Genesis 3:1.

2. How did the serpent distort this commandment?

Read Genesis 3:4-5.

3. What motive did the serpent say that God had for this commandment?

Read Genesis 3:6.

4. Why did Eve decide to eat the fruit?

For discussion:

What can we learn about the nature of temptation in this passage?

Adam and Eve decided to listen to the serpent instead of God. Basically the fall was an attempt to ***become independent of God***. When God told them not to eat the fruit, that they would die if they ate it, they should have believed Him simply because it was God their creator who said it. Nevertheless, they doubted Him and made a decision based on what ***they*** thought was correct. They pretended to know more than God in that moment; they put themselves above Him and became rulers over their own lives. In a word, the root cause of the fall was ***arrogance***.

5. The fall was an attempt to become I _____ of God.

6. The root cause of the fall was an attitude of A _____.

7. Let's analyze the results of sin, reviewing chapter 3 of Genesis: What consequences of the fall are shown in the following verses? Mention how these same problems are made manifest in our day:

a. Vs. 7.

Consequence: _____

Manifestation today: _____

b. Vv. 8-10.

Consequence: _____

Manifestation today: _____

c. Vv. 12-13.

Consequence: _____

Manifestation today: _____

d. Vs. 16.

Consequence: _____

Manifestation today: _____

e. Vv. 17-18.

Consequence: _____

Manifestation today: _____

f. Vs. 19.

Consequence: _____

Manifestation today: _____

g. Vv. 23-24.

Consequence: _____

Manifestation today: _____

8. Which of the following relationships were broken as a result of sin?

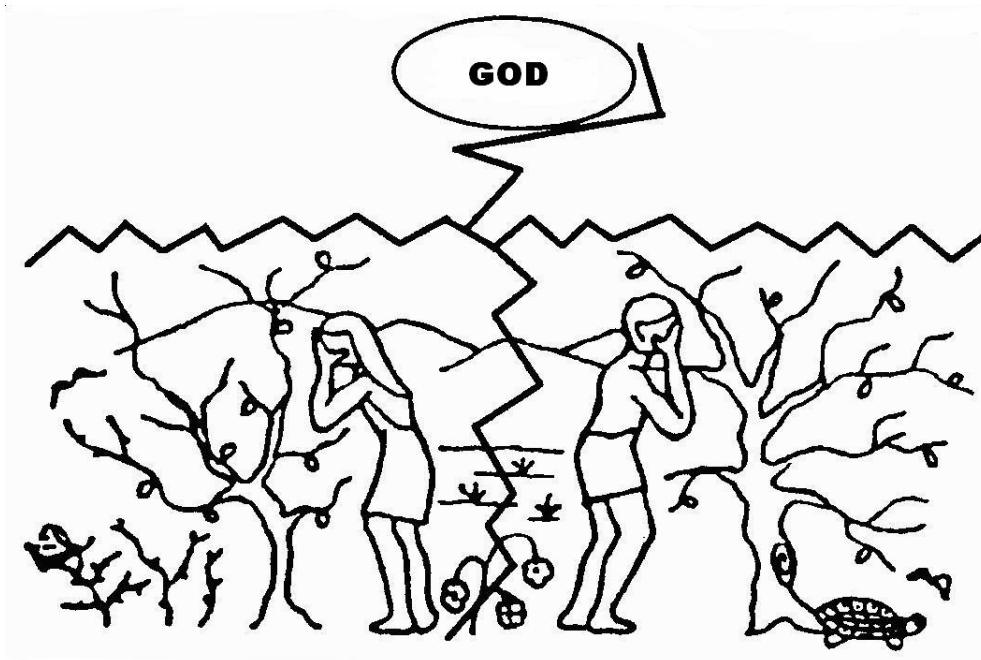
___ a. Between man and God.

___ b. Between man and other people.

___ c. Between man and nature.

___ d. Between man and himself. (Lost his sense of integrity, his sense of dignity, his self-respect.)

We could illustrate the results of the fall like this:



REVIEW

1. The fall was an attempt to become I _____ of God.
2. The root cause of the fall was an attitude of A _____.
3. As a result of the fall, the relationships were broken between:
 - a. Man and _____.
 - b. Man and _____.
 - c. Man and _____.
 - d. Man and _____.

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."

Genesis 3:7

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Independent.
2. Arrogance.
3.
 - a. God.
 - b. Other people.
 - c. Nature.
 - d. Himself.

LESSON

5

THE WORK OF CHRIST: RECONCILIATION



What if God were one of us?

"I believe that there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more compassionate, more reasonable, more valuable and more perfect than Christ. And not only is there nothing, but I say to myself with a jealous love, that there never could be."

(Fyodor Dostoyevsky)

The first death that I remember was that of Mr. Hanlon, our neighbor and the father of one of my best friends. Mr. Hanlon was our Cub Scout leader who often took us camping, fishing, and swimming near our hometown, Dodge City, Kansas. I still remember when we got the phone call, telling us that Mr. Hanlon had drowned in the Arkansas river. The river wasn't more than a stream, but it had some whirlpools that could be dangerous. My friend Bill and his sister Wilma were caught in a current and couldn't get out. Their dad jumped in and pulled one out, then the other. In the process, he lost his strength and couldn't resist. He was pulled under and never came back up. This is what Jesus did for us. He gave His own life to save us.

But there are two differences: First, Jesus purposefully laid down His life for us. It wasn't an accident. Secondly, He overcame death and Satan, and rose again victoriously.

A song that was popular a few years ago speculates about God:

"What if God was one of us?
Just a slob like one of us?
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home?" [1]

Although this song is irreverent, it does pose an important question. What if God were one of us, living a somewhat normal life among us? Would we be able to look Him in the face and talk to Him? What would it be like around Him?

It sounds absurd at first, but isn't this what God already did in the person of Jesus? Of course it would be bordering on blasphemy to call Him a "slob," but He did have a name and people did walk around with Him, look Him in the face, and talk to Him. Isn't that amazing? God in human flesh!

Jesus once asked the disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They answered that some were saying He was John the Baptist, or Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Then Jesus turned the question around to them: "Who do *you* say that I am?" (Matthew 16:13-15). Is there a more important question? Who do *you* think Jesus is?

[1] Joan Osborne, "One of Us."

For Previous Reflection:

What does "salvation" mean?

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes we talk about being "saved" as if it only meant going to heaven when we die. While it is true that this is one of the most wonderful promises in the gospel, the Bible teaches that our salvation includes many other blessings as well.

Read Colossians 1:15-20.

1. According to verse 20, what did Christ do to purchase our salvation?

2. What important thing happened after his death? The passage suggests it in verse 18 with the phrase, "first born from among the dead."

3. According to verse 20, what was God's purpose in sending Jesus to die on the cross and rise up again?

4. How could we define "salvation," according to this text?

Read Ephesians 1:7-10.

5. According to verse 10, what was God's intention in sending Christ?

6. How would you explain the concept of "salvation" according to this text?

In both passages, there is a key phrase which describes the work of Christ.

In Colossians 1:20 the word is "***reconcile.***"

In Ephesians 1:10 the phrase is "***bring together.***"

7. How many things have been "reconciled" or "brought together" in Christ, according to these verses?

8. Which of these relationships are included in our reconciliation?

___ a. With God.

___ b. With our fellow man.

- ___ c. With nature.
- ___ d. With ourselves.



We could write two definitions of "salvation":

THE FIRST DEFINITION OF SALVATION:

THE RECONCILIATION OF ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

Jesus came to reconcile God and man, suffering for our sins, nailing our debt to the cross, and rose again victorious over the power of sin and death. This reconciliation with God carries over into other dimensions of our lives. Once we are right with God, this affects our relationships with other people, with nature itself, and with ourselves.

Christ undoes all the effects of the fall. All the conflicts produced by sin are healed in Christ. We are freed from their damage. This gives us the second definition of salvation:

THE SECOND DEFINITION OF SALVATION:

LIBERATION FROM SIN AND ALL ITS CONSEQUENCES

9. Write down some of the results of the fall which are cured because of what Jesus did for us:

Think of your family:

Think of your emotions:

Think of your intellect:

Think of your eternal life:

Think of your physical body:

Think of your integrity and character:

Think of your work:

Think of other areas of your life:

Read Philippians 3:12-14.

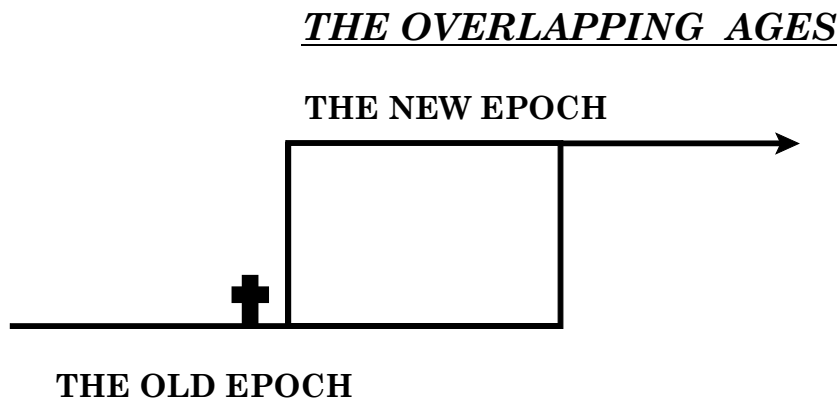
10. Does a Christian experience all the aspects of his salvation *immediately*?

___ yes ___ no

The salvation which Christ purchased for us is ***total***. However, we don't receive all the benefits right away. Our salvation will be completed only when Jesus returns and establishes the eternal form of His kingdom. Our salvation has been ***won***, but it has not been ***finished*** yet.

It's like inheriting millions of dollars which are invested in a savings account. The money is already in your name, but you do not receive it all at once. You get regular dividends, but must wait until the appropriate time to cash in the final amount. We receive continual blessings of our salvation, but will not see the full benefits until Jesus returns.

Observe the following diagram:



When Jesus died and rose again, the new era began. Nevertheless, the old age does not end until Jesus returns. In the mean time, we live in the period of transition (or overlap) between the two ages. Jesus already purchased our salvation, but we don't experience all the benefits until He sets up His kingdom in final form.

