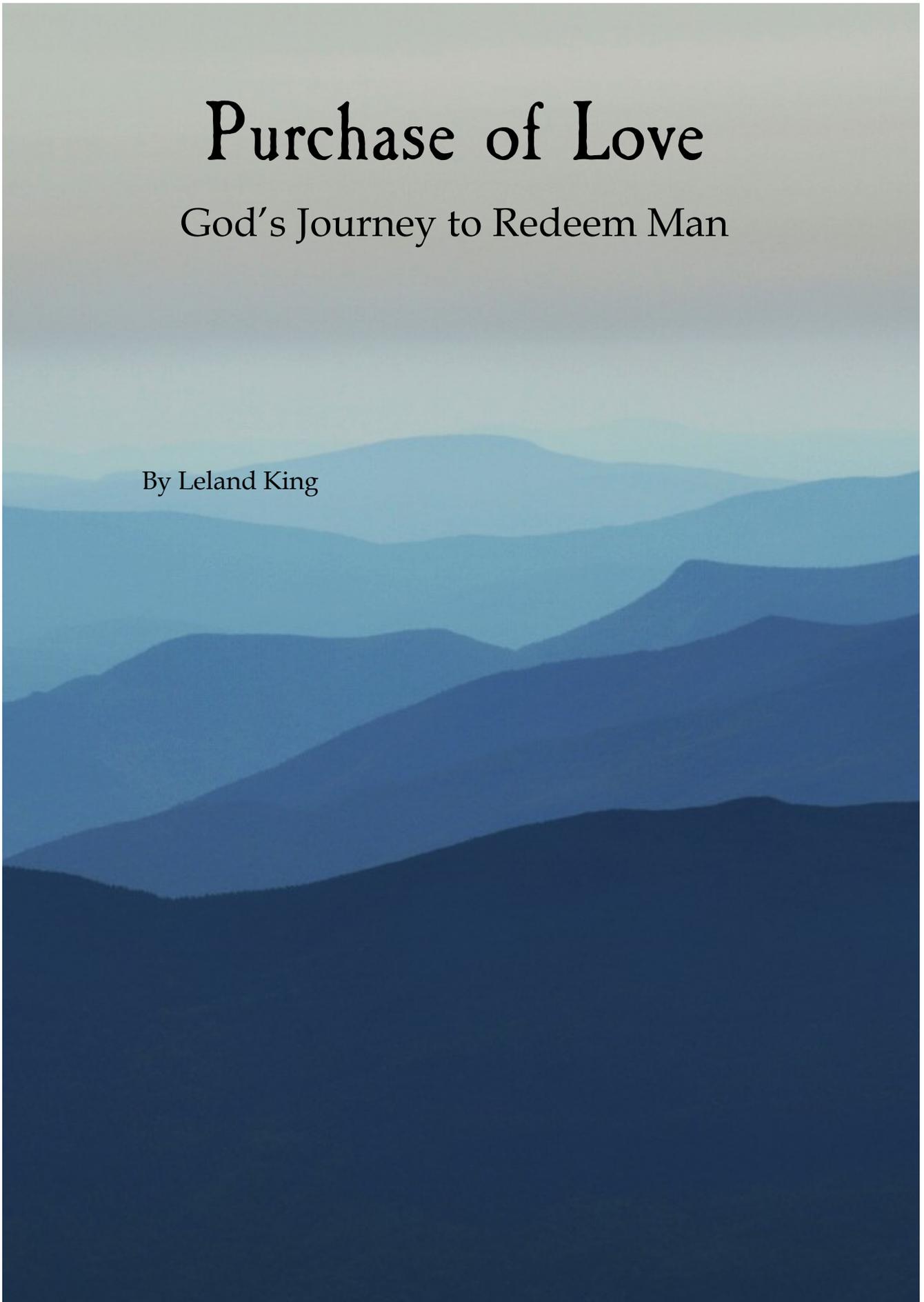


# Purchase of Love

God's Journey to Redeem Man

By Leland King



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## Introduction...

Many long decades ago I went to college at Oklahoma State University. My college roommate had no use for religion. Sound like anyone you know? Yet for as worldly of a man as he was, he still had this belief deep down inside that there was something out there bigger than this world. I overheard him having a religious sounding conversation with his cousin one day and they were talking about two figures named "it" and "other." I thought it interesting that while they wouldn't say they believed in God ('It') or the devil ('Other'), they definitely had their opinions about what God was like and why he did things the way he did.

It is confusing when people see different religious folks arguing about the God in whom they say they believe. How in the world can people ever hope to understand the true message of this big book we call the Bible, if everyone disagrees about what it says? What if we let God do the talking? Why don't we let him speak for himself, and let the Bible give us some clues as to who he is and what he thinks of us humans?

Most people have this gnawing sense that God is in fact real. People try a lot of things to fill that empty spot where they feel something spiritual needs to be, but how many really find a meaningful end? The Bible helps us to understand not only why we have these longings, but how to fill them with joy, peace, and purpose.

People who read this short booklet all come at different stages of their life with God. Some may be skeptical about this whole "God" thing, and even wonder about his reality. Others may believe themselves to be religious, but are looking for a better understanding of the Bible and what it says about God, man and the human situation. It is hoped that at wherever you are in your own journey, you will find this reading to be helpful in your own walk with God. May God bless you in your journey!

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## Who Can We Trust?

How can we know when someone is actually telling the truth? With so much access to information today, everybody seems to believe they can be an authority on any topic. Someone once posted a beautiful picture on Facebook of a full moon setting on the ocean. It got a lot of OOHS! and AAHS! and likes and shares before someone finally had the courage to point out that the picture was a photoshopped sham. But hey, why let Snopes ruin a good thing? People form careless judgments and blurt thoughtless words about what others are doing without stopping to see if there is any truth to the matter. It is hard to know when truth is actually being spoken.

Perhaps that is why many people don't want to have anything to do with the Bible. Why should we believe that the words of this book are any more reliable than the emotional comments of a troll criticizing a religious blog? But then we look around and see people in real life. We see goodness and compassion. We see self sacrifice and generosity. And we see a world of people who have seemingly been transformed by this thing called Christianity. Their lives are at peace, even amid trials. They demonstrate hope and show resilience in a world where tragedy often strikes.

The message of the Bible is that we as humans have messed things up to the point that only God can fix. And fortunately for us, he HAS fixed it. He is the only one with the answer. The Bible is the story of how God chose to show himself to a lost and dying world. But why would God say anything to us? And what would such words look like?

### I. REASONS FOR REVEALING

Did you ever have an art class where you took a lump of clay, formed

it into something, glazed it, and fired it in a kiln? What would you think if as you held it in your hands, the pottery suddenly asked you, "*Why did you make me this way?*" How could something created ever understand anything about its creator? As humans we can understand the things we create ourselves. To a certain degree we can understand humans, who are on our own level (although that definitely takes more work!) But how could someone created by God ever expect to understand the mind of God? A lump of clay has as much of a chance of understanding the mind of its potter.

That is, unless, the potter chose to give the clay the ability to understand a reality beyond its own clay nature. God created us with a spirit so that he could relate to us and have a relationship with us.<sup>1</sup> He gave us the ability to know that he really does exist, but he also gives us the freedom to choose whether we will lift our hands to the heavens to learn more about him, or whether we will ignore the thought and go on with life.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us, "*He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.*" God made us to be able to understand some basic things about him. But that knowledge only goes so far. We can be amazed at the power of God when we see the glory of a sunset or the power of the ocean, but that kind of information doesn't tell us anything about how God feels about us or what his plan is for our lives.

When you see all the different churches in your town, you get the idea that a lot of people believe in a higher being, and they have developed religions around those beliefs. But how do we know whose religion is right? Does it matter? Aren't all religions all the same? The truest religion would be based on the most accurate information about God's will and purposes. And God has told us more about himself than a sunset or mountain vista ever will tell.

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1. See also Romans 1:19-20

God has talked to people at definite times and places, and has invited man to enter into a relationship with him. Why? Because we are special in his eyes. He talked with man face to face when he first created him in the Garden of Eden. It was like man had a great WIFI connection with God, but lost the signal when he rebelled in the Garden of Eden. So future generations no longer had any signal bars. Yet God still talked to man, and set a plan in motion to reestablish our connection. What he said and did we will talk about later in this book. But for now it is important to see how God chose to reveal himself to people. What would that language look like?

## II. METHODS OF REVELATION

### A. Divine Speech

God spoke directly to some people. Sometimes he would appear in human form that people could see, and other times he would impress his message in their minds. However he did it, these people knew the message was from God and not their mind playing tricks on them. Hebrews 1:1 says, *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets...”* When God spoke, his message could be shared with other people in one of two ways:

#### 1. Verbal.

The person God was speaking to could simply pass the information to others by word of mouth. Many of the prophets spoke to the people what God wanted said. Much of God’s revelation was meant to be shared orally with others.

