

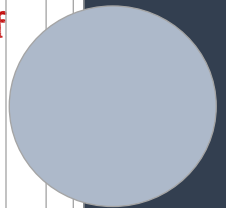
Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Lesson Six: Repentance from Dead Works

This lesson is the first of a series that explain the doctrines of Jesus Christ as stated in Hebrews 6:1, 2. They are full explanations about how you can achieve greater spiritual maturity and the salvation God has planned for you. You will learn the *process* needed for educating you in the thoughts and ways of God.

Repentance is the first step in this process. Once you understand why you must repent of your sins and the penalty imposed for not doing so, then you can begin to sort through God's remedy for repairing the breach and bringing about reconciliation between yourself and God.

Larry E. Ford



Scriptural Admonitions



Since the God who made the earth and everything that is in it is Himself Lord of heaven and earth ... He did this so that all nations might seek the deity and, by feeling their way toward Him, succeed in finding Him. He now commands everyone everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day when the whole world will be judged, and judged in righteousness. By raising Him from the dead, God has appointed Jesus Christ to be the judge [John 5:20-27].

They asked: "Brothers, what must we do?" And Peter replied: "Every one of you must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will thereafter receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 17:24-31 and 2:38, 39

Author's paraphrases of *The Jerusalem Bible*



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Introduction

I found a peculiar statement by C. S. Lewis in his famous work *Mere Christianity* that I think bears some scrutiny – especially in light of the statements made by the Apostle Paul in Acts 17:24-31 and the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:38, 39. Lewis said this:

Remember, this *repentance*, this willing submission to humiliation and a kind of death, is *not* something God demands of you *before* He will take you back and which He could let you off if He chose: *it is simply a description of what going back to Him is like*” (Touchstone: New York; 1980, p. 60; emphases added).

My first response to his statement that God does not *demand* our repentance was simple: “WHAT!?” I could scarce believe that such a noteworthy “Christian” figure would, or could, say such a thing! And this from a man who deftly works his way through so many knotty questions that confront average, ordinary “Christians” and their “faiths.” Would you have had a similar reaction to that statement?

I understand the context in which the statement is made. He is discussing “the perfect penitent” in relationship to the death of Jesus Christ – the fact that people generally believe that we must repent because Jesus Christ came to the earth to suffer, be killed, and be raised from the dead for our sins – for our desertion of God in favor of the Great Rebel, Satan the Devil. Lewis says:

What I came to see later on was that neither this theory [regarding the death of Jesus Christ] nor any other is *Christianity*...Theories about Christ’s death are not *Christianity*: they are explanations about how it works (p. 58; emphases added).

It appears from the wider discussion that he conceives of the various “Christian” denominations as representing the various “theories” about how “it works.” He would say that they all can be true to mere Christianity – the core beliefs they all have in common ... supposedly – yet, also be totally at odds with one another in their “theories.” Their differences in “theories” would not matter much to God. But, does that idea make sense in view of the 32,000+ “Christian” denominations?

For several years I taught that there exists a mere 400+ “Christian” denominations. Then, about 2001, I learned from a documentary on *The History Channel* that there were over 20,000. Less than 10 years later, in a telecast of *Tomorrow's World*, host Richard Ames posited that there presently exist over 32,000! Here is the underlying point of that observation: The doctrinal differences among them greatly expand the reason for concern – especially in light of Christ's prophetic warning in Matthew 24:4, 5!

To the point at hand: *Is repentance demanded by God before you can return to Him?* Or, as Lewis so confidently asserts, are the various concepts of repentance simply “theories” – *descriptions* – about what going back to God is like? As you might well deduce, this calls for a thorough explanation of the biblical concept of repentance and whether or not God demands it of us before He will allow us entrance to the blessings, promises, covenants, and kingdom. Let's consider a few salient points before we get into the lesson.

At the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ, He made the following announcement: “The time has come and the Kingdom of God is drawing near. You are to repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15; author's paraphrase; emphases added; see also Matthew 4:12-17). How remarkable is it that such statements accompany the beginning of the ministry of *Jesus Christ* – yet, go unnoticed as demands from God (see Matthew 1:23) that we should repent? How many times during His ministry would you suppose that demand was repeated?

I agree with Lewis that the *fact* of repentance is “...infinitely more important than any explanation that theologians have produced” (p. 58). It is self-evident that explanations of a process are not the same as the process itself – that they are word pictures of how a thing is done. Read this carefully:

Any theories we build up as to how Christ's death [disabled death itself] ...are...*mere plans or diagrams* to be left alone if they do not help us, and, even if they do help us, not to be confused with the thing itself (p. 59; emphases added).

Now comes the inevitable question: How is a *demand* to repent merely a theory – a “mere plan or diagram”? Would you consider a stop sign merely a word picture of a plan or diagram – not to be confused with the thing itself? No, it represents a demand imposed by a governing body. A process called “stop” must occur wherever that sign is posted, or a penalty can be imposed by the enforcers of the governing body.

Mathematical and chemical formulas are similar to this. Lewis says that what the formulas represent “...cannot be pictured, it can only be expressed mathematically” (p. 58). What Lewis fails to mention is this: A formula is a generalized statement intended to express some fundamental truth; it is, so to speak, a type of *summary* of that truth in its most basic form. *Repent* is not a *theory* in the sense of representing a general principle explaining observed facts that are *seemingly* worthy of belief. *Repent* is a *summary* that expresses a set of actions that *must take place* in order for God to understand whether or not the *process* (the changing of heart and mind that is supposed to take place in those who claim that they want to be holy as God is holy) is, in fact, taking place.

When one begins to explain the contents of that summary, then one begins to use other expressions like “*to show* regret,” “*to turn* from sin,” “*to resolve to reform* one’s life,” and so on. Once you begin to *unfold* the summary in your life *by the action you take*, then you also begin to unfold the description of the process that you are undertaking in order to receive God’s attention for becoming more like Him and receiving the salvation from sin and eternal death you need in order to eventually enter eternal life at God’s appointed time (Job 14:14, 15; 1 Cor. 15:23).

I agree with Lewis that the term is a picture of the thing, not the thing itself. However, I am amazed that Lewis got so hung up on explaining his concept of the mechanics of the theory and picture that *he missed the point entirely*. You cannot merely set aside what he calls the theory of *repent* if you do not think it helps you. You might compare the given description to what the Bible actually says in order to follow it or kiss it off. However, you cannot set aside God’s demand, based on

God's revealed description, *if it does not suit you*. You must, indeed, understand the fundamental truth involved in it and do it.

H₂O and 2 x 3 are as much about doing something as they are about representing something! So are *stop* and *repent*. What follows, then, in this lesson is the *unfolding* of that *summary* with more *terms* and *pictures* so you can know what you have to do as part of the *repentance* process.

May the God of Truth bless your understanding as you study this lesson.

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Chapter One

Understanding “Sin”

In order to understand the nature of *repentance* and *returning to God*, we must understand the *sin* in which we are bound. *Bound* is the term used in scripture because it carries with it two connotations: *slavery* and *marriage*. We'll use numerous New Testament scriptures to get the picture and to see the consistency in God's word about it. This will be somewhat detailed, so be prepared to think, think, think.

The Law and the Prophets

In 1 John 3:4, how does the Apostle John define *sin*? Use Exodus 20:1-17 as your model of God's *law*. Understand, too, that all commandments, ordinances, statutes, and prophecies shown in scripture are outgrowths of God's two great commandments: (a) loving God supremely and (b) loving your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:34-40). You should pay close attention to v. 40: “On these two commandments *hang all* the law and the prophets” (emphases added). What does that mean?

The Greek term is *kremannumi*. In this case, it is *figurative* language that demonstrates that the law and prophets (that is, the entire Old Testament) *depend* upon those two basic laws like a door depends upon its hinges in order to operate as designed. Both the law and prophets require *love* in order to operate as they were designed to operate. The fundamental principle revealed by Jesus Christ is that our *love* for God

and fellowman should be the same quality of *holy* love and regard that God has for His *kind* and humankind. In Matthew 22:34-40, that is expressed by the Greek term *agapao* (BAG; p. 4).

Paul speaks to this issue in Romans 13:8-10. As you read his thoughts, notice that v. 9 lists specific portions of the 10 Commandments: adultery, murder; theft, lying, coveting, and *any other commandment he did not mention*. In vv. 8 and 10, he specifically says:

v. 8 – “...he that loves another has fulfilled [the demands of] the law.”

v. 10 – “...love is the fulfilling of [the demands of] the law.”

What does Jesus Christ mean when He speaks of *fulfilling* the law and the prophets? That question is best answered in the prophetic statement by the Lord God in Isaiah 55:11: “...My word...that goes out of my mouth...shall *accomplish* that which I *please* [Heb. = pronounced *khawfates* – desire; to be inclined to do; James Strong’s *A Dictionary of the words in the Hebrew Bible*, #2654; p, 42], and it shall *prosper* in the thing whereunto I sent it” (emphases added). In other words, His words are not spoken for vain purposes and do not fall uselessly to the ground. *God is not a liar*.

Ask yourself why so-called “New Testament” Christians have adopted the spiritual position that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ “nailed the *law* to the cross” (Col. 2:14) and thereafter rendered it *invalid*. For centuries they have proclaimed that the *law* has been disposed of in favor of Christian “love.” How can you have one without the other?

Also, ask yourself the meaning and significance of this statement by Jesus Christ as it relates to the above claim:

Do not misunderstand why I have come – *it isn’t to cancel the laws of Moses and the warnings of the prophets*. No, I came to fulfill them, and to make them all come true. With all the earnestness I have to say: *Every law in the book will continue until its purpose is achieved*. And so if anyone breaks the least commandment, and teaches others to [do so], he shall be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But those who teach God’s

laws *and obey them* shall be great in the Kingdom of Heaven (*Living Bible*; Matt. 5:17-19; emphases added).

Now read Luke 24:44: "...All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (*KJV*). What is the difference between Matthew and Luke? It is really very simple if you pay close attention to the context of each statement. Matthew 5:17-19 was part of Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount at the beginning of His ministry ... before He was crucified. Luke 24:44 was after His crucifixion ... before He ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father.

Therefore, Luke 24 proves that He was as good as His word: He did not come to do away with the law and the prophets by His crucifixion. *If they had been nailed to the cross, His statement in Luke 24:14 would not have been necessary.* You should be able to understand that all that is in the law and prophets *was not fulfilled by His crucifixion*. His crucifixion was for our redemption and salvation. The law and the prophets relate to much more than those two very important issues.

Those who use Colossians 2:14 to "prove" their claim that the law and prophets were abolished are simply wrong in their claim because *they do not understand scripture*. The "...handwriting of ordinances, which was contrary to us..." was in the law that says that the person who sins shall die (Rom. 6:23). Our sins cause a death warrant to be issued against us. When we repent of our sins and accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, followed by baptism and the laying on of hands for the receipt of the Holy Spirit, that death warrant is declared null and void and has no further power over us (see Acts 2:38, Romans 6; 8:1, and 2 Cor. 5:17-21). But ... you should also be aware that you cannot willfully continue in sin thereafter (Rom. 6:1, 2; Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26, 27). As we discover more sins in our lives, we are responsible for repenting and getting rid of them (Rom. 8:12, 13).

That said, the following discussion should be more clearly understood because you can eliminate the false reasoning of those who claim that the law and prophets have been annulled by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Now you can understand sin in the context of God's law. Before we begin this discussion, read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and try to understand this prophecy concerning God's use of His law in the future. To whom is this prophecy addressed? Where is the Lord God going to

place His law among the Israelites? What is especially significant about that concept? We will discuss this in detail in the following chapters.

What is “Sin unto Death”?

In 1 John 5:17, John says: “All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.” There are two factors in his statement to which we should pay close attention: (1) unrighteousness and (2) the sin that does not receive the death sentence. Unrighteousness is easily explained in the context of sin. However, the sin that does not warrant the death penalty is not often clearly explained. Why does John include this in his definition?

Briefly defined, unrighteousness is behavior (thought and deed) that is not just, upright, and virtuous. If God’s original will is that mankind is to be holy, blameless, and loving (Eph. 1:4), then He certainly has justice, honesty, and a grasp of the difference between good and evil in mind. Paying heed to God’s declared code of conduct would amount to man being righteous in his relationship to God and fellow mankind. That is the essence of Romans 4:3-13.

True righteousness is bound up in the law of God (Rom. 8:1-4). If you understand what you just read, then you are a step closer to understanding John’s declaration about the sin that does not receive the death sentence.

Sometimes, translators do not attach to their translations the nuances of meaning that words have. That job is left to the exegetes and commentators. Exegesis is the interpretation of a word or a passage in a document. It literally means “to draw meaning out of the text.” Its opposite is eisegesis, which literally means “to read meaning into the text.” Exegesis considers the historical setting, the background of the writer’s belief system, and harmonization of other pertinent information. Eisegesis reflects the reader’s own presuppositions, agendas, biases, and/or opinions. What follows is exegesis.

Let’s focus on the expression “sin unto death.” We now know what sin is. However, Paul clarifies his meaning by using the expression “unto death.” That expression is a modifier ... which places a limitation on the meaning of “sin.” If you speak of a red car, then you limit the meaning of car and exclude all other cars that are not red. You would

further limit the meaning if you added additional modifiers like “candy-apple red,” “fire-engine red,” *et cetera*.

Barclay uses the Greek translation of the expression “unto death” by showing that it is translated into English from *pros thanaton*. I checked my Greek New Testament to ascertain the scripture in Greek: It is there as Barclay claims. I also checked my Greek lexicon to find the definitions of *pros* and *thanaton*. There are numerous definitions given for *pros*, but the lexicon pinpoints the definition most appropriate for 1 John 5:17: (1) def. #3 = “of the goal aimed at or striven toward”, (2) #3b = “of the result that follows a set of circumstances (so that) ... everything is to be done in such a way that it contributes to [that result] (BAG, p. 717). Of course, *thanaton* would mean “death.”

Here is the meaning that Barclay “draws out” of the text:

[*Pros thanaton*] does not mean the deadly sin; it means *the sin which is going towards death*, the sin whose goal and end is death, the sin, which, if continued in, must finish in death. The terrible thing about the sin which is *pros thanaton* is not so much what it is in itself, as where it will end, if a man persists in it.

The sin unto death is the state of the man who has listened to sin so often, and refused to listen to God so often, that he has come to a state when he loves his sin, and when he regards sin as the most profitable thing in the world. (William Barclay, *Daily Bible Readings: The Letters of John and Jude*, Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1965; p. 142, 143).

In other words, you could read Genesis 2:17 and understand that the sin Adam and Eve committed was *unto death*, that is: they would not die *immediately* upon eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. But ... if they did not change their behavior (repent) for having transgressed the Lord God’s command about not eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, they would eventually die a death from which they would not/could not be recovered. Genesis 3:21 would, therefore, indicate that the Lord God explained, through the deaths of the animals He killed in order to clothe them, the role that *repentance*,

forgiveness, and *holy sacrifice* would play in their *redemption* from that death. The sacrifice was a *type*, or *figure*, of Jesus Christ (see 3:15).

This is where I refer you to Romans 8:1 and 1 John 2:1, 2. In 1 John 2:1, 2, we learn that a Christian can sin without that sin leading to his death from which there is no recovery (the “second death” shown in Revelation 20:6, 14; see also Mal. 4:1-3). Why? Because the Christian has Jesus Christ as an advocate (a *parakletos* – an intercessor; a consoler; see John 14:15-18; 16:7, 13-15) to intervene with the Father on his/her behalf. In Romans 8:1, Paul boldly proclaims that there is *no* condemnation of those who are *in Christ*. Even though those *in Christ* are still subject to sin, they are treated as though that sin is not *unto death*. Nevertheless, they are expected to overcome (“put to death”; Rom. 8:12, 13) the sinful, carnal nature that so easily besets humans.

Christians are not given the *liberty* to sin at will without penalty. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are perfect examples of penalties imposed upon God’s people when they refuse to obey Him. Leviticus 26:40-45 and Isaiah 1:16-20 are perfect examples of His willingness to forgive and forget when His people repent of their sins and return to obeying Him. The repentant sinners suffer *penalties*, but not *unto [the second] death*.

Christian Liberty: Do True Christians Sin?

Paul tells us in Galatians 5:13 that we have been called to *liberty*, but it must not degenerate into licentiousness (unrestrained sin). Peter tells us essentially the same thing in 1 Peter 2:16. Those who use God-given *liberty* as a cloak (something that conceals, covers, disguises – see 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15) for unrestrained sinfulness are described in Hebrews 6:4-8. When you become an *apostate* by abandoning the faith once delivered to the saints, then your ultimate judgment (Heb. 9:27) will be to suffer the *second death* from which there is no possibility of recovery. Read 2 Peter 3:9 and Isaiah 1:18-20. What do those scriptures tell you about repentance and forgiveness?

According to 1 John 1:8-10; 2:4, no human is exempt from sinning (read Isa. 53:6). It is the *Christian’s* duty to endeavor to overcome sin and avoid it, but, inevitably, some kind of sin will occur. God has not left us any “wiggle room” when it comes to sin. We are born into it and

are affected by its many forms of influence. So, we must not make God a liar by not admitting that we sin.

Consider the law that the Lord God established (Ex. 20:1-17). It is virtually impossible for any individual to say that s/he has not broken any one of those laws either literally or spiritually (in one's thoughts and attitudes). James 2:8-11 says that we have broken the entire law if we break a single law. He explains this in vv. 14-26. It should be evident that the "spirit" of one's life in Christ is to be aimed at guiding our thoughts and actions toward holiness (Eph. 1:4). If you say that you have true faith, then demonstrate that true faith by thinking and doing that which is right and just and holy in God's sight.

Read Hebrews 12. Do you see the references to the training in which Christians are presently involved? Some translations use the word "chastisement," and others use "discipline." I think that the term "training" best describes the discipline of the Christian life ... even though some disciplinary actions are used for corrective measures, and ... some chastisement is used to increase the impression that sin is not acceptable to God. Either or both are part of a training process that helps the adoptee to think and act like the Family into which s/he is being adopted.