If you believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, you are already reconciled with God, and the process of liberation from sin and its effects is in progress. During the transition period, there are three categories to describe the different aspects of salvation:

1. **Already,**
2. **Not Yet,** and
3. **In Process.**

11. Identify the aspects which are already done for you ("Already"), the ones which have not yet begun ("Not Yet"), and the ones which have begun, but are not yet finished ("In Process").

- a. _____ Your sins are forgiven.
- b. _____ You are a child of God, adopted forever.
- c. _____ You have a new body.
- d. _____ You will not die a physical death.
- e. _____ There is a new heaven and a new earth.
- f. _____ You love your neighbor.
- g. _____ You understand the truth.
- h. _____ You live justly.

REVIEW

1. What did Jesus do to obtain our salvation?

2. Write the two definitions of salvation explained in this lesson.

3. Our salvation has been W _____, but it is not yet F _____.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you been reconciled with God? That is, have you asked for forgiveness for your sins, claiming Jesus' death and resurrection as the basis of your salvation?

If you haven't done that yet, you can do it now, simply by praying. You can ask God to forgive you for all your sins, even the ones you are not conscious of or don't remember, and thank Him for the pardon that Jesus already has gained for you on the cross.

2. What practical implications do you see in the definitions of "salvation"?
3. Do you understand the diagram of the "Overlapping Ages" ? Try to explain it to someone else.
4. If you have been reconciled with God, do you see the fruit of your new relationship with God reflected in your relationship with other people? How should this be shown?

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Colossians 1:20

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. He died on the cross and rose again.
2.
 - a. Reconciliation of all things in Christ.
 - b. Liberation from sin and all its consequences.
3. Won, finished.

LESSON
6
THE CALL



"Come and follow me!"

A friend of mine became a hippie in the sixties and went to live in a commune in California, where they ate nothing but brown rice. He eventually traveled around the world looking for the meaning of life. I'm sure he would have gladly worn that T-shirt that says, "I have gone to find myself. If you see me before I get back, tell me to wait for myself!"

When he felt betrayed by his friends, he returned to the United States. After spending time in a mental institution, he escaped by jumping through a glass window. While browsing around in the basement of his grandfather's home, he picked up a small New Testament and began to read it. He couldn't put it down. He says, "When I finished reading the gospels, I realized who Jesus was. I knew that when He said, 'Come and follow me, I had no choice!'"

How about you? Have you realized who Jesus is? Have you sensed Him saying to you, "Come and follow me"?

Have you answered His call?

Remember, Jesus first came to us. Now He asks you to come to Him.

For Previous Reflection:

When did the process of your salvation begin? _____

INTRODUCTION

One of the Bible teachings which give us most comfort and security is the fact that it is God who takes the initiative in our salvation. He began it and He will finish it.

Read Ephesians 1:3-5.

1. According to this passage, when did God choose us?

Read 1 John 4:19.

2. Who loved first?

a. ____ We loved God.

b. ____ God loved us.

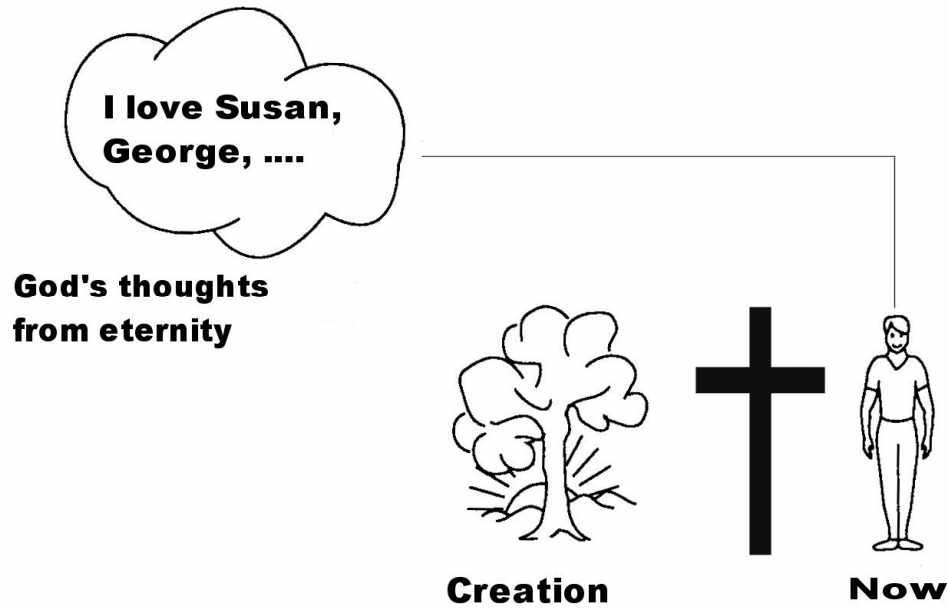
Read Romans 8:29-30.

3. Before calling us, God did two things. What are they?

a. _____

b. _____

The word "foreknew" means much more than simply knowing something *about* a person. It means *knowing the person*. It means that God *loved* us before we were even born! He who is above time loved us in His heart from before the creation of the world! This love is the reason He chose us. This eternal love is the reason He sent Jesus to die for us.



The word "predestined" means to *plan beforehand*.

4. According to Romans 8:29, what did God predestine with regard to those that He foreknew?

God:

- 1. Loved us,**
- 2. Predestined us,**
- 3. Called us.**

God did not call us because we were "good" people, or because we had faith, or because He knew we were going to believe, or because we went to church or belonged to a Christian family. Any of these reasons would have been personal merit. On the contrary, God chose us only because of His loving **GRACE**. He loved us and chose us **in spite of** our sin.

DEFINITION OF **CALLING**:

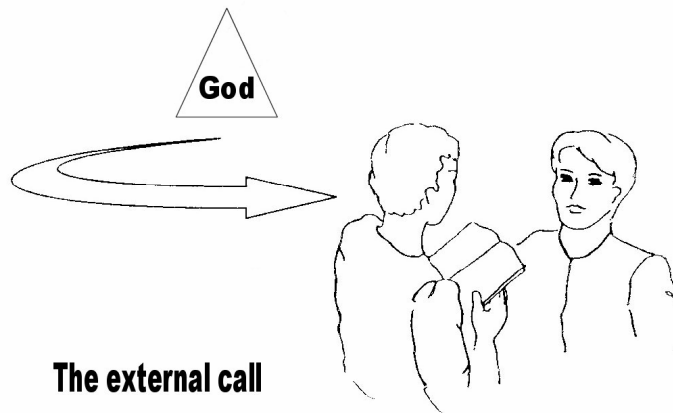
There are two senses of the word:

- a. The exterior call: ***Causing someone to hear the gospel.***
- b. The interior call: ***Causing a change in someone's heart so that they believe the gospel.***

Read Romans 10:11-15.

- 5. To be saved, you must _____.
- 6. To believe in Jesus, you must _____.
- 7. For you to hear the gospel, somebody must _____.

God, in His perfect plan, decided to use other people as instruments in our salvation. To call someone, God always sends messengers; these may be friends or family, someone who shares the gospel with us.



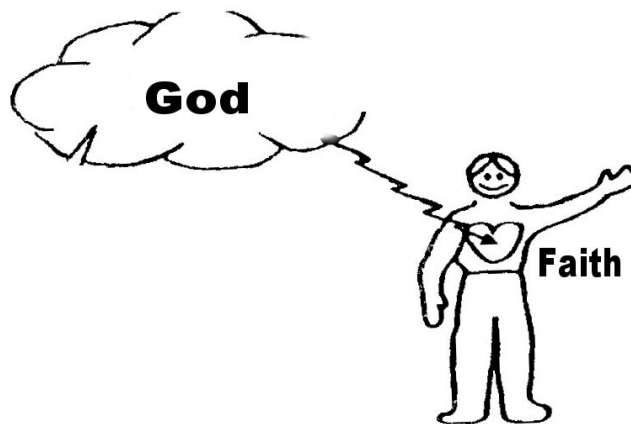
Read Matthew 22:14.

8. Is everyone saved who receives the external call, that is, everyone who hears the gospel?

Read John 3:3.

9. To be saved and see the kingdom of God, you must be _____.

Being *born again* is another way of describing the *internal call*. Sometimes it is called "*regeneration*." It means the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart which is capable of responding to the gospel in faith.



10. Give the two meanings of "*calling*":

a. The exterior call: God causes someone to H _____ the gospel.

b. The interior call: God causes someone to B _____ the gospel.

This is the order:

God loved us.

God predestined us.

God called us externally (caused us to hear the gospel.)

God called us internally (caused us to believe the gospel.)

REVIEW

1. Write the two definitions:

a. External call: _____

b. Internal call: _____

2. When did the process of your salvation begin?

3. Put these terms in their proper order: external call, internal call, predestination, love of God.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

4. What does *predestine* mean?

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does the fact that God has chosen us from before the foundation of the world eliminate our *participation* in the process of our salvation?
2. How would you answer a person who says that it is unfair of God to choose some people and not others? (See Romans 9 . Think also about this: If nobody *deserves* to be saved, how could it be unfair of God to not save somebody? Also, whose *fault* is it if someone is not saved?)

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

" For He chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

Ephesians 1:4

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. a. God causes us to hear the gospel.
b. God causes us to believe the gospel.
2. Before the foundation of the world.
3. a. God's love.
b. Predestination.
c. The external call.
d. The internal call.
4. To plan beforehand.

LESSON 7 REPENTANCE



"Out, damned spot!"

Lady Macbeth had urged her husband to commit murder, and eventually she goes insane due to her sense of guilt. She imagines her hands to be permanently stained with blood, and rubs her hands desperately to remove it, but it can't be cleansed. She cries, "Out, damned spot!" (Shakespeare)

Only true repentance can bring forgiveness and peace of heart.

I remember sitting on the balcony of an apartment in Cuba, having breakfast with the director of the *Los Pinos* Seminary. His wife served us each a cup of Cuban espresso, with that unmistakable aroma, and offered what looked like a bowl of sugar. Ramón and I both enthusiastically tossed two spoonfuls of the white powder into our coffee and stirred it up. Before I put the cup to my mouth, Ramón took a sip, wrinkled his face and shouted, "Margarita, this is salt, not sugar!" Margarita turned red and apologized over and over, "I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry!" What could she do? Only one thing: She had to bring fresh coffee. No matter how much sugar you add, it still won't taste good. That's the way sin is; you can't simply add good works to make it ok. It's already ruined.