#### 2. Written.

What you see when you pick up the Bible is actually the written Word of God. It was written by people but under the influence of God’s direction.<sup>2</sup> In this way God’s words would be preserved for all people. In Jeremiah 36:2, we find God instructing the prophet to *“take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel*

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2. See also Second Peter 1:20

*and Judah and all the nations...*"

### **B. Divine Actions**

Much of the Bible is a narrative story showing how God interacted with people throughout history, especially in his dealing with the nation of Israel thousands of years ago. Time after time we see God performing miracles to prove he alone was the one true God who was in control of kings and their kingdoms. Acts 17:26-27 says, *"He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him."* And amid all of these incredible actions of God we see the most important way that God chose to reveal himself.

### **C. Divine Visit**

When Jesus was born to a virgin girl from Nazareth, God in his fullness chose to wrap his divine nature in human flesh. The potter actually chose to become clay. 1 John 1:1 reads, *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made known..."* <sup>3</sup> We will talk more about this in the sixth chapter.

So now we know some of the different ways that God revealed himself to us. What makes these words so special?

## **III. QUALITIES OF REVELATION**

### **A. The Word of God has Authority**

The best opinions of people are often based on faulty information. Only God's Word is authoritative enough to call people to belief and action. Sure, people can reject road signs and go their own way, but how often do those ways end in futility and meaninglessness?

Other sources may sound believable, but no other source of information can back up its claims with miracles as does the Bible.

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3. See also John 1:1-18

## **B. The Word of God is “Inspired”**

Why should we trust the words of those who wrote the Bible? Why would God even choose flawed humans to transmit his word to other people? Inspiration is the process of God exerting his own supernatural power on the writers of the Bible so that we would get an accurate record of his will. The Apostle Paul wrote in II Timothy 3:16-17, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God (inspired) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*

## **C. The Word of God is Without Error (“Inerrant”)**

All this word means is that the Bible in its original form is fully truthful in all that it teaches. So any accurate translation or copy which reflects this original is also accurate and without error. We can trust the Bible in what it says about history, doctrine and ethics.

## **IV. PROOF OF REVELATION**

Some people claim that the Bible is a fictional book written by a few imaginative people. How can we be sure that this is not a great hoax? Actually the Bible is a book that was written by many people over several centuries. To have a message with such unity, harmony and consistency is a wonderful mystery calling for our belief. But as we mentioned earlier, the Bible itself reminds us that this message is fulfilled and confirmed by amazing miracles that were witnessed by so many people. Mark 16:20 says, *“...the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.”*

The Bible is as historically reliable as any other ancient book people acknowledge today. It has even more manuscript evidence to support its accuracy than almost all other ancient literature. To deny its words is to deny that we live in a world where truth can be determined beyond reasonable doubt. We should use caution when listening to anyone’s claims of truth. But no other belief system can back up its claims with solid evidence as the Bible does.

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## 2

### The Bible In a Nutshell

Boiling down the message of the Bible into a brief study is a difficult, but helpful task. Its many stories all fit into a magnificent theme. But someone unfamiliar with this theme might find themselves frustrated trying to understand the message. This study will attempt to break down the story of the Bible to make its message clearer.

The Bible is a book that was authored by 40 different authors over a span of 1500 years. The first books were written by Moses as early as 1450 years before Jesus lived. And the last book was written by a man named John about 60 years after Jesus died. The Bible was written in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic.

The word, "Bible" comes from the Greek word, *biblion*, meaning "book." If you look in any Bible's table of contents page, you will see that the Bible is divided into two major sections, called the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament contains 39 books while the New Testament has 27 books.

These sections are called the Old and New "Testament" because they represent two different ways which God has dealt with his people. The first "testament," or covenant, refers to the time in history where God established a physical nation (called Israel) and revealed himself to that nation. The second covenant refers to the time in history when God established a spiritual nation called the church. What's it all about?

In our last lesson we talked about why it was so important that God reveal himself to us. In the Bible we find that revelation taking place, but it didn't happen all at once. Actually, what we find is a process of "progressive revelation." The Bible story can be broken down into four ways that God has chosen to interact with humans.

## I. GOD DISTANT FROM MAN

The opening book of the Bible contains so much information. We find God's power displayed as he created the universe from nothing. He created man and woman and from these two the whole world was populated. Adam and Eve had it great in the beginning. They had a relationship with God that allowed them to communicate with him personally. They had relatively few needs or stresses.

All this changed when they made the decision to disobey God's will. Their fellowship with him was broken and they were separated from God.<sup>4</sup> This separation led to a separation from their source of life, both spiritually and physically. The world which was populated from Adam and Eve increasingly became more evil in their behavior.

Without God's influence in their lives, the world became so corrupted with sin that God made a decision to take what he had created and destroy everything in a great flood. Only a man named Noah and his family would live through this and eventually repopulate the earth.

These opening chapters in Genesis show us what happens to people when they try to live by themselves with no influence from God. Bugs in a jar have no chance of escape, unless someone is kind enough to lower a stick into the jar. God knew that humans needed his touch, and so he personally touched the human situation, bringing hope and grace to man.

## II. GOD INSTRUCTING MAN

In Genesis 12 God encounters a man named Abram. God made many promises to Abram and in faith Abram responded by obeying the call to move to a new country. God promised to Abram (later Abraham) that he would be the father of a great nation. Abram's aged wife, Sarah, was childless, yet through a divine miracle God granted this

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4. See also Genesis 6:5

couple a child named Isaac.

In the story of Abraham we find a very important word introduced, 'faith.'<sup>5</sup> Abraham was blessed for his faith in God to fulfill the promises he had made. The story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Genesis reveal the growth of this great nation God would claim for his own people. Their family grew in the land of Canaan, but had to relocate to Egypt due to a famine. Genesis ends with the descendants of Jacob now living in Egypt.

In the book of Exodus, the family of Jacob has grown to a mighty nation called Israel. Eventually they were enslaved and forced to work for the Egyptians, but God used a man named Moses to free the Israelites from captivity. God continued to deliver his people through many struggles on their journey from Egypt back to the land of their fathers, Canaan, which is now present day Israel.

During this journey God gave his people a law to live by, called the Law of Moses. The Bible books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy tell of the travels of the people as they made their way to Canaan, and also gives us a description of the many laws they were given to live by. This law was to distinguish them from the nations around them and give them a guide for holy living. This law also established a priesthood which provided a temporary arrangement of animal sacrifices which acknowledged the Israelite's understanding of their need to have their sin forgiven by God.

Despite God's goodness, many of the people rebelled and turned away from God. But there is a difference in this rebellion and the rebellion which caused the flood in Genesis. Through Moses God made a covenant with his people (hence why this section of the Bible is called the Old "Testament.") In spite of their rebellion, God was faithful to his promise to bless the descendants of Abraham. The remainder of the Old Testament sees God blessing this people through

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5. See also Genesis 15:6

their entrance into the promised land (Joshua and Judges) delivering them through various kings, and teaching them through the messages of many prophets he would send to them. At times they faced discipline and even destruction as consequences for their rebellious ways, but God never destroyed the whole nation. There was always a remnant of people who trusted in God and kept faith in God throughout this whole time.

It is helpful to understand that the Bible is not written in strict “beginning to end” chronology. The first five books deal with the beginnings of the nation until they arrived at the Promised Land. Joshua and Judges tell the story of their taking the land of Canaan and their early years in the land. Ruth is a powerful story about a woman who lived during this time.

First Samuel through Esther tell the narrative story of Israel all the way until 400 years before Christ was born. The nation of Israel had unity for many years, until a civil war divided the country. The southern two tribes continued to worship in Jerusalem, the capital. But the northern ten tribes set up their own places of worship, refusing to come to Jerusalem. The northern tribes quickly abandoned faithful worship to God and began worshipping the idols of the nations around them. Even the southern kingdom was not faithful to God as the years went by. Because of this idolatry and lack of faith, God allowed foreign nations to conquer and decimate the land, taking many people captive.

Eventually the people of Israel were allowed to return to their homeland. Many lessons were learned, and the people returned with a renewed zeal to follow God.

After this narrative section of the Bible, we come to several books called “Wisdom” literature. Job through the Song of Solomon are all books of poetry and proverbial literature, written by various authors, giving insight to the mind of God and his desires for his covenant people.

Finally we come to the last section of the Old Testament, the books of the prophets. These men received direct revelation from God and shared their messages to the Israelites during the later years of Israel's existence. With their words we come to the conclusion of the Old Testament. Part of their message involved promises and predictions of a day coming when God would establish a new covenant, and a deliverer called the Messiah would bring true spiritual salvation to his people in a way animal sacrifices could not do.

### III. GOD WITH MAN

All these stories in the Old Testament lead us to the point where God would finally intervene and touch the world in a way that would bring fulfillment to his promise to send a Messiah to truly redeem his people.

God's intention was to create a new people for himself of a different nature than the covenant he had with the physical descendants of Israel. <sup>6</sup> God desired to establish a new people, not governed by a law written on stone, but by a law written on the heart. God chose to become a man and we find the story of Jesus being born in Bethlehem. In Jesus, God now stood among humans both as God and man.

The first four books of the New Testament are four different accounts of the life and death of Jesus. Technically, Jesus actually lived and died in the days of the Old Covenant.

