

Growing Up in the Lord

by

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Preface

A few years ago, my parents told me of a dear couple who were desperately seeking help. Their son had confronted a significant challenge to his faith. He was questioning the very essence of all that he had ever been taught about God and his word. Specifically, these long time friends had asked if I, a young man roughly the same age as their son, had written anything that could help him overcome the doubts which were defeating him. I am sorry to say that I had nothing ready that I thought could help him handle the storms in his life.

I have never been able to totally put that request out of my mind. Actually, I realized that most of us arrive at a point in our lives when the faith of our parents is no longer sufficient to carry us through life's most difficult times. Our faith is challenged and we need answers in which we have personal confidence because they have come from our own examination and testing.

One might ask why people lose their moorings and find their faith adrift on a sea of doubt. The answer will likely vary from person to person. Some may find themselves on their own for the first time and decide to test waters previously uncharted. They may feel that being out from under the authority of dad and mom also frees them from the authority of the Almighty Father. Others may reel under the arguments of professors, or others, who ridicule the belief system of their childhood. Still others, when questioned by some sincere seeker, may discover the old answers seem empty because the arguments are not their own. Whether these, or other reasons, bring in the darkness of doubt is of little consequence to the struggling soul. He just needs help to overcome the challenge to his faith.

The goal of this series of lessons is to help each of us challenge our faith and, with God's help, develop answers for those questions about our eternal hope. The written text will not, in and of itself, resolve these issues for the individual reader. However, it is my hope that each reader will be stimulated to develop a closer relationship with God and a personal conviction about the meaning of the message contained in the Bible and truly grow up in the Lord!

Gary C. Hampton

Challenges To My Faith

1. Do I believe in God? Why do you believe as you do?
2. Do I believe the Bible is the word of God? Why?
3. Do I believe the Bible is the final authority in religion? Why?
4. Do I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Why?
5. Do I believe God intended for all those following him to be united? Why?
6. Does it make any difference what name God's followers wear? Why?
7. Does it make any difference what I believe? Why?
8. Does God have a design for the organization of his church? What is it?
9. What is Christ's design for the Lord's supper? What frequency is acceptable to him?
10. Should I baptize my baby? Why?
11. Can I fall from grace? What makes me believe as I do?
12. Will faith alone save me? Why?
13. Does God predestine some to be saved and others to be lost? Why?
14. Must I be baptized to go to heaven? Why do you think as you do?
15. Must I follow the law of Moses to go to heaven? Why do you think as you do?
16. Does it take a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart of a sinner to bring him to the point of obedience? Why do you think as you do?

Section 1
The Birth of Faith in God and His Word

Lesson 1

God Is!

It is not unusual to be challenged today by someone who has either been brought up to disbelieve or has had bad experiences in life. They may ask the Christian to "prove to me there is a God!" Of course, "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18). Neither has anyone tasted, touched or smelled Him. Some in the Old Testament heard Him, but none of us has. We cannot isolate God in a test tube or examine Him under a microscope. We must use some other means to show God is.

The Creation Proves There Is a God

The greatest evidence of God's existence is found in His creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Creation exhibits a design that must be the work of a designer. Most have no trouble understanding that any house, or other structure, had a designer, or architect, who drew up a plan for its construction. In the same way, the world around us displays a design that denies an origin of mere chance. Bert Thompson and Wayne Jackson, in their book *A Study Course in Christian Evidences*, on page 25, wrote,

Did you realize, for example, that the human body is composed of multiplied trillions of cells? In the nucleus [sic] of each cell, hundreds of thousands of genes are present. Each gene consists of a complex chemical called deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). DNA has a complicated code for the mapping out of the entire development of the individual. If the coded instructions of a **single human cell** were put into English, "they would fill a 1,000 volume encyclopedia" (R. Platt, *Reader's Digest*, October, 1962, p. 148).

One writer observed, "For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God" (Hebrews 3:4). The form and function of all the things God created teaches us there is a God (Job 12:7-10).

There Is a Prime Cause Behind the Cosmos

The cosmological argument seems to go hand in hand with the argument from design. This argument says the cosmos, including the world in which we live, obviously exists. It goes further to say that nothing comes from nothing. Therefore, there is a prime cause behind the cosmos, or God. The second law of thermodynamics, also known as entropy, says things go from order to disorder, or what we might describe as a winding down process. Such an obvious process lets us know the universe is not eternal. Something had to be behind its existence.

Man's Moral Nature Proves There Is a Moral Governor

Man's moral nature tells us there must be a Moral Governor. People the world over

condemned Adolph Hitler's attempt to destroy the Jews. Why? Because man's innate "sense of right" told them genocide was wrong. The animals do not display such a sense. Anyone who has ever seen a documentary on any of a number of animals has likely been impressed with their total lack of conscience. They can kill and eat another innocent creature without any pangs of conscience. For that reason, we do not bring an ox who gores a man up on charges of murder. Instead, we place the ox inside a fence and post warnings of the danger. In contrast, a man who kills is considered a criminal and will be tried for murder because he ought to know better. Thompson and Jackson ask, "If one does not acknowledge an eternal Mind with which intrinsic goodness is coexistent, how is 'morality' to be explained?" (p. 28).

Even in our age of skepticism and doubt, man seems to seek something to worship. Thus, we have what has been termed the new age movement. Individuals pursuing this concept believe in "karma" and "soul mates." Ancient Indians worshiped the "Great Spirit." The men of Athens erected altars to all types of gods, including one inscribed, "To the Unknown God" (Acts 17:22-23). Augustine believed this universal desire of man to worship, which he called "intuition," was clear evidence there is a God. Batsell Barrett Baxter, in his book *I Believe Because...*, explained this argument for God's existence by describing a first time visitor to Washington, D. C. seeing the 550' Washington Monument. He said when they stood before the monument, they would instinctively look up all the way to its top. The same type of instinct causes man to look up to heaven for the Almighty God.

The Concept of God in Man's Mind Implies He Is

Baxter also explained Anselm's ontological argument, by first telling his readers that ontology is the branch of philosophy devoted to the nature or existence of God. "Anselm began with a definition, 'God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived!' Then he argued that man is able to conceive in his mind of the idea that than which there is no greater." He then went on to say he could think of something even greater than "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." What was it? The existence of that being greater than anything which man could conceive. Baxter went on to point to Psalm 14:1, which says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Then, Baxter wrote, "In order for the fool to say 'God,' he had to have a concept of God in his mind. To start out to deny God is a kind of implication that God exists."

Lesson 2

A Book From God

Before we start to study the Bible, we need to recognize that it is God's word. Such recognition will help us to study with a more serious attitude.

The Bible Claims to be Inspired

The Bible lays claim to inspiration. Paul told Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul used the Greek word *theopneustos* in the place where we find "inspiration." *Theo* means "God" and *pneustos* means "breathed," thus, God breathed, or God breathed out. The idea is that God spoke, since we exhale, or breathe out, through the vocal cords to speak.

Peter explained inspiration when he wrote, "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The Hebrew writer must have recognized this as he often said God said a certain thing, when we know man did the actual writing (see Hebrews 1:5, 8; 5:5-6).

Many Old Testament writers claimed inspiration, as did some New Testament writers (see Isaiah 1:1-2, 10, 24; Jeremiah 1:1-2; 2:1; Ezekiel 1:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:2). Jesus considered Old Testament scriptures inspired and used them as authoritative (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). His whole purpose in coming to earth was to do God's will by fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (Matthew 5:7-18; John 15:25). The New Testament writers considered Old Testament writers inspired (Acts 1:15-16; 4:25; 28:25-27; Galatians 3:16-19).

The writers of the New Testament also claimed inspiration for other New Testament writers. Jesus said the apostles would be guided by the Holy Spirit (John 14:25-26; 16:12-13; Hebrews 2:1-4). The clearest and perhaps most intriguing of all these statements is that made by Peter about the writings of Paul. "And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation-- as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Scientific Foreknowledge Proves the Bible Is from God

However, such internal claims would be meaningless if they were not supported by evidence. In fact, such claims force us to test their validity. We can know the Bible is from God because of the scientific facts which were written in it long before man recognized them or knew about them. In Genesis 1:11-12, 21, 24-25, we find the expression "after his kind" in reference to the grasses, trees, fish, birds, cattle, and other beasts. These statements are made despite the fact

that man, even hundreds of years later, believed in spontaneous generation. Only recently some doctors think they have found certain special elements in the blood of a boy baby eight days old which help to heal. Yet, Moses, thousands of years ago, wrote by inspiration that boy babies were to be circumcised the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3).

Long before modern medicine thought of putting people with highly contagious diseases in isolation, God's word, in Leviticus 13:45, instructed the children of Israel to do just that with lepers. "Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!'" In George Washington's time, doctors believed "bleeding" a patient would rid the body of impurities. Now, doctors realize that the blood is the life of the body, just as Moses wrote in the long ago (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:11, 14).

Thompson and Jackson note that the Mississippi River dumps over 6 million gallons of water per second into the Gulf of Mexico (*A Study Course In Christian Evidences*, Montgomery: Apologetics Press, Inc., 1992). One might ask, "Where does it all go and why is the land not flooded?" The answer was revealed by God through Solomon. "All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again" (Ecclesiastes 1:7). In 11:3a, he fleshes out the explanation by saying, "If the clouds are full of rain, They empty themselves upon the earth." Amos concurs with Solomon when he describes God by writing, "Who calls for the waters of the sea, And pours them out on the face of the earth--The Lord is His name" (Amos 9:6b).

Specific Prophecies Fulfilled Prove the Bible Is from God

Specific prophecies about an event hundreds of years in the future could only come true if they were inspired of God. The Bible has many examples of such specific prophecy that was fulfilled. Just in the case of Christ, we find prophecies made from 400 to 700 years before the event which are true in details that could not have been guessed at. The place of His birth and fact that His mother would be a virgin are found in Micah 5:2 and Isaiah 7:14. Matthew tells us He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem (Matthew 1:20-2:1). His triumphant entry into Jerusalem is foretold in Zechariah 9:9 and fulfilled in Matthew 21:1-5.

Miracles Prove the Bible Is from God

The miracles worked in the Bible prove the spokesmen who worked them were from God. God gave Moses certain miraculous signs to use in proving to the Israelites that he was from God (Exodus 4:1-5). The miracles worked in bringing the ten plagues upon the land of Egypt were done to prove there was one God in the world and He was with Moses and the people (Exodus 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 11:7; 13:3; 14:14). Christ was raised from the dead to prove He was God's spokesman (Romans 1:4). That the apostles were speaking by God's direction is clear because of the signs they were able to work (Mark 16:14-20; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Geography Proves the Bible Is from God

The Bible is also geographically correct. When it says someone, or group, went up, the reader can be sure they went from a lower elevation to a higher elevation. For instance, in the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead" (Luke 10:30). A simple glance at a topographical map is very revealing. Jerusalem is in a mountainous area, with the Mt. of Olives being 2680 feet high. In contrast, Jericho is near the mouth to the Dead Sea. It is actually below sea level, at approximately -500 feet. So, one truly would go "down" from Jerusalem to Jericho!

Conclusion

Other areas of proof could be explored, such as: the historical accuracy of the Bible; the unity of 66 books written by about 40 writers, in different languages, over 1600 years; geographic accuracy; and the greatness of the message. However, I believe we can already see that the Bible claims to be "God-breathed" and there are undeniable proofs that it is.

Lesson 3

Fulfilled Prophecy Gives One Reason to Trust the Bible

The following was printed in, *These Times*, September, 1962. The name of the author was not given.

One day the world awoke to find that the Book of books had disappeared. All traces of its influence had vanished. Much of the music of the world was silenced. The mighty oratories were no longer to be heard. The hymns expressing the hopes and fears, the longings of human hearts, had died away. Christmas and all the rejuvenating carols were gone. Many of the masterpieces were no more; others had great parts of the music missing. Libraries looked as if millions of devouring moths had descended upon the printed pages. Books of Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Tennyson, Longfellow, Tolstoy, Dostoevski, and hundreds of others were well-nigh unintelligible, due to many omissions. Law books no longer made sense, for fundamental principles had been eliminated.

The Magna Charta of Britain, the Constitution of the United States, the American Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and all the great statements of liberty and human rights everywhere in the world were wiped blank except for a few commonplace words now utterly lacking in significance.

But the loss of the Book cut even deeper. Values became blurred; human life grew cheap. Men became tools to be used. Life grew drab and meaningless, and man had only himself to worship. Restraints fell off the human conscience, and all the brutal instincts of the animal in man were unleashed.

With the Bible lost, a veritable Hades had broken loose upon the earth!

The scene described above reminds one of the writings of Amos, who said, "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord God, 'That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the Lord'" (8:11-12).

A Famine In Theological Teaching?

One wonders if the teachings of some theologians could be a part of a famine like the one described by Amos. For instance, Robert H. Knight, in his book *The Age of Consent*, writes,

In the mid-nineteenth century, German Protestant theologian Julius Wellhausen delivered a bomb to the doorstep of the church that is still going off. Wellhausen's systematic critique of the Bible, which was later known as the "higher criticism," consisted of searching for the rational "evolution" of scripture. Instead of divine revelation, Wellhausen inferred, men had constructed the Bible to meet their own needs and prejudices. As Wellhausen's approach seeped into the seminaries and divinity schools, the whole idea of God's authorship became

moot: If man alone wrote the Bible, then man needed to reinterpret it according to man's intellectual growth and changing conditions....By the late 1990s, many mainstream churches had ditched "The Old Rugged Cross" and struck up the siren songs of the Me Generation, in which God, it is said, dwells in all of us. Since we have godlike perception, we need self-made rules that fit each of us best. Like infected tonsils, New Age priests and priestesses set out with enthusiasm to taint the rest of the Body of Christ and the larger culture with the disease of relativism (pp. xxii-xxiii).