Only true repentance can bring spiritual renewal

For Previous Reflection:

What is "repentance"?

Read Acts 17:30,31.

1. Who should repent?
-

Read Acts 3:19.

2. What happens to our sins when we repent?
-

Read 2 Corinthians 7:10.

3. Godly sorrow brings _____ which leads to _____.
4. Worldly sorrow, which does not come from God, brings _____.
5. One aspect of "repentance," then, is that it involves a feeling of
S _____.

Read Luke 3:8-14.

6. What else does true repentance include, according to this passage?

DEFINITION:

REPENTANCE IS:

A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE AND A CHANGE OF LIFE
--

7. Repeat the definition:

To repent is to make a full turn. One is walking towards sin, and he turns away from it to Jesus.

REPENTANCE INCLUDES:

A. FEELING SADNESS FOR YOUR SIN,

B. ASKING FORGIVENESS,

C. ABANDONING THE SIN, AND

D. FOLLOWING JESUS.

8. Write the four aspects of repentance:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

9. Which of the following people has truly repented?

- ____ a. "I am tired of getting drunk and getting into fights!
I always end up in the hospital! I'm going to change my life!"
- ____ b. "I know that I should stop taking money from the cash
register, but I can always go to church on Sunday and
confess my sins."
- ____ c. "I feel very bad about having offended you, Lord. I've been dishonest
and self-centered. Forgive me, and help me to change."

10. Explain what is wrong in the two cases above where the repentance was not real:

Read Mark 10:17-22.

10. Was the rich young man truly repentant? _____

12. What would have made his repentance valid?

Read John 13:10.

There are two senses in which we should repent:

There is a *first repentance* which is the first step in becoming a Christian and starting a new life. This lesson has been speaking primarily about this sense of the word until now. It is like washing your whole body.

However, there is *another* sense in which we must continue to repent. After the first cleansing, we still continue to sin and need to repent *daily*. This is like washing our feet.

The first repentance is for salvation, and the other repentances are for continual forgiveness.

13. The first repentance is like taking a _____.

14. Other repentances are like _____.

REVIEW

1. Define repentance:

2. List the four aspects of true repentance:

- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

- d. _____

3. Explain the difference between the two senses in which a Christian repents:

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Have you experienced a true repentance in the first sense of the word? That is, have you felt sorry for your sin and asked the Lord to forgive you and let you start a new life? If not, you should do that now! Don't let another day go by without considering your sins and asking for His cleansing. You can begin a new life, walking in His paths. He will not disappoint you!
2. If you have already made that decision, and are following Jesus, do you have a daily habit of reflecting on your sins and asking forgiveness?

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Analyze this comment from a movie. Does it seem correct? Why?

"Love means never having to say you're sorry."

2. What is the difference between true repentance and a "New Year's resolution"?

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

<p>"...Now he commands all people everywhere to repent." Acts 17:30b</p>
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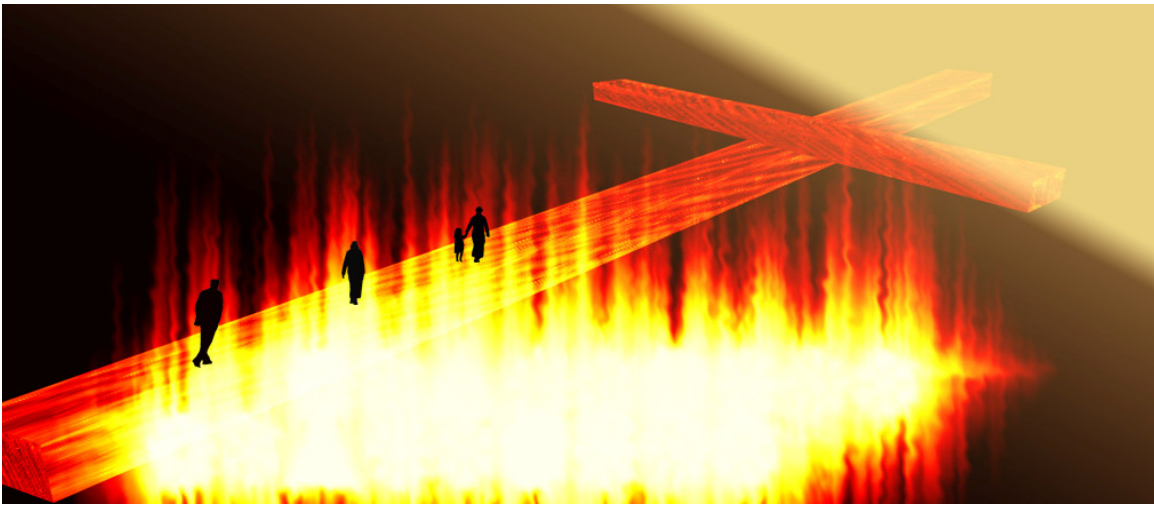
ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. A change of attitude and a change of life.
2.
 - a. Feeling sad for your sin,
 - b. Asking forgiveness,
 - c. Abandoning the sin, and
 - d. Following Jesus.
3. The first sense is when we first repent and become a Christian, like taking a complete bath, and the second sense is when we daily ask for forgiveness, like washing our feet (or some similar answer.)

LESSON

8

SAVING FAITH



Saving faith is not a "blind leap."

Sören Kierkegaard considered Christian faith an absurd act of the will, against all reason. According to him, there is no reason to believe, but we do anyway. Francis Schaeffer corrected this misunderstanding, insisting that there was a difference between true Christian faith and an existential blind leap. The following is a summary of his illustration:

Imagine that some mountain climbers are lost in the alps when a cold fog settles in. Their guide says they will freeze to death by morning unless they find shelter. He takes them into a dense fog to keep warm, but has no idea where they are. One of the climbers decides to use his rope and desperately drops down off a cliff, hoping to possibly find a place to protect himself from the cold. This would be a blind leap of faith, not exactly a wise decision.

Now suppose that the others hear the voice of man telling them he knows where a ledge is that would shelter them. They ask who he is, and realize that his name is of a well-known family from the area. They ask other questions, and as he continues to give them clear and convincing answers, they begin to trust him. Finally they drop over where he has indicated, they find refuge and survive. This is Christian faith, based on a personal relationship of trust, and not a blind leap. [1]

[1] Francis Schaeffer, *He is There and He is Not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1980), appendix.

For Previous Reflection:

What does it mean to "believe" in Jesus?

INTRODUCTION

In the last lesson we explained that when someone repents, he abandons his sin and follows Jesus. But to follow Jesus one needs ***faith***. In this lesson we will study what it means to ***believe*** in Jesus. There are different kinds of faith, but only one which leads us to salvation. First we will look at what saving faith **is not**, then at what it **is**.

I. WHAT SAVING FAITH IS NOT.

A. Saving faith is not mere intellectual knowledge.

Someone might think, "I believe in Jesus," meaning that he knows that a man named Jesus really existed. It's just like saying he believes in *Napoleon*.

Read James 2:19.

1. What correct thing do the demons believe? _____
2. Do you think the demons are saved because of this? _____

People can believe many correct things about God without having saving faith. Of course sound intellectual knowledge is good and necessary, but it is not **sufficient** to be saved.

B. Saving faith is not simply faith in miracles.

Other people think they have a lot of faith because they believe that God does miracles. Maybe they have been healed or seen some other unusual manifestation of God's power.

Read John 3:1-3.

3. Did Nicodemus believe that Jesus had done miracles? _____
4. Was he saved because of believing that? _____
5. What did he need before he could have saving faith? _____

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11.

6. Who else can do miracles (counterfeit)? _____

It is good to believe in God's power to perform miracles, but it is not **sufficient** in order to be saved. Even Satan believes God can do miracles, in fact he does them himself in order to deceive people!

C. Saving faith is not an uncertain hope.

Some people say that faith is "believing the impossible." They think, "If I could be sure, then I wouldn't need faith." But this can be a way of covering up real uncertainty. Maybe they **hope**, for example, that Jesus rose from the dead, but they really aren't sure. What they really have is not **faith**, but an **uncertain hope**.

Read Hebrews 11:1.

7. Write this definition of faith in your own words.

8. According to this verse, is faith something uncertain? _____

II. WHAT SAVING FAITH IS.

SAVING FAITH IS:

TRUSTING JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOUR

It is a personal relationship with Jesus which gives certainty of salvation and produces submission to him.

A. JESUS IS SAVIOUR.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.

9. According to this passage, one must believe the gospel to be saved.
According to verses 3 and 8, what are the essential doctrines of the gospel?

a. That Christ _____

- b. That Christ _____
 - c. That Christ _____
 - d. That Christ _____
10. To say that we must believe that Jesus died for our sins is to say that we should trust Jesus as our S _____.

*Many people say that they believe Jesus died for the sins of the world, but they have not personally received His forgiveness for their **own** sins. **Have you accepted His forgiveness?** If you have not done it, you can confess your sins directly to Him in prayer, and He will forgive you.*

Read 1 John 1:9.

11. If you asked His forgiveness, are your forgiven? _____
12. Are there any sins which remain unforgiven?

Read Romans 6:14.

13. Sin shall not be our _____.

Jesus not only frees us from the **guilt** of sin, but also from the **power** of sin. He **forgives** us and he **frees** us.

B. JESUS IS LORD.

Read Luke 9:23-25.