Jesus was born through a miracle, conceived not by a man but by God's Holy Spirit. He began his ministry of teaching when he was thirty years old. Through his powerful miracles and amazing teaching, many people believed he was the messiah promised by the prophets. But he gained enemies along the way, especially the religious leaders who felt threatened by his popularity. Eventually, this hostility would cause Jesus to be killed by Israel's leaders. His

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6. See also Galatians 4:4

death brought about the spiritual salvation of the world which we will talk about in Chapter Six.

#### IV. GOD WITHIN MAN

The story of Jesus ends with the establishment of a group of followers, believers who were willing to embrace in faith the teachings and promises of Jesus. They chose to no longer live under the same law as the physical nation of Israel. This group, called the “church,” is under a new spiritual covenant. This covenant is not one that is written on paper for people to follow. It is a covenant written within the hearts of man. Christians are blessed to have God’s indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to help them in their walk.

We will talk about some of these concepts in later studies. The emphasis of this lesson is to show how the Bible is divided based on these different times of history. The book of Acts tells the story of the early church in the days immediately following Jesus’ resurrection. One of the primary figures we find in this book is a man named Paul, who would travel extensively in the Mediterranean region establishing many churches.

Paul wrote almost half of the books of the New Testament. Romans through Philemon are all letters Paul wrote to either churches or to individuals. These letters address early church concerns, issues, doctrine, and lifestyle.

The book of Hebrews is a guide to help former Jews understand how Christianity was superior to their old life under the Law of Moses. We then find several personal letters written by James, Peter, John and Jude. The New Testament concludes with the prophecy about the last days called ‘The Revelation,’ given to the Apostle John in his old age as he languished in exile on the island of Patmos.

### The common thread?

The story of the Bible is the story of how God gradually revealed himself to mankind, pointing to a time in future history when that which was lost in Eden would finally be brought back to mankind. It is not an archaic message.

People living today are not that much different than people living centuries ago. The same problems facing Adam and Eve still face mankind today when people sin against God. The same redemption is necessary for man to be whole again.

And as God revealed himself more and more to people throughout the whole of Bible history, he does that today as well, gradually helping and teaching those who want to learn more. Isn't it encouraging to see how God can use us, as crazy and mixed up as we all are, in the same way he did men and women of old, to accomplish his purposes.

If God is so willing to extend a hand of help to such a sinful people as the Israelites, why would we think he is not still willing to extend that hand to us today? What we see in the Bible is a testimony to the extent God will go to rescue *his people*. Whether it be rescuing his physical heritage from a foreign army, or rescuing his spiritual people from the clutches of Satan, his power is demonstrated clearly in the scripture. In it we see the common thread of love, mercy, grace, and redemption.

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# 3

## Who Is God?

Now that we have broken down the story of the Bible a bit, we need to talk about the God who authored it and who controls every twist and turn of this incredible story. But how does one describe such a being as God? In the first chapter it was said that a human trying to understand God is like a clay pot trying to understand the nature of the potter who made it. Yet even in our ignorance we can feel the effects of the divine potter as he works on our lives. Fortunately for us, God himself gives us several clues as to his nature.

A discussion of the different words that describe the nature of God would fill many volumes. This lesson will examine some of the most basic qualities which give a better understanding of God.

Understanding God is important for another reason. In the opening chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1:27 records that, *“God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him...”* Knowing the nature of God will also help us to understand more about humans whom he has created in his image. So let’s look at a few important traits of God’s image.

### I. GOD IS CREATOR

The first picture to be drawn is that of God as creator with infinite power. Our understandings of power are a pale comparison to the power that was involved when God created from nothing everything that exists in our universe! Many Scriptures affirm and exalt the power of the Lord of creation.

God also has complete knowledge of everything.<sup>7</sup>

There is nothing beyond the scope of God’s knowledge and understanding ... nothing escapes his notice. Psalm 139 is a beautiful

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7. See also Isaiah 40:28

Psalm reminding us that God's perfect knowledge of us should come not as a fearful threat, but as a comfort.

The fact that God created everything physical is one proof that God himself is not physical in nature. He is not made of the same material as everything else in the universe. <sup>8</sup> Some people may use figurative language to describe God in terms they can understand as humans, such as the "Big Guy in the Sky" or a "Heavenly Policeman." In reality God is spiritual in nature and any success man has in understanding God is due to God deciding to reveal himself in a manner that we can understand. John 4:24 clearly states that "*God is spirit.*"

The existence of a being that is able to create something from nothing says some other things about God. He is "timeless." There is no beginning or end to God. "Time" as we know it is really a part of his creation. Also God is 'self-existent,' which means that he does not need a creator in order to exist. By definition he would not *be* God if he were created. He does not depend upon anything or anyone.

God is also in control of all things, and nothing happens without his knowledge and permission. There is no place where God is not, and no situation of which God is not aware. Daniel 4:35 says, "*He does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'*"

Two very important words must also be mentioned about the power of God, that is God's 'dominion' and God's 'sovereignty.' Dominion is God's rule over everything. There is no power higher than him. Sovereignty is God's freedom to use his power in any way that he desires.

## II. GOD IS RELATIONSHIP

The second picture of God paints him as being a God of relationships.

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8. See also First Timothy 6:16

Paul tells the people of Athens, “...He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and **perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.**” (Acts 17:26-27)

One of the main purposes of God’s creation is to relate to its creator. The writer Paul says in Colossians 1:16-17. “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

This verse tells us two things. First of all it affirms that creation depended upon God’s word in order for things to come into existence. Secondly, creation now depends upon that same word to hold everything together. He cares for his creation and provides what it needs to function. And he has a special care for humans whom he has created to share his own nature.

This care for humans is shown in the way he provides for our physical needs. God provides what we need for human survival, no matter how people feel about him. Matthew 5:45 says, “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” God also cares for us spiritually. He loves us and shows us mercy and compassion. Mercy is God’s attitude toward people who have done wrong. While wrongdoers deserve to pay for what they have done, God often withholds or defers the full amount of consequences which we deserve. Psalm 103:14 says, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” You might ask the question, “Why would God make people pay for their sin in the first place? We will address that question later in this study.

These qualities we have mentioned (mercy, love, grace and compassion) are words that cannot exist in a vacuum. They only have meaning when dealing with other people. Therefore we understand God as a being who desires a relationship with us.

### III. GOD IS THE MORAL STANDARD

How can we really know what makes something good or bad? The standard for most people is themselves. Good is that which happens to be pleasing to our senses, and evil describes things which we happen to not like. The problem with that is that everyone has a different idea about what is good.

True value is determined by the nature of God. His own character is the measuring rod by which all value and morals are determined. In the first place, God is not fickle. *"For I the Lord do not change..."* (Malachi 3:6) James 1:17 says, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."* That which is 'good', therefore, is whatever matches up with God's own 'good' nature. In other words, 'love' is a good thing, not because it has any value in itself, but love is good because *"God is love."* (1 John 4:8)

God is totally pure and has no flaws. One word often used to describe God is the word, "holy." Isaiah 6:3 says, *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts."* Nothing imperfect can exist in God's presence. While we do see times where God "get his hands dirty" while dealing with mankind, nothing impure can approach or dwell in his presence. Psalm 5:4 says, *"For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you."* You may be thinking, "well, I guess I'm in a lot of trouble!" The truth of the matter is, we ALL are in a lot of trouble, which is why we all need a savior!

Another very important word related to God's holiness is the word, "justice." God is a just God. God makes sure that when wrong things happen, there is an appropriate consequence. Through justice God establishes a moral balance. We all appreciate when we see the guilty not getting away unpunished. He does not let anyone who sins go free without an appropriate consequence. Since God is the ultimate standard, he knows what that consequence should be.

#### IV. GOD HAS A WILL AND A PURPOSE

The fourth picture sees God as having an intentional will and purpose for that which he has created. Have you ever wondered, *“Where is all of this headed?”* or *“Why am I even here?”* These are good questions that are impossible to answer without someone behind the scenes orchestrating a divine master plan. The scriptures reveal that God has designed a plan and a clear direction for all of his creation. <sup>9</sup> He is in control!

All of the events of the world work together as a part of God’s master plan. He even uses the evil activity of humans to achieve his purposes. Everything that happens in life, whether or not it is pleasant for us, is allowed by God and is able to be used by God to accomplish his will. His own holy character is not diminished because of human failure.

#### V. GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF LIFE

The last picture we will draw in this lesson shows God as being the source of all life. John 1:4 says, *“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”* God is ‘self-sufficient,’ which means that he has life in himself and can give that life to others. The opening book of the Bible describes how God created the earth with “living” creatures that fly in the air, live in the sea and upon the earth. Genesis 2:7 says, *“then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”* When God placed man in the Garden of Eden he allowed him to eat of every tree except the tree of “the knowledge of good and evil.” Of the trees man had access to was one called the ‘tree of life.’

Not only did God create man with physical life, but he also established a spiritual relationship with humans. God created man with a capacity to understand spiritual realities. Deuteronomy 8:3 says, *“man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”* Only through a relationship with

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9. See also Isaiah 37:26

God can we have spiritual "life."