One of the schools which might have been impacted by the thinking of Wellhausen was the Harvard Divinity School. Gordon D. Kaufman, a professor of theology at that school, wrote an article entitled, "What Shall We Do With the Bible?" for *Interpretation* in January, 1971. He said,

But all this is over with and gone. Though we may recognize and be grateful for its contributions to our culture, the Bible no longer has unique authority for Western man. It has become a great but archaic monument in our midst. It is a reminder of where we once were--but no longer are. It contains glorious literature, important historical documents, exalted ethical teachings, but it is no longer the word of God (if there is a God) to man (as quoted by Shelly in *What Shall We Do With the Bible?*, pp. 2-3).

Such thinking has had a dramatic effect on churches and religious people, particularly in the United States. Some are now very hesitant to describe any action as sin. Numbers of people, even within the church, often use the one word response "whatever" to deflect any discussion as to the rightness or wrongness of a particular action. The clear implication is that they recognize the other person's opinion is different from their own, but do not see the pursuit of either as good or bad.

The Importance of Testing the Trustworthiness of the Bible

The Lord and His apostles, in contrast, clearly saw some actions as being good, or right, while other actions were viewed as bad, or wrong. Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). Paul urged the brethren at Thessalonica to, "Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

Thus we arrive at a series of critical questions. Is the Bible the word of God? Did God have it written in a way intended to cause each of us to be able to see His expectations for our lives in the same way? Or, did the Almighty expect each of us, through our own experience and intellect, to respond to whatever it might mean to us individually? Ultimately, with so many saying the Bible means so many different things, one question must be answered. Can we trust the Bible?

God's Ability to Accurately Foresee the Future Proves the Bible Is His Word

Only God could have known specific events years before they actually happened and involving, at times, nations which did not exist when the prophecy was written. For that reason, fulfilled prophecy can be considered one of the strongest proofs the Bible is from God and can be trusted.

The criteria of true prophecy has been listed as the following: The event must be beyond the power of man to foresee; it must not be a vision of hope nor a result of fear; it must not be a scientific or political forecast. The prediction must be written before the event occurs and must be applicable to it. The language of the prophecy must be clear and the fulfillment plain (George W. DeHoff, *Why We Believe the Bible*, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 1966, p. 70).

When God's prophets challenged the false gods of the people around them, they used this very criteria. Isaiah, for example, wrote, "Show the things that are to come hereafter, That we may know that you are gods..." (Isaiah 41:23a). In contrast, the true God could say, "Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure'" (Isaiah 46:9-10). God's ability to look into the future, thus proving He is God and the Bible is His word, can be seen in numerous prophecies.

Isaiah's Prophecy Concerning Babylon Is One Example

Isaiah's (chapter 13) prophecy concerning Babylon is one clear proof the Bible can be trusted. At the time Isaiah wrote, Babylon was still ruled by a viceroy appointed by the Assyrians. Such may account for Hezekiah's boastful approach to the embassy sent to him from Babylon in 704 BC (2 Kings 20:12-19; Isaiah 39). Israel suffered the painful reward of Hezekiah's pride when Nebuchadnezzar II conquered Jerusalem. During that time, it was said Babylon had a wall around it wide enough to race 3 chariots abreast! The hanging gardens of Babylon were considered one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Yet, Isaiah's prophecy clearly looks well into the future to the time when a powerful Babylon would be thoroughly defeated by the Medes. He foretold the city would be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah and left uninhabited! Isaiah wrote around 700 BC, Jerusalem was conquered in 587 and the Medes attacked Babylon in 539. "So desolate did Babylon become that, when Alexander the Great later decided to restore it, he gave up the task as a hopeless one" (Shelly, p. 23). Only God could know the details presented by His spokesman!

God Called Cyrus By Name

Though Judah's captivity was not accomplished until well after the time of Isaiah, he foretold the day when the people of Judah would be restored to the land of promise. Among other things, he wrote, "Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure,' Even saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' And to the temple, 'Your foundation

shall be laid” (Isaiah 44:28-45:7). This prophecy is particularly telling since Cyrus was called by name some 100 years before his birth and 150 years before he would release God’s people!

Nahum’s Prophecy About Nineveh

The book of Nahum has an extensive prediction of the destruction of Nineveh. “Obadiah is a prophecy directed at the Edomites in which it is declared that (a) the heathen would conquer them, and (b) the Jews would conquer them” (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1953, p. 103). Both of these came to pass. Amos’ prophecy was made around 755 BC. God caused him to speak of the defeat of Damascus at the hands of Tiglath-Pileser, which occurred in 732 BC. He also prophesied the destruction of Gaza, Ashdod and Ashkelon, which were accomplished by 3 separate kings, Hezekiah, Sennacherib and Alexander the Great. Micah, who wrote about 730 BC, predicting the destruction of Samaria (712 BC) and Jerusalem (587 BC). Concerning Samaria, God said, “Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the field, Places for planting a vineyard; I will pour down her stones into the valley, And I will uncover her foundation” (Micah 1:6). In 722 BC, Sargon captured Samaria. “Samaria was on a hill and the stones may be found today literally poured down the side of the mountain, and the foundations of the city will be found to be discovered, i.e., laid bare” (Ramm, p. 105).

Prophecies Against Tyre

Ezekiel was one of the captives led away with King Jehoiachin in 599 BC (Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2 Kings 24:8-16). He received his call to be a prophet in the fifth year of exile (595 BC) and continued to prophesy for at least 22 years (29:17). In chapter 26, he prophesied against Tyre. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre for some 13 years and left the mainland city in ruins. The people fled to an island, about a half mile off shore and lived there in some safety because her enemies did not have ships to use in an attack. In 322 BC,

Alexander the Great came against Tyre and, in a most ingenious manner, overcame the problem which had stalled Nebuchadnezzar. He tore down the ruins of the old mainland city and used its stones, timbers and topsoil to construct a land bridge over to the island! Even this, however, was in fulfillment of prophecy. Ezekiel had said of Tyre’s enemies: “They shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the waters.” (Ezek. 26:12). And today the site of the old mainland city is nothing more than barren rock where fishermen can be seen to spread their nets! The city has never been rebuilt (Shelly, p. 24)!

A Prophecy About the Salvation of the Gentiles

For the Jews, no prophecy may be more distasteful or unlikely than the one made in Malachi 1:11. “‘For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations,’ Says the Lord of hosts.” The clear fulfillment of these words took place in the church after Jesus had broken down the middle wall of partition and Gentiles over the whole world offered acceptable worship to God.

Lesson 4

The Old Testament Prophets

There can be no doubting the role Old Testament prophesy plays in helping one to understand and fully appreciate the New Testament, in general, and Jesus Christ, in particular. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). After His resurrection, He explained to the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” After helping them to understand more fully, the Lord went on to say, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:44-47).

Modern man may have limited his view of prophesy to the books which were written by prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc. Clearly, the Lord did not see these as the only prophetic writings. Instead, His words indicate He viewed all of the Old Testament to be prophetic in nature (John 5:37-39). A full understanding of the writings of the Old Testament can only come to one willing to explore the meaning as revealed in the New Testament.

The Greek word “prophetes” means, “a proclaimer of a divine message” (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983). In a sense, any inspired writer could appropriately be described as a prophet. So, Paul could tell the Jews of Antioch of Pisidia, “For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him” (Acts 13:27). Because the Jews did not understand the meaning of words they read every Saturday, they crucified the very Son of God! Interestingly, their ignorance led, in part, to the fulfillment of the very prophecies they failed to understand (Acts 13:38). As a result, Paul was able to write, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Peter confirmed the same when he told the people in the temple, “But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.” He went on to say Jesus had been received into heaven “until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” One of the prophets he was referring to was Moses, who foretold the coming of a prophet like himself. “Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (Acts 3:18-26; 26:22-23).

One of the most perplexing truths about prophecy is that those who spoke, or wrote, it may not even have been aware of the meaning of their message. Peter explained this to his early Christian readers.

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Later, Peter answered the question which follows in many of our minds. That is, “How can someone write about things they do not even understand?” He said, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21). In other words, the words of the prophet were not a product of his own mind, or invention. Instead, they were carried along in their message, much as a ship is carried along by the wind, by the Holy Spirit.

An excellent example of such a prophetic writing is found in Psalm 22, which may have been written by David during the time he was being persecuted by Saul. F. Delitzsch, in his Commentary on the Old Testament, plainly states that he knows of no historical time in the life of David which exactly coincides with the events described here. They were realized in some small degree in the life of David. He went on to say, “On the other hand, the first portion exactly coincides with the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and the second with the results that have sprung from His resurrection” (Volume 5, p. 305). There can be no doubt that David was speaking in the spirit of God’s Anointed when he wrote this beautiful psalm!

The opening verse was quoted by Jesus as He hung on the tree (Matthew 27:46). The tragic agony of one being crucified is vividly pictured in verses 14-17. No wonder our Lord cried, “I thirst” (John 19:28)! Of course, someone might say Jesus was fully versed in scripture and simply quoted the words of David. However, it should be observed that others who had no apparent thought of God’s word also delivered lines from this prophetic psalm. Those around the cross clearly showed their contempt for Him with their mouths (verse 7). They also said, “He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (verse 8; Matthew 27:39-44). Though the soldiers who crucified the Lord had no known respect for the writings of the Old Testament, they did divide His garments and cast lots for His coat (verse 18; John 19:23-24). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews uses a quotation from verse 22 to portray the role the resurrected Lord would play among the saved (2:11-12). Interestingly, Jesus did call the disciples His “brethren,” after the resurrection (Matthew 28:10; John 20:17). The closing verses of Psalm 22 are a beautiful depiction of the evangelistic thrust of Christ’s followers into all the world (Verses 27-31).

Lesson 5

The Bible: A Complete Revelation From God

In the last two hundred years, it has been far from unusual for a new religious body to appear. Most of these new groups have claimed that God has given them some new revelation and it is their purpose to carry it to the world. Events such as these may cause one to question his own faith and wonder if he really does have the complete revelation from God in the Bible. In other words, does he have the essential ingredients necessary to form a belief which will bring about salvation?

The New Testament does not leave any indication that there is a revelation to follow. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correcting, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Peter plainly indicated that all of man's spiritual needs are provided for in the Scriptures. If this were not the case, he could not have gone on to say, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:3-4, 10). John by inspiration says that we have all that is necessary to receive eternal life (John 20:30-31). Paul was convinced he had preached the gospel and warned against anyone who preached anything contrary to it (Galatians 1:6-9). He also admonished the Corinthians to "stand fast in the faith" (1 Corinthians 16:13). All of these passages point strongly to the belief of the apostles in a complete revelation from God. It is no wonder that Paul warned Timothy against those who would turn away from the truth (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

The New Testament does have a claim to completeness. In speaking of Colossians 2:9, James D. Bales says, "Since in him 'dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' there is no one who could bring a fuller revelation of God" (James D. Bales, *The Finality of the Faith*, Shreveport: Lambert Book House, 1972, p. 67). He goes on to pen these words: "Immediately after saying that in Christ 'dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,' the apostle Paul said: 'and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power' (Colossians 2:10). Since in Christ there is nothing lacking in God's revelation of himself to man, there is nothing lacking in Christ for man" (Bales). Further, "Christ did not prophesy that anyone would take his place. Who could supersede the Son of God? He is God's spokesman to us today, and his word has been revealed and confirmed by the Spirit through the inspired men of the first century. (Hebrews 1:2; 2:3-4; John 16:12-14; Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:42)" (Bales, p. 69). The apostle Paul said that the new covenant was to be everlasting (Hebrews 13:20-21).

While all of these verses will show the Bible to be God's complete revelation to man, I feel that a proper understanding of Jude 3 is the strongest argument of all. Jude writes, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Vines says of the word here translated *faith*, "by metonymy, what is believed, the

contents of belief, faith." (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940, p. 71). Of the words *once for all* he says, "once for all, of what is perpetual validity, not requiring repetition" (Vine, p. 137).

After observing the meaning of these words, one can easily see why Woods makes the following comment: "The 'faith' for which Jude's readers were thus earnestly to contend... is the sum of all that which Christians are to believe and obey." (Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude*, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1955, p. 385) Also,

This faith has *once for all* (*hapax*) not simply formerly as the King James' Version implies, but for all time been delivered to the saints. The meaning is that the truth is delivered for all time; it is a permanent deposit, it will never be superseded, amended or modified. As it now stands it is a perfect, adequate, complete and inviolable deposit of truth, providing the means with which to confute the gainsayer, and resist the advocate of false doctrine. This deposit of truth was infallibly delivered, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 1:11; II Peter 1:21), and no part of it is superfluous or unnecessary (Woods).

While all of these new religions, to my knowledge, claim that the Bible is inspired, they attempt to hold to the inspiration of their new revelation. One can well see that this will not work. There is no mention of a new covenant that is to follow the one delivered by Christ. The gospel is complete and was established to last forever. Finally, the faith was delivered to the saints during the lifetime of Jude and that faith is complete, so there is no need for any addition of it.

Lesson 6

Rightly Dividing The Word of Truth

Paul told Timothy to "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). This verse clearly points out our need to study. Study will help us know what to do to be approved of God through obedience to his will. Paul's words to the young preacher also let us know there is a right and a wrong way to divide scripture. We must carefully study the truth so that we may rightly divide its teachings and be acceptable in God's sight.

Before the World Was Formed

God planned his creation before he began to create. His plan included the free moral agency of man, which meant that man could sin and fall away from God. Thus, God prepared for the eventuality of man's fall before he framed the world. In speaking of our redemption by the precious blood of the Savior, Peter says: "Who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (I Peter 1:18-20). Paul agrees with Peter and says God chose for the saved to be in Christ all along, but did not send him until the time was right.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love...that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him (Ephesians 1:3-4,10).

Creation and the Fall

Man was formed by God out of the dust of the ground and created in the image of God. God made a special garden and placed man in it to "tend and keep it" (Genesis 1:26; 2:7-15). Besides these assigned tasks, God only set forth one law, so far as the written record is concerned. Man was not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (2:16-17). Woman was created to be a suitable helper for man (2:18).

Satan became the father of liars by adding just one word to that which God had said (Genesis 3:4; John 8:44). He told a partial truth that made sin seem attractive (Genesis 3:5,7,22).