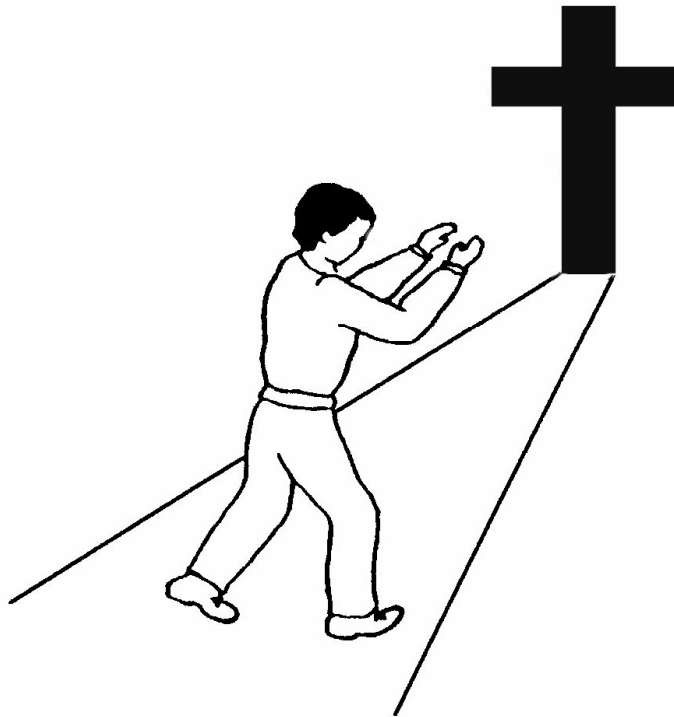
14. To be saved, what must you do, according to this text?

Read Romans 10:9-11.

15. To be saved, you must confess with your mouth that _____
and believe in you heart that _____

16. These two passages indicate that we should trust in Jesus as _____.

Perhaps you know that Jesus is "Lord," but you have not personally submitted your life to Him. If not, you can turn your life over to Him by praying and asking Him to guide you, and telling Him that you are willing to do His will.



Read Matthew 1:21-23.

17. Write down the two names of the child, and the meaning of each one:

_____:

_____:

18. Write the name that suggests that we should trust in Jesus

as Lord: _____

as Savior: _____

REVIEW

1. Explain three things that saving faith **is not**:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. Explain what saving faith **is**:

The most important decision in your life is this: *Am I going to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in my life?* Do it today! Receive His forgiveness and turn your life over to Him!

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is it possible that someone be mistaken about some of the doctrines he believes, and still be saved? What are some basic doctrines that one must believe in order to be saved?
2. What does it mean practically in our daily life to accept Jesus as Lord?

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Romans 10:9

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. a. Mere intellectual knowledge,
b. Faith in miracles,
c. An uncertain hope.
2. Trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

LESSON

9

JUSTIFICATION

Standing on the gallows with my head in a noose

In his senior years, Bob Dylan sings of his fear of condemnation.

I'm well dressed, waiting on the last train,
Standing on the gallows with my head in a noose.
Any minute now I'm expecting all hell to break loose.

I've been walking forty miles of bad road.
If the Bible is right, the world will explode.
I've been trying to get as far away from myself as I can. [1]

How about you? Do you have peace with God? Or do you still sense a black cloud
between you and God?

[1] *ThingsHave Changed*, 2000.

For Previous Reflection:

How would you explain what "justification" means?

INTRODUCTION

Man has always asked himself, "How can I be considered righteous before God?" (See Job 25:4 and 9:2, for example.) When you think about God the creator, holy and perfect, you don't feel very righteous. You feel guilty and seek peace in your heart. Sometimes people look for this peace in the wrong way, maybe trying to do "good deeds," or maybe exposing themselves to suffering in order to somehow expiate for their sins. In this lesson we shall examine the only way to be considered righteous by God.

Read Romans 5:18,19.

1. When Adam sinned, how did this affect mankind's legal standing before God?
 - a. It resulted in C _____ for all men. (Vs. 18)
 - b. All men are considered S _____. (Vs. 19)
 2. How did Jesus' righteousness affect man?
 - a. It brought J _____.
 - b. They are made R _____.
 3. How would you define "justification," according to these verses?
-

DEFINITION:

JUSTIFICATION IS:

**A DIVINE VERDICT
SAYING WE ARE NOT GUILTY**



IN OTHER WORDS:

TO BE JUSTIFIED MEANS:

TO BE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS

An easy way to remember this is to say that when I'm *justified* it's:

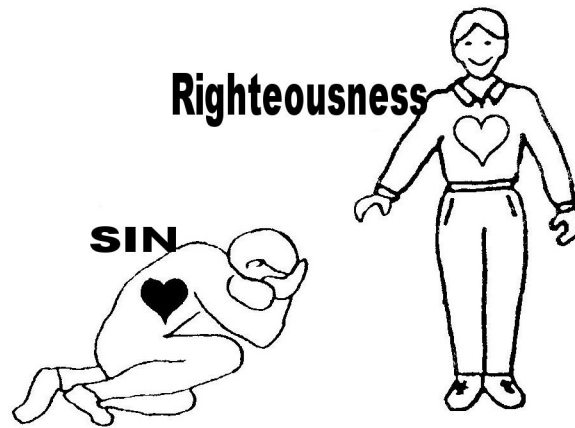
JUST AS IF I'D NEVER SINNED

The **BASIS** of our justification is the **WORK OF CHRIST**, not good conduct or human merit of any kind.

Justification does not mean "justifying yourself," giving false excuses, neither does it mean that we actually become totally righteous in our conduct. Justification is our **legal standing** before God. We are **declared** just.

This has two aspects:

- a. Our sins are forgiven (past, present and future!)
- b. Jesus' perfect righteousness is put on our account.



Read Romans 3:9-20.

4. Sum up in one phrase the main point of this passage.

Read Romans 3:21-31.

5. Sum up the main point of this section.

6. According to the conclusion in verse 28, man is justified by F _____
apart from observing the L _____.

7. How are we justified according to verse 24?

8. Why do you think God wanted justification to be by faith? (See verse 27.)

Read Romans 4:2-3.

9. Abraham was considered righteous because he B _____ God.

Read Romans 4:16.

10. Why does the promise of blessing come by faith?

Read Romans 4:10-11.

11. Was Abraham justified *before* or *after* being circumcised? _____

12. Then could Abraham say that he had already been justified at the point in time when he was circumcised, or did he have to wait until he died to be sure if he was justified?

13. Following the same argument, is it arrogant to say that you have already been justified and are already saved, if you believe in Jesus?

Read Romans 5:1.

14. What is the result of being justified? _____

SUMMING UP:

- a. The definition of ***JUSTIFICATION*** is:
A DIVINE VERDICT SAYING WE ARE NOT GUILTY.
- b. ***TO BE JUSTIFIED*** is: **TO BE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS.**
(*JUST AS IF I'D NEVER SINNED.*)
- c. The ***BASIS*** of our justification is: **THE WORK OF CHRIST.**
- d. The ***MEANS*** of being justified is: **FAITH.**
- e. The ***RESULT*** of being justified is: **PEACE WITH GOD.**

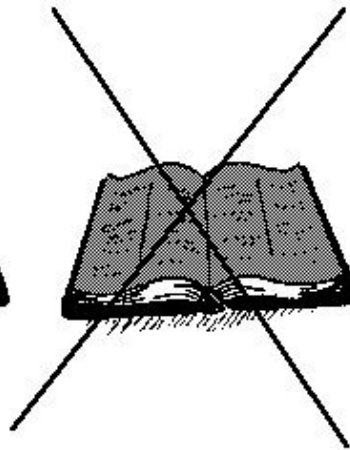
Faith is like an open hand which reaches out to receive a gift.



Justification is like if you were a murderer condemned to death, and Jesus offered to die in your place. God the Father is the judge, and He accepts Jesus' offer, declaring you not guilty.

We all have a record of bad behavior. Jesus offers not only to erase the bad remarks from your book, but also to give you His own record, with many notes about His excellent behavior, in place of yours.

**Righteousness
of Jesus**



My record of sin

Read Romans 9:30-32.

15. What was the Jews' error with regard to righteous?

Read Romans 11:6.

16. Some people think that you should combine faith and good works in order to be saved. They think that eternal life is partly given by grace, and partly earned. According to this verse, do you think that this is correct?

Read Romans 3:28.

17. According to this text, do good works contribute in any way towards our justification?

My friend, you can either **give** somebody a car, or you can **sell** it, but you cannot do both at the same time! If you receive even a dollar for it, legally it is not a gift, but a sale. Eternal life is a gift and cannot be sold. We should not try to pay anything for it.

NOTE:

In another lesson we will study the place of good works.

If someone is trusting any merit of his own for his salvation, he will never be sure if he has done enough. How good do you have to be to be saved? Really, the answer is that you would have to be **perfect**! But the problem is that **nobody is perfect**!

So how can you be saved?

Only by faith in Jesus Christ!

18. Which of the following people understand what justification means?
- a. ____ "I think God will accept me into heaven because I have been a relatively good person, after all."
 - b. ____ "I think God will accept me into heaven because He is kind and will not be bothered by my sin."
 - c. ____ "I believe in Jesus, but I am not sure whether I have eternal life, because I still sin sometimes."
 - d. ____ "You never know if you're justified until you die."
 - e. ____ "I am justified because I have been baptized."
 - f. ____ "I know that I am a sinner, but Jesus died on the cross for me, and forgave me, so I know that I have eternal life."

REVIEW

JUSTIFICATION:

- 1. The definition: _____
- 2. To be justified is: _____
- 3. The basis of our justification: _____
- 4. The means of being justified: _____
- 5. The result of being justified: _____

FOR MEDITATION

1. Have you received the gift of justification?
If you haven't, you can do it now. Ask God for forgiveness for your sins: past, present and future. Read 1 John 1:9 and claim this promise!
2. Read Micah 7:18-19. What does God do with our sins, according to this passage? What does that mean?

TEXTS TO MEMORIZE

"...Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Romans 3:24

"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."

Romans 3:28

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. A divine verdict saying we are not guilty.
2. To be declared righteous.
3. The work of Christ.
4. Faith.
5. Peace with God.

LESSON
10
SANCTIFICATION

It's both legal and personal

I have both a legal relationship and a personal relationship with my wife. We have signed a document and promised to take care of each other. We are legally responsible for our children. We even share financial responsibilities and are co-owners of our house. But there is more to our relationship than that! We also love each other! We enjoy talking, listening to music together, browsing in bookstores, watching TV, traveling, and sharing a good meal. I enjoy being with my wife more than with anybody else!

It's the same with God; we have a legal relationship and a personal relationship. Before our conversion, we were legally guilty and deserving condemnation. We were separated from God and had no rights. Now we have been forgiven in a once-and-for-all legal way, which is called "justification," and we have become God's children with incredible "rights" of inheritance. However, we also need to develop our personal relationship with God. We need to learn to walk in close fellowship with Him and to grow in our love for Him. This personal spiritual growth is what we call "sanctification."