These five descriptions do not exhaust the many faces of God. But they do give us a good glimpse of the nature and character of God, especially in his relationship with human beings. If man has been created in God' image, it should not surprise us to find some of these qualities in our own human fabric!

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## What Is Man?

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet...”

Psalm 8:3

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What is the nature of man? If you don't believe that we were created by God, then we are nothing more than another species who happened to have evolved with superior reasoning skills and mental capacities. By some unexplainable quirk we developed from random acts of nature, we are born to exist and eventually pass away with no purpose or meaning.

The passage above from Psalm 8 suggests otherwise. It is true that we can look in total frustration at that “man in the mirror” and wonder who we are. But the Bible gives us some very important clues that help us to know what our nature is and why we are here.

In the first book of the Bible we read the story about how God created the universe from nothing. Genesis 1:26-28 reads, *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So **God created man in his own image**, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

That tells us a lot. We are unique creatures that have God's image stamped on us. If this is the case, then we need to revisit those five 'images' of God that we looked at in our last study and see how people reflect those images.

## I. IF GOD IS CREATOR

God is not made of created matter as we are, but is spiritual in nature. What does that word, "spiritual" mean? First of all, it describes concepts and ideas that cannot be touched or seen with our physical senses. When we use words like joy, love, peace, anger, we are describing spiritual realities. When we talk about a "spiritual" person, we are talking about someone who makes decisions in life not focused only on what gratifies the needs of human flesh, but takes unseen qualities into consideration as well.

God created totally spiritual beings, such as angels. Angels are created beings who exist in the unseen spiritual realm. And then God created human beings, a unique blend of both physical and spiritual material. Unlike any other part of God's creation, we have the ability to understand and comprehend spiritual realities.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, *"He has planted eternity in the human heart..."* This explains why people have this awareness that there is something out there bigger than us. God put that awareness there!

God is also timeless, meaning he had no beginning and will always exist. We definitely had a beginning, but God's image in us means that the spiritual part of our lives will continue to exist even after our bodies die. And it is our human spirit that helps us to understand God and how he deals with us.

We mentioned in another study the power that God has over his creation. This part of God's image he has also given to man. He has entrusted to us the rule and care of the earth. We don't have the infinite power and knowledge that God does, but he has given us a measure of reasoning, intelligence and creative ability that is able to

understand the nature of the world we live in. We are called to use that knowledge to tame our natural world in such a way that would benefit mankind and bless the earth.

## II. IF GOD IS RELATIONSHIP

God did not wind up the world to watch it waddle along until time ran out. He interacts with his creation. He created nature and the laws that govern it. Nature glorifies God when it obeys these laws. But he has given to man a very special gift, that of personality. We can relate with God on a deeper level of understanding and communication. God speaks to us in our thoughts and through the words we read in the Bible. And we have the ability to respond in faith through prayer, worship, love and thankfulness.

But God also gives us the ability to relate to other people. A big percentage of the Bible is concerned with how people treat one another.<sup>10</sup> We were created to have social lives and interaction with other people. When Adam was created in the Garden of Eden, his first relationship was with God alone. God then created woman as a companion for man, because as Genesis 2:18 says, *"It is not good that man should be alone."* We were created for companionship. And as we interact with one another we are to treat each other as God treats us, with love, compassion, mercy, grace, kindness, and patience.

## III. IF GOD IS THE MORAL STANDARD

God is a holy God. To be created in the image of God means that in some way his own moral fiber has been planted into us. This implies a few things. First of all, it means that when God first created man, he made him without any moral corruption. Unfortunately, that didn't last long. Secondly, God created us so that we can understand the difference between right and wrong. Thirdly, if God made *us* so special it means that *every* human being has value. Our worth is not

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10. See also Matthew 22:37-39

based on what we do but simply because of who we are because we are made in his image. We are his creation, people made to be loved and to love.

So we see this sense of right and wrong tattooed on our soul whenever we experience feelings of shame or guilt. We see this moral stamp on our heart when we see laws written to control human conduct, when justice prevails, and when evil is restrained.

#### IV. IF GOD HAS A WILL AND PURPOSE

God has a will which gives meaning and purpose to our lives. This trait of God is reflected in humans. Unlike other creatures, we have free will. When God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he placed one tree in the garden and told them not to eat of it's fruit. By placing that option in front of Adam, man was given a choice of whether or not he would follow God and obey his will. God introduced free will to the world.

The physical universe is controlled by the laws of nature which God created to govern them. It has no choice but to perform as God intended. But we can choose to follow God or not. Our free will is on a higher level than that of seemingly intelligent animals. Their decisions are based on instinct and self preservation. God may have a purpose for our lives, but he allows us to make the choice of whether or not we will follow that path.

God's overall plans for the universe are fully under his control and nothing we can do can hinder those plans. But all along our journey we are making choices. Sometimes those choices are logical to human understanding but other times we make choices of sacrifice and self-giving which benefit others.

#### V. IF GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF LIFE

We mentioned in the last lesson that God gave life to all creatures when he made them. When he created man, he breathed into man the "breath of life" and man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7)

However, this life was different than that of the animals. He made man with the potential of living forever. He gave Adam and Eve access to a special tree called the “the tree of life,” which protected their bodies from deterioration. In our next study we will talk about how Adam and Eve lost their access to that tree. But in the beginning, it was not intended for man to die.

But remember, we aren’t just physical beings. We are also spiritual in nature. Not only does our physical body have life, but our spirit has life as well! God gave us a soul that can relate to and understand its creator. This soul will continue to live on even though the body dies. It is God’s desire that our soul would live on forever in *His* glorious presence. Because we have a spirit that is alive, we have the ability to know God, to understand God’s will, to accept God’s promises, and follow God’s plan for our lives. How well we *do* that will determine how “alive” our soul really is. <sup>11</sup>

After reading these thoughts on what it means to be created in God’s image, the natural question you might ask is, “WHAT HAPPENED!?” We need to remember that this study is focused on what man was created to be ideally. We often hear people using the phrase, “I’m only human,” when they realize they have done something wrong. In reality, if we were truly human as God fashioned us to be, we would not act the way we so often do. In our next lesson we will talk about man as he is in reality, how we have failed to live up to the ideal intentions of God, and what our situation is now because of that failure.

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11. See also John 17:3

## 5

### Man's Dilemma

Have you ever sunk a ton of money into an appliance or tool, only to have it break down (usually a week after the warranty expires?) Depending on the value of the object we decide if we want to chuck it or try to fix it. God did not design his creation to break down, but it did, and not by his choice. God knew that if he wanted to create someone who could freely make a decision to embrace him, then he would also have to make them able to reject him as well.

When a husband and wife make a decision to have a child they hope their child will come to love them and have a great relationship with them. They know that the possibility exists that the child might rebel and the relationship be dysfunctional, but their hope in the positive outweighs their reluctant fear of the negative. We don't have to read too far into the Bible to see man making a choice to walk away from God. And none of us have done any better. Ever since man's fall in the Garden of Eden, every person on earth has followed in Adam's steps and done *something* to violate God's holy will. Romans 3:23 tells us that "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" And 'all' means 'ALL.' So the question is, "If we have been made in the image of God, how does our rejection of God mess up that image?" Let's revisit each of the images we talked about in the previous lessons.

#### I. WE HAVE LOST SIGHT OF OUR CREATOR

People tend to focus only on what they can see with their eyes. They may feel that 'tug' of God on their soul, but most people do not turn to him. And if they DO, it is often a warped counterfeit, like turning to horoscopes and palm readings to get direction for life. A lot of people are agnostics, claiming that we just can't know for sure if God exists because we can't see him or measure him scientifically. The universe may show us that God exists, but many disregard that evidence and

say there is no God. <sup>12</sup>

And even people who *do* acknowledge the reality of God get off course. God created us of both physical and spiritual matter, but people put a lot more weight on the physical. God built into our human fabric certain desires to keep us alive and motivated, like health, hunger, sexuality, pleasure, rest, and self-esteem. But those needs are often distorted and abused to the point of developing addictions to gratify desires in unhealthy ways.

God entrusted us to be responsible rulers, but this dominion has been distorted by people seeking conquest and power, not just on a big scale of evil world leaders but also on a family scale such as an over-demanding, abusive spouse. Instead of taming and controlling the earth we abuse its resources to satisfy our own personal needs. We no longer see God in the creation that surrounds us, but take for granted the blessings that God provides.

## II. WE HAVE DISTORTED RELATIONSHIPS

When God gave us the gift of personality, he hoped it would be used by us to walk in fellowship with him and other people. As it is, people have a warped view of who God is and how we should relate to him. Some feel that God is a "You-Do-This-Or-Else" kind of harsh judge. Others worry about a cruel and vengeful "All-Seeing-Eye in the Sky." Some picture a kindly "white-bearded old man" who has no connection to what is happening here on earth. When people have such twisted views of God there is no prayer, no hope, no appreciation, no worship, no thankfulness, no shame.