Read Galatians 3:23-27 with that in mind. Read Romans 7:11-25. Notice how Paul recommends the law by saying that it is "holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (v. 12). Note v. 14 where he says that the law is "spiritual." Then note in vv. 15-25 how he admits that he struggles in life to be true to God's holiness, blamelessness, and love ... but falls short of it because he is human (v. 18). In the mix, he admits that a spiritual war takes place in his mind and heart (vv. 19-24). How is he ultimately to be delivered? *Through Jesus Christ, his advocate, comforter, and deliverer.*

In Genesis 4:7, what did God tell Cain was the root cause of his problem? Was it merely a bad attitude about the sacrifices (see Hebrews 11:4)? *The Jerusalem Bible* translates that verse thus: "...If you are ill disposed, is not sin at the door like a crouching beast hungering for you, which you must master?" *The Anchor Bible* translates it: "...If you do not [act right], sin is the demon at the door, whose urge is toward you; yet you can be his master." *Moffatt* reads: "If you are sullen, sin is lying in wait for you, eager to be at you – yet you ought to master it." Other

translations are similar. Notice the instruction that Cain is expected to control and overcome sin in his life.

The lesson that we should learn from this is simple: Christians are in the process of being adopted into the God Family through Jesus Christ. Because they are humans, they are not exempt from the sin that permeates our world. Even children are adjudged as having a period of time before they are held responsible for the actions that proceed from their increasing knowledge of good and evil (see Isa. 7:10-16; Rom. 9:11). Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:11-14 that Christians have a “child” stage through which they go. In both cases, Paul makes it crystal clear that they cannot remain “babes” and hope to move on to the spiritual growth and maturity that God expects (see 2 Peter 3:9-18).

Would you conclude from these verses that God has always had laws that would define acceptable behaviors – as well as unacceptable behaviors? In other words, would God have had standards of behavior for Adam and Eve – centuries before He gave the laws of the 10 Commandments to the nation of Israel (see Gen. 2:17)?

Romans 5:13

Did sin exist before God gave the law to Israel? Yes. Is sin attributed to man without a law? No (see Rom. 4:15). How would you answer those who claim that no law existed between Adam’s creation and Exodus 20? Do you have all the evidence you need to draw a reasonable conclusion? Let’s “walk through” some of the things you can use to draw a reasonable conclusion.

Read Romans 5:14. Was there death from Adam’s time to Moses’ time? Refer to 1 John 3:4 and Romans 6:23. Does that prove the existence of law? Transgression of some kind of law? Think about this very carefully. Of what sins were Adam and Eve guilty? Lying? Stealing? Coveting? Dishonoring their Parent? Murder (consider bringing the death penalty down upon themselves and all of mankind for their sin – or the innocent male child mentioned in Genesis 3:15)? Apply the same rationale to Cain. What do you think? Have you found conclusive evidence that sin was committed because a law was broken (see again Gen. 2:17)? Was there a commandment given to Adam?

Now, compare Romans 7:7 to Romans 8:3. What is the function of the law and why is it unable to do more than its function? The function of the law is to identify/define sin. The law cannot fulfill its primary function of creating a sinless world because humans are spiritually weak (see Hebrews 8:8). The problem with the first covenant with Israel was with the people ... not with the covenant itself – or the law that was given to undergird the covenant.

Ask yourself whether or not the law can make you do what it requires of you? Can it do any more than define the transgression? Can it give you the power to do what it says? Can the law give you the Holy Spirit to do it? If you obey exactly what the law says, have you fulfilled all of the spirit of the law? What does Paul mean that the law was weak through the flesh? Understand the function of the law.

Now read 2 Corinthians 10:2-4. Notice Paul's differentiation between in the flesh and after the flesh. Since we are made up of flesh and blood, can we help walking in the flesh? On the other hand, can we choose not to war after the flesh? That is your answer.

Here we see the term flesh used in two contexts: (a) a neutral context that means nothing more than “the human body” – which could also include seeing things from a human point of view rather than from God's point of view – and (b) an ethical context in which the term flesh is inextricably connected to sin. What Paul means when he uses flesh in the ethical sense is this: the body, with all of its mental, emotional, and physical instincts, is the point that is seized by sin in order to launch its attack on you with the greatest possible prospect of success.

Paul, in Galatians 5:13, uses the expression “...occasion to the flesh...” to describe this (emphases added). The Greek word is aphorme, which means “the starting point or base of operations for an expedition ... [and] the resources needed to carry through an undertaking; occasion, pretext, opportunity” (BAG, p. 127). This amounts to a bridgehead or other point of advantage from which to launch an attack. Sin – lawbreaking – uses our five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell) as an aphorme to attack our hearts and minds.

How many of these were employed by the tempter in Genesis 3:1-7? Sight – Eve saw that it was good for food and pleasant to the eyes; taste – she and Adam ate it; sound – they listened to the serpent's spiel; and touch – Eve said that God had warned them not to even touch it (vv. 3, 6). You can probably think of an example where smell is connected

to temptation and sin. Think of the movie *Scent of a Woman*, starring Al Pacino. How can touch and taste induce you to sin? For taste, read Genesis 2:16, 17; Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14; and 1 Corinthians 10:20, 21. For touch, read 1 Corinthians 7:1, 2 and 2 Corinthians 6:17.

What the mind does with the things that affect the five senses is dependent upon whether or not that mind follows what is holy or ... what is unholy. If you insist upon being your own moral compass, then the best you can do and be is fleshly (see Isa. 55:6-9; Rom. 8:5-8; and 1 John 2:15, 16 in order to understand the point). If you are remembering Jeremiah 31:31-34, then you should be getting the idea about why the Lord God is going to put His laws into Israel's hearts and inward parts. Remember this: Thoughts drive actions. A holy spirit in your mind and heart is a valuable weapon in this warfare (see Eph. 6:10-17).

The Spirit and Righteousness of the Law

We saw in Romans 7:12, 14 that the law is spiritual ... as well as holy, just, and good. We also saw in Romans 8:4 that the law has a righteousness in it that can be fulfilled in those who are spiritually-minded. If all of this is true, why would anyone think that it was God's will that the law should be annulled? If all of that is derived from the law, why make its presence among us unnecessary? Let's consider some situations in which God's law plays a most important role in determining the spiritual and righteous outcome in those of true faith.

Matthew 15:10-20 helps us to understand what defiles a person in God's sight. From where do the things that come out of a person's mouth come? The heart. In this situation, Jesus is not talking about the hollow, muscular organ that circulates the blood by alternate dilations and contractions. He is talking about the person's center of emotions, personality attributes, inmost thoughts and feelings. This is that to which Elihu referred in Job 32:8. This is that to which Paul referred in Romans 8:16 and 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. The things of God are revealed to us from His mind to ours. If you understand that, what do you think Jesus was saying in John 6:63?

What lessons about murder and adultery does Jesus teach us in Matthew 5:21-28? Is there more to the law than exactly what is written down – the letter of the law? Is there something called the spirit of the law that comes into play? In this case, spirit has to do with the real

meaning of the law. Isaiah 42:21 prophesied that Jesus Christ would come to "...magnify [to praise and increase the importance of] the law, and make it honorable" (emphases added). The Hebrew word gadal has several definitions that combine to mean: "become great and powerful, firm, strong like a twisted cord" (BDB, p. 152).

That is the essence of Paul's comment in Romans 3:31 where he says that the Christian faith does not make the law void; rather it establishes (Greek = histemi: to confirm, make or consider valid; BAG, pp. 382, 383) the law. Is that what Jesus was doing? Or ... was He replacing the law with His comments, as is claimed by many when they say that the Sermon on the Mount was the new law given to Christians? This where the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is misappropriated and used to claim that the God intended to give His Church a totally new law appropriate for the Christian faith (ostensibly, in contrast to the Jewish faith). Are they correct in that assumption? Not at all!

In His exposition in Matthew 5:21 through 7:29, Jesus shows that you can obey the letter of the law, yet transgress the spirit of the law. Remember Proverbs 23:7 ("As he thinks in his heart, so is he" – emphases added) and Jeremiah 17:9 ("The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" – emphases added). You can outwardly obey the letter by physically refraining from transgressing it, but inwardly disobey the spirit by harboring the thoughts and emotions that would, in fact, carry out a physical transgression if unleashed.

Moreover, Matthew 5:17-19 is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:1-20 is Jesus Christ's introduction to His discussion about the spirit of the law. Matthew 5:17-19 is His declaration that His following comments were not intended to make the declarations of God's law or prophets null and void. Why is that point overlooked? It comes from the concept that God did away with the law and prophets through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The carnal mind takes over the conversation from there.

It is evident, therefore, that the heart (the seat of our emotions and mental faculties) is the objective of any attack by any unholy enemy. Satan and sin are the two greatest unholy enemies we will ever face. Why? Because they are deceptive (read Revelation 12:9, Matthew 24:4, 5, and 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; 11:4, 13- 15). Look up the term deceive and write down the complete definition. That's what we are dealing with in

sin. Read again Matthew 24:4, 5 and contemplate what Jesus forecasted.

Now read again Jeremiah 31:31-34. What do you think God will be doing in the future when He puts His law into the hearts of the House of Israel and the House of Judah? Will they understand more fully the magnified concepts of His law? Read Hebrews 8:8 and 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Does it appear that the Israelites did not have the heart in them to obey God (Ex. 16:4; Deut. 5:29)? If not, what qualitative difference would it make to put the magnified law into their hearts? How does this add significance to Romans 10:1-11?

Be aware that Romans 10:4 (KJV) should be understood to mean that “Christ” (Gal. 3:23-25; 1 Cor. 2:16; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:27) is the telos of the law (the objective; the goal toward which the law is directed; BAG, p. 819). Most translations follow tradition when telos is translated to mean “the cessation, or termination, of the law.” How could that be true if it is plainly stated in Jeremiah 31:31-34 that God will put His law into Israel’s and Judah’s “inward parts” (KJV; emphases added) in the future? How could that be true if Jesus Christ said that He did not come to bring the law to an end (Matt. 5:17)? Read Romans 7:1. Are those not in “Christ” exempt from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:1, 2)? No. Does that explanation make it easier for you to understand Galatians 3:24, 25? The commandments identify sin in the letter and spirit. But ... the spiritual comprehension of its demands results in the development of a holy spirit that directs our minds and hearts toward the mind of Jesus Christ, the Lawgiver (see Rom. 8:1-9; 1 Cor. 2:16; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:5 and Col. 2:25-27).

Slavery to Sin

Paul makes a very important observation in Romans 6:16:

Don’t you know that you are the servant [Greek = duolos: any kind of dependence; BAG, p. 205] to those to whom you submit yourselves to obedience ... whether of sin unto death, or obedience unto righteousness? (emphases added)

Here, Paul is using the term servant in the broadest sense of the term (Ibid.). However, BAG shows that the same word in v. 19 is intended to read: “...you have yielded your members in slavery to impurity” (Ibid,

p. 204; emphases added). So, there is a sense in which *duolos* carries the sense of *slavery*. Paul and other New Testament writers demonstrate that their own lives are in *servitude* to Jesus Christ (see Rom. 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1). In 2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul says that the apostles are "...your servants for Jesus' sake." In that context, he uses *duolos* to mean that the apostles are *unconditionally obligated* to serve the Christians. Why? Because they are *unconditionally obligated* as part of their servitude to Jesus Christ.

This discussion is focused on the following question: If you sin, are you the slave/servant of sin? You have to understand this part of Romans 6 in the broader context of Paul's discussion about baptism and the spiritual benefits to be derived from it (vv. 6-23). It appears that Paul is giving the reader a reminder that s/he is going to be in *servitude/slavery* on one side or the other. His ultimate point is that the individual has the *choice* to be on the side with the greater, *eternal* benefits.

In Romans 7:1-6, Paul switches to another analogy in order to make the point clearer. His premise in this analogy is that God's law has dominion over all of us *as long as we live*. Paul wrote this several years after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Our relationship to *sin* is compared to a *marriage*. His argument might sound strange in today's world, but not so in Paul's (see Gen. 2:20-24; Matt. 19:3-9). According to God's law, "marriage" is bound by God to be "until death." The death of either marriage partner frees the survivor to marry again, if s/he chooses, without being charged with adultery. *Adultery* is a violation of God's law regarding marriage (Ex. 20:14, 17; 1 John 3:4; Rom. 6:23).

Once Paul establishes the serious nature of his analogy, he reveals in v. 4 that, in a *figurative/metaphorical* manner, we are "married" to *sin*. In order for us to be "married" to *Jesus Christ*, we must be freed from sin: either we have to die ... or sin has to die. Paul showed in Romans 6:3-14 that *we* have to *die* to sin through repentance and baptism. That "death" and "resurrection" is *symbolic* of our *new* lives in Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

The logic is simple: If, after we have *died* to sin, we continue to flirt with it and fall victim to it, we again fall victim to the law of sin and death (Ezek. 18:4, 20: "the person who sins shall surely die"). If we are put into a position to "marry" Christ, then we must be faithful to Him as His "fiancé" (2 Cor. 11:2, 3; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Paul shows in Romans

7:4-6 the essence of that comment: Jesus Christ Himself *died* that we should be “married” to Him – and paved the way for *us* to *die* to sin in order for our pending “marriage” to Him to be doubly secure.

Being “freed from the law” does not mean that the *law* is *terminated*. It means, as shown above, that we, as *Christians*, do not suffer the consequences of breaking the law ... what is referred to as being “under the law.” We are *not* given the liberty to sin at will; we are expected to repent, overcome the sin that so easily besets us, and move on spiritually. In Christ, we are under *grace* and *mercy* as long as we do not use them as an excuse for continuing in sin. We must understand the aphorism that teaches: Dead to sin; alive unto Christ.

Paul’s analogy continues in Romans 8. You must remember that chapters and verses are not part of the original letters penned by the authors of scriptures. They were added later by translators in order to serve as reference points – much the same as I do when I refer to a particular book, chapter, and verse in the lessons I teach. Romans 8 addresses important concepts that the reader should grasp and use as a framework for his/her spiritual education. For example: What does Paul say in v. 1 that is derived from chapters six and seven? He strikes a difference between “walking after the flesh” and “walking after the Spirit.” It is the difference between *sin* and *righteousness*.

Classically, the writer states a premise that is supported, or argued, in the information that follows it. Therefore, we should expect the following discussion to delineate between “flesh” and “Spirit.” Remember this: *Every cause has an effect; every effect has a cause*. Think of “flesh” and “Spirit” in the context of the “cause/effect” premise. From this, we will derive Paul’s *maxim* (Late Latin = *maxima propositio*) – *the greatest, concise rule of conduct*. In other words, if you truly desire to overcome sin, then you must know, understand, and follow this greatest, most concise rule of conduct.

The greatest statement in 8:1 concerns the question of whether or not those in Christ are subject again to *condemnation* every time they sin. Paul says that they are not. Why? They are not returned to the *pre-baptism* state if they continue to pursue the *spiritual* goals embedded in God’s will through Jesus Christ.

One of the most egregious mistakes made in traditional Christian theology is the teaching that repentance, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Spirit causes one to

be “born again” and, thereby, “saved.” However, that simply paves the way for one to enter “the new life of the Spirit” and abandon one’s slavery to sin and death.

Paul describes in the most poignant terms the continuing struggle that believers undergo after becoming Christians (7:15-25). What he ultimately demonstrates is that our salvation is an eschatological process: *It will be fully realized beyond history beginning with the return of Jesus Christ.* As *The Interpreter’s Bible* puts:

Paul is so sure of the divinely appointed end of history [that is: *eschatology*], and so certain that this end is imminent, that he is often able to disregard the interim and talk as though the new age has come ... 6:2-7:6. But actually this final fulfillment has not come; and it is “in hope” that “we are saved” (vol. 9; p. 504).

This concept is neatly framed in Romans 4:17 where Paul says that Abraham believed that God “calls those things that do not presently exist as though they already exist” (emphases added). In other words: *It is as good as done.* It is also part of the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 – which speaks specifically about “things hoped for.”

Adam Clarke’s explanation of the term faith is most interesting:

[*Substance* is] that which becomes a foundation for another thing to stand on. And *elenchos* (*evidence*) signifies such a “conviction” as is produced in the mind by the “demonstration” [that is: to show by reasoning and proof] of a problem, after which demonstration no doubt can remain, because we see from it that the thing is, that it cannot but be, and that it cannot be otherwise than as it is and is proved to be (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, p. 1275)

That said, now read Romans 8:2 carefully. What purpose does law serve? Does it provide a “framework,” or “principle,” of conduct relative to “life in Christ Jesus” and “sin and death”? What is the difference between the two? You must understand that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ” depends heavily on faith. When Paul speaks of law (Greek = nomos) in this verse, he is not using that term to speak of

the law given to Israel (the 10 Commandments). He is speaking of a “pattern, principle, system, or rule.”

The Interpreter’s Bible suggests in its exegesis that a comma be placed after “Spirit” and “Christ” so that you would read it to say that “The principle, or rule, of **the Spirit**—i.e., **of life in Christ Jesus**—**has set me free**, etc.” (p. 506). In this way, the Spirit is identified with the community of believers called the “Church”: “The Spirit, in other words, is what makes the church the church” (Ibid.).

In that same verse, Paul speaks of “the law of sin and death.” In this case, he is speaking of the law of God that is revealed in the 10 Commandments and elsewhere. God’s law says that breaking the commandment warrants a death sentence. But, “life in Christ” has freed us from that death sentence to the point that we apply v. 1 regarding being “in Christ” as opposed to “walking after the flesh.”

Interpreter’s posits an interesting explanation to which we should give serious consideration because it demonstrates the process of eschatology that is built into God’s plan. This explanation helps you to understand the seeming problem of spirit-led people who still sin against God. Here is the explanation:

If Paul means here “has already freed me,” he is speaking in the eschatological terms of so much of his discourse in this epistle, and really means “has already as good as freed me”—i.e., the thing is so certain and so imminent that it is fair to think of it as having already happened (Ibid; emphases added).

The great news is that you can live in spiritual freedom knowing that there is no condemnation for your sins. *Your salvation is as good as accomplished in Christ if you live as though what shall be is already accomplished.* Why? Because the acquisition of God’s spirit of holiness has broken the power of sin and death so that you can move ahead in life in the Spirit knowing that the ultimate outcome is more important than any future sin that you might commit through ignorance or weakness. Sin is placed under the death sentence (v. 3) so that you can live by the righteousness (the just requirement) of the law (v. 4).