The legal relationship will never change, but the personal relationship fluctuates, just like my relationship with my wife. When I offend her, it doesn't mean we need to get married again. However, it does mean that I need to ask forgiveness in order to remove the personal barrier and restore our sense of closeness. It's the same with God; when we sin, we do not lose our salvation, but we need to restore our personal fellowship with Him.

For Previous Reflection:

How would you explain the meaning of these terms?

- a. Libertinism.
- b. Legalism.

INTRODUCTION

There are two common errors with regard to sanctification: libertinism and legalism. Libertinism means living without law, and legalism means living as a slave to the law. The libertine lives however he wants, without taking into account the will of God, and the legalist trusts the law and his own efforts to become righteous, instead of trusting the Lord. One doesn't care much about righteousness, and the other tries to make himself righteous.

We shall see in this lesson that both of these positions are errors. Sanctification is necessary because it is a part of our salvation, but the capacity to grow spiritually comes from God.

Read Romans 6:1-2.

After explaining that we are justified by faith in chapters 1-5 of Romans, Paul anticipates the question: If we are saved by grace, why not continue in sin?

1. What is his answer?

Read Romans 6:14.

2. An important aspect of our salvation is liberation from the power of sin. Although we still sin, what can sin no longer do to us?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

3. When we believe in Christ, what do we become?

4. What is your conclusion? Has a person really become a Christian if he doesn't care about pleasing God with his life?

5. Which of the two errors mentioned in the introduction is proved to be wrong by these passages in Romans and 2 Corinthians?

6. Write the definition of libertinism: _____

Read Galatians 3:1-3.

7. How did they receive the Holy Spirit?

_____ by works.

_____ by faith.

After becoming Christians the Galatians were deceived by false teachers who insisted that they had to be circumcised to be saved. Paul wrote this letter to correct the error.

8. In verse 3, Paul says that if they are circumcised in order to be saved, they would be trying to obtain their goal by _____.

Read Galatians 5:2.

9. Explain Paul's point in this verse:

Read Galatians 2:20.

10. Now Paul lives by _____.

11. Who lives in Paul? _____

Read Galatians 5:22-23.

12. Write the different aspects of the fruit of the Spirit:

13. Which of the two errors mentioned in the introduction is corrected by these passages in Galatians?

14. Define legalism: _____

DEFINITION:

SANCTIFICATION IS:

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

PUTTING SOME THOUGHTS TOGETHER:

Part of our problem with regard to sanctification is that we tend to separate sanctification from justification. Often we think only of justification when we talk of salvation. For some, this can lead to licentiousness. Others may react to this and emphasize the importance of sanctification, but they make the mistake of taking their eyes off the Lord, trying to sanctify themselves, and they fall into legalism.

If we remember what ***salvation*** really means, we can avoid both errors:

Salvation is liberation from sin and all its consequences.

Obviously this includes both justification and sanctification. It means that we must grow spiritually, but we trust the Holy Spirit to help us.

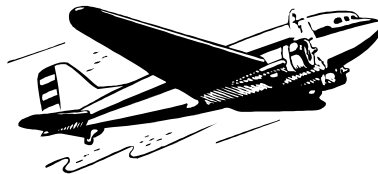
A second part of our problem is that we tend to misunderstand what ***faith*** is. Sometimes we talk about faith as if it meant believing in the existence of God, or a merely intellectual acceptance of Christian doctrine. Obviously if someone "believes" in this sense, he will not grow in his Christian life because he never really became a Christian! He doesn't have a personal relationship with the Lord.

If we remember what ***faith*** really means, we can avoid both libertinism and legalism.

Faith is trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

This includes trusting Him to sanctify us.

Faith in Jesus is like faith in an airplane. You can know a lot about a jet without really trusting it. If someone asks you if you have confidence in it, you can easily say yes. But you won't really know if you trust the plane until you have to **get in it**. In that moment, your faith is put to the test.



It's the same with Jesus. Some people think they have faith, but they haven't really boarded the plane. They only have intellectual faith. Maybe they believe He existed, that He was a good man, maybe they even believe that He died for the sins of the world. Nevertheless, their faith is not a personal trust in Him. They haven't asked Him for forgiveness for **their** sins, and they aren't **trusting** Him to help them grow.

How about you?

Are you trusting Jesus in this sense?

Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

15. Jesus is the _____ and _____ of our faith.

16. We should run the race with our eyes fixed on _____.

My friend, this is the secret of the Christian life! Keep your eyes upon Jesus. Justification is by faith in Him, and sanctification is also by faith in Him.

17. Which of these people show they are really trusting the Lord for their sanctification?

- ☐ a. "I'm justified by faith, and now I can do as I please!"
- ☐ b. "I'm justified by faith, and now I must prove I'm saved by being holy. God has done His part, and now I must do mine."
- ☐ c. "I'm justified by faith and now I trust the Lord to help me grow."
- ☐ d. "I believe in Jesus. In fact, I have a lot of faith. I must be saved, because everything is going so well with me in my career. God wouldn't bless me like that if I weren't saved."
- ☐ e. "I believe in Jesus. He's the best man that ever lived. I'm going to live my life after His example."
- ☐ f. "I believe in God. There must be a superior being who started the universe. All religions point to the same God."

REVIEW

DEFINE:

1. Libertinism: _____
2. Legalism: _____
3. Sanctification: _____
4. Salvation: _____
5. Saving faith: _____

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can you detect if a person is making the mistake of libertinism? Of legalism?
2. Which error do you think is more common in your own life? In the Church?
3. Make a line drawing that represents your process of sanctification? Explain why you draw it that way.

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to obtain your goal by human efforts?"

Galatians 3:3

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Living without law.
2. Living as a slave to the law.
3. Spiritual growth.
4. Liberation from sin and all its consequences.
5. Trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

LESSON

11

FAITH AND GOOD WORKS

How do we know if our bonsai is alive?

My wife got a bonsai tree for Christmas last year, and we weren't quite sure how to take care of it. First we understood that you should water it very lightly, so once in a while I sprinkled a few drops on it. To make the problem worse, the water seemed to roll off to the side instead of filtering through the soil. By the end of two weeks, it seemed dead. All the leaves dried up and fell off. I finally called a store where they sold bonsai plants, and they explained that bonsais need just as much water as any other plant, and that I should drench it completely in order to revive it. So I put the whole thing under the faucet and soaked it. Then I took it outside to get some sun. I waited and waited for days, but saw no signs of life. I thought I had killed it, but my wife encouraged me to be patient.

How do we know if our bonsai is alive? The only way to be sure is to wait and see if the leaves grow back. And sure enough they did!

In a similar way, the leaves and the fruit in a person's life are evidence that he or she is spiritually alive. We all begin spiritually dead, but when the Holy Spirit gives us new life, there will eventually be evidence of that. For some people it may take longer than others, but it will come.

That's the secret to the relationship between faith and good works. Obviously we don't produce fruit *so that* we can become alive. On the contrary, the leaves and the fruit come *as a result* of being alive.

For Previous Reflection:

1. What would you say to a person who said, "If salvation were by faith alone, then there would be no motive for doing good works"?
2. Doesn't the Bible say that we will be judged by our deeds? How can that be reconciled with the teaching that we are saved by faith?

INTRODUCTION

We have already established that we are saved by faith, but that part of our salvation is sanctification. Still, there are some Bible passages which talk about being judged by our deeds, and that "faith without works is dead." How can these teachings be reconciled? Are they contradictions? Did the authors of the Bible have differences in their theology?

In this lesson we will show how these teachings all fit together. They are not contradictions; each author emphasized different aspects of the same gospel.

Read James 2:14-26.

1. According to verse 26, if faith does not have works, what kind of faith is it?

In this letter, James is correcting a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching about justification by faith. Some people were distorting this doctrine to excuse their libertinism. James explains that true faith actually leads to good works.

Read Ephesians 2:10.

2. We do good works fundamentally because:

___ a. We are good people.

___ b. God planned our good deeds beforehand.

3. According to the previous lesson about sanctification, the source of our ability to do good works comes from:

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

How can this passage be harmonized with others which teach that salvation is by faith? Actually, the explanation is simple: What is being taught here is that the good works are **evidence** that a person is saved, **evidence** that he has faith. Just as we studied in previous lessons, a person who has been born again experiences some changes in his life. The Holy Spirit begins to transform his sinful ways into a loving life style. If there are no such changes in his life, it only shows that he does not have true saving faith.

4. Good works are E _____ of true faith.

Read John 15:1-5.

5. If one does not bear fruit, what happens?

6. What is the secret of bearing fruit? What must one do?

7. Can a branch bear fruit if it is not connected to the vine?

8. Thinking about this illustration, what do you think it means to "remain in Christ"?



Just as a branch of a grape vine cannot bear fruit without receiving its nutrition (water, minerals) from the vine and its roots, so a Christian cannot bear fruit of good deeds if he is not receiving his strength from Jesus. This figure of the vine is another way of saying that we must trust Jesus, depend on Him, to be able to produce good works. Faith is our vital connection with the Lord.

Analyze this:

Suppose a branch is not connected to the vine:

9. Could it bear grapes? _____

10. What would it have to do in order to bear grapes?

To be connected, or grafted, to the vine is a symbol of our spiritual relationship to Jesus.

11. What do we need to be grafted into Jesus? F _____.

12. Which of these makes more sense?

___ a. A branch wants to bear fruit in order to be connected to the vine.

___ b. A branch wants to be connected to the vine in order to bear fruit.

Suppose a branch which is not connected to the vine wants to be considered part of the vine, and therefore tries to bear grapes.

13. Is it possible? _____

Wouldn't it seem ridiculous? Nevertheless, in a similar way, many people are trying to do the same thing spiritually! They think they can do good works in order to be a Christian. This is just backwards! To be able to do good deeds, you need to become a Christian first! You need to be born again by putting your trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Only then will you be able to bear true fruit of righteousness.

CONCLUSION:

WITHOUT FAITH, THERE ARE NO TRUE GOOD WORKS.

WITHOUT GOOD WORKS, THERE IS NO TRUE FAITH.

GOOD WORKS ARE EVIDENCE OF TRUE FAITH.