He appealed to fleshly desire by telling Eve that it was good for food. Satan aroused her desire through sight, as she saw that it was "pleasant to the eyes." He took advantage of wrongful pride through causing her to think it was "to be desired to make one wise" (3:6; 1 John 2:15-17). In God's words to the serpent, after man's fall, God presented the first great foreshadowing of his plan to send Christ; "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (3:15). In his death on the cross, Jesus suffered a painful bruise like one we might get on the heel, but in His resurrection Jesus dealt a mortal, or head, wound to Satan.

While he was in the Garden of Eden, man enjoyed a close relationship with God (Genesis 3:8). Man's sin placed a barrier between him and God (Isaiah 59:1-2). The long road to the restoration of that relationship, or fellowship, began with the Patriarchal Age. During that age, God spoke to the head of the house, or Patriarch.

When God Spoke To The Fathers

Once man had sinned, God put into action His plan to bring him back. We call the first step in that plan the Patriarchal Age. In that age, the head of a household would direct his family as God directed him. For example, God spoke to Noah and instructed him to build an ark of gopher wood (Genesis 6:12-14). Notice that other families were destroyed for their disobedience, but Noah's was saved because he led them in the way of obedience. The writer of Genesis says, "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did" (Genesis 6:22). As the writer of Hebrews reports, "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7). As Noah and his family came forth out of the ark, we can see that great patriarch leading his family in worship to God (Genesis 8:15-20). His righteousness caused God to bless his family and promise never to destroy the world by water again (8:21-9:1).

Abraham was another of the Patriarchs to whom God spoke (Genesis 12:1-4). We should notice again that certain blessings accompany obedience. Further, God knew he would be a good spiritual leader for all those in his house, both servants and children (18:18-19). Abraham obeyed even in the most difficult of circumstances, thus teaching his son, Isaac, the way of obedience (22:1-13, especially 7-8; Hebrews 11:17-19; Genesis 26:1-3,6).

The Law Delivered On Sinai

After the Patriarchal Age, God dealt with man through the written law of Moses (John 1:17). This law was specifically delivered only to Israel, causing some to believe the Gentiles continued to worship God at the direction of their fathers (Exodus 19:3-6; Acts 10:1-4). Just as the people of the Patriarchal Age died in the flood because of disobedience, the disobedient under Moses' law were punished (Leviticus 10:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:1-10; Judges 2:10-14). The law showed man that he could not live a perfect life, and pointed out the great need for a means of overcoming sin, but it did not make such a means available to the people (Hebrews 10:1-4). That law fulfilled its purpose when it showed man his need for a perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ. "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (Galatians 3:19-25). Its stories serve as an example to us of how God will deal with disobedient man. "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Fellowship With God Is Restored In Christ

Jesus came to fulfill the law and its many promises of a Savior. Our Lord told his

disciples, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17-18). Just as the prophets had said, Jesus was born of a virgin in the little town of Bethlehem. He was crucified between two thieves, but buried in a rich man's tomb. He carried man's sins to the cross despite the fact that he had been rejected by the very ones he came to save (Isaiah 7:14; 53:1-12; Micah 5:2-3). In his death, Jesus took the old law out of the way and put his law into force. Paul told the Christians at Colosse, "Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 9:11-17). Christ's resurrection was the final great proof that he is God's anointed (Acts 2:22-36). He ascended to heaven and took his rightful seat on the throne of power.

In taking away the law at the cross, Jesus tore down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, or man and man. The blood shed on that cross also gave man the means of overcoming sin, which for centuries had stood as a barrier between man and God (Ephesians 2:11-16; Hebrews 9:22). The Gentiles, as well as the Jews, were granted repentance unto life (Acts 10:34-36, 40, 42-43; 11:15-18). In fact, it can be said that all are one in the church, or in Christ, since it is his body (Ephesians 2:16; Galatians 3:26-28). Thus, peace can be preached to all (Ephesians 2:17-19). We are built upon the foundation of Christ, and are a temple in which God can live (2:20-22; 1 Corinthians 3:9,16). Man had walked with God in the Garden of Eden. Now, in Christ, we can be in fellowship with him again through the blood of his glorious Son (1 John 1:3-7).

Section 2
First Steps, Developing Faith In God's Son

Lesson 7

The Son of God

The Word Was God

Today, someone's son is simply his male descendant or one he has adopted to fill that role. However, Jesus was called the Son of God for another reason. To be sure, He was God's Son by birth (Luke 1:34-35), but the title "Son of God" most often refers to Jesus being of the same nature as God. When Jesus called God His Father, the Jews understood that he was claiming to be God (John 5:17-24).

John, in his account of the life of Christ, tells us Jesus was God come down to earth. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3). John says that the Word was with God at the beginning and was God. That all things were made by Him is proof that He is God, since God was the creator (Genesis 1:1; compare Colossians 1:16-17). This Word, that was God, John plainly shows to be Jesus (John 1:14).

Jesus' Deity Was Confirmed by the Father

On two separate occasions, the Father testified to Jesus' Sonship. After Jesus' baptism, "a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" On the mount of transfiguration, after Peter suggested making tabernacles for Moses, Elijah and Jesus, "a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" (Matthew 3:13-17; 17:1-5). As we have already seen, the Jews clearly understood that Jesus being the Son of God made him partake of God's very nature, in other words, the Father was saying Jesus is God!

The Hebrew writer also shows us the Father thought of Jesus as God. "Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). Vine indicates this means that Jesus was the shining forth of God's glory and the very image of His substance. In verse 8, the Hebrew writer quotes Psalm 45:6-7, and says that God, the Father, called Jesus God.

John the Baptist and Paul Attest to His Sonship

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, God (John 1:23; Isaiah 40:3). Jesus understood Malachi 3:1 to refer to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7-10). By looking back to Malachi 2:17, we can see that this Lord, whose way he was to prepare, was the God of Judgment. By inspiration, John tells us whose way he came to prepare (John 1:29-34). It was Jesus, the Son of God.

Paul also believed Jesus was God come down to earth. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-7). Expressed in other words, Paul is saying Jesus existed as the very essence of God, just as He took on the very essence of a servant by becoming a man (Hebrews 2:9-18).

Jesus' Miracles Prove He Was Divine

As proof of His divinity, Jesus cited His miracles (John 5:36). Nicodemus had seen those miracles and knew they were proof Jesus was from God (John 3:2). John says the reason he made record of those miracles our Lord performed was that we might believe Jesus was God's Son (John 20:30-31). Jesus was able to turn water into wine (John 2:1-11), heal the son of a nobleman (John 4:43-54), and heal a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years (John 5:1-9) just prior to citing His miracles as proof of His being God.

Later, He raised the son of the widow of Nain, Jairus' daughter and Lazarus from the dead (Luke 7:11-17; 8:40-56; John 11:1-46). The Pharisees recognized a special power was behind Jesus' miracles, so they attributed them to the power of the devil (Matthew 12:22-30). Jesus showed them that Satan would be working against himself if he cast out devils. Therefore, the power had to be from God.

Jesus, the Fulfillment of Prophecy

As another proof of His divinity, Jesus turned to the prophecy of Old Testament scripture (John 5:39). Our Lord was born of a virgin, thus fulfilling the great prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:18-25). He was also uniquely the seed of woman and, as such, completed God's promise in dealing a mortal wound to the head of Satan by dying on Calvary and being raised the third day (Genesis 3:15). As Micah foretold, our Lord was born in the city of David, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1). Through Him, as the seed, singular, of Abraham, God blessed the heathen nations by giving them a means of salvation (Genesis 22:15-18; Galatians 3:8, 14, 16). Numerous other events in His life, such as the betrayal by Judas and the sayings on the cross, were prophecies plainly completed in the life of our magnificent Lord.

The Empty Tomb's Powerful Testimony

In his great Pentecost sermon, Peter stated, without successful contradiction from anyone, that God had raised Jesus from the dead. The religious leaders of the Jews would have liked nothing better than to have thrown a lifeless body down at the apostle's feet, thereby crushing the fledgling church before it got started, but they could not! In fact, they had paid the guards to testify they saw Jesus' followers take the body while they slept! The absurdity of that position is best demonstrated in the obedient response of some three thousand souls to Peter's declaration that Jesus had been made both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:14-41; Matthew 28:11-15).

Paul, in writing to the church at Rome, said he had been separated by God to preach the

gospel of Christ. Among other things, he proclaimed Jesus as the son of David, just as had been promised by the prophets. "And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:1-4). The witnesses to the Lord's resurrection are so numerous as to make it an irrefutable and well established fact in any court of law. What other incident has ever had over five hundred confident witnesses, among whom was at least one who violently opposed the preaching of Jesus as the Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-11)? Truly, Jesus is the Son of God, as the empty tomb shouts even today!

Lesson 8

Jesus: The Ultimate Fulfillment of Prophecy

A simple study of Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy will lead one to a deeper faith in the Bible. The passages discussed below are by no means exhaustive.

The Birth of the Christ

Prophetic accounts of the birth of the Christ are so detailed as to leave no doubt God was behind the writing. In Genesis 3, God told the serpent, “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel” (verse 15). A partial explanation of how this could be is found in the writings of the prophet Isaiah. He wrote, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (7:14). A child born of a virgin would be uniquely the seed of woman. As the angel of the Lord told Joseph, Jesus was that child. “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18-25).

God also told man the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The hand of God was obviously involved in Jesus being born in prophesied city. Mary and Joseph were residents of the city of Nazareth, but Caesar Augustus decreed that all the world should be registered. Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem “because he was of the house and lineage of David” and Jesus was born while they were there (Luke 1:26; 2:1-7).

The promised Messiah was to be of the tribe of Judah and the royal line of David (Genesis 49:10; Jeremiah 23:5). God’s prophets likewise said He would be a descendant of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 12:1-3; 21:12; 22:18). Matthew’s record of the genealogy of Jesus clearly shows He was the son of Abraham, Isaac and David, while Luke demonstrates Jesus was of the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). The visit by the wise men, which seems so remarkable, was foretold in the Psalms (72:10-15; Matthew 2:1-11). Sadly, God even knew Herod would kill numbers of children in a desperate attempt to eliminate the One who would sit on the throne (Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:16-18). Even the time baby Jesus spent in Egypt and the return was foreseen by the Almighty (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:12-15).

The Forerunner of the Christ

God’s spokesmen also looked forward to the ministry of John the Baptist. Malachi reported the Lord would send a messenger before Him to prepare the way. He was to be like Elijah the prophet (3:1; 4:5). Isaiah said he would be like the voice of one crying in the wilderness (40:3). Gabriel told Zacharias that Elizabeth would bear a son who would fulfill that prophecy. Jesus let the disciples know John was the Elijah who was to come (Luke 1:17; Matthew 17:10-13).

The Ministry of the Christ

The nature of Jesus' ministry was described by Isaiah when he told God's people the Messiah would cause the blind to see, deaf to hear, the lame walk and the dumb to speak (35:5-6). Obviously, the fulfillment of this came throughout the ministry of our Lord (Matthew 9:27-33; 12:22-23; 15:30; John 5:1-9; 9:1-7). In fact, when men came from John to ascertain whether Jesus was the promised Messiah, He told them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:1-6). Clearly, these things were a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that He would be compassionate, like a shepherd (40:11). The Psalmist also said Jesus would teach with parables (78:1-2; Matthew 13:34-35).

No one could successfully challenge Jesus' zeal for God's house (Psalm 69:9). His zeal was demonstrated in His cleansing the temple (John 2:13-16). The rejection by Jesus' brothers seems to have been in view in Psalm 69:4-8. There can be no doubt that they did reject Him (John 7:5). However, the Psalmist may have foreseen the rejection by the Jews, who also could be described as the Lord's brethren (John 1:11; 15:22-25). His rejection by the rulers of the Jews was also known in advance (Psalm 118:22-23; Isaiah 53:1; John 7:45-48; Matthew 21:23-46; John 12:37-43). They should have seen God's powerful "arm" in the miracles of Jesus, but they chose to attribute those works to the power of the devil (Matthew 12:22-30).

The Christ in Isaiah 53

In speaking of Isaiah 53:2, Shelly wrote on page 26, "The fact that Jesus was a rather rustic person from an unpromising corner of the land who lacked any royal 'comeliness' or carnal 'beauty' did contribute to prejudice against him and his ultimate rejection by many. (Cf. John 1:46-47)." Jesus also completely fulfilled the words of Isaiah 53:3. He was looked down upon and held in contempt, which is the meaning of the word "despised," even by the very people He came to save. He experienced all forms of sorrow, such as: the death of a close friend, betrayal, desertion by His closest companions, and, at last, separation from God (John 1:11; Hebrews 12:3; 2:9-10; 5:8-9; John 11:1-38; Matthew 26:47-50, 56; 27:46). The ministry of Christ was filled with occasions when He dealt with the illnesses and diseases of the people, or "griefs." No doubt He also knew a great deal of pain and mental stress from constantly coping with the problems of the people while realizing they were not turning to Him for the most important help of all!

Lesson 9

Prophecies Surrounding Jesus' Death, Burial & Resurrection

Perhaps the most impressive prophecies concerning the Messiah are those specifically involving His death, burial and resurrection. Many of these are quite detailed, yet Jesus' life fully fulfilled them!

His triumphant entry into Jerusalem riding on the foal of a donkey was foretold in Zechariah 9:9 and fulfilled in Matthew 21:1-7. That one of His own disciples would betray Him was foretold in the Psalms (41:9; 55:12-14) and clearly fulfilled by the actions of Judas (John 13:18-30). Additionally, the prophet named the price which would be paid for Jesus and the ultimate use of that price (Zechariah 11:12-13; Note: Jeremiah was sometimes used to describe his work along with the others that followed). Not only did Judas receive the correct amount, but he also threw it down in the temple and the Jewish leaders used it to purchase a potter's field in which the poor could be buried (Matthew 26:14-15; 27:3-10). Zechariah also knew Christ would be forsaken by His disciples (13:7), which, unfortunately, they did (Matthew 26:31, 55-56).