But ... there is a word of caution that must be understood. This is found in Hebrews 6:4-8. Read this carefully:

v. 4. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, v. 5. and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, v. 6. if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to open shame. V. 7. For the earth which drinks in the rain that comes often upon it, and brings forth vegetation that is useful for food by those who till it, receives a blessing from God: v. 8. but that which bears thorns and briers is rejected, and cursed to be burned (emphases added).

If you do not live by the hope of the ultimate outcome of God's plan, then you become as though you are a thorn/brier (Mal. 4:1). That is the ultimate price you will pay for remaining a slave to sin. As long as you sincerely try to live a sinless life, you are not condemned by the law. So, your personal choices have to be well-chosen.

Personal Choices

Read Romans 8:5-8 very carefully and think about what Paul is saying. What are the things of the flesh? What does it mean to be carnally minded? How does this compare to John's instruction in 1 John 2:15-17? Do you associate the lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and pride of life with the appetites of the flesh and the carnal mind? If so, then you are now aware of the "enemy within" that has to be resisted and fought.

Does the carnal mind have to do with being sensual? What does sensual mean? It has to do with the body and the five senses as opposed to the intellect or spirit (mind). Is the carnal mind obedient to God's rules of holy conduct? Paul says that it not only is not subject to the law of God ... it cannot be (v. 8). If God's law had been terminated when Jesus Christ was crucified, this statement would be moot (that is: resolved and not worthy of discussion).

The *KJV* renders a confusing translation of v. 9. Let's use the *NIV* translation:

You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does

not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Paul's point is really rather simple: You need *the gift of Holy Spirit* to guide you away from carnality. You need *a renewed mind* that is on a spiritual plane that will lead you away from carnality. Read John 14:26 and understand that the Spirit of God is an *educator* and *guide*. John 16:13-15 tells you that when it describes this Holy Spirit as a guide to all of God's truth. It will make you more and more aware of the things of God. That awareness should result in changed behavior.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 to understand how God, by revelation through His Spirit, will enable you to understand things that even the great carnal minds among us do not understand. Understand, though, that it is a *spiritual* education that you do not get in one, fell swoop ... in a sudden, single action. It comes, according to Isaiah 28:10, "precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little." Think of having to learn the alphabet before you can learn to read ... of learning how to count numbers before you can do arithmetic and mathematics. It takes time to be educated in God's thoughts and ways.

Read Romans 8:9-11. Does the *flesh* ("sinful nature" or "carnal mind") control humans outside of Christ? Because sin and wickedness are problems centered in your *mind*, they are *spiritual* problems. One way or another, we are motivated and led by one *spirit* or another. If you are *carnally minded*, then you are motivated and led by the *carnal spirit*. If you truly desire to be a holy person, then you must be motivated and led by the *Holy Spirit* of God.

In v. 16, you can see that Paul is consistent with his statement in 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. God spiritually communicates with us in order to focus our attention upon His holiness – His thoughts and ways (see Isa. 55:8-11). The things that He teaches us through that spiritual communication are *spiritually discerned*. In other words, *you have to have a holy mind in order to understand holy thoughts and ways*. Paul says that those who are *not* led by that Holy Spirit of God and Christ do *not* belong to God and Christ.

That understood, let's now focus our minds and hearts on some profitable information regarding *spiritual choices*. Read Romans 8:12, 13. Find two ways by which you can avoid being the slave of sin and subsequently suffering the *eternal death* to which you ultimately will be judged. Did you list: (1) living according to the dictates of the Spirit, as

opposed to the appetites of the flesh and (2) ridding your mind and heart of the demands of the flesh?

Note the *caveat emptor* (“buyer beware”) in Romans 8:12 – the essence of which is that you are not bound by any obligation to live according to the carnal mind (see vv. 5-8; Gal. 5:13-21). Why? Verse 13: If you do obligate yourself to live according to the carnal mind, you ultimately are going to suffer the eternal death. The rest of v. 13 explains that you have the choice of *mortifying* (*literally*: “to put to death”) the deeds of the body.

This means that you begin to subdue the physical desires of the carnal mind and practice self-denial. That is the idea put forth in Romans 12:1, 2. You begin the process of renewing your mind by submitting to God’s will. In the process, you become a child of God through Jesus Christ. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Are you willing to do what it takes to bring your mind and body into subjection to Jesus Christ? You are, after all, in a spiritual marathon, of sorts.

How do you maintain your freedom from sin? Read Romans 8:18. You compare the ultimate outcome of your future existence (“the glory which shall be revealed in us”; see 1 John 3:1-3) to whatever “sufferings” you have to endure in order to obtain it. Are you willing avoid being unequally yoked (see 1 Cor. 6:14-18)? Are you willing to follow Paul’s exhortation in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to constantly examine yourself in order to determine whether or not you are in the true faith? Read Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:23-31 about taking the Passover wine and unleavened bread. Take note of v. 28 where Paul says that the participants must examine themselves beforehand. Now, go back and read the entire eighth chapter of Romans to get the idea that Paul is teaching.

Galatians 5:19-21 lists the various ways in which the sinful nature (*KJV* = “works of the flesh”) manifests itself. Can those who yield themselves to these things inherit the Kingdom of God? Read 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. Note the various acts of unrighteousness Paul identifies. All of this has been the product of partaking of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. The same lesson has been presented to mankind for around 6,000 years. It is a testimony to the plain truth of Jeremiah 17:9, 10:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:
Who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins,

even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

What must you change in your heart and mind in order to please God? You have a choice in the matter.

Review Questions

1. How does the Apostle John define *sin* in 1 John 3:4?
2. 1 John 5:17 – What does John classify as *sin* in this scripture? What is *unrighteousness*? Look it up in a dictionary and write down as complete a definition as possible.
3. 1 John 1:8, 10; 2:4 – What kind of person has *never sinned*? Do we make God a *liar* if we say we have not sinned? What does God consider *you* to be if *you* claim that *you* have not broken His commandments? Is it evident that God does not leave any of us any “wiggle room”?
4. James 2:10, 11 – How *guilty* are we if we only break *one part* of God’s law? How does James explain the situation?
5. Genesis 4:7 – What did God tell Cain was the root cause of his problem? Was it merely a bad attitude about the sacrifices? (See Hebrews 11:4.)
6. Would you conclude from these verses that God has always had *law* that would define acceptable behaviors – as well as unacceptable behaviors? In other words, would God have had *standards of behavior* for Adam and Eve – centuries before He gave the laws of the 10 Commandments to the nation of Israel?
7. Romans 5:13 – Did *sin* exist *before* God gave the law to Israel? Is sin attributed to man *without a law*?
8. Verse 14 – Was there *death* from Adam’s time to Moses’ time? Does that prove the existence of *law*? *Transgression*?
9. Compare Romans 7:7 to Romans 8:3 – What is the *function* of the law and why is it unable to do more than its *function*?

10. 2 Corinthians 10:2-4 – Notice Paul’s differentiation between *in the flesh* and *after the flesh*. Since we are made up of *flesh and blood*, can we help *walking in the flesh*? On the other hand, can we *choose* not to *war after the flesh*?

11. Matthew 15:10-20 – What *defiles* a person in God’s sight? From where do the things that come out of a person’s *mouth* come? Are you understanding this properly yet?

12. Matthew 5:21-28 – What lessons about *murder* and *adultery* does Jesus teach us here? Is there more to the law than exactly what is written down – that is: *the letter of the law*? Is there something called *the spirit of the law* that comes into play?

13. Romans 6:16 – How can you tell if you are the servant (slave) of something? If you sin, are you the *slave* of sin?

14. Verses 12, 13 – List two ways by which you can *avoid* being the slave of sin.

15. Verse 18 – How do you *maintain* your freedom from sin?

16. Romans 8:5-8 – Read this very carefully and think about what Paul is saying. What are the *things of the flesh*? What does *carnally mindedness* mean? Does it have to do with being *sensual*? What does *sensual* mean? Is such a mind obedient to God’s rules of holy conduct?

17. Verse 9 – Does the *flesh* (“sinful nature”) *control* humans outside of Christ? Are those who are in Christ *controlled* by a different Spirit? Would that refer to a *Holy Spirit*? Give a brief explanation.

18. Galatians 5:19-21 – List all of the ways the *sinful nature* (KJV = “works of the flesh”) manifests itself. Can those who yield themselves to these things inherit the Kingdom of God? (See also 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.) What must you change in yourself in order to please God?

Chapter Two

What Went Wrong?

Does the Genesis 1:26-28 account by Moses agree with Paul's account in Ephesians 1:4-14? The term *image* in Genesis 1:26, 27 is from the Hebrew word *tselem*. It basically means "a representative figure." It is an *example* or *type*. Paul, no doubt, borrows from this scripture when he writes in Romans 5:14 that Adam was "the *figure* of Him that was to come" (emphases added). There were two ways in which Adam was a *type* or *figure* of Jesus Christ: (1) in his physical appearance and (2) in being the ruler over all the earth and everything in it (see also Psa. 24 and Col. 1:16 re: all things having been created "by Him ... and for Him"). Adam also was to be a *sample* of what the rest of mankind was to become *physically* and *spiritually*: holy, blameless, and loving (Eph. 1:4).

Adam: The First "Divine Appointee"

In the sense that we studied "divine appointees" in Exodus 4:16 and 7:1, Adam was appointed to be the "God" of this world when he was given *dominion* over it by the Lord God. He was created in the *bodily* characteristics of "God" ("image") and set on a path by which he and his descendants could be *born again*, by means of *adoption* (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14), through Jesus Christ. Adam became the Lord God's "divine appointee" when he was given "dominion." The Lord God is the divine being who became Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14; Phil. 2:5-11).

Now read Genesis 2:8, 9, 15-17. What did God warn Adam about in this account? Of which tree was he not to eat? What penalty would he

suffer if he did? What does the word *die* mean? Your answers to these questions should give you a gentle nudge toward God's truth: The Lord God's statement that Adam was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was based on the established standard of behavior of being holy, blameless, and loving (Eph. 1:4; 1 John 3:4). If he did *not* comply with that expectation, then he became subject to the *death* from which there is no possibility of recovery. Why? Because lovingkindness, blamelessness, and holiness are three important "pillars" involved in the coming adoption process. If Adam could not respond in *faith* to the Lord God's statement, then the consequences would *automatically* be the result of ignoring that expectation in God's will. How so?

Partaking of the fruit of the knowledge good and evil would lead to the *preservation of mortality* and all that being subject to it implies. Mankind, in fact, would *not acquire* immortality (exemption from death), much less self-existent, eternal life beyond this physical life, if he ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. The Lord God did, indeed, pronounce that death sentence upon Adam and Eve when He said: "...You were taken out of the dust of the earth and to the dust of the earth you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). With that judgment, He asserted that *mortality* would be their lot.

However, as Simpson put it in his exegesis on this verse in *The Interpreter's Bible*: "...There is no suggestion here that man would have lived forever had he *not* eaten of the forbidden fruit (cf. Gunkel, Genesis, pp. 22-23; Skinner, Genesis, p. 83). Rather, the implication is that man would have regarded death, not as the *last* fearful frustration, but as his *natural end*" ("Genesis," vol. 1, p. 512; emphases added). Mankind's lifespan would be *ephemeral* (short, transitory).

Irish poet William Butler Yeats wrote a poem titled "Ephemera" that poetically describes the *transitoriness* bound up in the lives of humans and nature. It's a sad "here today, gone tomorrow" commentary on love and life ... perhaps inspired by the scripture in Ecclesiastes in which Solomon describes the frustration he suffered in his pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. Paul's encouragement in Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5 is to "redeem" the time we have. The Greek term is *exagorazo*, which, as BAG puts it, probably means: "*make the most of the time* (which is severely limited because of [several reasons])" (p. 271). Why? *Because we do not presently have eternal life.*

As we should understand from Genesis 3:19-24, it was when the Lord God closed off access to the Tree of Life (vv. 22-24) that He removed any possibility that man would ever have life beyond his “dust-to-dust” existence unless God Himself intervened. Notice carefully the wording used in Genesis 3:22: “...lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” (emphases added). This is a signal to the observant student that man was not created immortal in any shape, form, or fashion. It should also signal that life’s choices are not inconsequential. The basic choice is between life and death.

Had man not eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would have accepted the cessation of his present, physical life as a natural end that looked forward to the next stage of being made in the image of Elohim – the tree of life. Once he ate the wrong fruit, he desperately needed to be reconciled to God in order to have the opportunity to move on to being “born again” in the “express [specific; real] image” of God – the ultimate result of being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

The Hebrew word used for die in Genesis 2:17 does not mean to break fellowship between two individuals, to die of natural causes, to die as the result of being smitten, or to die as a result of a penalty imposed by some human authority. The same word used in Genesis 3:3 means to die by a penalty exacted by God. It has to do with the ultimate destruction of the individual.

The story itself reveals that the Lord God did not intend for Adam to understand that he would immediately die a physical death if he ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – even though he would eventually die a physical death. We know this because Adam and Eve continued to live long after they sinned!

In all that the story does not reveal, it could be inferred that the Lord God must have given Adam some measure of instruction about working and taking care of the garden and warned him of a dreadful consequence for disobedience – a consequence more serious than merely terminating his physical life: that is, never having access to any kind of life beyond his physical death. As one homespun commentator put it: “When you’re dead, you’re like old Rover: you’re dead, and you’re dead all over.” See Ecclesiastes 9:4, 5. Only God has the power to give life to you again.

Genesis 3:1-7 shows how Adam and Eve were, in fact, deceived into eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What does that

mean? This is really very simple. When the serpent enticed Adam and Eve to partake of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, they, in effect, chose to be the ones who would make the determination of what is good and evil. The Lord God understood that the danger of man becoming his own moral compass lies in his inability to properly control that knowledge. God, on the other hand, understands how to control the use of that knowledge in order to avoid the inevitable consequences of its misuse.

How This Death Affects Mankind

Two very important questions are answered in 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22: (1) By whom did *death* come upon the human race? and (2) In whom do all humans *die*? Let's add to the "mix" Galatians 3:22-25 because it teaches us a great lesson about this generational problem. After reading that, does it appear that God learned something in His experience with Adam and Eve that provoked this decision to include all of his descendants, or ... do you think that this was also part of the warning about *death*? There is but one answer: Adam was also a representative figure of all of mankind. As such, the Lord God concluded that his descendants also would be subject to the sin that had been committed by him and his wife Eve. Subsequent scripture proves the Lord God to have been right.

It is not a debatable point regardless of how you answer the question because "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:23). You and I are not innocent victims in this problem because we, in our own turn, have perpetuated the problem of sin among humanity. In that way, perhaps, it was part of the warning. Either way, the Lord God was correct in His assessment of mankind. As Creator, He apparently already understood the nature of the problem due to the precautions taken by Him and His divine partner before the creation of the orderly universe (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

Galatians 3:22-24 uses the expression "...concluded all under sin..." (KJV; emphases added). The Greek term is sugkleio. The definition of this term sheds a light on the matter that probably makes the discussion quite a bit above "somewhat moot." The definition in BAG suggests that the Lord God did not go through the process of drawing a conclusion (an opinion or judgment after thinking about it) about the descendants

based on Adam and Eve's actions. In fact, the inference would be that He simply included any and all descendants in the penalty levied against Adam and Eve. Is there any scriptural evidence that such is the case?

We find partial evidence in Exodus 20:5, 6. Notice how succeeding generations suffer because of the sins of their ancestors. Note also Numbers 14:18-20: Succeeding generations suffer the results of their ancestors' sin, but ... the Lord God reserves His right to pardon those who willingly repent and begin to live by His thoughts and ways. To the point: It was no mystery to the Lord God that the parents' behavior, for good or ill, will influence the children's thoughts and ways for good or ill. So, that mixture of good and evil does not work well with God's original will that mankind should be holy, blameless, and loving.

Romans 1:18-32 is an interesting study into God's reaction to the *original sin* committed by mankind. Verse 25 states that what they did amounted to changing His truth into a *lie* and worshipping the *creature* rather than the *Creator*. *Self-righteousness* was introduced into the human milieu. What does Paul say happened as a result? Read vv. 24, 26, and 28. In those three verses, you will find the sense of Galatians 3:22-24.

Notice the expressions "gave them up to" (vv. 24, 26) and "gave them over to" (v. 28). Also, consider Paul's comments in Romans 8:20, 21 regarding creation being subjected to *vanity* and the *bondage of corruption*. Both of these references amount to this: When Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord God pronounced a terrible judgment on them *and creation*. He turned mankind over to the *consequences* of their sins and ... He subjected creation to a *purposelessness* (*vanity*; see Eccl. 1) and set it on a path to *degenerate* and *disintegrate* (*bondage of corruption*). See the final stages of that in Matthew 24:21, 22. Unless there is *repentance* and *obedience* in Jesus Christ, this creation will eventually *self-destruct*.

Back in Galatians 3:22-24, Paul distinguishes between *faith* and *law*. This is a prickly subject because of *militating* factors bound up in language. I argued in the "Introduction" against Lewis's claim that God does not *demand* repentance before He will take you back because it is a *description* of what getting back to God is. That statement is something that is a *militating factor* because it works against God's revelations.

For example, read Genesis 12:1-5. What directions did the Lord God give to Abraham (Abram)? Were the blessings He was offering conditional upon Abraham doing something? What? If Abraham believed that the Lord God would do such a thing ... *and never made a move to leave home and go to the country He would show him ...* would he have gotten the land anyway? Obviously not ... because some kind of action was required of Abraham in order to receive the promise.

Read James' commentary in James 2:14-26. That commentary addresses such prickly issues. Because Abraham had faith in the promise, he did as he was told to do: faith requires actions. Believing alone does not constitute faith in the sense of this discussion. In Ephesians 2:8-10, Paul explains that we are saved by grace through faith ... Not of works, lest anyone should boast." However, Ephesians 2:10 specifically says that we were "...created in Christ Jesus unto good works..." He completes his thought by saying that God had ordained those "good works" beforehand (emphases added; see Eph. 1:4 – holy, blameless, loving).