WE DO NOT DO GOOD WORKS IN ORDER TO BE SAVED, BUT WE DO THEM BECAUSE WE ARE SAVED.

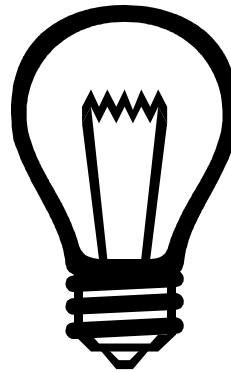
We say that without faith there are no true good works, because non-Christians can also do many things which seem very good, at least outwardly. The difference is, however, that their "good deeds" are not pleasing and acceptable to God because they do not come from faith and their internal motives are not correct.

Read Hebrews 11:6.

14. Without faith it is impossible to _____.

Think of a light bulb:

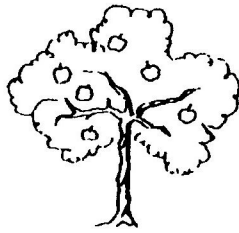
If the tiny wire inside (the filament) is broken, the current does not go through the light bulb, and there is no light. If the filament is in tact, the electricity goes through and the light goes on.



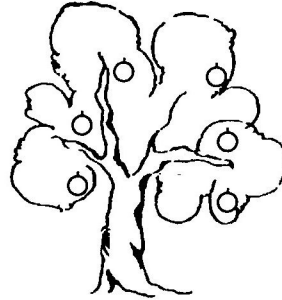
15. Try to identify the parts of the illustration. Which part represents the Holy Spirit? the Christian? faith? good works?

- a. The light bulb: _____
- b. The filament: _____
- c. The electricity: _____
- d. The light: _____

Imagine two kinds of trees: apple trees and avocado trees.



APPLE TREE



AVOCADO TREE

Suppose that only apple trees could go to heaven. On judgment day, both kinds of trees come forward, mixed among themselves.

16. How could you tell the difference between an apple tree and an avocado tree?

17. An apple tree would produce apples because:

___ a. It wants to go to heaven.

___ b. It is an apple tree.

18. Can an avocado tree produce apples? _____

Applying this to spiritual life, the problem is that we are all born as "avocado trees," so to speak. We cannot simply decide to produce apples in order to win our eternal life. On the contrary! We must be converted into apple trees first by faith, then we can produce apples. This requires nothing less than a miracle! God must change the very nature of the tree. Just as Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." This is the relation between faith and good works!

19. Identify the parts of the illustration. Match the spiritual truth represented by each item:

Apples.

True Good Works.

Avocados.

Works Without Faith.

Apple trees.

Christians.

Avocado trees.

Non-Christians.

REVIEW

1. Without faith, there are no real _____.
2. Without true good works, there is no true _____.
3. Good works are E _____ of true faith.
4. We do not do good works in order to be saved, but we do good works _____.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can you always tell the difference between the "apples" and the "avocados?"
2. How could you learn to trust the Lord more in order to bear more fruit?

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

John 15:4

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Good works.
2. Faith.
3. Evidence.
4. Because we are saved.

LESSON
12
ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Written in permanent ink

"Eternity is very long, especially at the end."
Woody Allen

When somebody wants to make sure a document is preserved, he writes it in permanent ink. Many years ago, important documents such as covenants were engraved in stone. We could say that God has written the names of His elect permanently in the Book of Life, and He will never erase the names. Contrary to what Woody Allen says, eternal life has no end.

Since God takes the initiative in our salvation, we can be sure that a true believer never loses it. That is, our eternal life depends on Him, not on ourselves. God is like a father who carries his child across the street in his arms; he will never let him out of his grasp.

For Previous Reflection:

1. Can you be sure that you're saved?
2. Can you be sure you will never lose your salvation?

INTRODUCTION

Some Christians live with the constant fear of losing their salvation. They are not experiencing the joy that could be theirs if they only understood the doctrine of eternal security. The Bible teaches that we already have eternal life and we cannot lose it!

Read John 3:16.

1. What is necessary to obtain eternal life? _____

Read John 5:24.

2. When do we obtain eternal life?
 - ___ a. After we die.
 - ___ b. In the moment we believe in Jesus.
 - ___ c. After we are baptized.

Read 1 John 5:12-13.

3. Do you need anything else besides Jesus to obtain eternal life? _____

Read Romans 5:8-10 and Romans 8:1.

4. If God has already declared us "not guilty," could He go back on His word and condemn us?

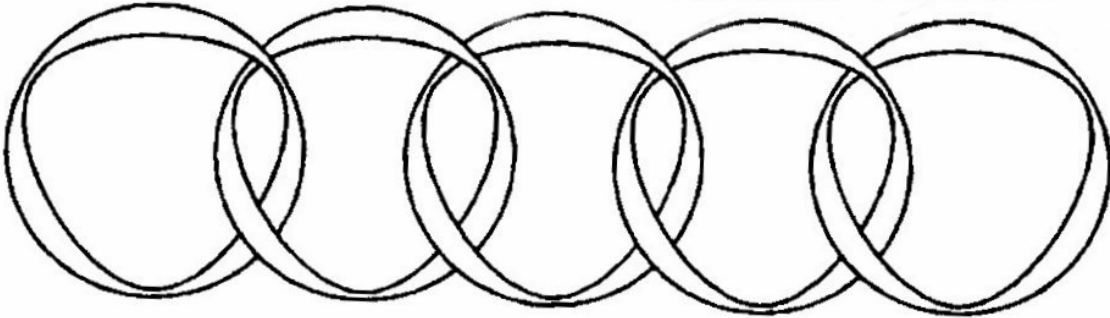
Paul's argument is that Christ died for us while we were sinners, therefore, what would he **not** do for us now that we have been reconciled with Him?

After explaining in the first seven chapters of Romans that we are justified and sanctified by faith, Paul crowns his doctrinal study with chapter 8 on eternal security.

Read Romans 8:28-30.

Verses 29 and 30 have been called the "unbreakable chain," or the "golden chain." Some very important terms which we have been studying are linked together inseparably.

Foreknew Predestined Called Justified Glorified



5. Those that God F _____, he also P _____.

Those he predestined, he also C _____.

Those he called, he also J _____.

Those he justified, he also G _____.

Let's review:

To ***foreknow*** us means to love us from before the foundation of the world.

To ***predestine*** us means to plan our salvation beforehand.

To ***call*** us means to have us hear the gospel and change our hearts so we can believe.

To ***justify*** us means to declare us not guilty.

The only term which we have not studied is ***glorified***. It means that we will be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Himself. It is the last step in the process of sanctification. Of course we do not become divine, with all His attributes and power, but we become like Jesus morally, sharing His holiness.

DEFINITION:

TO BE GLORIFIED MEANS:

TO BE MADE LIKE JESUS IN HIS HOLINESS
--

6. According to verse 29, what does God predestine us to be like?

According to these verses, there is a group of people that go through the whole series of steps in their salvation. The same group of people who are foreknown and predestined are the same ones who are called, justified, and finally glorified. The chain is unbreakable. It makes sense: If God Himself predestines us to become conformed to the likeness of His Son, then He will carry out His purpose in us until the end.

7. The same people who are foreknown and predestined will be G _____.

The obvious question is, "How do I know if I'm one of those who has been predestined and will be glorified?"

The answer is simple: If you have **faith** in Jesus Christ, you know that you have been justified, and therefore that all the other things in the "unbreakable chain" happen to you, too.

Read Romans 8:31-34.

8. Explain the point of these verses in your own words:

Read Romans 8:35-39.

9. Sum up in your own words the point Paul makes in these verses:

10. What is your conclusion? Can someone who is saved lose his salvation?

11. Our salvation is sure because:

___ a. We have a lot of faith.

___ b. We no longer sin.

___ c. We have been baptized.

___ d. We go to church every Sunday.

___ e. Our parents were Christians.

___ f. God is faithful to His promises.

12. According to Romans 8:28, how many things does God work towards our good?

This is one of the most comforting promises in the Bible! It would be very helpful to stop and take the time to memorized this verse!

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those that love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Romans 8:28

13. After memorizing it, write it in this box:

14. Which of these things does God work out to our benefit?

- ☐ a. I brake my leg.
- ☐ b. I lose my job.
- ☐ d. My house is burned.

The fact that God works all things out for "good" does not mean material and physical benefit, but spiritual growth.

Also, this verse does not mean that we can sin and expect God to bless us for it!

When we sin, we do not lose our salvation, but we make God unhappy. It's like the relationship between an boy and his father. Let's suppose the boy gets unnecessarily angry and yells at his father. He still remains his son, but he has offended him, and he needs to ask forgiveness in order to restore the joy to their relationship.

When we sin, we still are God's children, but He is offended and we need to ask forgiveness to renew our fellowship with Him . We have already been justified, and that **legal** relationship doesn't change, but the **personal** relationship needs to be restored.

Read John 13:10.

15. Being washed all over reminds us of our L _____ relationship with the Lord. (We are justified.)
16. Washing the feet reminds us of our P _____ relationship with the Lord. (We are forgiven continually.)

Read John 10:27-30.

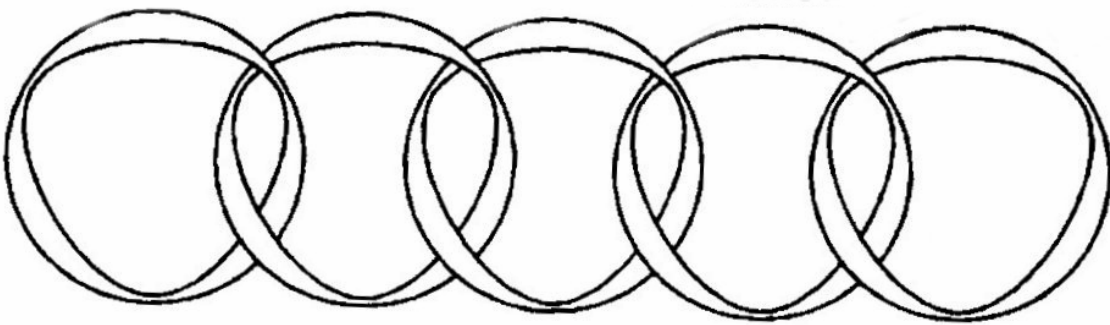
17. What does this passage teach about whether you can lose your salvation?