This distortion of relationships also affects how we get along with other people. What friendship has not been threatened? What marriage is immune from conflict? As much as we desire acceptance and love from one another, all of us at some time or another have

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12. See also Romans 1:25

strained relationships with other people. Mercy is replaced with vengeance, patience with criticism, forgiveness with grudges, service with self-centeredness, grace with selfishness, love with indifference.

### III. WE HAVE REJECTED THE MORAL STANDARD

God made us to be able to tell the difference between right and wrong. Even people who don't know God still make laws and rules to govern their society. But no one ever lives up to the law 100%. Adam was created as a perfect human being with no baggage and no influences from an evil society, yet even *HE* made a willful choice to rebel against God. And that tarnished God's image within him. We have all done the same. We still continue to bear the image of God, but it is now tainted with the damage of sin. This damage affects us mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Being made in God's image also means that we all have worth and value. But how many people feel the gut-wrenching pain of failure, low self esteem, lack of self-worth, and rejection? We want to feel good about ourselves, so we compare ourselves to others. That ends up with people either despising those we see as higher or judging those we see as lower. Man has developed value systems that put humans at the center rather than God, resulting in institutions such as slavery. A self-absorbed society wants to get as much as possible from others without having to do anything in return. All of these problems develop when man shifts the standard of holiness from God to themselves. This shows the truth of Proverbs 14:12, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."*

### IV. WE HAVE LOST OUR PURPOSE

What is our purpose in life? To glorify the God who created us. To live a life that honors God and blesses other people. In an earlier study we saw that when God created Adam and Eve he placed in the Garden one tree whose fruit they were not supposed to eat. That tree represents God giving man free will choice. Notice how quickly

Adam and Eve opted to disregard God's will. When they ate, not only did they violate God's will, but they also disregarded God's purpose for them as caretakers of the Garden of Eden.

The image of God shines brightly whenever we see people making good choices. When our will lines up with God's will it is always a good thing. But we see evidence every day of our own inability to live right. We lack the moral power to live perfect lives. We give into temptation way too soon.

God always has a reason for what he does. And there is always a purpose involved with what he wants us to do. As with Adam, when we disregard God's will, we lose sight of God's purpose. It is good to know that this world is not just a meaningless spinning rock headed for nothingness. Too many people go through this life frustrated with God because they see bad things happening. It becomes easy for people to question God's character if we are not able to understand his true nature and will.

Even religious people can lose sight of God's purposes. We see examples that show how people thought that they could perfectly live up to God's standards and somehow earn their way to heaven through slavishly obeying God's law. The impossibility of doing this again leads to futility and frustration.

## V. WE HAVE LOST LIFE

As you can probably tell from this lesson, the tragedy of our situation originates in the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. When man ate of that forbidden tree, his action led to several consequences, such as increased pain for woman in childbirth, distortion of the husband-wife relationship, and an increase in the toil required to survive.

One of the most damaging consequence of their choice, though, was that they were denied access to the tree of life.<sup>13</sup> Before their rebellion they could eat of this tree and as long as they did, their bodies would

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13. See also Genesis 3:22-23

not experience death. But the moment they were driven from the garden, their human body began the process of deterioration.

Every human being on earth (except for two incredible exceptions) has experienced death. This may seem like a harsh reaction from God, but in fact is a wise choice of God's grace. He knew how bad we would become in our fallen and sinful state. And he provided a way for us not to be stuck in such a fallen world forever.

We find an interesting verse in Genesis 2:16-17. *"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for **in the day** that you eat of it you shall surely die."* When Adam and Eve ate, notice that they did not die that day, physically, at least. But remember that the life God gave to us is not only physical but also spiritual. When man sinned in the Garden, "in that day" they did die spiritually. The fellowship they once had with God was damaged and they could no longer have face-to-face fellowship with him.

After the fall, God continued to communicate with man. Occasionally we find God coming to man and revealing himself to different people in different ways. But man no longer had the same access to God. In our sinful condition we could not approach the presence of God.

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, we are in a heap of trouble! And nothing we can do can get us out of our fix. In Romans 7:24 Paul is thinking about his own personal battle between knowing what God wants and knowing how powerless he was to live up to it. He says in total desperation, *"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*

Is all hope lost? Fortunately not! But— before we talk about the remedy we must understand the sickness. Darkness always comes before the dawn. We must accept our situation before we can embrace and appreciate what God did to rescue us. In the next chapter we will

talk about the “good news” of what God did to save us from our darkness.

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## 6

# A GOOD PLAN!

“God...saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel..” 2 Timothy 1:9-10

In our last lesson we painted a dark picture of man’s spiritual situation. This came as no surprise to God. He knew before he created us that we would not be able to live up to his holy standard. The Bible tells us that God came up with a plan to save us even before the world began.

### I. TO SAVE, OR NOT TO SAVE ... NEVER A QUESTION

Even though God saw his new creation as “very good,” he knew that by giving people free will choice, that we could (and eventually would) reject his will. As we mentioned earlier, nothing impure can come near to God. We, with our sin, could never hope to dwell with God forever, no matter how much we tried to be good people. This situation creates a couple of problems.

#### **Problem #1 – We need holiness, but we aren’t holy**

Because God loves relationships, he wants to share his life with us. He wants us to be with him. The problem is, God is holy and only people without sin can enter into his presence.<sup>14</sup> And we have already seen that verse from Romans 3:23, “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*”

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14. See also Hebrews 12:14

## **Problem #2— God wants to forgive, but sin has consequences**

Because of God's attribute of 'mercy,' he wants to offer us salvation even though we are not righteous. But he is also a God of 'justice,' which demands consequences for evil behavior. The tough thing is, the consequence for sin is death. Death is the logical outcome for walking away from the source of life.

Leviticus 17:11 says, "*For the life of the flesh is in the blood.*" Hebrews 9:22 tells us that "*without blood, there can be no forgiveness.*" As drastic as it seems, God requires a death in order to bring moral balance when people sin. So we see a battle between two of God's most important attributes, his mercy which desires to forgive sin, and his justice which demands payment for wrongdoing. How can God be true to both of these attributes?

## **II. OLD COVENANT, DEFERRED JUDGMENT**

God chose to reveal himself in a special way to the descendants of Jacob, a people who would later be known as the Israelites. God did not choose to bless the nation of Israel because of anything special about them personally. He did not choose them because of their power, their holiness or their prosperity.<sup>15</sup>

God's choice of Israel was the result of a promise made to Abraham long before, and was part of his plan to redeem mankind. Time and time again throughout the Old Testament period, we find God delivering this nation from foreign enemies, saving them through trials, and blessing them in many ways.

But God wanted to remind his people of a greater truth. As much as God saved his people from physical peril, God was more interested in their spiritual lives. With the nation of Israel, God revealed something new to the Bible story, the concept of sin-forgiveness.

When God gave the Law of Moses to his people in the book of Exodus,

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15. See also Deuteronomy 7:6-8

he introduced animal sacrifice as a way to symbolically 'cover' the people's sin. Notice the remainder of the verse mentioned earlier from Leviticus 17:11: *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life."*

Animal sacrifice was a temporary arrangement God made with Israel to visually show that death is the consequence for sin. Through animal sacrifices, God was shielding his eyes from their sins. God established an annual festival called the "Day of Atonement," where the priest would offer a blood offering for the people's sins. Some have described this sacrificial system as God's choice to "kick the can" of human sin down the road, deferring his judgment until a future day when a sacrifice would be offered that could truly and fully forgive people.

But what sacrifice COULD possibly be sufficient? A bull or a goat? It wasn't the *animals* who sinned. In God's plan he allowed for the blood of an animal to be an acceptable 'substitute.' Through these sacrifices, Israel was basically acknowledging that (1) We have sinned, (2) We deserve to pay the penalty, and (3) We recognize that this animal really represents what we deserve. The only way human sin could truly be forgiven would be for a human to pay the consequences for that sin. But what person could possibly do that? Since God knew that no animal sacrifice could provide true atonement for sin, his plan provided what we really needed, a perfect sacrifice.

### III. FULFILLED IN JESUS CHRIST

The story of Jesus is the story of how God chose to come to earth and take upon himself the form of a human being. Since only humans could pay for their sins, God became a human. But a perfect sacrifice could have no flaws. And only God is perfect. Many prophets in the Old Testament talked about a day in the future when God would truly save his people in a way that would be like no other salvation. Jeremiah 31 talks of the new day and a new covenant where God would remember their sins no more. There would be no more annual

remembrance of sins; no more annual sacrifice of ineffective animal blood. <sup>16</sup>

And when the time in history was right, the Word of God became flesh and God put on human form. The world celebrates the beauty of the Christmas story and Jesus' miraculous birth to a virgin girl. How God accomplished this is beyond our ability to fully understand. We must accept this by faith. Although God is one, we see different expressions of his deity, such as God's Spirit, the Father, the Word, the Son ... all in perfect unity as one God. The Bible states, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:1, 14) That Word was not only full of grace and truth, he was also full of holiness. Jesus never sinned.