Faith, in one sense of the word, means that you take God at His word *without trying to impose a law upon Him that requires Him to do what He says He will do*. Abraham received the promises of God through faith. Paul makes this clear in Romans 4:3-5, 13-21. Verses 3-5 explicitly say that God made a promise to Abraham, and Abraham believed Him. That infers that God did not set up a perpetual list of things Abraham had to do in order to get the reward. If Abraham had been told to complete that list of demands in order to get the reward, then God would have owed him the reward. Nevertheless, there were actions Abraham had to take in order for that faith to be properly demonstrated. Doing nothing would not have demonstrated true faith.

On the other hand, if God could not trust man to act in faith, then He would impose a law (a standard for behavior) in order to train him to act in true faith (Gal. 3:23, 24; Heb. 12:1-11). Adam and Eve did not act in faith: they did not believe God meant what He said about the effects of eating the fruit of good and evil. God's response should have been predictable: He would make the judgment that, apart from faith, all things human would be locked up in the prison of sin – therefore, inevitably in death (see Romans 3:23; 6:23).

In order to mitigate (soften; make less severe) the sentence of ultimate destruction, He imposed laws that would define sin for us in

order to *teach* us how to obey Him and act on faith (see John 3:16-19; Rom. 7:7, 12; 2 Pet. 3:9). The law is a two-edged sword because it imposes death upon the trespasser, but it also makes man dependent upon God's *grace* and *mercy* and seek it for *redemption*. How did God do this?

The True Effect of Sin

Read Romans 1:18-32 thoroughly and understand the cause-effect relationships involved. Why is God's *wrath* revealed? What does this expression mean: "...hold the truth in unrighteousness..." (v. 18; *KJV*)? *The Jerusalem Bible* reads: "...keep the truth imprisoned in their wickedness"; the *RSV* reads: "...by their wickedness suppress the truth"; *Moffat* reads: "...hinder the Truth by their wickedness"; and *Barclay* translates it: "...in their wickedness, [they] willfully suppress the truth that is struggling in their hearts."

Paul's point in this section of scripture has to do with *God's wrath expressed toward mankind's sinful hindrance of His Truth*. That means that *sin obstructs God's will concerning man's thoughts and ways* when compared to God's thoughts and ways (Isa. 55:6-11). What we need to pay attention to from this point on is what God has decided to do about it. Let's consider the remainder of this very important piece of instruction in holiness, blamelessness, and love.

Verses 19, 20 reveal that has God manifested to mankind details about His existence. Paul says that all of the various parts of God's creation are God's revelation of His power and high seat of authority (see Rom. 9:20-24; Isa. 45:5-9). Mankind is not excused from *ignorance* of God's existence. Even those who make idols of the works of their hands admit that "God" exists! However, the idols (in whatever form they exist) are *false* gods (see Ex. 20:1-6).

Now read verses 21-23. Paul lists five things that express the actions of mankind toward God's manifestations of His existence:

1. They kept God's truth from being known and properly spread to all of mankind.
2. They actually knew God, but they did not praise, honor, or make His name and magnificence widely known.

3. They were not thankful toward God for His plan for them or the benefits that He has in store for them by which they could successfully complete that plan and receive even greater benefits from Him.

4. They claimed that they were wise because of what they believed and did as self-proclaimed arbiters of truth and morality. By that very action, they revealed their own foolishness because they were utterly incapable of knowing and doing the things God knows and does (Isa. 55:8, 9).

5. They created their own gods that were made to look like evil, deprived, degenerate man, birds, four-footed animals, and creeping things (like snakes, dragons, lizards, etc.).

In verses 24, 26, and 28, Paul writes something that expresses God's reaction toward man's hindrance of His Truth with their wickedness: "...God gave them up to/over to..." Then he gives examples of the things to which they were given up/over. What does this expression mean? To put it simply, God did a "Dr. Phil" on mankind and said: "Well, if you want to be your own moral compass and do things your way, instead of mine, then let's see how that works for you."

Specifically, it means that His judgment of their attitudes, as manifested in the list of the five ways in which they dishonored Him, is a judgment by which He allows the results of their sins to be visited upon them. It involves the simple cause-effect principle: their misguided moral principles will automatically cause their natural, undesirable results. God would allow them to know the deceptive nature of sin through experience. Someone can tell you that the stove is hot and hope that such instruction is sufficient. You can learn that way. But you can receive a deeper education when you ignore that warning and put your hand on the stove anyway.

First, because they became vain in their worship of their own idolatrous "gods," He allowed the cause/effect nature of their filthy sexual enjoyments and practices to come upon them. This would include all of the various sexually transmitted diseases and sexual aberrations – like transvestite fetishism, voyeurism, frotteurism, exhibitionism,

sexual sadism and masochism, pedophilia, gender identification disorders, abortions, and on and on – to come upon them.

Next, because they changed the truth of God into a lie, as their passions continued to degrade, they fell into homosexuality – abandoning the male/ female sexual identities that God originally gave to mankind (see Genesis 1:27, 28 – noting especially His intent that they *multiply ... a natural impossibility* between same-sex partners).

Then, because they did not want to retain the knowledge of God – not only the existence of the True God, but also the knowledge He continues to reveal as you learn His thoughts and ways – there came the plethora of *increasing social problems* such as we have to deal with today.

Paul is very candid in his description of the cause/effect nature of hindering God's truth by our wickedness. Little by little, generation after generation, these problems will manifest themselves in the social fabric of humanity until they reach the point at which our destruction is imminent. It is frightful to think about what future generations will be like as that cascading effect continues to grow in size and rapidity.

This is what went wrong – and this is why we need to be “saved” out of it through Jesus Christ. It should be very obvious that *we* are *incapable* of saving ourselves out of the mess we have created.

Dying in Adam ... Made Alive in Christ

Compare 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22 to Hebrews 7:9, 10. How could we die in *Adam* if we were not even yet born? How could *Levi* tithe in *Abraham* when Levi had not yet been born? Both of these statements are unusual concepts – especially in light of Ezekiel 18:19, 20.

Dying in Adam is connected to the original sin and its penalty of death. Paul is expressing *the principle of solidarity* – a special union or bond – among the human race. President John Kennedy used this notion of solidarity in a speech he gave in Berlin, Germany when he told them: “Ich bin ein Berliner!” (literally translated, he actually said: “I am one Berliner!” – he should have said: “Ich bin Berliner!”). He was not actually from Berlin; he was merely telling them that he suffered when they suffered, their pain was his pain, their problems were his problems. He was stressing the *universality* (solidarity) of the problems they

suffered because of the communist death-grip on so much of the world at that time.

Paul, in Romans 7:24, refers to the human body as a “...body of this death...” – that is, *a body that is mortal and destined to return to the dust and remain there, unless God has reason to be merciful and gracious enough to cancel that death sentence*. Remember that this was the penalty that Adam was told he would suffer if he ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. The universality of sin and death is a proven fact. That quandary entered the human experience through Adam. When God levied that curse upon Adam and Eve, He included all of their descendants. One would assume that He reasoned that their offspring would act no differently from the *fountainhead!* Remember our discussion above about this topic.

While you are not accountable for your father’s sins, you are accountable for doing whatever is necessary to be personally reconciled to God and give Him reason to cancel the death sentence against you (remember Colossians 2:9-15 – especially v. 14). Paul points out in this scripture that our way of escape – by a resurrection from the dead – is through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:6, 7). In these statements, Paul points out the fact that Jesus Christ became the forerunner of a new order of life that is made possible by faith in Him – just as Adam had introduced into the human milieu an order of life that would only end in confusion and death.

In Matthew 24:22, Jesus Christ prophesies the ultimate result of mankind’s knowledge of good and evil – if God does not intervene. Note that Jesus Christ says that “...there should no flesh be saved...” if those last days of awful tribulation are not cut short by God. The foolishness of mankind blinds him/her to this awful prophecy.

They will admit that climate change is caused by mankind, but they leave out that mankind’s sins have provoked God to a judgment, not only of mankind, but of the creation itself. Read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Notice all of the references to the climate conditions that will affect mankind and the production of food. Notice the remarks made about “strangers” coming into your land and displacing you and devouring your foodstuffs. Does any of that sound familiar in today’s world? If it does not, then your lack of that knowledge is a problem in the larger conversation about the solution to climate change.

Read John 3:16-21. What has to be done in order for that condemnation to be taken away? Do you get credit for being just a good person or an innocent child? Why or why not?

From the moment of your birth, you are condemned *in Adam*. The innocence of the infant does not cancel the death we are to receive *in Adam*. I know that sounds harsh on God's part, BUT – and this is important – do not react negatively at this point! You are going to learn in this Course the very special plan God has for dealing with questions like that. You are going to learn from your very own Bible God's revealed truth – not the traditions of so-called “Christianity” that are so lame and contradictory toward one another and God's revelation. The knowledge God provides frees us from the darkness of not *truly* understanding Him and His plan of salvation (see John 8:31, 32).

It is important for us to learn the “nuts and bolts” of what went wrong because it helps us to understand the “nuts and bolts” of how God intends to fix it. We should understand just how terribly wrong things went as a result of Adam's and Eve's sins and ... ours. We should understand just how seriously God takes the matter of sin.

Review Questions

1. In what way does the Genesis 1:26, 27 account by Moses agree with Paul's account in Ephesians 1:4-14? Explain the definition of the Hebrew term *tselem* in your answer.
2. Explain how and why Adam was appointed to be the “God” of this world.
3. What did God warn Adam about in Genesis 2:17? Of which tree was he not to eat? What penalty would he suffer if he did? What does the word *die* mean?
4. If Adam did not comply with that expectation, then he became subject to the *death* from which there is no possibility of recovery. Why?
5. There is no suggestion here that man would have lived forever had he not eaten of the forbidden fruit. (a) True (b) False Explain your answer.

6. Explain the significance of Genesis 3:19-24.
7. Explain the word used for die in Genesis 2:17.
8. What is the message of Ecclesiastes 9:4, 5?
9. What is the significance of Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil?
10. By whom did *death* come upon the human race? In whom do all humans *die*?
11. Galatians 3:22-24 uses the expression "...concluded all under sin..." (KJV; emphases added). Explain what that means, and use the terms vanity and bondage of corruption in that explanation.
12. Why is Romans 1:18-32 important to this discussion?
14. What is the difference between mitigate and militate?
15. Explain the difference between faith and belief. What role does Ephesians 2:8-10 play in this difference?
16. Does faith allow humans to impose demands upon God? Explain.
17. List five things in Romans 1:21-23 that express the reactions of mankind toward God's manifestations of His existence.
18. Explain the meaning of the expressions "gave them up/over to" in Romans 1:24, 26, 28. How did this affect mankind socially and sexually?
19. Explain how God's truth is turned into a lie through man's religions.
20. What does Paul mean that we all die in Adam?
21. What have you learned about the cause of climate change?

Chapter Three

Repentance from Dead Works

The basic – fundamental, or elementary – doctrines of Jesus Christ are listed in Hebrews 6:1, 2. There are seven of them: (1) repentance from dead works, (2) faith toward God, (3) baptisms (plural), (4) laying on of hands, (5) the resurrection of the dead, (6) eternal judgment, and (7) going on to perfection (that is, spiritual maturity; KJV). The first six appear to be a step-by-step formula for achieving number seven. To that end, it should be clear that these are things that must be understood, believed, performed, and taught in order for the true Christian to be spiritually educated enough for reaching spiritual maturity. Further, it should be understood that this is *expected* of us by God Himself. *They are not optional*. After all, the Apostle Paul wrote that “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 perfect, fully equipped and prepared for any good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). That is what *you* desire, right?

We will now begin a series of studies to explain what each doctrine means and how each relates to your ability to achieve true spiritual maturity and the salvation God has planned for you. It is a *process* for educating you in righteousness, but it is not necessarily a sequential process as listed. For instance, faith toward God might need to precede repentance from dead works; otherwise, what would be the stimulus for changing one’s heart and mind? I will assume at this point that you have an elementary faith in God and want to learn this process.

In coming to grips with why we must repent, it is vitally important to understand *what went wrong*, and ... what penalty was imposed because of it. Once we understand those two things, then we can begin to sort through God's remedy for fixing it – that is, for repairing the breach and bringing about reconciliation between ourselves and God. After all, the work He started in creating man in His own image is *not complete*. We don't get to the completion stage until we are fully reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

As always, look up every scripture, answer every question, study, and pray. May God bless your efforts to learn and do. You will be amazed at what you learn from these fundamental doctrines!

What God Planned

In order to understand why a certain need must be met or a certain demand obeyed, we must study through the Bible to figure out what was planned, as well as what went wrong with the plan. It is relatively simple to figure this out in scripture ... if you know for what to look. One sure-fire way of doing that is to go back to the most distant “beginning” of God's plan and work from there. Among scriptures like Genesis 1:1, John 1:1-3, Ephesians 1:3-14, Philippians 2:5-11, and 1 Peter 1:18-20, you find discussions about various aspects of the “beginning.” Can you tell by reading them which is the *most distant* “beginning”?

Ephesians 1:3-14 is the one that specifically reveals the plan of God to make mankind in His image and adopt them into His family. Paul says in v. 4 that this was done “*before* the creation of the orderly universe” (emphases added). With the exception of Genesis 1:1, the other scriptures reveal various aspects of things that went on *before* anything was created. However, Ephesians 1:3-14 describes the plan itself. That is where you want to begin your understanding of what was expected by God and why some of the other actions were taken *subsequent* to the overall plan.

The first question that Paul answers for us involves when God chose mankind *in Christ*. Paul states that it happened “before the foundation of the world” (*KJV*). The term *world* is translated from the Greek term *kosmos* – shown in the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* to mean “before the everlasting constitution of the universe” and “before the world existed.” That would put it before

Genesis 1:1. Scientists say that the universe came into being about 14 billion years ago, and the earth was formed about 4.5 billion years ago. This was well before the creation of man – *Homo sapien* having come into existence a mere 5,800+ years ago (refer to Bible Study Course Lesson Three, Chapter Five, pp. 79-86).

In v. 4, what does Paul say about the kind of character God intended mankind to have once He created us? Paul answers that question very succinctly: “...We should be *holy* and *blameless* before Him in *love*” (emphasis added). This suggests that God had a definite standard of behavior to which those who were to enter the “God” family would have to adhere. Why? Leviticus 19:2 explains it very succinctly: “You shall be *holy* because I am *holy*” (emphases added).

Humans and their Savior

That brings up the next question. Read Ephesian 1:5. For what *purpose* did God create mankind? Paul shows that, during this pre-creation time, God planned to *adopt* mankind into His family through Jesus Christ. Focus your attention on the information before you. What does this suggest? You have to read vv. 6, 7 to expand the “picture” that Paul is “painting” here. Verse 6 suggests that those *not* “in Christ” are *not* acceptable to Him. Verse 7 suggests that God anticipated that the human being would *not* always be holy, blameless, and loving.

Consider for a moment what the term “love” implies. Read Matthew 22:34-40, Exodus 20:1-17, John 14:15, Romans 13:8-10, and 1 John 1:5-10; 2:1-6. Now read 1 John 3:4 and Romans 6:23. The “death” the sinner will ultimately suffer, if his/her sins are *not* forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ, amounts to *total destruction* (see also Ezek. 18:4, 20). Every “soul” (the Hebrew term is *nephesh*: “a living, breathing being”; *BDB*) is responsible for his/her own sins. “Death” ultimately means “non-existence” (Isa. 65:16, 17; Mal. 4:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:24-26). Revelation 20:14, 15 reveals that the destruction of *death* and the *grave* is called “the *second* death” (Heb. 9:27). *Judgment* follows the first death; *destruction* follows the second death. It should be evident that this is a very serious matter relative to one’s access to becoming part of the God family. We will discuss this in greater detail in a later study.

In Ephesians 1:7, Paul discusses God’s plan to *redeem* sinful mankind through a *blood sacrifice* involving Jesus Christ. Please

remember that this was planned *before* the creation of the orderly universe. How can we track scripture's revelation of this? Use a concordance to look up various forms of the word *redeem*. Use the following scriptures as examples: Psalm 34:22; 103:4; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 9:11-15; 1 Peter 1:18-20; and Revelation 5:9; 14:3, 4.

In 1 Peter 1:18-20, we find something else that took place “before the creation of the orderly universe.” This is pertinent to our discussion because Peter confirms Paul's claim that Jesus Christ was set aside (ordained) to be the *redemption sacrifice* for mankind's sins at that time. Do you understand the gravity of John 3:16 more deeply by knowing this pre-history ... *before the universe even existed*? What can you understand now from Hebrews 10:5? Does it tell you that God determined *at that time* that the one who became Jesus Christ would come in a *human* body as a sin sacrifice?

Let's first consider information given to us by the Apostle John in John 1:1-3. John describes a pair of holy beings who companied with one another “in the beginning.” By his language, John shows that they are, essentially, *equals*. He does not put one in a higher position than the other. He refers to one of them as *the Word* and the other as *God*. I know that the word “God” could be used to show a dominant position ... but, John says that the Word was also *God*. How do we solve this puzzle?

Paul provides information in Philippians 2:5-11 that does exactly that. In v. 6, he shows that the two divine partners were *equals* ... and they did not argue with one another about their equality and fight for dominance. What was so remarkable about the one who became Jesus Christ, the human? In v. 7, we learn that He *willingly* submitted Himself to His divine partner in order to become a servant of humankind *in human form*. This information should enable you to understand more fully Hebrews 2:5-18 and Hebrews 10:5. It should also enable you to understand Paul's comment in Ephesians 1:3 regarding “the God and Father of Jesus Christ.”

I will use an example from Exodus 4:16 and 7:1 regarding the expression “God.” The Lord God made Moses “God” to his brother Aaron and the Egyptian Pharaoh. He was given *a position of authority* that was *higher* than the two. Read carefully John 10:30-36. Now read Psalm 82. To whom is this psalm addressed? Those humans to whom He has given authority as *judges* over other humans. Let's understand how this system worked among ancient Israel.

When the Lord God appointed Moses “God” over Aaron and the Pharaoh, He literally ordained Moses to be the *judge* of Israel. He gave to Moses the laws, statutes, and ordinances that would regulate *holiness* among the tribes of the nation. The first five books of the Bible are called “the Law.” You can see in Exodus 24:4 that “...Moses wrote all the words of the Lord...” That should tell you that those laws, statutes, and ordinances are not *Jewish* law or the law of *Moses* ... as many in mainstream Christianity claim/believe.