Read Philippians 1:6.

18. What God has begun in us, He will _____.

REVIEW

1. Can a Christian be sure he is saved? _____
2. Can you lose your salvation? _____
3. Write the names of each link in the "unbreakable chain" of Romans 8:29-30:



4. Define "glorification": _____
5. Write out Romans 8:28:

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is it possible for a true Christian to lose his assurance of salvation? (Not lose his salvation, but his sense of assurance.)
2. What can you do if you begin to doubt your salvation?
3. What do you think about a person who seems to be a Christian, but falls away? Do you think he was really born again?

ANOTHER TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God does not have life."

1 John 5:12

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Yes.
2. No.
3. Foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified.
4. Being made like Jesus in His holiness.
5. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

LESSON
13
LIVING BY GRACE

Are you burned out?

David Seamonds tells of his experience as a missionary in India. A young man went to him for counseling, complaining of a sense of guilt, of anxiety, of anger, and of a low self esteem. He was spiritually burned out. When he asked the young man the typical questions of whether he was reading his Bible, praying, and attending church, he found that he was way ahead of the counselor himself in the spiritual disciplines. He spent hours daily reading the Scriptures and praying, and was attending many church activities. But something was not working. In that moment, Seamonds realized that the young man simply was not resting in the grace of God. He was trying to accomplish his own sanctification through his own human strength. Seamonds concluded that it was possible to do all the right things, without trusting the Lord, and this changed his whole ministry. After that, he began to put all his emphasis on the grace of God. [David Seamonds, *Healing Grace*. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989.]

It is very common that people begin their Christian life fully trusting Christ for their forgiveness, but soon fall into the mistake of trying to sanctify themselves by their own strength. While it is true that we must fulfill our own responsibility, we can so easily fall into a dangerous trap, putting the attention on our own performance and taking our eyes off of the Lord.

This is exactly what happened with the Galatians. They began well, but soon became legalistic, saying that it was necessary to be circumcised and follow the Jewish customs in order to be saved. I believe that we are doing something similar when we pretend to earn points with God or obtain our own sanctification.

Galatians 3:3

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

When I drive down the highway in my car, I must observe the signs to arrive at my goal. However, if I fix my gaze only on the signs, and take my eyes off the road, I'll have an accident! The law in the Bible works that way; it's a sign pointing us to Christ, and we should not give so much attention to it that we take our eyes off of Him. Sometimes our tendency is to prefer the law, even though it seems crazy. Why? Because of our pride; that way we feel like we can do something on our own. We take our eyes off the Lord and begin to trust ourselves.

I like to fix things around the house, but I have a problem; when something doesn't work, I usually just try harder. If a screw doesn't go in right, I just push harder and try to force it. Sometimes the screw bends or pops out, or maybe I cut my hand with the screwdriver. Brute force doesn't work very well. It's better to guide the screwdriver carefully, and push more gently.

A good golfer or baseball player knows that he can't simply hit the ball as hard as possible. He has to hit the ball squarely and direct it to the right place. The Christian life is like that; instead of just trying harder, we need to learn what it means to grow by GRACE. It's true that there are no simple formulas for spiritual growth, and we spend our lives learning more about this, but the key is to keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

For Previous Reflection:

Must I be holy for God to bless me, or does He bless me in spite of my sin?

INTRODUCTION

Normally God's blessing is related to our obedience. In fact, some promises in the Scriptures are conditioned upon our faithfulness. (If we do such and such a thing, God will fulfill a certain promise.) However, in this lesson we want to warn of some possible distortions of this principle and show that God is free to bless us in spite of our imperfect obedience.

The Trap.

Some people begin their Christian life trusting in God's grace, but then fall into some form of legalism, just as the Galatians. Remember: Satan is very astute, and he will do anything to keep us from trusting the Lord. Let's look at some ways in which we might mistakenly leave the pathway of grace.

1. First, remind yourself of the meaning of grace:

Grace is U _____ F _____.

2. If we do not live by grace, we can fall into L _____, taking our eyes off the Lord.

Keeping this in mind, and remembering what we have studied in previous lessons, we will evaluate two mistaken attitudes, represented by person "A" and person "B."

A. Person "A" thinks that we suffer to the same measure that we sin.

He thinks that for every sin we commit, we suffer all the corresponding negative consequences in our life. He supposes that God punishes us for every sin, to carry out justice. He imagines God as a severe judge looking down from heaven, from behind the two tables of the ten commandments!

Answer:

Although it is true that many times sin does have natural negative consequences (for example, if a young man uses drugs, it affects his health), nevertheless, God is not vengeful towards His children. He "punishes" us more in the sense of fatherly discipline, in order to help us grow, not in the sense of retributive justice. He is a God of GRACE and MERCY. He is constantly working out all the events in our lives for our good. He forgives us for our sin and loves us in spite of our failures.

Read Micah 7:18-19.

3. What does God do with our sins? _____

Read Psalm 103:10-13.

4. Does God punish us as we deserve for our sins? _____

5. God is like a F _____ who has C _____ on his children.

**GOD DOES NOT TREAT US AS WE DESERVE FOR OUR SINS,
BUT HE TREATS US ACCORDING TO HIS GRACE.**

It's very important to understand this in order that we not feel punished by God when something goes wrong in our lives. Some women, for example, when they lose a baby, feel that God is punishing them for some previous sin, and the guilt is almost impossible to live with.

B. Person "B" thinks that God blesses us in the same measure that we obey.

This person turns the concept around. He says, "Maybe God does not **punish** us as we deserve for our sins, but He will not **bless** us if we are not living correctly. To receive His blessings we must be obeying Him and living in intimate fellowship with Him.

Answer:

This idea contains some truth. Of course it is good to live correctly, and we do miss many blessings by not maintaining closer fellowship with the Lord. However, God does not only bless us when we **deserve** it; He blesses us by **GRACE**.

This does not mean that the Lord simply blesses us arbitrarily. In fact, as we mentioned above, some promises are conditioned upon our obedience. However, the point we want to make in this lesson is that God is free to show His love **in spite** of our sin. Without this understanding of His grace, we could not **ever** expect His blessings!

It's not hard to find illustrations of this in the Bible. All through the history of God's people we see that they have been unfaithful, but God blesses them anyway.

Read Hosea 14:4.

6. In this case, God scolds Israel for their idolatry, but continues to love them F _____.

Read 2 Timothy 2:13.

7. Does God's faithfulness depend on our faithfulness? _____

Please do not misunderstand this! This should never be taken to mean that it doesn't matter how we live, or whether we are in close fellowship with God. It's just that His blessing doesn't depend on US, but on HIM. Think of this: just how good would we have to be in order to somehow deserve God's love?

We must clarify this point in order to highlight the main emphasis in all of these lessons:

that God blesses us by PURE GRACE.

It's important to understand this in order to have correct motives for our obedience.

If we think God only blesses to the extent that we obey Him we may try to **manipulate** God. That is, we might obey Him in order to get something from Him. This would be using God for our own ends, somewhat like a vending machine; we put in the right amount of good deeds or self-inflicted suffering and God will let the blessing come out.

Why should we obey Him, then? Simply because we **love** Him!

A Christian really doesn't want to sin, because sin offends the Lord. **He obeys out of love, not out of fear, or in order to gain something.** How would a man feel if his wife prepared a delicious meal for him, not because she loved him, but only to "butter him up" and ask him for a new dress!

8. To serve the Lord in order to receive something from Him is to

M _____ Him.

9. We should serve the Lord, not out of F _____, not to receive

a blessing, but out of L _____.

10. Which of these people understands what it means to live by grace?

___ a. "God blesses me whenever He wants. It makes no difference whether I'm good or bad, so I guess I'll get drunk tonight!"

___ b. "I've failed the Lord several times this week. I'll probably have some kind of problem at work soon!"

___ c. "I would like for God to help me get into the university. I guess I'll have to start going to church for a while so He can answer my prayer."

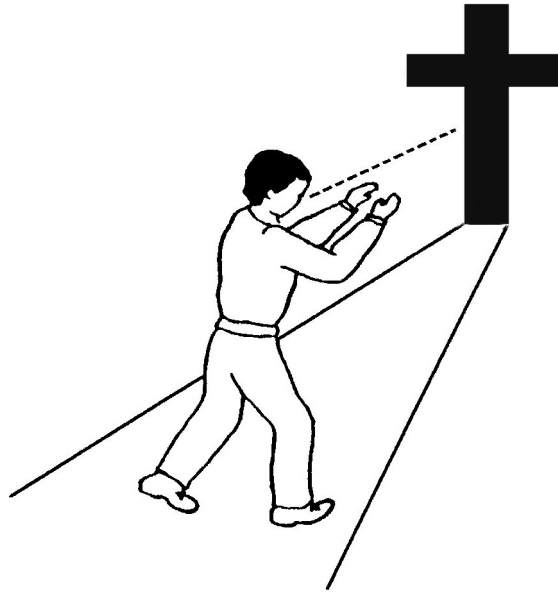
___ d. "I've made a deal with God: if he heals my wife, I'll serve Him the rest of my life."

___ e. "I haven't had time to read the Bible lately, so I'm not even going to pray. It's no use. God won't hear me now."

___ f. "I'm praying for a job so I can provide for my family. I know I don't deserve it because I haven't always been faithful to the Lord, but I hope He will be merciful to me."

THE SECRET

KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS



The secret of living by grace is always keeping your eyes on Jesus, not on yourself. Look to Him to see how you should live. Trust Him to receive the strength to do His will. Count on Him to shower His blessings upon you, not because you deserve them, but because He loves you.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

11. Run the race with all your strength, but with your eyes on Jesus,
the _____ and _____ of your faith.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:8.

12. "God is able to make all grace A _____ to you, so that in _____ things and in _____ times, having _____ that you need, you will abound in _____ good work."

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9.

13. His grace is S _____.

Read Ephesians 1:7.

14. What does this tell us about God's grace?
- _____

Read Acts 13:43.

15. Paul encouraged them to _____ in God's grace.

Read Romans 1:16-17.

16. Our righteousness comes from _____, and it is by F _____
from first to last.

Our life is like a bridge over a river, with strong foundations on each side made out of grace. We walk by faith all the way, from the beginning to the end.