God also knew, and foretold well in advance, that His Anointed would be accused by false witnesses (Psalm 27:12; 35:11). The chief priests and elders examined many false witnesses looking for a basis on which to accuse God's Son (Matthew 26:57-62; Mark 14:55-61). Further, there can be no doubt that the trials Jesus went through were a complete mockery of justice. The Jewish trial, alone, violated many of the specific rules for trials among the Jews, such as, not being conducted at night. So Isaiah was right when he foretold that Christ's "judgment" would be taken away (53:8).

It is hard to imagine one being on trial for his life without presenting a defense, but this was exactly what the prophet said would happen (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus made no defense at His trial, but stood like a lamb dumb before its shearers. Jesus had already proven who He was by His actions, so said nothing in His own defense at the trials (Matthew 26:57-68; 27:11-14; Luke 23:1-11; John 19:1-13).

The Almighty foretold the scourging which would precede the death of Christ, as well as the fact that some would spit in His face (Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 26:67-68; 27:26-31). God even revealed, through the Psalmist, that the Messiah would die by crucifixion (22:16)! Likewise, the Father knew the soldiers would gamble for Jesus' clothing (Psalm 22:18; John 19:23-24). The singer of Israel knew, through inspiration, the soldiers would offer Jesus gall and vinegar (Psalm 69:21; Matthew 27:34; John 19:28-29). The Omniscient One further told of the cruel mocking Jesus would endure, as well as the fact that His side would be pierced, in lieu of any of His bones being broken (Psalm 22:6-11; 34:20; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 27:39-44; John 19:33-37).

Our Lord's body should have been placed in a plot among the wicked since He was crucified between two thieves and was accused of blasphemy, which called for a disgraceful

burial. However, the Romans let Joseph of Arimathea have the body and place it in his newly hewn tomb. Man may have intended to bury His body with the wicked, but God would not allow it because of His innocence (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60; John 19:38-42).

God also revealed that Jesus would be raised from the dead! “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Psalm 16:10). Such was the means of His seeing His seed after being put to death and His body being buried (Isaiah 53:10). Clearly, God was saying the Christ would see children come out of His sacrifice on the cross (Hebrews 2:10-13; 1 Peter 1:22-23; 3:18-22). Isaiah also proclaimed the success Jesus would achieve in His work of bringing many sons to God through the justification which is found in His sacrifice. The entire book of Acts relates the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy (Isaiah 53:11; Acts 2:38-41; 4:4, 14; 6:1, 7; 8:4-8; etc.).

God’s Messiah was to ascend from the earth, according to Psalm 68:18. If the apostles had have been more familiar with the words of the Psalms, they might not have been so amazed when He was taken up from them (Acts 1:9-11).

It is difficult to grasp the power behind so many fulfilled prophecies concerning the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The odds of so many things specific prophecies coming true is beyond the imagination. For instance, the odds of tossing the 26 letters of the English alphabet into the air and them landing in order are one in 500 million, million, million times! Clearly, there are more than 26 specific prophetic utterances which were fulfilled by Jesus. Their fulfillment in so many specific details gives me every reason to trust the Bible today!

Lesson 10

Jesus' Powerful Blood!

Sin Stands Between Man and God

A careful reading of Genesis 3 leaves one with the distinct impression that man and woman, prior to violating God's will, were able to walk with God. Apparently, God came during the cool of the evening to walk with man in the Garden of Eden. Unfortunately, sin spoiled that relationship. Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden and that close fellowship with God was lost.

However, God longed for man to once again be in a close relationship with him. In fact, even before forming the world, God formulated a plan for restoring lost mankind in case he should fall into the snare of sin (Ephesians 1:7-11; 3:8-13). To achieve his purpose, the Almighty had to find a way to rid man of sin, since it is sin that separates between man and God. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2). Every man or woman, who has reached an age where they can discern right from wrong, must admit they are guilty of sin (Romans 3:10, 23). Sin's paycheck is eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23).

Life Is In Christ's Blood

Medical science has caused us to realize the life of our physical bodies is in the blood. Of course, God knew that all along, as he had Moses write in Leviticus 17:11, 14. Physical blood is needed to sustain physical lives. That is why we have blood banks and urge individuals to give blood during blood drives. Someone may need surgery or have an accident which will require them to have a blood transfusion to prevent the loss of life.

In a similar way, the blood of Jesus is the life blood of the spiritual body, or church. Paul told the Ephesian elders, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). When we remember, "according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22), we come to realize our need for blood to be cleansed from sin and restored to a full fellowship with the Father, or spiritual life. Not just any blood would satisfy sin's demand. It had to be the blood of an innocent one, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:29).

Christ Left His Blood in His Death

The Savior shed His precious blood in His death on the cross of Calvary (John 19:33-34). It was because He was already dead that the soldier pierced His side with a spear and blood came out mixed with water. Since the blood of God's innocent Lamb is absolutely essential to having our sins remitted, we must ask how we can reach His death where He left His blood?

Scripture only describes one means of reaching that death. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). In writing to the Colossian brethren, Paul again explained that we are buried with Christ in the watery grave of baptism. He also indicated baptism was the means of our being circumcised by God. The Almighty cuts away the old body of sins and makes us alive with Christ (Colossians 2:11-13).

Christ's Blood Is the Means of Restoring God's Friendship

In Romans 5:9-11, we are said to be reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus. Thayer says the word reconciled means, "to be restored to the favor of God." Hence, some have said the word means to make friends again (compare Colossians 1:20-22). Two proofs are offered by Paul to show we are reconciled to God. First, God does not impute to us our sins. Second, he has given us the message of reconciliation to carry to the world (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Such reconciliation is conditioned upon our being in Christ (verse 17). We must be baptized to be in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27). Further, we must walk in God's way if we are to enjoy the constant cleansing his blood affords (1 John 1:7-9).

Christ's Blood Can Give One Remission from Sin

Christ's blood is also able to release us from the bondage of sin, or give us remission. Jesus told his disciples about his blood while he was instituting the Lord's supper. "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). In Christ's parting charge to his disciples, he said, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47). Significantly, in Acts 1:4, Luke reports that Jesus commanded them to wait in Jerusalem until the promise of the Holy Spirit was received.

They were in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, when they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in languages they had never studied. That led to a crowd gathering asking questions about how such a thing could occur, which, in turn, gave Peter and the others the opening to tell them about the resurrected Lord. Once the assembled multitude realized what they had done, they asked the question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1-38). So, the blood of Jesus which was shed for the remission of sins is available to anyone who meets the condition of repenting and being baptized by Christ's authority.

Christ's Blood Is the Ransom for Man's Release from Sin

Paul told the brethren from Ephesus that redemption is through Christ's blood. (Ephesians 1:7; also Colossians 1:14) Redemption describes one's release through the payment of a ransom price. That price was paid for people living empty lives of sin. Our freedom was not

obtained through the hoarding up of perishable items, but with the highly valued blood of God's own Son (1 Peter 1:18-19). Again, we find redemption to be conditioned upon our calling out to God for a clean conscience through baptism (1 Peter 3:21).

John describes Jesus as the propitiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). It was God who sent Him to play that role (4:10). God, being just, had to require an appeasing sacrifice to enable him to look favorably upon man (compare Isaiah 59:1-2). We are able to find such favor in Jesus, through faith (Romans 3:25). Such faith is produced by hearing God's word and obeying it in baptism (Romans 10:17; Galatians 3:26-27).

Christ's Blood Gives Us Boldness to Approach God's Throne

Christ's blood is also able to cleanse us from sin's defilements (Revelation 7:14; 1:5). Saul learned that he must not wait but arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Baptism is clearly our means of calling on the Lord's name to be saved (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13-15).

When we recall that sin is the barrier between us and God, we come to recognize the necessity of being cleansed from sin before we try to approach God's throne. Christ's blood gives us boldness to approach God's throne because it removes the terrible stain of sin (Hebrews 10:19-20). Through Christ, we even have the assurance that we are on the way to heaven (John 14:1-6). Like all the other blessings the blood gives us, this one is conditional. We must do the will of the Father in heaven to have the hope of entering into the eternal city (Matthew 7:21). Of course, that will requires us to believe and be baptized to be saved from sin (Mark 16:16).

Thank God for the blood of Christ and all the blessings it supplies!

Section 3
The Formative Years, Beginning to Live Like Christ

Lesson 11

I Need to Commune with God

A good friend of mine once told me of an experience which changed his life. It seems he had played an important role in organizing an annual youth rally. Each year, the rally continued to grow in attendance. Then, one year he got so wrapped up in the details that he forgot to pray. The day of the youth rally arrived and the crowds were far below expectations. His first instinct was to blame God, but then he remembered he had not included Him in the plans. He immediately went into a room alone, got down on his knees and asked God to forgive him. He then asked God to bring about whatever good possible within the group assembled. My friend told me that was the best youth rally of all. The young people seemed to get deeper into the studies conducted and numbers of them responded to the Lord's invitation. He said from then on he tried to always begin planning by going to God in prayer!

The lesson learned from that youth rally is one I need to remember every day of my life. It is important for me to take time to pray. Yet, as I hurry from place to place trying to fulfill all of my commitments, there just does not seem to be a convenient time to pray. Daniel's solution was to set aside 3 specific times each day for prayer. In fact, so dedicated was Daniel to that routine that his enemies tried to use it to destroy him. They got the king to say no one could petition any god or man other than King Darius for 30 days. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days" (Daniel 6:10). For Daniel, prayer was a part of his daily routine. I find it much easier to pray when I make prayer a habit, in terms of setting aside special times for prayer.

When the crowds kept our Lord busy from sunrise to dark, He got up long before daylight so He could commune with His Father (Mark 1:35). Rather than saying I need to develop a more meaningful prayer life someday, I need to plan a time right now and keep my appointment with my loving, heavenly Father!

Besides setting aside specific times to pray, it would be good for me to pray in a private place. As we have already seen, Jesus got up long before daylight, "departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed" (Mark 1:35). On another occasion, Matthew tells us, "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on a mountain by Himself to pray. And when evening had come, He was alone there" (14:23). During the sermon on the mount, the Lord instructed,

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly (Matthew 6:5-6).

Public prayer certainly has its place (1 Timothy 2:8). However, it can be even more important to recognize the value of private prayer. Jesus wanted the 3 disciples to watch with him while He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemene. He wanted them near, yet, He wanted to be alone. Such circumstances allow me to talk with my Creator and Father about the most personal things. It gives me an opportunity to pour out all of the doubts and fears, as well as private sins, which may be hindering me from doing my utmost in service to Him!

Setting aside the time and place for prayer will prove ineffective if I do not believe God will provide an answer. In a reassuring song, the singer of Israel said, "The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing" (Psalm 34:10). Jesus promised His disciples, "And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24). James stressed the importance of belief in his epistle to the scattered first century Christians.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:5-8).

Of course, I have to pray for the right reason. James later wrote, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (4:3).

During a class discussion on prayer, two other useful suggestions were put forth by class members. First, it is good to make specific requests in our prayers to God. Paul requested that the Colossian church ask God to give him an opportunity to preach the gospel. He also wanted them to ask God to speak in the right way, walk wisely around unbelievers and use his time well (4:3-5). Second, it is good to develop a prayer list. Children are particularly good at this in the prayers before bed. It is not unusual for them to include every family member they can think of as well as pets and dolls! After reading Paul's letters to various churches and individuals, it appears he too had a list (Romans 1:8-10; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:15-16; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-4; Philemon 1:4).

Like most other people, no matter where I have travelled, I have always wanted to stay in touch with those I love. For the Christian, that certainly ought to include our Father. So, I need to set aside times to pray. It may be helpful to do a portion of my praying in a private place so I can talk openly to God. Too, I must believe He will hear and answer or my prayers will be ineffective. To be even more effective, it is good to make specific requests of God and develop a list of people, and things, you want to be sure to take before the throne.

Lesson 12

Letting God Speak To Me Through His Word

My good friend, John Klimko, does a lot of counseling. He has observed a number of the troubled people he sees have similar problems. Many of them have begun to think they can resolve any problem without the assistance of the Almighty. Too, they have concluded the Bible is out of date, which has led them to regard its teachings as nothing more than archaic nonsense.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible contains insight into the mind and heart of the Creator. While man may have to adjust his thinking as new discoveries are made, God knows His creation. Further, God, who loved man enough to send His own Son to die for him, has "given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). So, Solomon said, "A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel" (Proverbs 1:5). He also wrote, "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning" (Proverbs 9:9).

The importance of knowing and obeying God's will is vividly portrayed in Abraham's conversation with the rich man in Luke 16. After realizing there was nothing that could be done to ease his own torment, the rich man asked that Lazarus be sent back to earth to warn his five brothers lest they join him in torment. Abraham told him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them". The rich man evidently did not think they would pay attention to the written word, but did think they would heed the words of one returned from the dead. Abraham said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:19-31, esp. 27-31). Clearly, the word of God is vital to those who would live in heaven!

The Bible is vital because it can teach me to fear God. The Deliverer instructed Moses to, "Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deuteronomy 4:10). Similar thoughts were conveyed by God as He was issuing instructions concerning the tithe of the grain produced in their fields. God also instructed future kings of Israel to make a copy of the law, read it and learn to fear. The people were, likewise, to participate in a reading of the law every 7 years so they and their children could learn to fear the Lord and keep His commandments (14:22-23; 17:14-20; 31:9-13). No wonder the Psalmist said, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (34:11).

I need to learn the word of God because, "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, And the people whom He has chosen as His own inheritance" (Psalm 33:11-12). "Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed; Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause. Show me Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your path" (Psalm 25:3-4). David saw learning the Lord's will as being closely tied to protection from his enemies (27:11).