Exodus 18:13-16 shows that Moses, at first, was the only judge of Israel. The task took so much of his time from morning to night that he was about exhausted and unable to attend to his full range of duties as the leader of Israel. Verses 17-26 shows how that problem was solved. Verse 25, 26 show that Moses chose men out of Israel who were capable of serving as judges among Israel. These *judges* acted on behalf of the Lord God. In essence, they became “gods” to the people. That is the sense of John 10:34 and Psalm 82. We can also see the sense of this in Romans 13:1-7 relative to human governments.

True Christians among the *firstfruits* from the dead will make up the “ruling realm” of the Kingdom of God. God’s word reveals that those who are resurrected to eternal spirit life at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:50-54; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; Rev. 14:4; James 1:18) will be given offices in His government: kings, lords, priests, and judges (Matt. 19:27-30; Rev. 5:10; 11:15; 20: 4-6). Revelation 20:5, 6 reveals that there will be a *second* resurrection 1,000 years *after the return of Jesus Christ*. During that 1,000-year period, humans will continue to exist and inhabit the earth (Isa. 2:1-5; 11:1-16; Ezek. 37; Zech. 14) and ... *offered salvation through Jesus Christ*. Isaiah 65:17-25 also shows that *humans* will continue to exist *beyond* the creation of the new heavens and new earth (see also Rev. 21). What does this mean?

Salvation Beyond the Return of Jesus Christ

The existence of humans *beyond the return of Jesus Christ* is a *fundamental indicator* in scripture that God’s plan to create man in His image was not a temporary, fleeting pursuit limited to the time between the creation of Adam and the return of Jesus Christ. Most Christian denominations teach the concept of salvation as though the *adoption* process is to occupy a *limited* space and time in eternity.

Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelation 21 demonstrate that such is not the case. If “God” is going to fill the expanding universe, then a continual production of humans must take place, and ... a continual path to join the God family by a change from flesh to spirit must also be available. That is the importance and scope of what God planned before the creation of the orderly universe.

Finally, let’s consider Paul’s comments in Ephesians 1:13, 14 and Romans 8:23 relative to the term redemption. Ephesians 1:13 explains the role of the gift of the Holy Spirit relative to salvation. In essence, Holy Spirit is a down-payment on a larger gift of “spirit.” That earnest of Holy Spirit identifies the recipient as belonging to God (see 1 Cor. 6:19, 20). The sacrifice of Jesus Christ bought you out of the death penalty imposed for your sins. That is part of the purpose of the redemption. I say that because there is more to redemption than being bought out of the death penalty. How so?

Paul tells us in v. 14 that the down-payment (the earnest) is made toward our inheritance. Our inheritance is our adoption into the God family. Paul admits in Romans 8:9-23 that the gift of the Holy Spirit identifies us as being the children of God. In Romans 4:17, Paul shows that God considers those things that presently have not been achieved as though they are already as good as done. In Ephesians 1:14, Paul speaks of the redemption of the purchased possession as though there is more to it than putting a down-payment on the purchased possession. If you have ever used a lay-away plan in a department store, then you know that you technically “buy” the goods but do not “redeem” them until the full purchase price has been paid. In this case, what then?

The term redemption in Romans 8:23 and Ephesians 1:14 comes from the Greek term apolutrosis. It is very instructive because of the second part of its definition. The first part deals with the penalty for one’s sins because that puts one back on the path to fulfill God’s original plan for creating humans. Jesus Christ told Nicodemus in John 3:1-8 that the human has to be “born again” in order to become part of the Kingdom of God. He revealed that it is a matter of flesh becoming spirit (v. 8). Paul told the Corinthians that flesh-and-blood cannot be in the God family; it has to be changed to spirit (1 Cor. 15:50-54). Notice in v. 54 that he says that “mortal must put on immortality and corruptible must put on incorruptibility” (emphases added). *If they must be “put on,” then the human does not already possess immortality or*

incorruptibility in any form. How does being “born again” relate to apolutrosis?

The second part of the definition shows that the individual also overcomes the limitations of the flesh. That is the description given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Being changed from flesh to spirit (“born again”) means that the individual becomes part of the God family by inheriting eternal life – self-perpetuating life that is not dependent on any outside source for its existence (see John 5:26). The return of Jesus Christ marks the first group of humans who will inherit this powerful life force. They will assist Jesus Christ over the following 1,000 years in teaching other humans how to come to this marvelous salvation until all of God’s enemies have been destroyed – even death, the grave, and sin (1 Cor. 15:23-28). That is the significance of Christ’s comment in Luke 21:28: “...your redemption draws near” (emphases added).

Now that you know what God planned, you must understand more fully what went wrong ... and why repentance from dead works is necessary.

Review Questions

1. What are the seven basic doctrines of Jesus Christ and where do you find them listed in scripture?
2. How is doctrine #7 dependent on the first six doctrines? Are any of them optional? Explain.
3. What must you understand in order to understand the necessity of repentance?
4. Why was the creation of Adam not the completion of being created in God’s image?
5. When did God choose man “in Christ”? What does “before the foundation of the world” mean?

6. What kind of *character* did God intend mankind to have once they were created? What does that teach us about a standard of expected behavior among mankind?
7. For what *purpose* did God create mankind?
8. How are the commandments of God connected to “love”?
9. What does it mean in Genesis 2:17 that man “became a living soul” when he was created?
10. With only a couple of exceptions in the Old Testament (from Genesis 2:7 to Zechariah 11:8), the *King James Version* translates the word *nephesh* into the English word *soul*. How, then, would you interpret Psalm 23:3: “He restores my *soul*...”? How about Psalm 16:10 (also refer to Acts 2:22-36 – understanding that the word *hell* refers to the grave in both Hebrew and Greek)?
11. How do Genesis 3:19, 22-24 help you to understand that the second death results in the individual’s utter destruction? Hint: Pay close attention to v. 22: *Why did the Lord God expel Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and place cherubim around the Tree of Life?*
12. Explain the significance of the Greek term *apolutrosis* relative to the English term *redemption*. Use Ephesians 1:14, Romans 8:23, and Luke 21:28 to frame your answer.
13. Using John 3:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 15:50, explain the concept of being “born again” relative to the second definition of *apolutrosis*.
14. What is the significance of Philippians 2:5-11 when compared to Ephesians 1:3 and John 1:1-3? Is “God” a *single* being who reveals Himself in three different roles ... or, is “God” shown to be *two* separate beings who company with one another and work to complete the plan they made before the creation of the orderly universe? How does 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 help you understand God’s truth about this matter?

15. Explain how “God” became the “God and Father of Jesus Christ.”
16. Use Philippians 2:9-11 and Colossians 1:19 to explain the significance of Matthew 28:18.
17. Why is it a mistake to call the Old Testament Jewish or Mosaic law? Whose law is it and why?
18. What role will the “firstfruits” play in the Kingdom God that is to be established on the earth by Jesus Christ? Which four ruling offices will they occupy? From where in scripture do you get that information?
19. How do we understand that humans will continue to exist and come to salvation after the return of Jesus Christ? Will there ever be a time in the eternity ahead when humans do not exist? Explain.
20. Why must the humans put on immortality (not being subject to death) and incorruptibility (not being subject to evil, depravity, and destruction)? What is eternal life?

Chapter Four

The Unpardonable Sin

Matthew 12:31, 32 poses the problem of a sin for which you can never be forgiven. It is called *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*. It's hard to imagine that you can commit all manner of sin and blasphemy – even against Jesus Christ – and be forgiven. But ... if you *blaspheme against the Holy Spirit*, you can never be forgiven! What manner of sin is this?

The term *blasphemy* is from the Greek term *blasphemia* – which has to do with using malicious language intended to defame the reputation of someone, as well as to verbally abuse them. Still, why can you do this to *Jesus Christ* and be forgiven, but not *the Holy Spirit*? The problem is not so much the *language* used as it is the *heart and mind* that give utterance to it.

The context in which this is written shows that the Pharisees attributed Jesus' casting out of a demon to the work of Beelzebub (the demonic "Lord of the Flies"). Jesus called this a "kingdom divided against itself" and wondered aloud by whom some among the Pharisees cast out demons. Then He uttered the expression "If you are not with me, then you are against me." With that, He warned them about their slanderous remarks.

Sins against the Son could be attributed to a simple ignorance or misunderstanding. But, sins against the Holy Spirit were different. Jewish teachings of that time attributed to *the Holy Spirit* two functions: (a) as God's instrument of revelation, it brought *God's truth* to mankind;

and (b) it enabled mankind to recognize and understand the truth when they saw it. Thus, the Holy Spirit is God's great *power* used to illuminate the mind of man about the truth of God's thoughts and ways (compare Isaiah 55:8-11 to 1 Corinthians 2:6-16). It should be obvious from this explanation that mankind *needs the Holy Spirit both to recognize and to understand God's truth.*

But ... what happens when someone constantly *repudiates* that revelation – and thinks so little of it as to consider it to be of little to no worth? To be openly *disrespectful* and *disobedient* toward it? Will s/he be converted by God's *revealed truth*? Let's explore that.

Mankind's First Test: Choice

Genesis 2:16, 17 show that the Lord God planted a garden in which there were all manner of trees. Verse 9 says that all of them were "pleasant to the sight, and good for food." In vv. 16, 17, the Lord God told Adam (Eve had not yet been created) that he could freely eat of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Read v. 17 very carefully.

This instruction was given to Adam as a commandment, not just a simple word of advice. The choice Adam had was to either obey or disobey the commandment. Because this commandment was given as a divine revelation, it was, therefore, a gift of holy spirit – spiritual knowledge for understanding God's thoughts and ways ... of which he had no experience due to having been newly created. It was after this incident that the Lord God put Adam to sleep and created Eve from one of his ribs (vv. 18-25).

Does it appear that the Lord God was concerned about mankind's ability to handle all that is involved in dealing with good *and* evil? Why should He have been? In the first place, Adam was newly created and had absolutely no experience in making choices about good or evil, much less a deceptive mixture of the two. This was Adam's orientation to his new life and new environment.

The fact that the Lord God and His divine companion had created a contingency plan, before the creation of the universe (1 Pet. 1:18-20), for the possibility of wrong and/or detrimental choices by newly created man, shows that They thought that it was necessary to give newly

created mankind a “heads-up” warning about the dreadful and terrible consequences involved in knowing good and evil.

Genesis 3:1-7 shows that God’s concerns were validated when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of good and evil. What was to be their punishment? This is reminiscent of a weak character in a book or movie who, in the face of great, overwhelming danger, says: “I can take care of myself!” It is interesting that the serpent chose to single out Eve and tempt her. We see no action or voiced resistance by Adam as the serpent wove his web of deception in Eve’s mind and heart.

There is no indication about how long this temptation lasted before Eve finally chose to eat the forbidden fruit. Her premise for doing so is found in v. 6: “...The woman saw that the tree was good for food ... pleasant to the eyes ... to be desired to make one wise” (emphases added). Genesis 2:9 did not say that any of the trees were “to be desired to make one wise” (emphases added). But ... that was probably the outstanding element of the serpent’s temptation that tipped the scale toward Eve’s choosing to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Why?

Knowing was not going to be a problem for the newly created humans. From their first moment of awareness after their creation, they were learning. The problem would be in the choices they would make about the knowledge that would be available to them as their lives unfolded. The Lord God never intended that mankind would not know ... simply because mankind was created with five senses through which various forms of knowledge would be acquired.

Knowledge of good was the preferred choice. Knowledge of evil was absolutely not allowed. As we have seen here, any kind of compromise between the two – some good and some evil – was not a reasonable compromise. This was the situation with which Moses confronted Israel before his death (Deut. 30:15-20): the choice between life and good and death and evil (v. 15).

Why was the serpent’s temptation so attractive to Eve? The Hebrew term translated as wise is sakal. It means that such a person can be intelligent, prosperous, skillful, successful, inventive, and insightful. In other words, one can be self-sufficient – with no need to depend on any outside sources for anything. Not only would s/he be able to gather knowledge, s/he would be able to experience all that the acquired knowledge brings with it ... for good or ill, weal or woe.

What need would such a *self-sufficient* individual have for God? If there is no need for God, then there is no need for His Holy Spirit to direct your life and lead you to the fulfillment of His grand design for the existence of humans. *That would be the unpardonable sin.* Why? Such a person would find it very difficult to change his/her mind and surrender to God through Jesus Christ. S/he would not choose “life and good” over “death and evil.”

Adam and Eve chose to believe that they could handle all of the attendant problems of trying to sort out good and evil in their lives. Little did they realize that they would have to *experience the consequences* of not getting it right (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). This is especially true when evil has the *appearance* of good and vice versa (Prov. 14:12; Isa. 5:20). At that point, it takes the *mind of God* to discern the truth of the matter. You can wrap evil with the appearance of good ... and present it with great emotion and charm ... but it is still evil.

Calling Good Evil and Evil Good....

What is the problem discussed in Isaiah 5:20? Isaiah includes two other similar pieces of faulty reasoning. As we learned from 1 Corinthians 6:14-18, yoking *unequal* things together is reckless and stripped of sound mindedness. A modern-day example would be abortion on demand for any reason. Why do you suppose people could confuse these things? Isaiah 5:21 provides the primary answer: *They are wise and prudent in their own eyes!* In other words, they believe that they are learned and free from defect, damage, and/or decay in their judgment and choices.

Read carefully Isaiah 5:21-23. What are some of the problems that arise from this confusion? Verse 23 is the summary judgment: The wicked are *falsely* justified in their behavior and obstruct and diminish the righteousness of those who are righteous. In this judgment, you should be better able to understand Paul’s thought in Romans 1:25: They change God’s *truth* into a *lie* (KJV; see also John 4:23, 24)! This is the essence of Judges 21:25: “In those days ... every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Refer back to Proverbs 14:12. About what does this proverb warn you? Would you need *proper guidance* to be able to tell the difference between the way that *seems* right and the way that *is* right? The Lord

God's commandment in Genesis 2:17 was proper guidance. Once that proper guidance was ignored by Adam and Eve, they were turned over to the naturally-occurring consequences of their self-righteousness.

In Malachi 2:17, what two things weary the Lord God? First, their words weary Him. It is like the song that has a line that says: "You talk and talk and talk and talk and just say nothing ... you just say nothing." The second thing is that they are unaware of the reason their words weary Him. Here are their words: They say that everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord ... and they question the existence and/or presence of the God of judgment. Does this also sound like people who are unable to discern good from evil? Such is the "fruit" born of the knowledge of good and evil. The mixture of the two is calamitous.

Do you think that it is possible that the person who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is one who would call God's truth a lie – and call religious lies the truth? Write down a clear explanation for your answer. Give yourself some examples. I will offer you an example of this: A religious lie posits that the seventh-day Sabbath has been changed to Sunday, the first day of the week. Read Matthew 5:17 and Luke 24:44. Re-read Bible Study Course Lesson Five p. 17 (the three enumerated points given) and the indented quote on p. 18. Focus on the problem.

Why is God's wrath revealed "...against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..." (Rom. 1:18-25)? By what means do they suppress His truth? What does Paul mean when he says that they "hold the truth in unrighteousness"? How do they change the concept of "God"? Now read vv. 26-32. How does the suppression of God's truth lead to a cascading effect of consequences? By the multiplication of sin.

Paul's expression "...hold the truth in unrighteousness..." is better translated "...hinder the Truth by their wickedness..." (*Moffatt*) or "...keep truth imprisoned in their wickedness..." (*The Jerusalem Bible*). The *KJV*, in v. 25, says that they changed God's truth into a lie; other translations say they replaced it with a lie. I prefer the *KJV* in this case because it is more in line with calling good evil and evil good. It shows a great disregard for God's truth to the point that one would pervert it to suit his own purposes (see Matthew 24:4, 5; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15; Galatians 1:6-9; and 2 Peter 2).

Note in Romans 1:26, 27 that the consequences for this suppression of God's truth also affect the social order of society, as well as the sexual identities and preferences ... at one time, it was more commonly

called *perversions*. Finally, note in v. 30 that humans also became “inventors of evil.” It was not enough that men *disobeyed* God’s revealed truth and became *evil*; they actually began to *invent* thoughts and actions that oppose and suppress it. Think about ways by which mankind has become *inventors* of evil ... and call it *good*.

Those Who “Fall Away” From God’s Truth

Consider carefully the instruction in Hebrews 6:4-8. The basic problem of which you should be aware is that the people to whom this is addressed had made confessions of faith, been baptized, and were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. They also had been blessed in various ways with spiritual understanding and knowledge of God’s plans for the future. All of that notwithstanding, they “fell away.”

This is not a description of the true believer who commits sins of various kinds ... yet maintains the faith once delivered and presses on to overcome those failures of the “flesh” (Rom. 8:1). This is the person who becomes *apostate* – who *completely abandons* the truth once delivered via the Spirit of God ... who counts the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ as being of no worth or ultimate importance. Abandoning the Spirit of God and considering it to be a lie puts them on the path to eternal destruction. *Can they repent of that sin and be taken back?*

I dare not second guess scripture in this matter. Verse 6 is too specific in that regard. It does not *say* that the person has to *die in apostasy* in order to receive such a judgment. However, clearly there is something grossly wrong with the person who makes such a dreadful choice. The true believer who commits sins has not made a decision to *abandon* and *repudiate* the spiritual advantage that God has made available through Jesus Christ. S/he has sinned because of spiritual weakness. In such cases, John 3:16 and 2 Peter 3:9 are still at work.

Citing situations like the one into which Peter is put in the novel based on the *Quo Vadis* legend has no merit in this discussion. The story is a historical *fiction* that is set during the Neronian persecutions of Christians in Rome. Peter experiences a failure of courage and faith and flees Rome to avoid martyrdom. As he makes his way down the Apian Way, Jesus comes toward him headed to Rome. Peter asks: “Where are you going, Lord?” *Quo vadis* means: “Where are you going?” In Latin

it would be expressed: “*Quo vadis, Domine?*” That incident is found in Chapter 69 of the book.