Can you imagine someone trying to jump high enough to land on the moon? Wouldn't that be impossible? The only way to get to the moon is on a space ship. In the same way, the only way we can get to heaven is through Jesus Christ.

The problem is that some people start out well, knowing that they are justified by grace in Christ, but then they somehow think they can continue on their own, and they take their eyes off Him. Can you imagine someone getting half way to the moon in a space ship, then jumping out the window because he thinks he can make it the rest of the way in his own?

It's just as ridiculous to begin our Christian life by grace, then to continue by human effort.

Read Galatians 3:3.

17. Paul says that it would be _____ to try to continue by human effort.

REVIEW

1. What is wrong with the statement that we suffer in direct proportion to our sin?

2. What is wrong with the statement that we receive blessings in direct proportion to our obedience?

3. We should obey God, not out of fear, or in order to gain something, but because _____.

4. The secret of living by grace is: _____.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the errors represented by person "A" and person "B." Do you sometimes fall into the trap of thinking somewhat this way?
2. Discuss possible misunderstandings of the main point of this lesson.

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"...Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."

Hebrews 12:1b,2a

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. God doesn't punish us as we deserve for our sin, but He deals with us according to His **Grace** (or some similar answer).
2. God doesn't bless us because we deserve it, but because of His **Grace**. (or some similar answer).
3. Because we love Him.
4. Keeping your eyes on Jesus.

LESSON
14
WHY DO WE SUFFER?

Bruce Almighty

In a recently popular movie, *Bruce Almighty*, a man becomes angry with God for allowing him to have so many problems. God comes to him in the figure of a man, and turns the city over to him for a while. Soon Bruce realizes that it is not so easy. He tries to answer everybody's prayers, but by doing this he ends up causing serious problems. Once he allowed everyone to win the lottery, but this meant that they all received merely 25 cents.

Sometimes we might feel like Bruce. But if we reflect a while, we should realize that we are too small and ignorant to understand why God does things the way He does. We may not always agree with how God is managing things, but we need to learn to trust Him.

As they say, life is like a tapestry. We see the loose strings from below, and can't quite make out the design. But God is weaving a beautiful picture that only He can discern from above.

For Previous Reflection:

After studying about God's grace and love, an important question remains: Why does God allow us to suffer?

What do you think?

INTRODUCTION

Some people think that when they suffer, it is because they have done something wrong, and God is punishing them. In this lesson we will see that suffering for a Christian is not punishment, but a manifestation of God's grace for his good. We will study some of the different purposes in our suffering.

Read John 9:1-3.

1. Was the blind man being punished for some special sin he had committed?
-

Read Job 1:1.

The story of Job is well known. His "friends" came to "comfort" him, telling him that his problems were due to some terrible sin he must have committed, and that he should repent.

2. According to this verse, was Job suffering more than his friends because he was more sinful?
-

CONCLUSION

SUFFERING IS NOT NECESSARILY PUNISHMENT FOR SOME SIN.

In one sense, as we studied in the first lessons, all suffering is a result of sin and the fall. However, we cannot relate every problem directly to some particular sin, and the amount of suffering does not necessarily reflect the amount of sin in a person's life.

SOME PURPOSES FOR OUR SUFFERING:

Read James 1:2-9.

3. According to this passage, what is one of the purposes of trials?

Read Romans 5:3-4.

4. Suffering produces _____.

Perseverance produces _____.

Character produces _____.

Read 1 Peter 1:6-7.

5. What is the purpose of our trials, according to these verses?

Read 1 Peter 4:12-13.

6. Why should we rejoice in our trials?

Read Hebrews 12:4-8.

7. What is another reason for our suffering?

If a father does not discipline his children, he doesn't love them!

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

8. What is another positive result of our suffering?

Read Job 1:6-12.

9. Why did God permit Job to suffer?

In Job's case, God permitted his tragedy and illness in order to show Satan that Job really loved the Lord. It was a test. The interesting thing is that Job never did find out why he was suffering. If he had known, the test would not have been valid! The Lord only told him that there were many things he couldn't understand, indicating that he should *trust Him* and let *Him* control the situation.

Many times the Lord does not let us know exactly why we are suffering. The only thing He wants us to remember is that He loves us, and He is working out everything for our good, even our suffering. **We** don't have to always know why, but **God** always knows why, and has a good reason.

Read Romans 8:28.

10. Make sure you have this verse well memorized! Write it out here:

Read Genesis 50:20.

Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave. But even though he did suffer, he became a leader in Egypt and was able to help his whole family survive a famine.

11. What is Joseph's attitude about what his brothers had done to him?

They intended _____, but God intended _____.

Think about the cross: To crucify Jesus was the most horrible act in all of history. However, God planned His death to be the most wonderful thing that ever happened to us! His death brought us salvation! If God can use such an event for good, what can He not work together for good?

SUMMARY:

Some of the purposes of suffering are:

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. To produce character.b. To test our faith.c. To allow us to participate in Christ's sufferings.d. To discipline us as God's children.e. To enable us to comfort others that are suffering.f. To test our love for God. |
|--|

REVIEW

1. Write the six purposes of suffering mentioned in this lesson:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
2. Can we always know the purpose of any particular suffering? _____
3. However, we do always know that God will work everything
for our _____.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can you think of any other purposes or positive benefits from suffering?
2. What should our attitude be when we suffer?
3. What does it mean that we "participate in the sufferings of Christ"?

TEXT TO MEMORIZE

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

James 1:2-4.

ANSWERS TO REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. a. To produce character.
- b. To test our faith.
- c. To help us understand Christ's sufferings.
- d. To discipline us as God's children.
- e. To enable us to comfort others that are suffering.
- f. To test our love for God.

LESSON
15
REVIEW

Now What?

My wife Angelica and I had the opportunity to share these Bible studies with a friend once, meeting with her every week for several months. We carefully looked at every Bible passage, and she seemed to be understanding everything. We were so happy with the way she was responding. But when we came to the last lesson, and I pleaded with her to give her life to Christ, she just looked at me with a blank stare. I couldn't believe it! She was understanding only in her mind.

The purpose of these lessons is to help you develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If you "understand" everything in your mind, but don't respond to Him in your heart, it means little. You still need to personally come to Him, ask forgiveness, and ask Him to be your Lord. Turn your heart, your mind, and your life over to Him, and you will experience the joy of a new beginning!

The purpose of these lessons has been to clarify the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, with an emphasis on GRACE. Hopefully, you have come to understand GRACE better, and will experience greater joy and peace, responding to God's love with greater faithfulness.

These review questions will help remind you of the most important teachings of the booklet:

1. Define these terms:

a. Grace: _____

b. Sacrifice of Atonement (Propitiation):

c. Salvation (two definitions):

d. The external call: _____

e. The internal call: _____

f. Repentance: _____

g. Saving faith: _____

h. Justification: _____

i. Sanctification: _____

j. Libertinism: _____

k. Legalism: _____

l. Glorification: _____

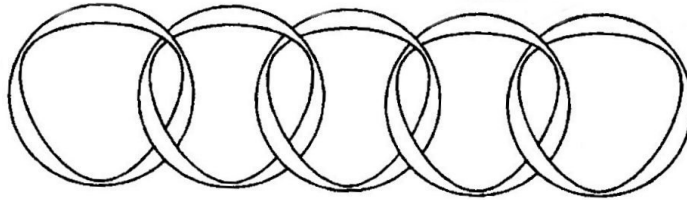
2. God created everything in perfect H _____.

3. The fall destroyed the relationships between:

- a. Man and _____,
- b. Man and _____,
- c. Man and _____, and
- d. Man and _____.

4. Write out Romans 8:28:

5. Fill in the names of each link of the "unbreakable chain" of salvation in the proper order. (Romans 8:29,30).



- 6. Without faith, there are no true _____.
- 7. Without good works, there is no true _____.
- 8. Good works are E _____ of true faith.
- 9. We do not do good works in order to be saved, but because we already are _____.

10. We do good works, not out of fear, or in order to obtain something from
God, but because we _____ God.

11. Can a Christian be sure of his salvation? _____

12. Can a Christian lose his salvation? _____

13. What is wrong with saying that we suffer to the same degree that we sin?

14. What is wrong with saying that we receive blessings only to the same
degree that we are obedient?

15. Name six purposes of our suffering:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

16. What is the secret to living by grace? _____

ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW

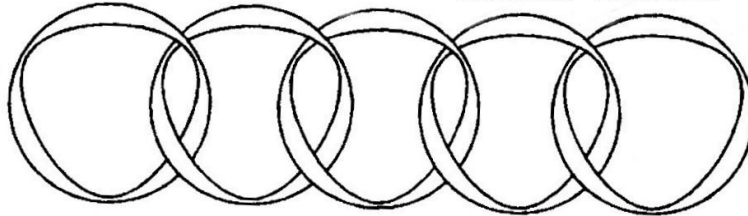
1.
 - a. Unmerited favor.
 - b. A sacrifice which takes away the wrath of God.
 - c. The reconciliation of all things in Christ.
Liberation from sin and all its consequences.
 - d. Cause someone to hear the gospel.
 - e. Change someone's heart so they can believe.
 - f. A change of heart and a change of life.
 - g. Trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.
 - h. A divine verdict that we are not guilty.
 - i. Spiritual growth.
 - j. Living without law.
 - k. Living as a slave to the law.
 - l. Being made like Jesus in His holiness.
2. Harmony.
3.
 - a. God.
 - b. Other people (Woman).
 - c. Nature.
 - d. Himself.
- 4.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Romans 8:28

5.

Foreknew Predestined Called Justified Glorified



6. Good deeds.
7. Faith.
8. Evidence.
9. Saved.
10. Love.
11. Yes.
12. No.
13. God does not deal with us according to what our sins deserve, but

according to His GRACE.

14. God does not bless us because we deserve it, but by GRACE.
15.
 - a. To produce character.
 - b. To test our faith.
 - c. To allow us to participate in the sufferings of Christ.
 - d. To discipline us as God's children.
 - e. To help us comfort others.
 - f. To test our love for God.
16. Keeping your eyes on Jesus.

FOR DISCUSSION

Study the following drawing and talk about its meaning.
How does it summarize the doctrines we have studied?
See if you can use the drawing to explain the steps in our salvation process to someone else.