The longest psalm is dedicated to meditations on the excellencies of the word of God. In fact, 8 verses were written for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet! Repeatedly, Israel's singer referred to his need and desire to learn the will of God (Psalm 119:7, 12, 26, 33, 64, 71, 108). Moses let Israel know the Lord had commanded him, "to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess" (Deuteronomy 4:14). When Israel returned from captivity, one of her most powerful leaders was Ezra. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

Ultimately, I must let God speak to me through His word so I can learn what is pleasing in His sight. Paul's greatest desire for the Christians he taught was that they could grow in knowledge of the will of the Father. He told the Colossians,

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy (Colossians 1:9-11).

Knowing God's will is essential to those who would abide with Him eternally since, "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8). In his own ministry, Paul asked, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). To please God, I must have faith, which only comes through hearing the word of God and walking in His commandments (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:1).

All Christians should set pleasing God as their primary purpose in life. That means focusing attention on the will of our Commander and not the many distractions of the world (2 Timothy 2:4). Like our Lord, our purpose needs to be always doing those things that are pleasing to the Father (John 8:29), which means we must let Him direct us through His word. "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:9).

Lesson 13

I Must Be a Servant

The story is told of a Texas rancher who bought ten adjoining ranches and tied them together to form one giant spread. A friend asked him the name of his new mega-ranch. The rancher had wanted to keep part of each of the ten names of the ranches he had acquired as a reminder to everyone of the clout he had shown through his purchase. So he named his new ranch enterprise The Circle Q - Rambling Brook - Lazy H - Double Fork - Sleepy T - Triple O - Bent Arrow - Flying J - Rocking K - Crooked Creek Ranch. His friend, notably impressed, said, "Wow! I bet you have a lot of cattle!" "Not really," explained the rancher. "Not that many survive the branding" (copied from a church bulletin).

Unfortunately, like the farmer in this story, our society seems to have made the advancement and glorification of self its primary goal. The men and women who are set forth as role models are the ones who have "pulled themselves up by the bootstraps." In such a climate, a servant is someone who works for you, not a role to be desired.

Our Lord saw things in a wholly different light, as can be seen in an incident recorded in John 13. Jesus knew who He was, from whence He came and where He was going (verse 3). Despite the fact that He knew He was God, our Savior could aptly be described as the ever loving servant. John describes Jesus by saying, "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." The beloved apostle goes on to report that Jesus arose from supper, took off His outer garments, girded himself with a towel and started to wash the disciples feet in a basin of water (verses 1, 4-5).

The Son of God also recognized the importance of submission. When He came to Peter, a most interesting exchange occurred. Peter asked, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Tone of voice is not recorded in scripture. However, the emphasis was likely on **You** and **my**. It is hard to imagine the shock he must have felt when the very Son of God stooped to wash his feet. After all, such tasks were performed by servants, which, in man's mind, was not the role of the Savior.

Jesus responded by saying, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter emphatically stated, as is indicated by the use of a double negative in the original, "You shall never wash my feet!" The Lord's answer to that comment is surprising in its strength. He said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." In short, if Peter could not yield to the Lord, he could have no part with the Lord! Peter instantly said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" The Lord let him know that only the feet were necessary. After all, the feet would have gotten dusty as they walked along dirt paths (John 13:6-10a).

This demonstration centered around external, physical, cleansing. Of course, the Lord knew there was a cleansing other than physical, which is clearly demonstrated in His next statement. "And you are clean, but not all of you." John added an inspired explanation. "For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, 'You are not all clean'" (John 13:10b-11).

Remember, the apostle had already written, "And supper being ended, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him" (verse 2). Later, Jesus would go into a more detailed explanation of the things which were about to take place. He knew Judas would betray Him. In fact, it had been prophesied long before the Lord ever came to earth! These prophetic words were specifically designed to demonstrate that He was the Son of God (verses 18-30).

For the rest of the apostles, though, there was another important lesson. They needed to recognize the importance of following the Lord in humble service. As Jesus began to explain His actions, He acknowledged He was both their Teacher and Lord. He wanted the apostles to see what the Lord had done. He had taken the servant's role and washed their feet. Now, Jesus wanted His followers to take the servant's role as well. "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (John 13:12-17).

Clearly, the Lord wants His followers to be servants. That Paul understood this is clearly seen in his writings to the various churches. He described himself to the Romans by saying, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ..." (Romans 1:1; Titus 1:1). He apparently taught Timothy to be a servant and described both of them in Philippians 1:1 by saying, "Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ...." He also taught the Galatians to be ready to serve, even telling them, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:9-10).

Opportunities to serve can come in many different forms. When Jesus told the parable of the judgment, He described the importance of feeding the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, taking in strangers, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and visiting those in prison (Matthew 25:31-46). Paul described his own actions in Ephesus by saying,

I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:33-35).

Of course, service of others ultimately led Jesus to the cross. It caused Paul not to value his own life more than the opportunity to preach the gospel (Philippians 2:5-8; Acts 20:24; 21:13).

Every Christian's goal should be to serve, like Jesus served. Each should strive to follow the Master in looking out for, and taking care of, the needs of others. No task should be too menial for one following the Lord who took up the towel and basin!

Lesson 14

I Must Love

In many areas of life, children teach through their simple examples. An author, unknown to me, wrote the story of her little girl who showed the love of a true friend.

One day my young daughter was late coming home from school. I was both annoyed and worried. When she came through the door, I demanded in my upset tone that she explain why she was late.

She said, "Mommy, I was walking home with Katy and halfway home, Katy dropped her doll and it broke into lots of pieces."

"Oh Honey," I replied, "you were late because you helped Katy pick up the pieces of her doll to put them back together?"

In her young and innocent voice, my daughter said, "No, Mommy, I didn't know how to fix the doll. I just stayed to help Katy cry."

I believe her actions demonstrate precisely the type of love Jesus commanded His disciples to have for one another.

Immediately after they left the place where Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He explained that He would soon be glorified and go to a place they could not come. So, He told them, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:31-35). Peter, who was present to hear the Lord's words, later wrote, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Peter 4:8).

To Peter, there was no doubt that love had to come first. Paul saw it as an essential ingredient in the Christian's service.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

He went on to conclude, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). So, at the end of the letter, Paul urged the Corinthian brethren, by saying, "Let all that you do be done with love" (16:14).

For love to truly be effective within the family of God, it must be practiced to the fullest. Remember, Peter said, "have fervent love for one another." Vine says the word translated "fervent" means strained or stretched out. Imagine one of your children fell in a river and was

floating downstream toward a waterfall. As you run down the bank, you see a limb extending out over the river. You climb out on the limb and reach down, only to discover you cannot quite reach out far enough. I believe you would stretch and strain to reach that child before it went over the precipice. That is the idea I find in Peter's command.

Paul joined Peter in stressing the importance of love in Christian relations. He wrote, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Galatians 5:13-15). In Hebrews 12:12-15, Christians are pictured as running a race, like a marathon, through enemy territory. They are urged to support each other and make special provision for those who are weak. Further, they are urged to be sure no bitterness arises that could cause people to be troubled and defiled. After similar admonitions, Paul writes, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:1-4). John went so far as to say the brother who had what another brother needed and withheld it did not have the love of God in him (1 John 3:16-19)!

When love is exercised completely among brethren, they will discover that it covers a multitude of sins, as Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:8. This is accomplished in several ways. For instance, forgiveness is one of the things Christians do because of what the Lord did on Calvary. "Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Colossians 3:12-13).

When one really loves, it will result in a readiness to forgive like Jesus displayed when He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Of course, they still had to repent, but Jesus had already exhibited a willingness to forgive before they acknowledged their sins and turned away from them by putting Him on in baptism (Acts 2:22-23, 36-38). After all, love "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). It will cause brothers to go in search of the straying brother in hope of getting him to come home to God in repentance (James 5:19-20). Those who are spiritual will humbly seek to restore them and will gladly help to bear their burdens (Galatians 6:1-2). This is especially true of the shepherds who watch over the flock, which is the reason Christians ought to obey them. "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

There can be no doubt, love is an important element of the successful Christian's life. He sees it as the distinguishing characteristic which the Lord wanted His followers to display before a watching world. A true disciple will see the need to participate in it fully so both he and his brethren can complete the journey to the heavenly home!

Lesson 15

I Must Be A Teacher

Most parents anxiously watch, with baby book in hand, to see that their children do everything on time. When should a child first roll over, crawl, take his first steps and speak his first word? At what point should he go on to eat cereal, mashed vegetables and meat? The list is endless. If they are a few days early, parents rejoice and brag. If a few days late, they make a speedy appointment with the doctor.

The writer of Hebrews gives a brief description of the way young Christians ought to develop. He saw the full grown Christian as one who could teach others God's truth. He said it began with going from drinking milk, representative of the simpler parts of the truth, to feeding on the meat of God's word, or the more complex teachings. Of course, the Hebrew brethren had failed to go on to meat eating and were unprepared to teach! "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (5:12).

Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who would "hunger and thirst after righteousness." He said they would be filled (Matthew 5:6). During the temptations in the wilderness, the Lord told Satan, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). Feeding the spiritual man is vital, since the physical man is dying! 2 Corinthians 4:16 "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Unfortunately, some Christians never grow up and are unable to appreciate the "meat and potatoes" of God's word.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Such people tend to follow men instead of the Savior. They seek to satisfy their own desires and fail to seek the will of the Lord.

Coming to a fuller knowledge of God's will for my life means I must grow through experience. "For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe" (Hebrews 5:13). The word translated "unskilled" can be defined as having no experience. While I might say, "Well, I have been a part of the body of Christ for over 30 years. How dare you say I have no experience!" Unfortunately, there is a difference between having 30 years of experience and 1 year of experience 30 times. If I never learn from my mistakes and do not overcome the obstacles before me, I cannot grow in knowledge. No wonder Paul told Timothy, his son in the gospel, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who

does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." He also explained, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17).

The mature believer will be one who has exercised discernment in his life's choices. "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). If I want to grow, I must learn to "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The only way to learn how to use scripture to determine what is right or wrong for me to practice is to consider a matter in light of God's word and let His will guide my choices.

That was precisely what the Hebrew brethren had failed to do. The author of the book which bore their name wanted to go into a detailed discussion of Melchizedek's priesthood and its foreshadowing of the role of Christ, but they had been dull, sluggish or lazy (Hebrews 5:5-11). Believers who would positively impact those around them must be diligent seekers ready to teach others by answering their questions with the Biblical reasons for their hopes. Peter instructed the scattered believers by saying, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed" (1 Peter 3:15-16).

I am not experiencing proper growth as a child of God if I have not gone on to a knowledge of the deeper teachings of His word. If I cannot tell others the reason I have hope of going home to heaven, then I am stunted in my growth. In short, I need to immerse myself in the word of God, ask God to help me have wisdom to apply it to my life and then show others what I have learned through the experience.

Lesson 16

I Must Adjust My Thinking

In *A 3rd Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen repeated a story they had found in "The Sower's Seeds."

Thomas Edison's laboratory was virtually destroyed by fire in December, 1914. Although the damage exceeded \$2 million, the buildings were only insured for \$238,000 because they were made of concrete and thought to be fireproof. Much of Edison's life's work went up in spectacular flames that December night.

At the height of the fire, Edison's 24-year old son, Charles, frantically searched for his father among the smoke and debris. He finally found him, calmly watching the scene, his face glowing in the reflection, his white hair blowing in the wind.

"My heart ached for him," said Charles. "He was 67 - no longer a young man - and everything was going up in flames. When he saw me, he shouted, "Charles, where's your mother?" When I told him I didn't know, he said, "Find her. Bring her here. She will never see anything like this as long as she lives."

The next morning, Edison looked at the ruins and said, "There is great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew."

Three weeks after the fire, Edison managed to deliver his first phonograph.

I must confess, the more I read about Thomas Edison, the more I am impressed with the attitude he had. Unfortunately, not everyone has the same attitude. Many people are being held back by faulty thinking. Thankfully, for those who will listen, God has the answer.

Just about every parent has seen a child struggle with some new task until they finally say, "I can't." It is then that the thoughtful parent will come to the rescue with words of encouragement and, perhaps, some further directions. Despite realizing a little encouragement and further directions might help, many adults fall into the same trap. "I can't" is more than the expression of a frustrated child.

A rich young ruler came to Jesus asking, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The Lord let him know he should keep the commandments God gave to Moses. The ruler said he had kept all of those from the time of his youth. Then, Jesus replied, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." The ruler turned away sorrowful, because he had many possessions.

Jesus then turned to His disciples, saying, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." This led the disciples to wonder who would be able to be saved. Jesus responded by saying, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:18-27). So, I can if I rely on God. That seems to be precisely what Paul was telling the Philippian brethren when he said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens

me" (4:13).

Others, especially in times of trial, will say, "Nobody loves me." This is an especially common problem among the children, whether young or grown, of divorce. They sense it is their fault their parents have separated. They painfully feel completely unloved. God answered their cry on the cross of Calvary. Jesus told Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16-17).

Interestingly, God's love was shown to man when he was the most unlovable to God. After all, man's sin separates him from the Almighty (Isaiah 59:1-2). As Peter puts it, "But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). Sin's final reward is eternal separation in the second death (Romans 6:23). "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:8-9).

Some, suffering through the loss of a life long mate or the agony of divorce, are heard to say, "I am all alone." However, God responds by saying, "Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5-6). In unknown circumstances, David penned the reassuring words of the twenty-third Psalm. They should be a constant reminder that the one who makes the Lord his shepherd will never be alone, though surrounded by enemies!

One of the reasons certain people do not obey the gospel is they feel, "I am unforgivable." Though Paul may have had such a sense at one time, he penned God's answer to such faulty thinking. "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!" He went on to say, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 7:24-8:1). Of course, to continue to know the blessings of God's forgiveness, I must walk in the light and be ready to confess whatever sins I may commit. If I do, God will cause Jesus' blood to continually cleanse me and He will forgive me of my sins (1 John 1:7-9).

Clearly, God does not want us to have the defeated attitude of many in the world around us. He has given clear answers to all of man's faulty thinking so we may go on in hope!

Lesson 17

I Must Be Forgiving

One of the most difficult things for most of us to do is to forgive some wrong, whether real or imagined, committed against us. In my reading, I discovered a "formula for forgiveness" which I have found very helpful. It is taken from Paul's great statement in Philippians 3:12-14.