Galatians 4:4-5 says, "*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*" Jesus ate our bread and felt our pain as a human being. He was tempted in every way as we are, but never gave into sin. And he died the most cruel death known to mankind, the death of crucifixion. He did not deserve to die. He had no sin for which he had to atone. But he chose to come as a representative of the entire human race to provide an adequate consequence for human sin. In the greatest demonstration of love known to man, God showed us his desire to share his glory with us. And in doing so, he gave us the potential of being free from the bondage of our guilt of sin.

II Corinthians 5:21 shares this amazing thought, "*For our sake he (God) made him (Jesus) **to be sin** who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

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16. See also Jeremiah 31:33-34

#### IV. CONFIRMED BY A MIRACLE

The punishment for man's sin was completely satisfied when Jesus died on the cross. But how would anyone know? After all, human eyes could not see what was taking place in God's mind. All the world saw was the son of a carpenter, a good man, dying on a cross because the religious leaders thought he was a threat to their livelihood. The Romans were more than happy to kill someone who claimed to be a king. The story might have died in obscurity except for the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead a few days following his crucifixion. This miracle proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the words of Jesus are in fact true! We can trust our eternal souls to his sacrifice, even if it means dying for that belief.

#### V. HOW SAVED IS SAVED?

God opened up a door for anyone who wants to be freed from the consequences of their rebellion against God. None of us could pay the penalty for someone else because we are unclean ourselves. Two children in a mud puddle cannot hope to cleanse each other. If you were in a group of people who walked into a restaurant and only realized that no one had their wallets until after you had eaten, what could you do? Jesus in effect took the tab of any who wanted to leave the restaurant and paid the price we owed.

Jesus came to die so that our rebellion against God would have some way to be dealt with. Otherwise we would personally have to face the consequences we all deserve and we would be separated from God forever. Our sin is not overlooked. God sees every sin that has ever been committed, but because of the cross, we do not have to pay the consequence for that sin. Our most holy lives will never earn us enough favor in God's eyes to offset the stain of our sin, no matter how small. But our failure to live up to God's holiness no longer needs to separate us from God's presence.

God's offer is available to all. Does this mean that every human being

will be saved? It is certainly God's desire that all people WOULD take advantage of his gracious offer. Even though Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient to cover the sins of the world, the answer to the question is, "No." Not everyone will be saved. As in the restaurant example, the potential for salvation is there, but not everyone will give Jesus their tab. The question we need to ask is, "How do we actually 'give Jesus our tab?'"

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## SO WHAT DO WE DO?

By this time you are probably asking, “OK, what’s the bottom line, tax and all?” “What’s my part of the bargain?” We have seen what God has done for us. What is man’s part of the salvation process? Some don’t like talking about ‘man’s part’ in salvation because it seems to suggest that we can somehow earn our way to heaven. Not so. There is nothing we can do or say to God to obligate God to “owe” us anything. We can never clean up our act enough to undo the spiritual damage that sin has done. So if our good deeds aren’t the key that gives us the holiness we need, what is?

Remember from our last lesson that God had a plan to save us before he even created the universe. He desired for people to share his glory forever in a realm untouched by evil. Imagine God as preparing a great life-raft. His plan was for the eventual destination of that life-raft to be eternal glory. The question of this lesson is, “Who is on the boat?” And how do we get on board? Some think that God arbitrarily picks and chooses those he wants. The Bible says that God actually allows us to be part of the process. Our part in salvation is wrapped up in one very important word, *“FAITH.”*

“For by Grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

*Ephesians 2:8-9*

### I. BY GRACE ... THROUGH FAITH

God’s decision to let Jesus’ sacrifice pay for our sin is the greatest gift he could give. It is God’s grace that allows a door even to be opened into his presence. The Bible teaches that this door by which we enter is the door of “Faith.”

Let’s look at the relationship between grace and faith. The Bible is full

of stories where God gives people something they do not deserve. He often makes choices to bless people for reasons known only to him. He blesses in hopes that people will turn to him and respond in a positive way. We do the same thing ourselves, don't we? We might give a gift to someone who doesn't deserve it. We may not be looking for anything in return except appreciation, but if the gift is thrown away, it sure affects how we treat that person in the future.

Responses have consequences. How I respond when someone swerves their car into my lane will make a difference to all involved. If you offer me a gift, my choice to accept that gift not only affects me, but also affects you as the giver.

So it is with salvation. God's decision to send Jesus into the world to die for us was not motivated by any quality of our own. He extends the boundaries of his grace to the entire world even though we were all lost in our sin. But this does not insure that everyone in the world will respond or appreciate this gift.

## II. FAITH BRINGS HOLINESS

In the process of God gradually revealing himself to mankind after the fall, he encountered a man named Abram. In Genesis 12-17 we see many times where God made promises to Abram that he would be the father of a great nation. Despite being childless in his old age, Abram believed in the incredible words God was saying. In Genesis 15:5 God took Abram outside and told him to look at the stars in the sky.

*"Number the stars, if you are able to number them."* Then God said to Abram, *"So shall your offspring be."* Verse 6 is one of the most important verses in the whole Bible. It says that Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord *"counted it to him as righteousness."*

God saw the belief of Abram and because of that belief he regarded Abram as being righteous. This verse is used in many places, such as Romans 4, Galatians 3, and James 2 to show that the only way people can get the holiness they need to be with God is to have faith. In chapter five it was mentioned that our biggest problem is our sin. We

aren't holy and only holy people can enter into God's presence. But if we trust in the promise of God that the blood of Jesus forgives our sins, God will see our trust and view us as holy!

God lets us decide whether or not we will accept or reject his promise of salvation. He allows our free will to be part of the process. Romans 10:13 clearly says, *"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

What does that mean? How do people "call on the Lord?" If you read Romans 10:9-17 you will see that calling on the Lord really has to do with our faith. So exactly what IS faith? What does faith involve?

### III. PICTURES OF FAITH

#### **A. Faith is Supported by Reliable Evidence**

John 20:30-31 says, *"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* The miracles of Jesus were done to prove to people that Jesus really was who he said he was.

Christian faith calls people to trust in a promise they can't see, but the promise-giver has given us good reason to believe him. Faith is not a blind leap into darkness hoping that the story might be true. The facts that support the claims of Jesus' life and resurrection are just as valid as any testimony accepted in a court of law today. Eyewitnesses saw the miracles of Jesus and witnessed him raised from the dead.

Because of this evidence, we can trust that the story of the Bible is in fact true; that God really DOES exist; that Jesus is in fact who he SAYS he is.

But there is more to "calling on the name of Jesus" than simply believing that the story is true. James 2:19 says, *"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!"* So what else is involved in saving faith?

#### **B. Faith Involves the Will**

In the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was preaching to the people,

*“Repent and believe in the gospel.”* (Mark 1:15) Faith involves the orientation of our hearts. There are some people unwilling to admit to their need of salvation and unwilling to change their hearts to accept Jesus. Repentance is the step of saving faith where people re-orient their hearts from a desire to follow their own will to a desire to submit to the will of God. In Luke 13:3 Jesus says, *“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

### **C. Faith Involves Activity**

*“Now wait just a minute!,”* you are probably saying. I thought it was said earlier that nothing we can DO can earn our salvation. This is true, but don’t misinterpret what that means.

Everything we do in life is in some way or another related to faith. I eat a sandwich in faith that the ham within does not contain botulism. I plop down in a recliner in faith that it will not collapse under my weight. I drive my car in faith that the steering linkage will not fail. If I refuse to drive my car because I doubt its ability to work, I do not have faith in that car. I may have seen other people driving it (reliable evidence); I may sincerely desire with all my heart to WANT to drive it (the will). But until I actually go through with it and verify by my actions, I need to use another word to describe my situation than faith.

How does all of this relate to the life-raft mentioned earlier? God gave us a seat on the life-raft because of his merciful grace. Nothing we could do prompted his decision. He offered us a chance to be with him despite our sins. No amount of good living could earn us a seat in the raft. But the benefits of being on that boat will certainly be affected if we make a choice not to get on board. The Bible supports this notion clearly. James 2:14-26 illustrates this connection of faith to activity. Hebrews 11 is an entire chapter devoted to Bible heroes who by faith – *did* something.

Obedience is a good barometer of a person’s faith. It is the fruit of a person who has given their life to God. Obedience in no way obligates God to give people anything. He has already given the potential for

life to all men before we did a thing. But now that the gift is in front of us, obedience is simply our willingness to step on board the life-raft of salvation. Ultimately God is the only one who knows the names of those on board. But we have certain points of contact that help us understand how we actually make that step.

Analogies can be weak, but there is an analogy of marriage which may help us to understand how we get on the boat. Two people are drawn together and develop a relationship. This leads to love which eventually turns to commitment. The two finally decide to get married. The love they have for each other the day before they say their wedding vows is likely no less than the day after, but this public proclamation changes their status in the eyes of God and society. In reality the marriage ceremony is the point in time at which this couple expressed publically their life commitment, and this ceremony has a definite bearing on how God views their relationship.

Likewise people are drawn to a relationship with God. Those with open hearts will allow this relationship to grow and develop, eventually to a commitment to be faithful forever. Some would say the process is complete, and that they are in fact now Christians. Some would say their vows are completed when they make a vocal expression of faith in Jesus or pray that Jesus come into their hearts.