The author, Henryk Sienkiewicz, puts into the mouth of Jesus Christ the following answer: “If you desert my people, I am going back to Rome to be crucified again, this time in your stead.” With those words, Peter is shamed into going back to Rome ... and subsequently dies a martyr’s death there. Peter was, indeed, crucified in Rome in AD 67 at the hands of Nero’s circus. They granted his request that he should not be crucified in the same position as Jesus Christ. They crucified him upside down, which the apocryphal book *Acts of Peter* attributes to the position of Jesus Christ when He was born to Mary.

Sienkiewicz got his inspiration for this “*Quo vadis?*” part of his novel from the apocryphal book *Acts of Peter* ... not from scripture. Why would anyone have a problem with that example? Some Bible commentators use this fictitious story to demonstrate that Hebrews 6:4-6:

...Was never meant to be erected into a doctrine and a theology that there is no forgiveness for post-baptismal sin. Who is any man to say that any other man is beyond the forgiveness of God? What it is meant to show is the terrible seriousness of choosing existence instead of Christ. (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Hebrews*, p. 58; emphases added).

This scripture is not a warning about something that does not happen and is, therefore, impossible to punish. Here is where you have to understand scriptural revelations. In this discussion, we must consider Hebrews 6:6 and 10:12-14. How do you reconcile the two scriptures with the claim that apostates can be recovered? Is their apostasy an unpardonable sin? Hebrews 6:6 warns that such circumstances amount to the necessity of Jesus Christ having to be crucified again. If there is more than one such circumstance among mankind, then it would amount to crucifying Jesus Christ over and over again throughout history. That would greatly subvert the purpose of His sacrifice. How so?

Hebrews 10:1-11 discusses the utter futility of continually and repeatedly sacrificing animals for sins. The result of such sacrifices is that they are continual reminders of sin, and ... they, therefore, do not

clear the conscience of sins. God has no pleasure in *repeatedly* watching innocent sacrificial animals being slaughtered for the sins of mankind.

In his work *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus points out that Passover in Jerusalem was a time "... when they offer sacrifices with great alacrity; and when they are required to slay more sacrifices in number than at any other festival..." (Book XVII, Chapter 9, section 3). Some estimate that more than 250,000 lambs were sacrificed at Passover each year.

It is understandable that God the Father preferred the *reality* above the *type* because the *reality* would be once-and-for-all and the dead sacrifice (Christ) would be resurrected to the spirit life He had with the Father before the creation of the orderly universe (see John 17:5). Imagine all of the animals that were sacrificed for sins from Genesis 3:21 until Jesus Christ came.

Micah 6:6-8 is a prophetic response to this question: God's remedy for mankind's sins does not lie in the repeated offerings of thousands of rams, rivers of olive oil, and deaths of firstborns. It lies in three requirements of God: do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. If you are not willing to do that, then all of your religious "sacrifices" will utterly fail to impress Him (see Matt. 7:21-23).

Why? Because you will not have understood *God's will* if you merely substitute the *type* for the *reality*. God's will, from before the creation of the orderly universe (1 Pet. 1:18-20), was that the *one*, all-encompassing remedy for all of mankind's sins throughout history would be "*once-and-for-all*" (Heb. 10:10). Verse 11 says that the animal sacrifices "can *never* take away sins." Verse 9 says that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ *eliminated* the *repetitious* sacrifices (the first manner of sacrifice) and established the sanctity of the *once-and-for-all* sacrifice (the second manner of sacrifice).

That is why we must discuss Hebrews 10:12-14. Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross was the *one* sacrifice according to God's will. That is why God the Father had no pleasure in all other religious sacrifices for sin (v. 5 – from Micah 6:6-8). Verse 14 is more direct and specific: "For by *one offering*, He has perfected *forever* them that are sanctified [set aside for holy purposes]" (emphases added).

Then there is Hebrews 10:26-31. It is about the *willful sin*. Paul compares the consequences of violating the law that the Lord God gave to Israel to the more serious consequence of treading underfoot the Son

of God and counting the blood of the New Covenant, by which we are set aside for holy purposes, as though it was *nothing* ... despite the gift of the Holy Spirit. Here, again, this is a discussion about *apostasy*.

Read 2 Samuel 11:1 through 12:25. David's sin in this matter was *willful* because he lusted after another man's wife (see Ex. 20:14, 17). He was so consumed with his desire to have Bathsheba as his wife that he plotted to have her husband Uriah killed in battle. When confronted with his sin, David deeply repented ... nevertheless, the Lord God punished him severely. Now read Psalm 51. Note especially v. 17: "The sacrifices of God are a *broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart*, O God, [that] you will not despise" (emphases added). The Lord God forgave David ... but He exacted a heavy price for his willful sin. Take note that David did not reject all that the Lord God had done for him. He did not live out the rest of his life *apostate* from God's spirit and truth.

All of this is information that would *refute* the concept that Jesus Christ would have told Peter that He was going to Rome to be specifically *crucified again* – that time *for Peter*. In God's revelation (2 Tim. 3:16), there is no room for a second, third, *ad nauseum* crucifixion by which Jesus Christ would have to return to a body of flesh-and-blood in order to be sacrificed over and over again! It is the height of scriptural *stupidity* to even suggest the possibility of such a thing! How does Hebrews 10:26-31 affect the famous "once saved, always saved" concept taught by many?

When I left the Baptists and embraced God's truth revealed in the Bible, my mother asked me if I believed in once saved, always saved. I said that I did ... depending on what you mean by "saved" and "born again." Well, that was an uncomfortable thought for her because she did not understand what I had learned from scripture. It is really very simple if you correctly follow the reasoning.

John 3:3-8 teaches us that we must be "born again" in order to be in God's Kingdom. That Kingdom has not yet been established on earth as prophesied in numerous places in scripture. Jesus told Nicodemus that the "born again" experience would entail becoming *Spirit* (John 3:8).

Several years after his conversion, Paul taught the Corinthians that flesh-and-blood cannot be part of the "ruling realm" of God's Kingdom ... and *corruption* (the flesh) cannot inherit *incorruption* (Spirit). In other words, *it is not a natural process for the human to go immediately*

from flesh to spirit when the flesh dies. Then Paul detailed the process by which flesh is to be changed to immortal, incorruptible Spirit at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:35-58 – note especially v. 46). It is something reserved for those who are in Christ.

After going through an extensive explanation of this, I told my mother that prior to this event of change from one state-of-being to another, we are converted and, through faith, as good as saved. We believe that our salvation is as good as achieved. But ... once we have finally achieved this change from flesh to Spirit, we will have been “born again” and, thereby, “saved.”

That is the sense of Luke 21:28, Romans 8:23, and Ephesians 1:14. Redemption (Greek = apolutrosis) means: (1) freed from the consequences of sin and (2) freed from the limitations of the flesh. We get #1 upon true repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit; we get #2 when we are changed from flesh-and-blood to Spirit. Once we are thus “saved,” we will live eternally – always “saved.” Because she was so steeped in her own traditional religious faith and practice, she could not understand this wonderful truth. At God’s own time in the future, she will understand it fully.

So, in what way are these people in Hebrews 10:26 similar to those in Hebrews 6:4-8? Both situations address those who have apostatized completely from the true faith once delivered ... with no thought whatsoever of returning through repentance. Is their sin unpardonable? By virtue of their unmitigated abandonment of the true faith, their sin is unpardonable because it is a sin against the Holy Spirit that represents God’s guarantee of the salvation to come (Eph. 1:13, 14). Whether or not they will ever have the “spirit” of repentance before they die is not addressed in Paul’s comments. David’s example is an example of hope for them if God is willing to grant them the spirit of repentance.

Read Ephesians 4:30; Acts 6:10; and 1 Thessalonians 5:19. Define grieve, resist, and quench. Do you think that people who do such things relative to the gift of the Holy Spirit: (a) have a desire for a pardon and (b) even recognize the need for one? Is repentance possible if you do not desire it or recognize the need for it? That is the danger into which you fall when you apostatize. Your rash decision can be very deadly for you when God removes His Spirit of understanding from your mind and heart. Proverbs 10:7 says: “The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.” Regarding Israel’s enemies, Isaiah 26:13,

14 says: “They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore, you have visited and destroyed them and made all their memory to perish.” Now read Isaiah 65:16, 17. What do you think?

Having One’s Understanding Hindered

The Apostle Paul posits an interesting thought in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29. Note two important reasons that Paul gives about to whom God chooses to reveal His “mysteries” and why He chooses to allow them to know and understand them. I think that the expression “not many” is important in our present discussion ... especially when you compare it to Matthew 7:13, 14; 24:4, 5; and Luke 13:23, 24. Unless and until you understand the whom and why of the issue, you might assume that only a very few will ultimately be saved. The more complete idea is covered in BSC Lessons Eleven and Twelve.

Another related source for this thought is found in John 6:44, 65. The idea revealed by Jesus Christ is that the Father chooses whom to draw to Jesus Christ and the truth of God. Again, if you assume that such randomness on the part of God begs the question about why anyone should become a professing “Christian” and risk not having been called by God to be one, then you are dealing with an incomplete “picture” that hinders your understanding.

Some have taken this idea and used it to support the concept of “predestination” – that is: the idea that God has already determined who will be saved and who will be lost ... with more being lost than saved. All religious practices and beliefs notwithstanding, they say that you will not be saved if you have not been predestined. How do we sort out this theological quandary so that it makes sense according to God’s word of truth?

Consider first God’s “world view” as stated in John 3:16-21 and 2 Peter 3:9. Make note of the concept of an all-inclusiveness that is based on the choices and decisions made by the individual. According to 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, Jesus Christ, at His return, will pursue a program of destroying the enemies of God ... even the last enemy: death. That presupposes that He will also have to destroy sin (Rom. 6:23). It also presupposes that there is a terminus point at which the present offer of salvation either ceases or takes another path (see Heb. 4:1-11). This is where it becomes difficult to explain God’s truth to the general public.

Why? They have very little experience in coming to grips with the truth of God's thoughts and ways. That inexperience is a hindrance – which suggests that what you do not know can hurt you.

Two most significant ways by which your understanding can be hindered are: (1) God not allowing you to understand and (2) Satan deceiving you and, thereby, skewing (distorting, twisting, and/or perverting) your understanding. Remember the previous discussion about choices. I remind you of that because what you have been studying from the time you began your venture in this Bible Study Course is one of God's means by which He attempts to “draw” you to Jesus Christ. Read Romans 10:13-15. I have been called by God through Jesus Christ to be one of those preachers of His truth. Now read v. 17. You have not come this far in these studies by accident. Please do not waste this precious knowledge. Let's explore the two ways by which your understanding can be hindered if you choose not to pursue the faith that comes by hearing the word of God. Your choice is always a third potential hindrance.

Isaiah 1:1-9 covers a swath of history during which the Lord God pursued a relationship of “faith” with Israel, His chosen people and “wife” by covenant agreement. Make note of the horrific problem Israel presented to Him because they wanted their own way and would not submit to even the harshest discipline. The Lord God came to the point where He had a choice of totally destroying Israel, or ... finding a more effective time and circumstance when He could deal more effectively with her. You can see in vv. 7, 8 that He had almost totally destroyed her. He openly admitted that more severe punishment will do no good.

Verse 9 is an example of His grace and mercy. In all of Israel's history with the Lord God, there was only a faithful remnant of Israelites who had made the choice to be faithful to His offer (Ex. 19:5, 6). Despite the ebb and flow of the main body of Israelites between faith and apostasy, this “remnant” of faithful Israelites was noticed by Him. Because of them, He decided not to destroy Israel from existence.

In vv. 18-20, He addresses the entire nation and asks them to be reasonable people and engage with Him about the ways by which they had abandoned His truth and how they could be forgiven and restored to Him. In vv. 21-31, He presents His evidence of their apostasy – vv. 25-30 represent the proverbial “olive branch” of peace and reconciliation. Verse 31 represents the punishment of those who

continue to reject His authority over them and remain hard to handle. It is very dangerous to do so (see Heb. 10:26-31).

“Tow” (*KJV*) is the waste and refuse that is shaken out of flax – the seed is used to make linseed oil and the fibers are used to spin linen fabric. “Tow” is the refuse left after the seeds and fibers have been harvested and processed. So, “tow” represents something that is shaken out as refuse and brought to destruction ... usually by fire (see again Mal. 4:1). Verse 31 says that such a fire will not be quenched. Seed husks and fiber trash will be burned together and nothing and nobody will be able to put them out. Now read Revelation 20:14, 15 and Malachi 4:1.

When we get to Isaiah 6, we find the Lord God’s method for dealing with the recalcitrant rebels among Israel. That solution is presented in vv. 9-13. The Lord God tells Isaiah that He is going to stop their ears and blind their eyes (spiritually speaking) so that their spiritual understanding will be severely hindered. All of the spiritually “deaf” and “blind” will be removed from the land until there is only a tenth of them left – ostensibly, the “remnant.” What was the effect of this prophecy?

Approximately 800 years after Isaiah’s prophecy, Jesus Christ (the Lord God of the Old Testament) uses it to answer a question posed by His disciples in Matthew 13:9-17. The disciples ask Jesus why He teaches the Jewish crowds in parables. Many today believe that He did it *to make the meaning simple to understand*. Read these verses very carefully so you can see if they are correct in their conclusion.

First, Jesus draws a conclusion that distinguishes between His instruction of the crowds and His instruction of His disciples: “It is given to you [the disciples] to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven [Mark = kingdom of God], but to them it is not given” (emphases added). Continue reading. Verse 12 explains that those who have the knowledge and understanding will increase it, but those who do not will find that whatever smattering of knowledge and understanding they presently have will be further diminished. Notice what He says in v. 13: “For that reason, I speak to them in parables: because they seeing do not see; and neither do they understand when they hear” (emphases added).

Next, He cites Isaiah 6:9-13 to verify the seriousness of the prophecy and how far-reaching it was intended to be ... and why: the problem had

existed generation after generation among Israel with very little change. Why? Because the results of their sins had not yet brought about the fulfillment of Isaiah 6:11, 12: banishment from the land. The Lord God adds, in Isaiah 6:13, that the salvation of Israel will be the result of the faithfulness of “the holy seed.”

Paul makes reference to this same prophecy in Romans 11. He predicates his comments on the question about whether or not God had cast away (repudiated; rejected) His people (v. 1). It is evident that God did, in fact, cast away a major portion of His people ... leaving only about one-tenth of them who were a faithful remnant. Paul uses the example of Elijah’s experience after he had slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the groves (1 Kings 18:19, 40; 19:1-18). So, about 20 years after Christ’s conversation with His disciples, Paul speaks of the “remnant according to the election of grace” (v. 5) that has obtained what the majority of Israel strove in vain to obtain (v. 7). Why?

Paul says that the Lord God blinded the majority and gave them “the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear ... unto this day” (vv. 7, 8; emphases added). Were they cast away forever (v. 11)? No. Paul goes on to say that they were set aside temporarily in order for God to make a direct and plain invitation and offer of salvation to the Gentiles (the Lord God never “married” the Gentiles). That invitation and opportunity was designed to make Israel jealous and provoke her to repent and return to the Lord God as His “wife.” Verse 15 insinuates that the majority of vast generations of Israel will be raised from the dead to be brought to salvation at a later time (read Ezek. 37).

Read carefully the rest of Romans 11. Note especially vv. 23-36. What profound thing do you learn about God’s love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness? As a result of Isaiah’s prophecy, was most of Israel, in fact, blinded by God? Would they suffer punishment as a result of this God-induced blindness? Could they repent and be grafted back into the holy stump (v. 23)? Or ... were they to be cast off forever? Why? Read v. 29. This is a great lesson about God’s determination to save as many as possible.

For the many, at present, He inhibits their understanding in order to preserve them for a later time. Their faith is presently too shallow or non-existent (even when they are very religious people – see Matt. 7:21-23). In other words, this is not the only “day” of salvation. Through this

knowledge and understanding, you are being given an opportunity to be part of the first group of true believers who will be given salvation at the return of Jesus Christ. This will be discussed in more detail in BSC Lessons Eleven and Twelve.

Understand this: Between 721-718 BC, the *House of Israel* (10 tribes of the nation of Israel) was taken completely out of the land by the Assyrians (see 2 Kings 16 through 19) ... and, to our present day, they have never returned. That was the beginning of their “very long time.” Yet, scripture tells us that the “lost sheep” of the House of Israel will be found and returned to the land.

The temple and Jerusalem were destroyed in AD 70 by Titus, but Jerusalem was razed and rebuilt between AD 132-136. During that time, Emperor Hadrian colonized it for Rome and built an entirely new city named *Aelia Capitolina*, named after the Emperor, whose family name was *Aelius*. Thus, the “very long time” of banishment from the land began for the House of Judah (remember Deut. 24:1).

The Balfour Declaration was a public statement issued by the British government in AD 1917 during World War I announcing support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, then an Ottoman region with a small minority Jewish population. That Declaration was not realized until AD 1948, many years after the Ottoman Empire was defeated. Since its establishment in 1948, “Jews” from all over the world have been allowed to come back to the area as citizens of the new “Jewish” State. Those who make up the nation of Israel today are mostly represented by three Israelite tribes of the *House of Judah*: Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. They are the *House of Judah*. The *House of Israel* is still out there ... largely unrecognized and unknown.

Conclusion

Here you see an awesome revelation from God! It appears that there are situations in which He prevents the commission of the unpardonable sin by blinding people to spiritual revelation and truth. They might even be religious people by personal choice – or, they might be professed agnostics and atheists. If those spiritually ignorant Israelites could be grafted back in, why couldn't those non-Israelites who are spiritually blind also be grafted in at a later time?

All of that considered, there are two types of people who can commit the unpardonable sin: (a) those who incessantly resist and oppose the revelation of God's truth for the purpose of bringing them to repentance and true faith and (b) those who have repented, but who have cast off the truth that God has revealed to them – *grieving, resisting, and/ or quenching* the Holy Spirit.

This *unpardonable* sin is committed when the individual refuses to listen to God's guidance, turns his/her back upon God's urging, and prefers his/her own human ideas to the ideas God seeks to put into his/her mind and heart. When this happens, s/he reaches a point where s/he cannot even recognize God's truth if it slapped him/her in the face – even to the point that s/he would look upon God's goodness as evil and Satan's evil as good. And ... like the Scribes and Pharisees, s/he would even consider Jesus Christ to be a partner with the Devil (see Matt. 12:22-35; Mark 3:22-30). *When a person reaches that point, repentance is impossible.*

For this reason, it is *doubtful* that the person who worries about having committed such a sin has, in fact, *not* committed it. There is too much guilt and conscience left for that to be the case – too much sense of having sinned. How can a man repent if he cannot recognize God's good – and desire it? How can he repent if he cannot understand the awful consequences of his sins – or even care that there are such consequences? According to Jesus Christ, this will also be true of those humans who are ruled over by Christ and His Saints during the 1,000-year Kingdom of God. **If they cannot or will not repent, they cannot/will not be forgiven** (Rev. 20:14, 15; 21:6-8).