The first thing I need to do is recognize my own vulnerability to sin. Paul said it this way, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected..." (Philippians 3:12). In the sermon on the mount, Jesus gave his followers a model of prayer in which He taught them to ask God to, "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:11-12). Since I believe God inspired every word of scripture, it seems significant that Jesus would use the word "and," a coordinating conjunction, between asking for "daily bread" and asking for forgiveness. It seems He may have seen these two needs as occurring with roughly the same frequency.

Immediately after giving the model prayer, the Lord went on to state, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). Clearly, our Lord saw each of us would violate (sin) the will of God and need to be cleansed. That the apostle Paul recognized the truthfulness of this within his own life is clear from his description of his former state. "Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." Thankfully, he went on to state, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:13, 15).

After seeing my own shortcomings, I need to recognize the power in forgetting. As Paul put it, "forgetting those things which are behind..." (Philippians 3:13). Joseph may be the greatest example, outside of Jesus, of this in all of scripture. After all his brothers had done to him, the governor of Egypt refused to retaliate. Instead, he told his brothers, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

When Paul gave his inspired description of love, he said, "...[love] keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:5 N. I. V.). Peter effectively joined him when he wrote, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Peter 4:8). Ultimately, Christians realize vengeance and justice will be dispensed by the Father.

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; If he thirsts, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19-21).

Forgiveness is brought to completion when I set aside personal, fleshly, feelings and make pleasing Christ my goal. As Paul put it, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Joseph was guided by the thought that his every action reflected on his family, whether on earth or in heaven. When Mrs. Potiphar tempted him, he responded by asking, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

Peter used the Lord's life to challenge his first century readers.

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was guile found in His mouth", who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Ultimately, we must do as Paul told the Ephesians in 4:31-32. He wrote, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, & evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you." If Jesus could forgive someone like me, who willfully disregarded the laws of His Father, surely I should set aside my bruised ego and forgive my fellow man whenever he asks me to forgive!

The formula for forgiveness is simple, yet effective. I begin by recognizing I too am a sinner, guilty of wrongs against my heavenly Father. Then, I need to see the power of forgetting. Finally, I must make pleasing Christ my ultimate goal, which will require me to forgive others, just as He died to help me be forgiven.

Section 4
Living As a Mature Child of God

Lesson 18

Lessons Learned at My Funeral

During one 6 month period of time, I found myself working harder and accomplishing less than at any other time in my life as a preacher. I was offended when someone suggested I was not doing my work, especially since I was going from daylight until past dark. So, I began to keep a detailed list of time spent on various activities.

The results were staggering. I began to realize an endless list of truly worthy tasks clamored for my attention. A careful review of my time diary confirmed that the projects which seemed most urgent were getting my attention first while some very important tasks went wanting. Obviously, I needed to find an effective means of setting my priorities so the most important needs would be met first, with, if necessary, those of lesser importance going unfinished.

One of the best remedies I have ever found to this perpetual problem was written by Stephen R. Covey. He suggested that each of us ought to envision our own funeral. Imagine there will be 4 speakers, one each from one's own family, friends, work and church. Try to "hear" what each speaker would say about you if your funeral was today (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989, pp. 96-97). Then, ask yourself what you would like to hear. Honestly ask how you could live so as to eliminate those things you would not like to hear and add those you would like to hear.

Covey went on to suggest the most effective people will be those who begin with the end in mind. "To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you're going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction" (p. 98).

Or, as Paul said, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). Notice, the apostle was focussed on a single goal, heaven. That may help us understand how he could say, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain....For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you" (Philippians 1:21-24).

With death just around the corner, Paul could say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

The great men and women of faith were propelled by similar thought processes. Looking ahead to the end enabled them to live as wanderers in tents rather than more permanent structures. They lived like aliens, rather than citizens, in a foreign land. Oh, they longed for a

homeland, but not on earth! "But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Looking at the end instead of the beginning may explain how Joseph was able to withstand all the suffering he endured. In fact, just such thinking can be seen in his response to Mrs. Potiphar's tempting offer. "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). He tried to help his backward looking brothers, after the death of their father, by saying, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego trusted God to deliver them from any harm the king intended to bring upon them. After the king threatened to have them cast into the fiery furnace, they said, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

The motivating force behind Daniel's prayers, even in light of a new law against offering petitions to any god or man other than Darius for 30 days, was his ability to see beyond earthly punishment to the heavenly reward. When King Darius cried out into the lions' den and asked Daniel if his God, whom he served continually, had been able to deliver him, Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you" (Daniel 6:20-22).

Obviously, numerous other men and women of faith could be presented as examples of the impact of beginning with the end in mind. However, these suffice to show us the power of looking at one's own funeral before deciding what course of action to follow. If I want to be remembered as a good father on the day of my funeral, I need to start doing the things a good father does. If I want to be remembered as a good husband, sacrificial servant and one who was always active within my community, then I must start to practice those things today.

Lesson 19

I Am Responsible For My Actions

In Westminster Abbey, on the tomb of an Anglican Bishop, a very powerful thought is recorded.

When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world. As I grew older and wiser, I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country. But it too seemed immovable.

As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it.

And now as I lay on my deathbed, I suddenly realize: If I had only changed myself first, then by example I would have changed my family.

From their inspiration and encouragement, I would have been able to better my country and, who knows, I may have even changed the world.

(Anonymous. *Condensed Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen & Patty Hansen, 1996.)

The above inscription reminds me of one of the most misunderstood incidents in the life of Christ, which occurred after His resurrection. Jesus had just told Peter that he would be bound and forced to go where he did not want to go when he was old. Peter looked around and saw John. He then asked, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus responded, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." John reports that a rumor came out of the exchange between Peter and the Lord which said that disciple would not have to die (John 21:20-23). Of course, the Lord did not say John would not have to die. Instead, he was trying to let Peter know that he should focus on his own relationship to the Lord and let the Lord deal with others, like John.

To be a highly successful Christian, I must determine to take responsibility for myself. Paul told the saints at Rome, "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). In his second letter to the Corinthian church, the apostle gave a little more insight into the day of accounting. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (5:10). No wonder he went on to command them to, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified" (13:5).

Avoiding disqualification will require me to plant the right kind of seed (actions) in my life. As Paul told the churches of Galatia, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (6:7-8).

Nathan, my son, has always enjoyed working in the garden with his granddaddy. One

year, he got his granny to send some seeds home from the garden so he could plant them at our house. Of course, his mother and I forgot all about them. When spring came, Nathan asked about the seeds. Teresa found the old pill bottle containing the seeds from granddaddy's garden. Nathan assured me they were watermelon seeds. Though they did not look like any watermelon seeds I had ever seen, we planted them in mounds the appropriate distance apart. Sure enough, vines began to grow after a short time. Then, came blooms and, later, a slowly elongating green fruit. After several more weeks, we had some of the finest inedible gourds you have ever seen!

Why did we not get the watermelons for which Nathan had his appetite whetted? We did not plant the right kind of seed! Similarly, those who want to go to heaven and attain the Christian's ultimate "success" must plant and cultivate the good works of the Spirit in our lives! I cannot expect to plant selfish, worldly life and reap everlasting life in heaven.

It seems a number of people today, as well as in the past, like to blame others for their failures. Flip Wilson, the comedian, used to say, "The devil made me do it." For others, it is their parents, teachers, society, an inherited defect, environment and hundreds of other things that are to blame for their misdeeds. Rather than blame his upbringing, Paul wrote, "Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief....This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:13, 15). He encouraged his brothers and sisters in Philippi to take a similar attitude by writing, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Rather than waste my time trying to change the world, I need to take responsibility for myself. When I do, there is a very real possibility that I will positively impact my family. Through them, I can improve my community. An improved community will certainly make my nation better and, if God wills, can change the world!

Lesson 20

Confession Truly Is Good For My Soul

For as far back as I can remember, I have heard the expression, "Confession is good for the soul." It sounded good, as long as it was advice for someone else. But, when it is me that needs to do the confessing, it is more difficult to accept. After all, most of us, or should I just say I, do not like to admit we have been wrong.

James encouraged those in the first century church to keep on confessing their sins to one another and to keep on praying one for another (James 5:16). A similar concept is found in 1 John 1:7 where the apostle of love urged his readers to keep on walking in the light so they could have the continual cleansing of the Lord's blood. Note that no one is set above another in the church. All are enjoined to confess to one another. All should desire the healing power of God's and the brethren's forgiveness. According to the promise recorded by James, the one who does the Lord's will can be assured his petitions have great power.

Our Lord, in the great sermon preached on the mount, said, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). Clearly, Jesus expected His followers to be concerned about their sins and obtaining forgiveness from the one who had been wronged.

It should be noted the Lord also expected the wronged individual to be concerned about the status of his brother. The offended brother was directed to go to the offending party with the object of gaining his brother. If that failed, he was to take 1 or 2 more as witnesses. In the event those actions failed to spur the brother to repentance, he was to take it to the church (Matthew 18:15-17). Jesus' emphasis throughout these instructions was on saving the brother.

An incident in the city of Samaria seems to demonstrate the importance of dealing with a brother's sins swiftly and decisively. Peter and John had been sent to Samaria to lay their hands on the new converts there so they might receive the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit. Simon the sorcerer, who was also a babe in Christ, saw what happened and expressed his desire to purchase the ability to bestow miraculous gifts on others. Simon's attempt to purchase this power with money led Peter to tell Simon he and his money would perish together if his heart was not changed. He could have no part in matters eternal so long as his heart was not right with God. Notice, the apostle did not command him to repent of his sins, but "of this your wickedness," thereby indicating a single sin is involved. Peter also instructed Simon to pray God would forgive him, which is significantly different than his instructions to those who asked what to do on Pentecost.

Specifically, Simon had sinned by having the wrong thought in his heart, which caused him to be in a miserable condition. Lenski says, "As in Hebrews 12:15 the 'root of bitterness' means a root out of which bitter fruit grows, fruit which the Lord abominates, so here 'gall of bitterness' is that fruit." Thus, Simon's recently freed heart had again become bound by sin.

Simon asked the apostles to pray to God for him, his actions thus foreshadowing the directions James would give the early church (Acts 8:14-25).

Psalm 66:18-20 shows the close relationship between prayer and mercy. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear. But certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer, Nor His mercy from me!" It is vital for the man of God to keep even the consideration of sin out of his heart so God will continue to hear his prayers. As Delitzsch notes, "Prayer and mercy stand in the relation to one another of call and echo. When God turns away from a man his prayer and His mercy, He commands him to be silent and refuses him a favorable answer" (p. 238).

Numbers of passages show the value of confession. David wrote, "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5). One wonders if this refers to the same sin mentioned by David in Psalm 51, which is one of his songs of penitence. He used 3 different words to say he had disobeyed God (transgressions, iniquity and sin) and in 3 different ways asked for cleansing (blot out, wash and cleanse). He openly recognized his sins, turned from them and promised to tell others the way to be cleansed (verses 1-4, 10, 13).

Though John wanted to help Christians avoid sin, he also recorded a great promise to those who would confess their sins. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). There is great similarity between John's words and those of the wise man, who wrote, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:18).

While I may not like to admit it when I am wrong, the plain teaching of scripture is that it is a necessity. God knows I am going to sin (Romans 3:10, 23; 1 John 1:8, 10). He desires that I acknowledge such sin so it can be forgiven and put away.

Lesson 21

Recognizing the Power of Partnership

I once read about a horse pulling contest held in Canada. The horse in first place pulled just over 9,000 pounds of dead weight. The second place horse pulled just under 9,000 pounds. They hitched them together to see what they could pull, assuming that the total would be around 18,000 pounds. The result was astounding. The 2 pulled over 30,000 pounds!

This story has a lot to offer to me if I desire to be a truly effective Christian. When every Christian does his, or her, part, the church can achieve much greater results. In Ephesians 4:16, Paul said, "From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." The apostle wanted the Ephesian brethren to be closely joined like a body and united, or knitted together, like the rejoining of a broken bone. Each member has a work to do, thus supplying the body with some essential. Effective working only takes place when each member gives all he is capable of giving. All of this will promote the growth of the whole body which will be strengthened by love.

Perhaps that is the reason fellowship was stressed so much by the inspired writers of the New Testament. Fellowship has been defined as, "share, participate, have in common, partnership." Interestingly, numerous different types of sharing, or partnership, are mentioned in scripture. James and John were partners with Peter in fishing. All men share in having fleshly bodies. One could also impulsively approve of someone and find himself sharing in his sins (Luke 5:10; Hebrews 2:14; 1 Timothy 5:22; 2 John 11).

However, a more powerful synergy, or combining of forces to accomplish greater good, occurs in spiritual realms. The Christian sees the value of such in his partnership with God (1 John 1:3, 6-7; 2 Peter 1:3-4). He knows the power of a shared memorial in the weekly remembrance of Christ's death (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). So valuable is that thoughtful time together that Paul warns against disregarding others by eating, without thought of one's brethren, only to fill his stomach. It leads to unworthy eating by causing one to fail to thankfully remember Christ's great sacrifice on Calvary. "Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another" (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 29-30, 33).

Partnership in the Lord's work was used by Paul as a factor to motivate Philemon to accept Onesimus back into his house. It was one of the reasons Paul said the Corinthian brethren should go on and prove their love through the gift they would give to the needy saints in Judea. Similarly, those taught in the word were urged to share their material goods with those who did the spiritual teaching. Also, the Philippian Christians shared with Paul in the preaching of the gospel in various mission fields (2 Corinthians 8:23; Philemon 17; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 4:15-16; 1:5).

From the very day 3,000 were added to the church, they had fellowship in providing for the physical needs of their hurting brethren. As Luke wrote, "Now all who believed were

together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." Later, he observed, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common" (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32). Since the good news had spread from Judea into all the world, disciples in many cities seized the opportunity to help members of God's family around Jerusalem who were suffering through a period of famine (Romans 15:26-27; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:12-13).