Fortunately, the Bible shows us examples of when and how believers in the early days of the church actually became Christians. They saw their public confession of Jesus and their baptism into Christ as the faith “response” which identifies the time when they come into contact with the blood of Christ. <sup>17</sup>

According to the Bible, baptism is the point at which we are placed “in Christ.” In Romans 6:3-4, Paul affirms that baptism identifies us with Jesus’ death and resurrection. *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was*

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17. See also Galatians 3:26-27

*raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."*

Baptism is also related to the forgiveness of sins. In Acts 22:16, Paul is recounting the story of his conversion, after his blinding encounter with the risen Lord, Jesus. Paul is clearly a believer, yet the prophet Ananias tells him to *"rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name."* (See also Acts 2:38)

The Bible clearly connects baptism to our own salvation. Baptism is not a work of salvation that saves us, but nonetheless is the time when God links our faith to his righteousness. Peter says in I Peter 3:21, *"Baptism ... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."*

A believer who submits to this act of faith (odd as it may seem, being submerged under water) acknowledges that they are totally unable on their own to gain righteousness in God's eyes. Baptism is a symbol of our own trust in the only one who is sufficient. In baptism, a believer is in a sense "reborn," not physically, but spiritually, in the eyes of God.

So now we have before us a clearer picture of saving faith, and what "calling on the name of the Lord" really means. It is more than a mental belief that the story is true. It means trusting that Jesus' death paid the consequence for our own sin. It means turning our heart over to a new master who now calls the shots. It means a willingness to acknowledge our faith to the world. It means identifying with Jesus death, burial and resurrection in our own baptism. It is certainly a life changing decision.

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## BLESSED BEYOND BELIEF!

Have you ever watched the T.V. show, "Let's Make a Deal?" Contestants pick door #1, door #2, or door #3, eagerly awaiting the gifts on the other side. What's on the other side of the door for people who chose to become Christians? What blessings await them? This chapter will talk about the many benefits and blessings belonging to God's children.

It may seem surprising that more people don't accept God's offer and promise of salvation. Why is this so? Perhaps part of the answer is that people don't understand that God is the source of any good thing that is experienced in life. When we see service, loyalty, kindness, love and justice we see evidence of God's hand. It is easy to take for granted God's gracious blessings of health, physical pleasures and the joys of good human relationships. James 1:17 tells us that *"every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."*

God does not discriminate, and he showers many earthly blessings upon both good and bad people. Perhaps some believe that these blessings come as standard equipment for this world, and will just extend into the realm of whatever afterlife people dream up for themselves.

The truth is, only those in a saved relationship with God will continue to receive his blessings in the next world. The rest will be separated from God and not have such blessings. People who say, "I'd rather be separated from God and spend eternity with the rest of my non-Christian friends," don't understand the nature of the afterlife. If even something as simple as the joy of human friendship is a good gift of God, people separated from God will not even experience the joy of finding a friend.

The number one reason people desire to become Christians is that they can be forgiven of their sin and dwell with God forever in heaven. That is definitely a good reason! There is so much pain and trouble in this world which creates a longing to be in a better place after death. But there are other wonderful benefits. This lesson will focus on some of the good things that belong to people in a saved relationship with God. These blessings do not just belong to Christians after they die. These are blessings that help people in their every day current life. Since these blessings are spiritual in nature, they may not be seen or felt by human senses, but they definitely are there. Let's begin with some verses from the book of Ephesians.

### Blessings in Ephesians chapter one

- 1:4 "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world"
- 1:5 "He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ."
- 1:7 "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace"
- 1:11 "We have obtained an inheritance"
- 1:13 "You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it."

### ... CHOSEN ...

Have you ever seen the pain in a child's eye on the playground when passed over for a game or not chosen to be on anyone's team? What a joy it is to be chosen! Those who put their faith in Jesus can be assured of their place on the team he has chosen for future glory. Salvation was not an afterthought, but a conscious decision by God to save people from their sin!

### ... ADOPTION ...

Christians are adopted by God! Children who are adopted come from situations of previous neglect and abandonment. Adoption is a

recognition of love and commitment to consider a child once on the outside as a true son or daughter. God's choice to adopt shows that Christians are in a position of favor. God made a permanent decision to establish a relationship where once none existed.

### ... INHERITANCE ...

Only legitimate children receive an inheritance from their parents. Since we are adopted we now receive the very same things that only God's true son now shares. Whatever we see Jesus receiving, whether it be resurrection, glory, or eternal life, we can be assured that we too will receive the same inheritance.

### ... REDEMPTION ...

Christians are also redeemed. Redemption means to "buy something back" that once belonged to someone but for some reason that ownership was lost. Because of sin all people have sold themselves to Satan's "pawn shop." But Jesus bought the world back. His blood paid the redemption price for sin so that we could once again belong to our original owner, God.

### ... HOLY SPIRIT ...

Christians also receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit. God works upon the hearts of everyone in many ways, and his Spirit helps people to even come to believe and receive the truth about Jesus. But to people who become Christians, God gives a special measure of his own Spirit to help in their Christian walk. In John 14:16, Jesus tells his disciples, *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...he dwells with you and will be in you."*

How Does God's Spirit help believers?

#### **A. The Holy Spirit dwells within Christians.**

Christians have God's Spirit dwelling within them even if they do not understand fully how he works. God does not leave his children even if they fail to tap into the power his Spirit gives.

### **B. The Holy Spirit empowers Christians**

The Holy Spirit enables Christians to resist sin more successfully. Rather than having to rely on human willpower to overcome temptation, Christians have within them the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Those who yield to the Spirit's leading have certain victory in the battle over sin. *"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."* (Romans 8:2)

### **C. The Holy Spirit guides the Christian**

God's Spirit is a Spirit of 'truth' which helps believers to better understand God's Word and have discernment when faced with spiritual decisions in life.

### **D. The Holy Spirit gives comfort and assurance.**

God's Spirit also comforts his people in trials and gives assurance of salvation. I Corinthians 1:21 says, *"And it is God who...has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."* God's Spirit writes the names of baptized believers in permanent ink in the book of life. Faithful Christians can know for certain that a reservation is held in their name in heaven.

The second passage of scripture that contains many blessings belonging to Christians is found in the fifth chapter of Romans.

#### Blessings in Romans chapter five

5:1 "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

5:2 "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

5:11 "We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

5:18 "As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men."

5:3 "We rejoice in our sufferings..."

### ... JUSTIFICATION ...

Justification is a legal term which means that God makes a choice to view people as being “just” or holy. Because the penalty for sin has been paid by Jesus, God removes the “guilty” verdict from his children. He views them through the blood of Jesus and sees only holiness. He sees me as “*just - if - I’d*” already paid the consequences for sin. Jesus took upon himself the world’s sinful nature and in turn gave to Christians his own righteous nature.

### ... PEACE ...

Because Christians are seen as just and holy, there is no more hostility between believers and God. There is no longer a barrier of sin keeping people away from God. In this scripture, “peace” is a term that means, “No longer at war.” God’s future judgment is no longer aimed at those in Christ, so Christians do not need to fear condemnation. Believers can confidently come before God knowing God is viewing them favorably.

### ... HOPE ...

Because of this saved status, believers now have hope for tomorrow. No matter what life deals out, the glory of God will one day belong to God’s people and nothing or no one can take that victory away. The hope of the Christian is not a hope *that* the story is true. Christian hope is a concrete assurance of one’s salvation, but it is not in possession just yet. Romans 8:23-25 says, “*we...groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*”

### ... LIFE ...

Christians also have the blessing of renewed life. When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he died both spiritually and eventually

physically. In chapter five it was pointed out that when we sin, we suffer the same loss of spiritual life. But when people become Christians, they regain the life that was lost when Adam sinned. Christians are given new spiritual life. They can now (with the help of God's Spirit) live lives that reflect the qualities of God. And in the end, even the curse of physical death will be reversed. God's people will be resurrected from the dead and receive new immortal bodies fit for the heavenly realm.

### ... RECONCILIATION ...

One of the blessings of the Christian is "reconciliation." This means a change of relationship has occurred. God has restored the bond of fellowship that was lost when Adam sinned. At one time human sin caused people to be regarded as enemies of God, but now believers are reconciled and regarded as friends. When people understand how God has reconciled them, it affects relationships with other people as well. Not only is the war over between man and God. It should also be over between man and his fellow man. Ephesians 2:14 tells us that Jesus has *"broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...that he might create in himself one new man in the place of the two, so making peace."* What God has done for man, man must now do for one another. If God has loved and forgiven our neighbor, we cannot withhold our love and forgiveness toward them.

### ... SUFFERING??? ...

You probably didn't expect to see suffering listed as a blessing belonging to believers. Actually all people face suffering and pain because we live in a fallen world. But Christian suffering is of a different nature. Becoming a Christian places people in direct opposition to the world and creates friction with the non-believing world. Suffering for the sake of one's belief is a blessing because it helps people grow in their strength of character. Overcoming trials and enduring the scorn of the world identifies the believer with Jesus, who suffered more than any of us will ever be able to imagine.