Review Questions

1. Matthew 12:31, 32 – Is there a sin for which you can never be forgiven? What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?
2. Genesis 2:16, 17 – What did the Lord God warn Adam against regarding the trees in the Garden? Does it appear that He was concerned with man's ability to handle all that is involved in dealing with good and evil? Why should He have been?

3. Genesis 3:1-7 – Were God’s fears validated when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of good and evil? What was to be their punishment?
4. Isaiah 5:20 – What is the problem discussed here? Why do you suppose someone could confuse these things?
5. Read vv. 21-23 – What are some of the problems that arise from this confusion?
6. Judges 21:25 – What is the sad commentary about Israel during the times of the judges? Why is it called self-righteousness?
7. Proverbs 14:12 – What does this proverb warn you about? Would you need proper guidance to be able to tell the difference between the way that seems right and the way that is right? Why?
8. Malachi 2:17 – What two things weary the Lord God? Does this also sound like people who are unable to discern good from evil? Explain.
9. Do you think that it is possible that the person who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is one who would call God’s truth a lie – and religious lies the truth? Write down a clear explanation for your answer. Give yourself some examples.
10. Romans 1:18-25 – Why is God’s wrath revealed “...against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...”? What does Paul mean in vv. 24, 26, and 28 that God “gave them up/over to certain things? How do you understand the sexual and social consequences of this ungodliness and unrighteousness? What did Paul mean when he said that mankind became “inventors of evil”?
11. Hebrews 6:4-8 – Consider carefully this description. Did such people at one time have the gift of the Holy Spirit? How can you tell? Does it appear that their falling away is unpardonable? Why? What is their punishment? How does this verse affect the famous “once saved, always saved” concept taught by many?
12. Hebrews 10:26-31 – In what way are these people similar to those in Hebrews 6:4-8? Is their sin unpardonable? Explain briefly.
13. Ephesians 4:30; Acts 6:10; and 1 Thessalonians 5:19 – Define *grieve*, *resist*, and *quench*. Do you think that people who do such things: (a) have a

desire for a pardon and (b) even recognize the need for one? Is repentance possible if you do not desire it or recognize the need for it? Explain.

14. Isaiah 6:9-13 – What assignment did God give to Isaiah regarding the Israelites? How many would remain faithful? For how long would the punishment last? Has that punishment been completed yet? Explain.

15. Matthew 13:10-17 – Why did Jesus speak in parables? Was it to make His teachings easier to understand? Would His disciples understand while the others would not? Why? Is this a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 6:9, 10?

16. Romans 11:7-36 – As a result of Isaiah's prophecy, was most of Israel, in fact, blinded by God? Would they suffer punishment as a result of this God-induced blindness? Could they repent and be grafted back into the holy stump? (See v. 23.) Were they to be cast off forever? Why? (See v. 29.)

Chapter Five

Properly Understanding Repentance

It is vital, then, that we get a biblical understanding of *repentance*. Isaiah 55:8, 9 tells us that God's thoughts and ways are higher than man's, so it would benefit us greatly to understand what God means when He says that we must *repent and believe the gospel* (Mark 1:15). Can we do one without the other? No ... it's a package deal. It's not enough to repent without belief in the gospel of the Kingdom of God; it's not enough to believe in the gospel of the Kingdom without repenting of the things that would prevent you from entering it. Let's understand this thoroughly.

Eight Types of Sin Found in Scripture

What follows is a brief description of eight types of sin from which we must be "saved" – of which we must repent. Remember, however, that we must repent of *all sin* – whether or not it is in this list:

1. *hamartia* ("a missing of the mark") – the failure to be what we ought to be and can be; failure to meet the divine standard (ex.: Rom. 5:12, 21; 6:23);

2. *parabasis* (“a stepping across a line”) – deliberately overstepping God’s law, the line that divides right from wrong (ex.: Rom. 2:23; 5:14);

3. *paraptoma* (“slipping up”) – slipping up due to carelessness and unconcern (ex.: Rom. 4:25; 5:15; Eph. 2:1);

4. *anomia* (“lawlessness”) – deliberately breaking a law which we know exists and that we know we should obey (ex.: Rom. 6:19);

5. *apheilema* (“a debt”) – the failure to pay to God the debts we owe Him – like love, loyalty, and obedience; to take something away from someone (ex.: Mal. 3:8-12; Luke 10:38-42);

6. *asebia* (“ungodliness”) – the most profoundly theological word for sin: irreverent; impious; wicked (ex.: Jude 15 – used 4x);

7. *adikia* (“wickedness”) – wickedness that arises from the perversion of worship (ex.: 1 John 5:17; Rom. 1:29; 2:8; 2 Thes. 2:7-12);

8. *parakoe* (“disobedience”) – disobedience caused by an unwillingness to listen/hear (ex.: Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 10:6).

How does God intend for this repentance to take place? What are the essential elements of the repentance needed? Let’s begin by gathering some scriptural background.

In Acts 17:30, God, in fact, commands all people everywhere to repent. No one is left out because everyone everywhere, since the Garden of Eden, has sinned in one way or another (Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:23; 1 Pet. 2:25). Remember a previous discussion about Galatians 3:22. You might think that you are an exception to the rule, but ... you are not. It would be an absolute miracle if you have lived thus far and not committed any *one* of the eight sins listed above. One sin is enough to make you guilty (James 2:10, 11). What is the solution?

Read Matthew 3:2; 4:17; and Acts 2:38. What do these three scriptures have in common? John the Baptist says: “Repent.” Jesus Christ says “Repent.” The Apostle Peter says “Repent.” Why? It is necessary for you to repent of sin in order to be admitted into the Kingdom of God – the ultimate, great potential for humans through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3-14; 1 John 3:1-3).

Now read Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:12; and 1 Samuel 15:11. Compare these scriptures to Numbers 23:19 and James 1:17. With that information, what does it mean for God to repent? God is perfect in every way and not subject to error or sin. What would you suspect is the difference in the meaning of the term when it is applied to man? Look up the meaning of repent in a dictionary and use the various definitions to frame your answer. Also, review pp. 27-30 in BSC 5. The definitions that you will find apply to all eight of the “sins” listed above.

Here’s a hint to help you in framing your answer: pay attention to the part of the definition that says that it means “to change one’s mind; to show regret; to feel sorrow for something done.” Can you regret that you did something – without that something being sinful? Yes. You might regret having gone to the Grand Canyon instead of Hawaii. Neither was a sinful choice. Keep in mind, however, that man’s need to repent has to do specifically with his sin.

“What Shall We Do?”

Read Acts 2 in its entirety. Now, focus on v. 37 and determine what is the first step in the repentance process. This is where the question “What shall we do?” – relative to the existence of Jesus Christ and His suffering and sacrifice – demands an answer. Peter points out the process: (1) repent, (2) be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, (3) after which you will be given the Holy Spirit ... which is done by the laying on of hands by God’s true ministry (see example in Acts 8:14-17). You can study this more fully in BSC 9 and *A Statement of Beliefs* (pp. 69-82).

What follows is a selected text from *A Statement of Beliefs* regarding the laying on of hands:

Receiving the Holy Spirit: The laying on of hands for receiving the Holy Spirit is required after baptism. Acts 8:15-

17 shows the example of people who had been baptized, but who had not received the Holy Spirit because they did not have hands laid on them. Peter and John did the laying on of hands in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit. In Acts 10:44-48, God gave Cornelius and his household the gift of the Holy Spirit *before* baptism because this was a special circumstance in which God was showing Peter that God's will was for Gentiles to be brought to salvation (read the entire account to get the idea presented here). The same was true in the conversion of the great enemy of God's Church, Saul of Tarsus – who became the Apostle Paul. Acts 19:1-6 shows that men who were baptized by John the Baptist had to be *rebaptized* in the name of Jesus Christ and immediately had hands laid on them for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. This demonstrates that some baptisms are not acceptable to God – and ... they must be corrected in order for God to accept them. "Baptisms" by pouring and sprinkling, no doubt, would be examples of such baptisms because they are not *complete immersions*. Baptisms in the name of a Trinitarian God also would not be acceptable because "God" has not been revealed to be a single God who plays three different roles. Not all things done in the name of Jesus Christ are acceptable to God. That includes various types of baptisms (p. 76).

Read Acts 16 to get the setting of the message intended in the following comments. What did the jailer ask Paul and Silas? Now read Acts 9:1-20. Why? Because there is something in Acts 9:1-20 that should give you an answer for my next question relative to the jailer and his household. What does Acts 9:17, 18 tell you about Paul's baptism and receipt of the Holy Spirit? It is true that Paul received the Holy Spirit *first* by the laying on of Ananias' hands, but ... *that was done to allay any fears Ananias had about the character of the man who had been persecuting God's Church* (vv. 10-16).

Here is your question about the jailer in Act 16: Do you think that Paul and Silas laid hands on the jailer and his family *after* they baptized them? Why would they *not* have done so ... especially if you consider Paul's actions in Acts 19:1-7? This is important: While John the Baptist was called by God to be a prophet in the religious fashion of the Prophet

Elijah (see Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 11:7-15), his baptism was one of *repentance*, not one regarding the faith in Jesus Christ required for ultimate salvation. Paul's action in Acts 19:1-7 was not to denigrate John the Baptist's "Elijah" role among Israel at that time in anticipation of the appearance of the Christ. John prepared them for *belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah – the Sacrifice for the sins of mankind*.

Note two things these men admitted: (1) They had not received the Holy Spirit because (2) they did not know that any such thing existed (v. 2). When they accepted what Paul taught them about God's truth about the matter, Paul *re-baptized* them and laid hands on them for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. None of this was done to denigrate John's baptism; it was done to reveal God's truth about faith in Jesus Christ. These 12 men thought they had already taken care of the faith in Jesus Christ and what they were supposed to do regarding repentance, but Paul corrected their misunderstanding and set them on the proper path.

Being "Religious" or "Spiritual" is not Enough

It is not unusual to encounter people who claim no specific religious affiliation, but who claim to be "religious" and/or "spiritual." Is that enough for God to be satisfied regarding their salvation? No. God has been specific about the remedy for our sins. I want to demonstrate my point by examining a few scriptures that are pertinent to this point.

First, read Matthew 7:21-23. What do you see in v. 22 that stands out significantly to you? In whose name are they doing all of their "religious" and/or "spiritual" deeds? What is Jesus' answer to their claims (v. 22)? On what basis does He render His judgment (v. 21)? Would you conclude, therefore, that true believers have to live and act *according to God's will*? Would that also mean that those who do not do so *cannot be included* among the *true* believers (John 4:23, 24)? How many "religious" and/or "spiritual" things can you think of that would be *excluded* by God? I will give you some assistance in this.

Read Matthew 15:1-9. Jesus is addressing *religious traditions*. In v. 3, He says that their *religious traditions* "transgress the commandment of God." Then He uses the tradition of *corban* (a tradition not commanded by God) to demonstrate their failure (see Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Josh. 1:7; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 12:18, 19). What judgment does Jesus add in vv. 6-9? What does He mean when He says: "But they worship me in

vain when they teach the commandments of *men* as though they are the doctrines of *God*” (v. 9; emphases added)? What effect do their religious traditions have on God’s commandments (v. 6)? How many religious traditions can you think of that would do the same thing? If you have none to offer, pay close attention as you continue your studies so you can take notice of those we will discuss. In those discussions, the existence of 32,000+ different and opposing denominations of “Christians” will be examined (read Eph. 4:1-16). Why?

Would you concede that the Jews were a very religious people? There were several “denominations” of the Jews at that time who opposed one another theologically, doctrinally, and traditionally. John 4:23, 24 sets a standard by which the differences among them would be *eliminated* so they could be a *unified* nation of *true* believers. Think back on Isaiah 6:9-13 and Matthew 13:10-17.

With that in mind, read Matthew 24:3-13, Luke 21:5-19, and John 15:16 to 16:3. What is your reaction to these prophecies by Jesus Christ? How does Acts 7:51 to 8:3, and Acts 22:19, 20 fit into this discussion? Christians, at the time, were a *Jewish* sect (Acts 15:5; 28:22). This was nothing less than religious warfare against fellow members of Judaism.

Acts 7:58; 9:5; 22:20 show that Paul’s previous *religious* actions and convictions were shown to be *erroneous*. In what way? In Acts 9:5, the glorified Jesus Christ confronts Saul on the road to Damascus – Saul’s destination to carry out more persecutions (vv. 1, 2). Jesus told Saul that his actions were not simple persecutions of people whom he considered to be heretics; it was a persecution of Christ Himself! That confrontation changed Saul’s life forever. Paul gives the account of his conversion to Christianity in Acts 22:1-21.

The main point of this discussion has been to demonstrate that being “religious” or “spiritual” is not enough for one to be granted forgiveness for sin and brought to salvation. Scripture uses specific terms to describe what has to take place to put one in position for salvation. It is not as easy as simply naming the name of Jesus on your lips, as some opine. There must be an accompanying acceptance of your personal guilt in the matter of *sin* – a personal *conviction* in your own mind and heart that you have fallen short of the holiness of God, the blamelessness you should have about your personal thoughts and actions, and the sense that you have not loved God and fellow man in the true spiritual manner that God intends. Regardless of how good you might otherwise be, you must

understand that you have not measured up to the *holy* potential God intends because you are not in “Christ” (see Rom. 8:1-17; 1 Cor. 2:16; Gal. 2:16-21; Eph. 1:3-14; Phil. 2:5; and Col. 1:27).

This begs the question: Could you sincerely repent if you had no consciousness of guilt – no matter how good you might otherwise be? That would be highly doubtful because repentance, first and foremost, involves a consciousness of guilt before *God* ... not yourself or mankind.

You must be aware of the difference between *worldly sorrow* and *godly sorrow*. “Worldly sorrow” is based on the beliefs and attitudes of society at large outside of the dictates of the holy being who created us. It is aimed more at damage done to *self* than to God or mankind. Paul discusses this in 2 Corinthians 7:10 where he says that *godly* sorrow is that which leads to salvation and brings no regret, while *worldly* sorrow leads to death.

Let’s use some of the commentary from *The Interpreter’s Bible* to make clear the distinction:

Worldly grief ... is felt for the consequences of sin, such as the loss of friendship, physical disability, wounded self-esteem, material losses. All these are like the pain which disease produces and may be mistaken for the real trouble. If we are content to deal only with the pain the real disease may be masked or even aggravated. We are dealing with symptoms instead of getting down to the root of the matter... If the grief is only for physical results, or the material loss, or the wound to our self-respect, it is powerless to effect any inward change. The real question is whether the sinner hates his sin because he sees it as opposition to God’s will of love, or because he dislikes the pain it has produced. (vol. 10; p. 359).

God’s objective is to help us to learn to abhor sin and disassociate ourselves from it in order to break its power to bemuse us and cause us to yield to its temptations. Once we have broken free from that power that is in opposition to God’s thoughts and ways, we can live with no regrets and live the life that leads to God’s salvation and forgiveness. The secret to this kind of repentance is the same for breaking any kind of bad habit or addiction: The individual must make up his/her mind that

parting company with sin means that you have done it with a sense of finality and no possibility of being drawn back into its deadly snare. Ultimately, you have to understand that it is not enough to be outwardly “religious” or “righteous.”

Confession unto Salvation

After reading Romans 10:9, 10, what do you think is involved in confessing with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead? Are you, in the process, confessing your sins and asking for forgiveness? Notice that the confession is made “...unto salvation” – in other words, it will lead to salvation. Ask yourself this most important question: Are you permitted by God to take Romans 10:9, 10, *in isolation from all other scriptural revelations*, and claim that all you have to do to be saved is name the name of Jesus on your lips? No, you must take the full scriptural revelation together in order to have fuller knowledge of what God requires of you. (For a much fuller discussion of the subject of salvation, download our free book *There is More to Salvation than Meets the Eye*.)

Read Daniel 9:4-19. Write down the things which Daniel confesses as he seeks to understand God’s word and live by it. Check out vv. 5, 6 for examples. Note the comments about wickedness, iniquity, departing from God’s precepts and judgments, and refusing to listen to God’s prophets. With that as a guide, complete the examination of vv. 7-19. Also, note the *judgments* against the Israelites because of their *sins*. Even though Daniel confesses all of these sins and *personally* repents and asks for forgiveness, please note that he includes *national sins* in his request for God’s mercy and forgiveness. Why? Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22 that *we all sinned in Adam* and have to be rescued from the death penalty through Jesus Christ. Each of us has a *personal responsibility* for our continued participation in Adam’s sin.

If the term *repent* means to feel such regret over an action, intention, *et cetera* so as to change your mind about participating in such things, then is it *reasonable* to believe that calling on the name of Jesus Christ for salvation purposes *requires* a repentant mind and heart about any and all sins that *you* have ever committed? Read Psalm 34:12-18; 51:17. Psalm 51 is a mournful cry to God for forgiveness of a grievous sin that David committed. If *all sin* is worthy of eternal death (Rom. 6:23; Gen.

2:17; 3:16-24), then any individual sin is a grievous sin and needs to be feared, shunned, and avoided through repentance. You must develop the proper attitude about the nature and consequences of sin in God's sight ... not yours.

Some people assume that they can hide their sins from their fellow man and God. That assumption leads them to be wrong relative to trying to hide their sins from God. Adam and Eve were the first victims of the attempt to hide their sin from the Lord God (Gen. 3:8-13). Cain was the next (Gen. 4:1-9). They did not consider that the Lord God was intellectually equipped to investigate and learn the truth of the matters involved.

Indeed, the Lord God revealed to the prophet Jeremiah that He has such skills:

The [human] heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt: who can understand it? *I the Lord search the mind and try the heart*, to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruits of his doings (RSV; emphases added).