The greatest news of all is that Christians get to participate in the death of Christ. This takes synergy to its ultimate end. I would have to die to pay for my sins, but, when Christ is my partner, the blood shed by the Lord on Calvary becomes the payment for my sins! No wonder Paul was willing to give up all the things he had once cherished. His purpose being, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10-11).

Now, it is true the Christian, like the Lord, may have to endure persecution and suffering during his time on earth, but he will also get to share in glory to come. So, Peter encouraged his first century readers by saying, "But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:13). Peter went on to use that very glory to exhort elders, like himself, to shepherd the flock of God (5:1). All believers need to remember, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He will also deny us" (2 Timothy 2:12). Paul's words to the church of God at Corinth may well provide the greatest strength to press on despite trials.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation (2 Corinthians 1:5-7).

There can be no doubt that the follower of Christ can find far greater strength to get things done when he is part of the fellowship of believers. The ability of 2 or 3 individuals working alone grows geometrically when they join together in God's service. Of course, the greatest benefit is found in sharing in Christ's blood which is able to do for me what I could never do for myself.

Lesson 22

I Need the Right Diet and Exercise

Almost every day there is a report in the newspaper concerning some new discovery about the impact one's diet and exercise has on his health. Granted, some the advice given also seems to change almost daily. However, certain things are generally accepted as true, like the need for 3 or more helpings of fruit and vegetables daily and the fact that all of us need to exercise. It should come as no surprise that the spiritual man also needs a proper diet and exercise.

A good diet for the spiritual man includes words of faith. Paul wrote, "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed" (1 Timothy 4:6). While others may question the value of some part of creation, or try to restrain God's people from the proper use of them, Paul's words help the Christian realize everything God created is good for its purpose. God clearly announced that each part of His creation was good (1 Timothy 4:1-5; Genesis 1:4, 12, 17, 21, 25, 31). All of the things God has given us can be set apart for His service through giving a prayer of thanks.

As with most diets, the earlier one starts, the more effective it will be. Timothy had been taught by his mother and grandmother since he was a child. He had "carefully followed" the words of faith they had given him to sustain him spiritually and promote his growth (2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15-17). Then, he was also urged forward by the example he found in the life of the apostle Paul. He had seen him hold true to the doctrine despite persecutions and knew God had delivered the apostle from all the difficult times brought on by unbelievers (2 Timothy 3:10-11).

Just as most good diets eliminate excess salt and saturated fats, a good spiritual diet excludes false, worldly stories. Paul instructed Timothy by saying, "But reject profane and old wives' fables..." (1 Timothy 4:7a). Men chosen to be pastors over God's flock were expected to hold God's faithful word tightly and be ready to use it to stop those who would speak against the truth and convict those who spoke in a way contradictory to their own and others' good. "For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain" (Titus 1:9-11).

Herod the Great had destroyed the genealogies because he could not trace his ancestry back to Abraham, so many misleading stories and arguments had arisen over those lists of descendants. Timothy was urged to focus instead on the true doctrine which would lead to edification (1 Timothy 1:3-4). Unfortunately, through the inspiration of the Spirit, he was also able to look down through time and see men who would not remain true to the words of faith. He warned, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Clearly, the one who would remain a faithful child of God must reject such worldly stories and

cling to the word of God.

The right diet is made more effective by a proper exercise program. So, Paul wrote, "...and exercise yourself rather to godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:7b-8). That is why Jesus taught as He did during the sermon on the mount. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). The one who follows Christ realizes there are things of eternal significance which must take priority over even the closest of relationships on this earth (Matthew 19:29).

While earthly leaders may deceive us, the truth about Jesus, including His life on earth and sacrificial death on the cross, had numerous eyewitnesses to support its truthfulness (2 Peter 1:16). So, Jesus revealed through John the importance of remaining faithful to death. "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). Knowing these things, the believer should devote himself first, and foremost, to practicing those things set forth by God in His word. His regular exercise regimen will include deep meditation upon the truth so as to avoid those things which would destroy his faith and jeopardize his eternal home (Psalm 1)!

The man of God needs to watch the type of spiritual food he consumes. There are all kinds of untrue teachings that can weaken the spiritual man. Too, God's child must constantly practice the things set forth in the word so as to have a spiritually "toned" body.

Section 5
Life in the Family

Lesson 23

The Only Means of Defeating the Devil

There can be no doubt in the minds of right thinking people that Satan is alive and well today. All around us there is violence and wickedness. Senseless acts have been displayed in all our living rooms by the means of television news. Some have begun to question the power or effectiveness of Christianity to meet the challenge. Others ask why those who believe in Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God have failed to reach more with the truth. Why has society been more influential in the church than the church has in society? Why have so many sinners not come to the light?

Unity

The answer rests in one simple, powerful, deadly word, division. The religious world is obviously divided and that division proclaims to the unbelievers a confusion which cannot have originated from the Author of peace. When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth about their assemblies for the exercising of the spiritual gifts, he told them "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:32-33).

The only solution to the problem of division is unity. Right thinking, God fearing people must call for a unity of believers under the banner of Christ if we are to help effect any changes in the world around us. In the final hours before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed to his Father in behalf of his disciples. He asked that God would keep them from the evil one, or devil. Then he said, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21). If we are to bring the world to Christ, we must have unity. How can that unity be achieved?

A Common Source of Instruction

First, we must have a common source of instruction. Jesus stated, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Since Jesus words will serve as the basis of judgment, they are the best possible source of instruction. Those words can be found in the accounts of his life recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In fact, when he wrote the book of Acts, Luke said, "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). So, Jesus' teaching is clearly in the first four books of the New Testament.

However, we also need to realize the rest of the New Testament contains the words of Christ as well. Jesus told his disciples the Holy Spirit would teach them "all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." Later, he again emphasized that role for the Spirit when he said, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He

will tell you things to come" (John 14:26; 16:13). If we would be acceptable workers in the sight of God, we must study all the New Testament says and work with all our might to pursue the course outlined for us there.

There Is Only One Faith

It is common to hear someone say, "Well, you have your faith and I have mine, but we are all going to the same place anyway." Yet, the apostles of Christ did not speak of a multitude of faiths. Inspired men like the apostle Paul plainly said there is one faith (Ephesians 4:5). Jude wrote encouraging his first century readers to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). At the end of the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas "returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:21-22). Paul told the Roman brethren about the "word of faith which we preach" and urged the Corinthians to "stand fast in the faith" (Romans 10:8; 1 Corinthians 16:13).

The apostles and inspired writers spoke of a faith which was the sum of everything believed and held in common by all who followed Christ. It was not flexible. Instead, it was a standard by which all followers of Christ would measure themselves. "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified" (2 Corinthians 13:5-6). Our plea is that all religious people who would see an end to the division would return to the New Testament as our common source for instruction and cling to the faith so that we might, with God's help, defeat the devil!

Lesson 24

What's In A Name?

There are hundreds of different religious groups denominated (designated or classified) by different names. One only has to pick up a telephone book to see the Church of God, Episcopal, Lutheran, Baptist, the Bible Church, the Church of Christ, Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal, the New Covenant Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Assemblies of God, Baha'i, the Christian Church, Eckankar, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodist, Catholic, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, Full Gospel churches, Pentecostal churches, Unitarians and many more. Many of these names are of human origin, that is, they were not designated by God. Does it really matter what name we go by?

The Significance of Names In the Bible

Names have been given a great deal of significance in the Bible. Abram means "high father." God changed his name to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude" (Genesis 17:1-8). Sarai means "my princess", but God changed it to "princess of nations", or Sarah (Genesis 17:15-16). The significance of the name change was realized in the birth of Isaac, the son of promise. Through Isaac and his descendants, the new names God gave them came to express the whole truth. Esau's brother was named "heel grabber", or "supplanter", which is our name Jacob. On the night he wrestled with the angel, he was renamed Israel, which means "having power with God" (Genesis 32:22-32). Jesus changed Simon's name, which means "hearing", to Peter, or "a piece of rock" (John 1:40-42).

When God was dealing with rebellious Israel, he told Hosea to take a wife from among the idolaters in the land who were actively involved in harlotries. Her second child, a daughter, may well have been conceived in harlotry. God caused Hosea to name the child Lo-Ruhamah, which means, "No-Mercy," saying, "For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel." Another child was conceived when that one was weaned and God said the boy should be named Lo-Ammi, meaning "Not-My-People." God was tired of Israel's rebellion and said, "For you are not My people, And I will not be your God" (Hosea 1:1-9).

Of course, the very greatest names were preserved for our Lord. The angel told Joseph, "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). In verse 23, the angel quoted Isaiah 7:14, which said, "they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." He is called Christ because he is God's anointed. We call him Lord because he bought us and should be supreme in authority in our lives (Romans 7:24-25; I Corinthians 6:19-20). Significantly, the American Standard Version translated Romans 10:9, in part, by saying, "confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord." Most people in the religious world would not be willing to call Jesus by some name other than one of those used for him in God's word.

A New Name For God's People

In Isaiah 62:1-2, Isaiah looked forward to a day when Jerusalem would send forth the Lord's righteousness and salvation. At that time, the Gentiles, or nations, would also see the Lord's righteousness and God's people would be called by a new name. It appears, according to the New Testament record, that Antioch was the first church with Jews and Greeks in it. How significant that the name Christian should first be used to describe the disciples in that place (Acts 11:26).

Later, Paul would try to persuade Agrippa to be a Christian, as is seen in the king's response, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." Peter encouraged the early disciples who suffered as Christians to glorify God in that name (Acts 26:28; I Peter 4:16 A.S.V.). All of us can agree that the name Christian is acceptable. Why not be Christians only and drop all man made names?

God Given Names For the Church

Why should anyone accept a name other than a God-given one for Christ's church? Remember, the church is Christ's body (Ephesians 1:22-23). Also, Christ, like the rest of us, has only one body (Ephesians 4:4). Would any of us be happy to have our head identified with our correct name while our body assumed someone else's name? Likewise, we should recall that the church is Christ's bride (Ephesians 5:22-23; Romans 7:4; 2 Corinthians 11:2; John 3:25-26). Most husbands are not happy with a bride who wishes to wear another man's name.

The Father and Christ, through Holy Spirit inspired penmen, have left us some acceptable names for Christ's body to wear. It is simply call "the church" (Acts 2:48; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). It is also referred to as the "church of God" (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2). In Romans 16:16, Paul says, "The churches of Christ greet you," which is evidently a message, from several churches meeting in different places, to the church in Rome. In Colossians 1:13, Paul talks about Christians being people who the Father delivered from the kingdom of darkness and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Compare Revelation 1:9). The church is likewise called the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:13, 20, 27).

Could religious division be, in part, produced by the wearing of man-made names? Is there anyone opposed to dropping such names and going by names God has clearly endorsed by having inspired penmen use them?

Lesson 25

What Creed Should One Follow?

Anyone who has spent much time with a two year old has heard the question, "Why?" more than he would care to remember. Yet, it forms the basis for many important questions. Particularly so when one begins to consider the matter of what he, or she, believes. Why does any person, or group of people, hold to the various doctrines which comprise their faith? Often, the answer is simply that such is what is taught in the creed of one's church.

A Creed Is A Statement of Belief

The word creed comes from the Latin word "credo," which means "I believe." Webster's Dictionary defines it as, "A statement of religious belief; a confession of faith." Obviously, everyone who has a set of religious beliefs has a creed. That creed may come from the statements of belief of an individual or a council. It may be plainly called a creed, manual, catechism, prayer book, discipline or some other name.

In 1 Peter 4:11, Peter said, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God." Peter's exhortation should be heeded by all. Paul added clarity to Peter's point when he said the man, or angel, who preached another gospel should be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9). Human creeds thus become unnecessary and even dangerous. If they add to God's word, they contain more than God said. If they take away from God's word, they are less than God said. Either way, they become another gospel and are dangerous to the soul who supports them. If one argues that his man-made creed contains only what God said and all of what God said, then it is the Bible and should not be considered man-made.

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). The truth of which Jesus spoke is to be found, according to his prayer in John 17, in the word of God. He asked the Father to "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." So, the only truly acceptable creed is the word of God!

Today, Jesus Speaks for God

Jesus is God's spokesman for today (Hebrews 1:1-2). Moses and Elijah appeared on the mount of transfiguration with Christ. Moses would stand for the law, while Elijah is representative of the prophets and Christ would be the testator of the new will. Peter wanted to build three tabernacles, one to honor each man, but God caused a bright cloud to overshadow them and spoke from that cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him" (Matthew 17:1-5). Jesus acted in accord with the Father's will and spoke the words the Father gave him to speak (John 12:44-50). Jesus promised his disciples that, when he ascended, he would send the Holy Ghost to remind them of his words and say the things Jesus would have him to say (John 16:7-14). Thus, it can be said the apostles spoke in accord with God's will and God confirmed it by the miracles they worked (Hebrews 2:3-4).

God Gave a Rule To Be Taught and Followed

Included in the promise to the disciples in John 16 was Jesus' statement that the Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth (Verse 13). This the Spirit did. Jude wrote to the early Christians encouraging them to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3 A.S.V.). Peter said God had given them "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

Recognizing the importance of following God's rule, Paul urged Timothy to continue in the teachings his mother and grandmother had delivered to him in childhood. He assured him that the scriptures were the God's own breathed out, or inspired, word. He said the man of God can be perfected by those scriptures in every good work (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Paul told the Philippians to "walk by the same rule" (Philippians 3:16). He told the Galatian brethren that it was this rule that created a new creature (Galatians 6:15-16). So, the rule we are to follow is the law of Christ, which produces that new creature (Ephesians 2:13-15; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1-2).

Lesson 26

The Organization of the Church

A Multitude of Organizations

One distinctive feature which sets one religious group apart from another is their organization. Various approaches are used both at the local and national levels. For instance, "The Church of the Nazarene has a representative form of government." Their manual goes on to say, "We are agreed on the necessity of a superintendency, which shall foster and care for churches already established, and whose duty it shall be to organize and encourage the organizing of churches everywhere."