To add to this list from Ephesians and Romans, one more blessing will be mentioned in this lesson. In First Corinthians 6:11 Paul is talking to a group of Christians reminding them of their former life before they were members of the Kingdom of God. He says, *“But you were washed, you were **sanctified**, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ...”*

### ... SANCTIFICATION ...

Sanctification means to be “set apart” to be used in a special way. This is the basis of our word, “Saint.” Christians have been cleansed so that God can use them in his service. It carries with it the idea of holiness. If you found a knife buried in your back yard, would you immediately take it to the kitchen and cut up some vegetables? Not until you cleaned it up first. God has cleansed his people and made them so that they are fit to be used in his service.

It is wonderful to know that so many spiritual blessings belong to people who become Christians. It redefines what it means to really live. But what does a Christian DO with these blessings? If God has cleansed his children so they are fit for service, what does that service look like? What kind of life do Christians live? What goals do they pursue? What are their main purposes in life? The next chapter will talk about those questions.

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## 9

# THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

“For you were called to freedom, brothers, Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Galatians

5:13-14

Why do people do what they do? What motivates our actions and prompts our behavior? Personal pleasure and self-gratification motivates one to invest money in a bank and motivates another to rob that same bank. Pragmatic reasons cause people to act in a way that will best serve them in the long run. Our physical desires prompt us to eat, sleep, shower and exercise. Most governments are built around the betterment of society. Laws and treaties abound that insure safety for humanity. To a great degree, human decisions are closely associated with things that serve our own best interests.

These motivations are not bad in themselves but there is a higher motivation that drives Christians to operate from a different perspective than the rest of the world. Granted, all people, religious or not, all have needs that must be met, but God has given his children a higher motivation for life than simply physical or emotional necessity. God’s word says that the most important motivation for living is “love.”<sup>18</sup>

## GOD IS GLORIFIED THROUGH LOVE

When God created, he established laws of nature to govern his creation. When water evaporates, bacteria breaks down mulch into soil, and planets orbit around the sun, God is being glorified because

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18. See also Matthew 22:37-40

the universe is functioning as God created it to work. God created humans to glorify him as well. When man is functioning as God created him, God is glorified. But man has something that the rest of creation does not have, and that is free-will. Man is truly glorifying God and honoring him when we make the choice of our will to follow God. That is why the “law” or principle of love that guides man is different than the rest of creation. But exactly what is love?

Love is a selfless and unconditional desire to better a relationship with someone. The opposite of love is not “hate” but rather is “indifference.” God in his love was not indifferent to man’s sinful problem. In his desire to establish a relationship with people he sent Jesus to die. Christian love (and behavior) is a response to what God has done. Because he loves, people love in return, not just God but other people as well.

In Romans 6:12-13, Paul is answering a very good question: *“If Christians have been forgiven by God, why does it matter how they live, since God is going to cover them by his grace anyway?”* In this chapter Paul appeals to the new relationship between God and his children. He says, *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”* Believers think differently about God and about other people, simply because God has saved them. God has cleaned his people and ‘retooled’ them for his purposes. What are those purposes?

## I. Love For God

God desires for people to grow in their relationship with Him. Two very important purposes God desires from his children are spiritual growth and worship.

## **A. Spiritual Growth**

People grow in their relationship with God when they develop life changing habits that imitate their creator. If someone truly wishes to become more like Jesus, they must learn all they can about Jesus and his ways. Jesus himself says in John 13:15-16, *"I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you...a servant is not greater than his master."* Christians are called to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (II Peter 3:18) Part of loving God is spending more time developing good spiritual habits such as prayer and Bible study.

Growing spiritually also means putting the teachings of Jesus into actual practice in life. Believers are called to put to death the behaviors that gratify only their own desires, and put on behaviors that reflect the new life Christ has given. Remember that the most valiant effort to be holy will never save anyone. Only Jesus' blood can give people the holy status they need to be right with God. But now that God sees Christians as holy, they are called to do what they can to bring their behavior and words under the control of Jesus. Put simply, Christian growth is getting the person we see in the mirror to look more like the 'sinless' person God sees when he views us through the blood of Christ.

## **B. Worship**

Worship is a public expression of how one feels about the God who saved them. God is worthy of worship simply because of his supreme power and might. Because of the wonderful ways God has intervened in the lives of man to save him, people praise God. Several places in the New Testament show groups of believers coming together to share their common adoration for Jesus.

Bound by their common faith and the Holy Spirit dwelling in each of them, they joined their hearts to sing, to pray, to comfort one another, to encourage one another, to learn more of God's Word, and to share in a symbolic meal honoring Jesus' body and blood, called the Lord's

Supper. This community of believers was called the church. Today, God's church is made up of all people who have obeyed the Gospel and become Christians. They use their combined resources and efforts to broaden the boundaries of God's kingdom.

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## WHAT IS THE CHURCH???

At this point it would be good to talk more about this group of people called the "church." The lessons presented so far have been written to address people's individual relationships with God. Each one of us has to acknowledge our own personal sin and our own need for the saving blood of Jesus to cover us. But this experience is not a solitary journey. It is an experience shared by many. Christians have not only been brought into a personal unity with God, but are also brought into a brotherhood of believers made up of other sons and daughters of God.

In Matthew 16 Jesus questions his disciples as to who they believe he really is. Peter acknowledges, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* In response, Jesus tells Peter that this confession of faith will be the foundation of God's future people. Jesus says, *"On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* This church came into existence in Acts 2, where at the preaching of Peter three thousand people were baptized into Christ. Since that day, the church has been in existence, accomplishing the purposes and work of God on the earth.

While the church is universal in its nature, and only God knows the number of those who are truly saved, we see in the Bible local groups of Christians in various cities and towns gathering to share their common life as adopted children of God. These groups had to work through many obstacles and prejudices to maintain the unity they had in Christ. Many of the books of the New Testament speak to some of these early problems and difficulties, and give us clues as to how the early church worked and worshipped.

So while the Christian life is one which must be lived individually, there is a corporate nature to it. This lesson speaks to how individual Christians are called to live, but much of that life is related to how to get along with other people who are in their local community of believers, the church.

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## II. Love For Neighbor

God also desires for people who belong to Jesus to grow in their relationship with other people. He calls believers to treat one another as he has treated them. Here are some purposes God has in mind for people who are part of his spiritual kingdom.

### A. Edification

Ephesians 4:16 says that the church is *“joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped,”* and *“when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”* One of God’s purposes of people loving their neighbor is to encourage one another and build each other up. God has given believers individual gifts, talents, and abilities which are to be used to create a strong body. Believers try to lift one another to be all they can be. Envy, pride, jealousy and a desire for self-glory have no place in the church.

Edification usually refers to relationships that exist within members of Jesus’ church. But Christians should always watch their words around all people, believers or not. Words that build up are always better than those that tear down.

### B. Service

Jesus came as a servant to the world he saved. According to Jesus, the greatest leaders are those who serve others. Rather than seeking recognition, position, or praise, Christians follow Jesus’ example of lending a quiet, often unseen hand to people who need help. I Peter 4:10 says, *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as stewards of God’s varied grace.”* One of the main purposes of a Christian is to bless the world that is within their own personal reach. The

world is desperate for people who are looking to the needs of other people rather than trying to gratify its own desires!

### **C. Evangelism**

A third way that Christians show their love for others is by sharing with them the good news of Jesus. Someone once said that Christianity is simply “one beggar telling another where he has found bread.”<sup>19</sup>

Among the last words of Jesus was his commission for believers to go out and “*make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” (Matthew 28:19) The only way the message of God’s mercy will be made known to a lost world is through the words and actions of those who are saved.

### **TRUE MOTIVATION, LAW OR GRACE?**

One more topic needs to be addressed about the Christian’s motivation for living. Christians are not driven to do what they do because they are forced to do so by law. It is true, law get a lot of things done. Law keeps drivers safer on the road. Law enables societies to function efficiently. But the basis of law is the fear of what will happen if you disobey.

Fear of consequences is not what motivates Christians to behave as they do.<sup>20</sup> Rather, it is the existence of God’s Spirit in one’s heart that enables one to really live holy lives. When God through his Spirit motivates a person’s actions and words, there will be no place for self gratification or bad behavior.

Christian motivation is driven by a desire to “want” to serve rather than feeling like one “has” to serve. Law is associated with consequences for failure. Since in Christ the consequences for failure have already been paid, Christians desire to serve God because they want to honor the one who saved them from their sins.

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19. See also I Corinthians 5:19-20

20. See also Galatians 5:16-18

When you think about it, our whole journey to future life with God is all wrapped up in the word, "Love." No wonder John 3:16 is such an important verse, "*For God so loved the world...*" Love motivated God to create. Love prompted God's desire to have us with him forever. Love initiated God to come up with a plan to save us. Love sent Jesus to die for all of our sin. Love brings a person to draw nearer to God. Love causes us to acknowledge and accept the good news (Gospel) of Jesus. Love causes believers to imitate, honor, worship and follow God. And love motivates Christians to treat one another differently. May this study help you to understand and accept God's offer of love for yourself!

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