In *Christ Among Us: A Modern Presentation of the Catholic Faith*, Anthony Wilhelm wrote, "The college of bishops under the leadership of the pope has the authority of governing Christ's Church. The pope has supreme power, but when he uses it he acts on behalf of the whole college of bishops." In the book *Doctrine and Covenants*, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints finds that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were ordained to be apostles (27:12-14). Other types of government could be listed, but suffice it to say that there are a variety of governments among the churches.

Christ Is the Head of the Church

Christ promised to establish the church (Matthew 16:18-19). After Christ's resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God, the Father made Christ the head of the church. "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18; 1 Peter 3:22). Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). We must submit to that authority since there is but one Lord (Ephesians 4:5).

Our Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). Membership is not voted on by men. Membership is open to all people throughout the world (Mark 16:15-16; Romans 1:16). In fact, Christ's followers are commanded to go into all the world to teach others so that Jesus might have more disciples. It should be noted that the word church is used in two different senses in scripture. Frequently, the word church is used to describe the entire body of the saved under Christ's authority. On other occasions, the word is used to describe a group of saved people meeting in a particular location (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1). It may also be used to designate the saved in a particular region (Galatians 1:2).

The Organization of the Local Church

Outside of pronouncing Christ as the head, the New Testament does not give us an organization for the church universal. However, it does describe an organization for the local church. It appears that the apostles, under Christ, were over the church at Jerusalem and in Judea (Acts 6:1-4). However, shortly thereafter elders are mentioned Acts 11:27-30). Toward the end

of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas ordained elders "in every church" (Acts 14:23). Paul directed the young preacher, Titus, to "ordain elders in every city" in Crete (Titus 1:5). He went on to give a list of qualifications a man should possess before being appointed to such an office (verses 6-9). Evidently, Paul expected Timothy, another young preacher, to also have occasion to ordain elders, since he provided him with a list of qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

It is the job of the elders to oversee (or be bishops) the flock with which they work (Acts 20:28). This verse ought to remind elders of the headship of Christ, as it refers to the fact that Jesus purchased the church with his blood. Peter speaks of the elders' job of overseeing the flock and reminds them that Jesus is the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4). They cannot force the flock to follow them but should appeal for them to willingly follow. Their example before the flock should cause each sheep, or member, to want to follow. Also, the members should note that elders are to watch out for the safety of their souls "as those who must give account," which would encourage careful consideration of their leadership (Hebrews 13:17).

The Role of Deacons In the Local Church

The New Testament does not say as much about deacons, but we can piece together some important facts. Thayer says the word deacon means "one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master; a servant; attendant; minister." Paul likewise lists some qualifications for the men who would hold this office (1 Timothy 3:8-13). The first seven men who appear to have held this office were those appointed at the direction of the apostles (Acts 6:1-8), though they certainly had some qualifications not listed in 1 Timothy 3. Their role was to take care of the needs of the widows during the daily distribution of goods to those in need. This allowed the apostles to devote themselves to the word of God.

Notice that they were assigned a specific task and when it was carried out, the word of God increased and the church grew. This is not an honorary title! Deacons need to strive to "minister well" (1 Timothy 3:13). When deacons do their job, elders, or shepherds, can watch out for the needs of the church, or flock, as we have already seen. Those shepherds can focus on keeping every soul safe and ready for the Lord's return. Deacons should recognize the important role elders, or shepherds, play and respect them for it. They should desire to carry out their assigned task in an effective way so the elders will be able to defend the truth against any attacks (Titus 1:9).

Lesson 27

The Lord's Supper

Various Views Exist Concerning the Lord's Supper

Some believe in transubstantiation, where the bread and fruit of the vine become the actual body of Christ during the partaking of the Lord's supper. "When the priest at Mass says over the bread and wine Christ's words, 'This is my body . . . This is the chalice of my blood . . . !' the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ. By the power of Christ working through the priest the bread and wine, though still appearing to be bread and wine, become Christ" (Anthony J. Wilhelm, *Christ Among Us: A Modern Presentation of the Catholic Faith*, page 244).

Others teach that it does not matter whether or not one partakes of the bread and fruit of the vine as our Lord did. "For, behold, I say unto you, that it mattereth not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink when ye partake of the sacrament, if it so be that ye do it with an eye single to my glory--remembering unto the Father my body which was laid down for you, and my blood which was shed for the remission of your sins" (Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 27:2).

Still others believe the Lord did not set forth the time to partake of the supper. "Jesus did not say when or how often believers should observe the Lord's Supper. He instituted it on Thursday night. New Testament Christians observed it on the Lord's Day" (Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, page 90).

The Lord's Supper Is A Memorial Service

Memorials, like statues, tombstones and plaques, are used all over the world in honor of men, especially the dead. The Lord's supper is a memorial service. "And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you'" (Luke 22:19-20). Paul tells us Christ also directed the disciples to partake of the cup while remembering him. He went on to write, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-34, esp. 26).

So, every time a Christian partakes of the Lord's supper, he is partaking of a memorial feast. Each should have a thoughtful attitude as he considers just what a great sacrifice Jesus made in his behalf. There should be a natural inward reflection as he thinks of his own inadequacy in overcoming sin and the Lord's selfless, sinless offering of himself on the cruel cross despite the fact that he was guilty of no wrong. To fail to reflect would be to sin. "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup" (1 Corinthians 11:27-34).

The Passover Foreshadowed the Lord's Supper

The passover was a shadow of the Lord's supper. The passover feast was eaten by the Israelites once a year to remind them of their release from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 11:1-8; 12:25-27, 46). When Paul encouraged the Corinthians to withdraw from a sinner in the church, he wrote, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Just as the Israelites were reminded of their release from bondage in Egypt each time they partook of the Passover, Christians should be reminded that Jesus' sacrifice is their means of release from the bondage of sin (Romans 6:16-18; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:22-28). Because he is our passover, not one of his bones was broken (John 19:31-36).

The Supper's Two Elements

As we gather around the Lord's table, we will find the feast has two elements, the bread and the fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:23-25). The bread would have been unleavened, since Jesus and the disciples had just finished the passover meal. God had told Moses to tell the people, "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel" (Exodus 12:15).

It is interesting to note that Matthew actually tells us it was "the first day of the feast of unleavened bread" (Matthew 26:17). Matthew notes Jesus words as he took the bread, saying, "this is My body." This has lead some to teach the doctrine of transubstantiation, which says the bread and fruit of the vine become the literal body and the blood of Jesus. Since Jesus was present in his physical body when this feast was instituted, it seems obvious that he was using a metaphor. Some of us say, "I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse." We do not mean we could literally eat a whole horse, but we are saying we have a large appetite. Similarly, Jesus was not saying we eat and drink the literal body and blood, but that the bread and fruit of the vine represent such to the Christian.

Frequency of Partaking

The Lord's supper should be taken upon the first day of every week. Luke wrote, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight" (Acts 20:7). Paul was in Troas seven days (verse 6), yet the disciples came together to break bread on the Lord's day. The first day was also the day Jesus was raised and the day his church was established (Mark 16:9; Acts 2: Leviticus 23:15-16). Now, when God said, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8), the Jews understood that he meant every Sabbath.

Gus Nichols wrote a good article on the frequency of our Lord's supper observance. In it, he quoted 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 and said, "If a school teacher should say to some naughty boys, "You did not come here to learn," she would be understood to mean that they should have come

for that purpose. Hence the apostle's meaning is clear when in reproof of the church he said they had not assembled to eat the Lord's supper." From this excellent analysis, we conclude that early Christians assembled to partake of the Lord's supper. Nichols also tells us "the Greek preposition 'Kata' is used in this passage, and means 'every,' with reference to week." (I Corinthians 16:2) Thus, we have the early church assembling every first day of the week. We know they assembled to break bread and Paul tells them to give every first day of the week.

Lesson 28

Infant Baptism

In explaining why infants should be baptized, Warren Carr, in his book *Baptism: Conscience and Clue for the Church*, said of the infant, "he shares the inherent human weakness that we call original sin, and will suffer from its effects all his life. He experiences what it is to be unloved, beginning in the womb, and will be unloving in return. Baptism sets up a new relationship, gives him a new orientation..." The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has printed a book called *The Truth that leads to Eternal Life*. It says, "All of Adam's offspring were born after his disobedience. Thus his offspring inherited sin and death from him....Just as a perfect piece of machinery cannot be produced from an imperfect mold, so Adam in his imperfection could not produce perfect children, free from sin."

Infant Baptism in the Bible

The Bible was written with the explicit purpose of giving man every thing he needed in regards to eternal life and godliness. Men like the apostle Paul clearly state that a careful meditation upon the word of God will completely equip a man to perform any good work. Despite that fact, there is no mention of infant baptism within the pages of God's inspired word. It should be noted that there are several passages in which children are specifically singled out for discussion (Matthew 2:16; 15:38; 19:14; Acts 21:5), so it could not be said God's writers were not accustomed to directing their comments pointedly toward children. Further, God in the law of Moses distinctly directed that eight day old baby boys were to be circumcised and the law was carried out (Genesis 17:12; 21:4; Luke 2:21).

Children and the Sin of Adam

Infants do not inherit Adam's sin. If they did, Jesus would have been guilty of sin, yet the writer of Hebrews said of Jesus, "For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26). John says, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:4-5). Two lessons can be learned from John's words. First, Jesus had no sin in him, including one which might have been inherited from Adam. Second, the newborn baby has not transgressed God's law, or displayed any act of lawlessness, so he is not guilty of sin in that sense.

Neither has any baby failed to perform a task he knew was right to perform, so he is not a sinner because of a failure to do good (James 4:17). In fact, Jesus used the humility and purity of little children to show his disciples the kind of lives they should lead. The Lord said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Later, he said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-3; 19:13-15).

Ezekiel Shows Sin Is Not Inherited

The prophet Ezekiel evidently wrote to a people who believed in a form of inherited sin. God had him write this response, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." (Ezekiel 18:20, see also verse 19.) The New Testament confirms that judgment will be based upon the actions of the individual being judged. (Romans 14:12; Galatians 6:7-8; II Corinthians 5:10)

We have thus far seen that the Bible nowhere commands us to baptize infants. They have no sins of their own to wash away and they have not inherited Adam's sin. We should further observe that infants are not able to meet the prerequisites of baptism. "The eunuch said, See here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:36-37; see also Mark 16:16; Matthew 10: 32-33; Romans 10:9-10) The infant is unable to believe on Jesus as God's Son and certainly will not confess him. Neither is the infant able to repent. (Acts 2:38; 17:30) In fact, we have already shown that a baby has nothing to repent of. So, infant baptism is completely unnecessary.

Lesson 29

Can I Fall from Grace?

What Occurs After Baptism?

In baptism, one is born again. He changes from a man dead in sin to one alive in Christ. Is that change permanent? Is the one who has been born again going to forever remain in a saved state? Herschel H. Hobbs, in *The Baptist Faith and Message*, states,

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, bring reproach on the cause of Christ, and temporal judgments on themselves, yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

If Hobbs is right about the teachings of God's word, then one who has been born again has no need to fear ever being separated from God again.

A Warning to the Saints At Philippi

Paul wrote the book of Philippians "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi" (Philippians 1:1). The word "saints" includes all those who had been separated from sin and dedicated to God's service. Paul told the Corinthian brethren, "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). To those who had thus been washed and sanctified at Philippi, Paul wrote a warning. "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Clearly Paul saw a need for Christians, or those who had been sanctified, to exercise care so that they might receive salvation in heaven. The apostle knew they had gotten a good start on salvation's road and wanted them to work toward the goal of full completion. He also knew the revelation of Jesus from heaven at the end of time would include a punishment for all those who did not keep on obeying (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Learning from the Fallen Israelites

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul described the tender care God had for his chosen people as he delivered them from bondage in Egypt. Then, he tells us that God was not well-pleased with many of them. In fact, their corpses were strewn in the wilderness. Those who fell had lusted after evil things, worshipped idols, committed fornication, tempted Christ and murmured. Paul then tells the saints, of the church of God at Corinth, that the stories of their fall were written as

an example and means of instruction for Christians. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:1-12).

T. W. Brents, in his book *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, says, "We know not how the apostle could have given more conclusive proof that the number of the elect composing the church of God at Corinth, was liable to be diminished by apostasy than is here given." Paul had already told of his concern for himself in 9:27, where he wrote, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." It seems clear that Paul was saying the Christian can so sin as to be lost.

The Importance of Keeping the Faith

One might wonder how the previous passages tie in with 1 Peter 1:4-5, which says, "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." If one stresses the words "kept by the power of God" without going on to emphasize "through faith," there would be a seeming contradiction. Obviously, Peter saw one's faith as an essential condition to God's keeping him safe.

Paul described himself as one who had "kept the faith" and then said there was a crown laid up for him and expressed his confidence that the Lord would deliver him from every evil work and preserve him (2 Timothy 4:6-8, 18). In the same book, he urged the younger preacher to continue "in the things which you have learned" (3:14-17). Jude told his readers of the angels "which kept not their first estate" and are "reserved" for "the judgment of the great day." He ended with a plea for Christians to remain faithful because Christ is able to keep us from falling (verses 20-25). Even within those words of hope is a word of warning for those who would try to help others be saved. In *Life in the Son*, Robert Shank well observed, "Jesus affirmed that the condition whereby He perseveres in the saints is that they persevere in Him. 'Remain in me, and I in you....If a man remain not in me, he is cast forth...' (John 15:4,6)." God will keep us if we do our part in keeping the faith.

"That You May Know"

1 John 5:13 is a passage full of assurance. The apostle of love wrote, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." Notice the assurance he extends is based upon the things he had written.

In reviewing the rest of the book, we come to realize that we can know we have eternal life when we: walk in the light and confess our sins (1:7-10); keep his commandments (2:3-5; 3:24; 5:3); love the brethren (2:9-11; 3:14-15, 18-19, 23; 4:11-12, 19-5:1); love the Father and not the world (2:15-17); are loyal to gospel (2:24-25); continue to practice right living (3:29; 4:7-10); and believe on the name of Jesus (5:10, 13; 3:23).