If you do not understand, and subsequently do not believe, that God has such power, then you are “skating on thin ice,” as the saying goes.

To Cover or to Confess?

Proverbs 28:13 gives us this bit of wisdom: “Whoever covers his/her sins will not be successful in doing so, but whoever confesses them and forsakes them will receive mercy.” Read the last part of Numbers 32:23: “...Be sure your sin will find you out” [that is: “catch up with you”]. – What is the difference between covering your sins and confessing your sins? The proverb suggests that confession includes forsaking. It is not enough to simply admit that you sin ... and name specific sins of which you are aware. The idea is that repentance means that you will quit doing the thing that offends God.

Sins of omission and commission must be recognized and dealt with. Just to be sure that you understand the sin of omission properly, it is a sin that you commit when you do not do what you know is right. James 4:17 briefly addresses this by saying: “...To him that knows to do good, but does not do it, it is sin.” The parable of the Good Samaritan is an

example of two men with ranks of authority in a religious order who know to “do good,” but they ignore a man in dire need of help because his “kind” are not considered to be worthy of their attention. Or, their business elsewhere is counted as being more important than his problem (read Luke 10:25-37). The “Good Samaritan” very easily could have been someone from the House of Israel. Or, he could have been a Gentile who lived in Samaria ... the former homeland of the House of Israel before they were removed by the Assyrians (see John 4:1-30).

What does James mean in James 5:16 when he tells us to confess to one another our *paraptomas* (“slipping up” – slipping up due to carelessness and unconcern toward one another)? How is that *helpful* to your repentance? What else does he consider to be helpful to the repentance process? I would not recommend *widely broadcasting* your careless or unintentional/intentional slip-ups to others – even in a church setting. I do not think James intends for that to be the practice. It would make sense that you should be able and willing to confess to another person the sins that you have committed against him or her. In doing so, you remove barriers that prevent you from loving him/her as yourself. Broadcasting it widely throughout the congregation is not the same as confessing it to the party against whom you have sinned. Matthew 18:15-17 is most like the focus of James’ directive.

What are the *first* steps you should take if someone sins against you? Is your first step to make a public display of it – or to do this privately? Why is this first step helpful? Should it be undertaken with anger and loud accusation? Could you pray together if there were anger and rancor? Does this process sound anything like what James might have had in mind? Notice, however, that the individual who is not willing to forgive and forget is the one who is disfellowshipped. There are two barriers that must be removed in this process: (1) the barrier between man and God and (2) the barrier between man and man (see Matt. 22:34-40).

Notice another part of this process in Matthew 6:12: “Forgive our trespasses *as we forgive those who have trespassed against us*” (emphases added). Confession must be made both to God and our fellowman in order to remove barriers that impede our personal forgiveness. Jesus tells us to ask God the Father to forgive us *in measure to the degree that we forgive those who have sinned against us*. Think long and hard about that suggestion. If our personal forgiveness is

received in relationship to how we forgive others, then the onus is placed upon the individual to become more loving and merciful toward others.

However, generally broadcasting our sins to others who were not involved in the problem can do infinitely more harm than good. Matthew 5:23, 24 tells us to be reconciled with our brother before making our offerings to God. The Apostle John asks a compelling question: “If a man says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. How can a man love God – whom he has not seen – if he hates his brother – whom he has seen?” (1 John 4:20). In all of this discussion, it is clear that God expects us to be repentant (2 Pet. 3:9). With the availability of His grace, mercy, and forgiveness, there is no reason why we should attempt to cover our sins and pretend that they did not happen. I am sure that James was aware of this reasoning.

Dead to Sin

Romans 6:2 says that we are to be dead to sin. Does that statement mean the same as Romans 8:13 – that is, to mortify the deeds of the body (the flesh)? Let’s study through this in order to understand the message of any similar scriptures.

Only in Romans 8:13 and Colossians 3:5 is the term mortify used in scripture. But ... in each place a different Greek term is used. In Romans 8:13, it is thanatoo, which means “to kill; to cause to be put to death” – in essence, to extirpate, exterminate, eradicate, uproot, to cut out by surgery. In Colossians 3:5, it is nekroo, which means “to deaden; to subdue” – in essence, to make it impotent to the point that it is totally powerless. You should get the idea that both words mean that you should turn from sin with an attitude of finality. In essence, that was the idea behind the Lord God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt: Under His leadership and guidance, Israel was to never again be a slave to any other nation. The Lord God’s attitude was an attitude of finality.

True repentance is not merely changing your mind, being sorry for your sins, mere reformation of your life, or simply confessing that you have committed some kind of sin. It is to set your mind and heart on accepting Jesus Christ as the Lord and Master of your life so He can lead you to the point where you will determine to never again allow sin to dominate you – if possible, totally eradicating it from your life in order to be like Him (read Rom. 6). This is very difficult without the aid

of God's Holy Spirit, so you must be prepared to constantly audit your life to discover sinful behavior that needs to be dealt with in this manner.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. There are three overarching questions that you should ask yourself as you examine your life:

1. Am I willing to be taught God's thoughts and ways (Psa. 25:4, 5)?
2. Am I willing to allow myself to be corrected through Jesus Christ under His instruction in God's truth (Jer. 10:23, 24)?
3. Am I willing to repent in order to correct my mistakes and abandon the path of life that exposed me to them (Luke 13:5; Psa. 51)?

Now that you have studied this most important lesson, would you agree or disagree with Lewis (p. 3) about whether or not God demands repentance before He will take you back? Why/why not? Read the following scriptures to help you with your answer: Acts 17:30; Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 20:21.

Just before He ascended to sit at the right hand of the Father, what did Jesus instruct His disciples to preach (Luke 24:47)? To how much of the earth were they to preach this? Comparing this scripture to Matthew 4:17, do you think that Jesus was consistent throughout His ministry in preaching that we must repent of our sins? Is repentance necessary in order for you to be put right with God?

In Ezekiel 18:4, 20, what is the alternative to repentance? How does this death compare to the one mentioned in Hebrews 9:27? How about the one in Genesis 2:17? You must understand that physical death is part of being a human being. Regardless of the relative merits of our lives, we are all going to die a physical death. The thing with which we must be concerned is the judgment that comes afterward. Matthew 25:41 demonstrates that the death spoken of in Ezekiel 18 and Genesis 2:17 is a death from which you cannot/will not be recovered. Revelation 20:6 calls this death the second death. We will discuss this more fully in BSC Lesson 10 when we study about the resurrection(s) from the dead.

What follows are some thoughts that you can study through and bring this chapter to a reasonable conclusion:

1. The remission of sins that comes as a result of our repentance is an act of God. God is not obligated to remit your sins because you really do not deserve to have them remitted. Acts 3:19 describes remission as being a “blotting out” of your sins (*KJV*). In essence, it is an action of God that erases your sins from His records. That is the idea embedded in 2 Corinthians 5:17: In God’s eyes, you become one that is newly created ... and are given the opportunity to become a totally new person in your thoughts and ways. Read Psalm 32 in order to get the idea involved in remission.

2. In Psalm 103:8-18, David describes God’s fatherly character and attitude. The term merciful means that God is “full of compassion” (deep sympathy and pity). The term gracious means that He is ready to give you the gift of forgiveness ... a gift that cannot be bought, earned, or repaid. He is slow to anger, patient, and puts off punishment in order to give us space to repent. He does not speedily execute upon us the sentence for our sins.

Verse 14 is remarkable because of God’s attitude toward us: He remembers that we are dust (Gen. 2:7; 3:19). It would be sufficient if He simply let the creature of dust die and be reduced back to the dust out of which he was created. Remember this: There is no “immortal soul” ... and there is no eternal punishment by fire in hell. According to Malachi 4:1-3, the wicked will be reduced to ashes by fire. When the fire has done its job, the ashes will become part of the dust of the earth again (Eccl. 3:18-20; 9:5; 12:7; Rev. 20:14, 15; Rom. 16:).

Has God given us what we deserve? According to vv. 8-12, we should not take His mercy and grace for granted. There is a limitation on how long He will tolerate our sinful ways. When all of God’s judgment is finally concluded, those of us who have been forgiven and “saved” will find that He has not dealt with us according to our sins or rewarded us according to our iniquities. In fact, His forgiveness will be so eternally effective

that our sins will have been removed from us as far as east is from the west. Pay close attention to how the psalmist selected his description of the expanding distance between east and west. Why?

You should understand the line in Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Ballad of East and West" that was published in 1889: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." On the earth, you can go only so far north or south, but you can travel endlessly east or west. Such is the significance of v. 12. After God has forgiven and "saved" you, then you and your sins will never meet again (Isa. 65:16, 17).

3. What does God expect from us in return for His mercy and grace? Micah 6:8 is a terse, but significant, answer:

He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

If you seek forgiveness and eternal life, is that too high a price to pay for them?

Review Questions

1. Briefly explain the significance of Acts 17:30.
2. What do Matthew 3:2; 4:17; and Acts 2:38 have in common?
3. Briefly explain the significance of Numbers 23:19. How should you interpret Exodus 32:12, 14 in relationship to Numbers 23:19?
4. According to Acts 2:38, what are three necessary steps in the repentance process? Why is it called a repentance *process*?
5. How does Acts 16 support your answer to Question #4?
6. Using Acts 7:58; 9:5; and 22:20, briefly explain how Paul's religious

activities were sinful (think about Matt. 7:21-23).

7. What role does conviction serve in the repentance process? What role does a consciousness of guilt play?

8. Explain what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 7:10 when he contrasts godly sorrow with worldly sorrow. What does he mean when he says that godly sorrow is "...a repentance not to be repented of..."?

9. What is the significance of *confessing with your mouth* and *believing in your heart* (Rom. 10:9, 10)?

10. Write down the things Daniel confesses in Daniel 9:4-19. Are all of them personal sins?

11. According to Proverbs 28:13, what is the difference between *covering* your sins and *confessing* your sins? What must you do in addition to *confessing* your sins?

12. How is confessing your paraptomas to one another helpful? Does James intend that you should widely broadcast your careless sins and intentional slip-ups to others? How would you use Matthew 18:15-17 to better understand this instruction?

13. Explain Romans 6:2 relative to being dead to sin.

14. Explain Romans 8:13 relative to mortifying the deeds of the body.

15. What is the difference between thanatoo and nekroo? What is the conceptual similarity between these two terms?

16. Explain *true repentance*.

17. What is the remission of sins that comes as a result of our repentance? Why is God not obligated to forgive and forget your sins?

18. What is significant about Psalm 103:8-18? Explain the difference between mercy and grace. Why is the east/west comment important?

19. What is significant about Micah 6:8?

20. Write out a good explanation of 2 Peter 3:9 ... paying close attention to terms like *slack* and *longsuffering*. Does this verse give you a good excuse for not being concerned about repentance? Explain.

21. After you have completed this part of the current study, write about why you agree or disagree with C. S. Lewis about whether or not God demands repentance before He will take you back. Use the following scriptures to assist you in forming your answer: Matthew 3:2; Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 20:21.

Chapter Six

Meeting God's Divine Standard

Some scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus why He associated with publicans and sinners. His answer was simple: “They that are whole do not need a physician; those who are ill do. I did not come to call the righteous to repentance; I came to call the sinners” (Luke 5:30, 31). In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul explained how sin has infected the entire human family in its various forms ... and came to this conclusion: “...All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...” (Romans 3:23; Isa. 53:6). Sin, therefore, is *universal*.

What have we done? We have failed to meet God's *divine standard* of thought and action and allowed our *self-will* to intrude into the sphere of *divine authority* – insulting God's divine truth (notice, too, that Romans 3:20 says that we understand what sin is through God's law). Romans 3:9 says that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin. John says: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say that we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8, 10; Rom. 1:17).

David's Problem with Sin

What is David's point in his prayer in Psalm 38? He is asking God to take compassion on him because he understands how great his sins

have been – both in number and nature. In v. 6, he admits that he has been beaten down and humbled (thereby showing a consciousness of his shortcomings) because of his sins. He expresses his shame and guilt ... as well as a great concern that his enemies could use them to accuse and taunt him and denigrate God Himself because of His choice of such a man to be Israel's king. If successful, their derisions could make David much less effective as God's servant. In v. 18, David declares his heartfelt intention to confess his sins. What sin had he committed?

Read 2 Samuel 11 through 12:23 and Psalm 51. David committed murder, among other sins, in order to take Uriah's wife Bathsheba as his wife. The child they conceived died as an act of God's judgment against them. Note the emotions of David in Psalm 51 as he pours out his heart to God for forgiveness. What does he ask God to do in order to heal the situation? Read vv. 6-19. The most significant of these remedies is found in v. 10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." That, of course, is possible only if David fully surrenders to God and allows it to be done on God's terms.

In 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, Paul had rebuked the Corinthians for allowing an abominable behavior to go on in their congregation (read also 1 Corinthians 5). His rebuke evidently brought about true repentance among them. What does Paul mean that they "...sorrowed to repentance ... after a godly manner..." (v. 9)? What effects did their godly sorrow produce in them? There are seven effects it had upon them: (1) an earnest longing to be reconciled, (2) a desire to be set upon the right path, (3) an indignation about the sin, (4) a fear of the consequences, as well as (5) an awe and reverence toward God, (6) a strong devotion to restore a lost relationship, and (7) proper steps to discipline the guilty party. This, no doubt, is the path that David would have had to have taken.

Would you agree that there is something special about godly sorrow? It is much more than being regretful about getting caught. People who think like that would commit the same sin again and again if they felt that they were never going to get caught doing it; or, if caught again, nothing of much consequence would follow. That is worldly sorrow.

Now read Matthew 3:8, 9. What do you think John the Baptist meant by telling the Pharisees and Sadducees that they were to "...bring forth ... fruits meet for repentance"? That is, they would show by thoughts

and actions the truth of their repentance. It is evident that Jesus Christ is saying that there should be a qualitative change in your life that is evidence that you have truly repented. If you confess Jesus Christ with your lips ... but do not change your life to follow God's thoughts and ways ... then there is a serious question about the validity of your repentance. You very well might deceive the world about the necessary change, but you will not deceive God.

Should you think that your family relationships and friendships are sufficient to get you into God's favor? Is being kin to a true Christian enough to earn you favor with God? Is being an all-around good guy enough? There are many who are genuinely good people. Their goodness convinces them that they have done nothing wrong. If they have done nothing wrong, then they think that they should be given credit toward "salvation" for their goodness. After having studied this lesson, what advice would you give them?

David set an example of repentance that is acceptable to God. God's will that we should be holy, blameless, and loving (Eph. 1:4) is a very high goal for our Christian growth and development. But ... it is not one that cannot be successful (Matt. 11:28-30).

In Jonah 3, God sent Jonah to Nineveh to declare to them God's judgment of their imminent destruction because of their sins. What did the people of Nineveh do in the face of that threat of destruction? What was the King's reasoning in the face of such a sure event (v. 9)? What did God do as a result of their actions (v. 10)? Does this demonstrate that God might change His mind about prophesied events of destruction if enough people take repentance seriously?

Now read Isaiah 1:18-20 and Deuteronomy 26:40-46. Would the repentant still have to suffer some disciplinary measures? Would that be part of the reconciliation process? Grace and mercy do not necessarily exclude the disciplinary actions needed to reinforce the requirements.

In Romans 2:4-13, Paul explains how God leads us to repentance through His goodness. What kinds of things would He do to get us to realize our need to repent? Does His goodness include some types of disciplinary measures? Read Hebrews 12 and understand that the word chastisement (KJV) can also be translated to read discipline and training. Verses 6 and 7 are very important in this discussion.

Jeremiah 44 is a testimony of what happens when God runs out of patience with those who abandon His truth and worship false gods.

Consider the blessings that were heaped upon the Israelitish people because of God's covenant with Abraham. Both the House of Israel and the House of Judah either mixed and mingled His truth with pagan trash, or they abandoned His truth altogether in order to follow pagan gods (see Ex. 20:1-7; Deut. 12:29-32; and Jer. 10:1-16). When He has run out of kindness, patience, and tolerance, His heavy hand of punishment will come upon those who refuse to enter covenant with Him, as well as those who break covenant with Him.

Salient Points to be Understood

Paul gives us additional important information in Romans 10:3-17. Specifically, he is addressing his remarks about *Israel* to Gentiles ... but there is an application that can be made to mankind in general because it is God's will that all of mankind should come to salvation through Jesus Christ. There are several salient points that Paul makes that are very important for our understanding of God's truth.

First, there is the problem of religious zeal that is empty of the knowledge of God's truth (v. 2). What does this mean? In v. 2, the Greek term for knowledge is epignosis. The word for ordinary knowledge is gnosis. The prefix epi- changes the meaning of the word gnosis to mean extraordinary knowledge, or a higher quality of knowledge. Paul's inference is that you can be a religious zealot, yet lack the higher quality of the knowledge of God's truth (see Heb. 5:11-6:30). The Hebrews, obviously, were not capable of dealing with spiritually "strong meat."

Paul pursues such a conversation in 1 Corinthians 1 where he warns them about the difference between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. He continues in chapter 2 to explain that God's wisdom and truth are not the products of the best wisdom of the world; it is divine knowledge of God's mysteries that are revealed to His true people through divine revelation (vv. 6-14). That is the essence of epignosis. That is the problem Paul had with the Corinthians (see 1 Cor. 3).

Second, he says that "...Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes" (emphases added). Many people think that Paul is saying that Jesus Christ annulled/voided the law of the Old Testament. It is true that the Greek term telos can mean "end" in the sense of termination and cessation, but ... that definition would contradict Matthew 5:17-19 and Luke 24:44. Interestingly enough, the

epignosis involved in the term is revealed in the context of the larger meaning of the word: “the end or goal toward which a movement is being directed, outcome” (BAG, p. 819). That *epignosis* reveals that the term end is meant in the sense “...of the consummation that comes to prophecies when they are fulfilled” (Ibid.; emphases added). How so?

Galatians 3:22-26 is useful in this discussion. Notice that God’s revelation in scripture is that all have been imprisoned under the power of sin. The thing that would separate the “sheep” from the “goats” (Matt. 25:31-34) would be faith in Jesus Christ as Redeemer, Lord, and Savior. Those who take advantage of that kind of true faith will be released from the law’s demand for their eternal death (see Rom. 8:1). In other words, the unrepentant will be under the judgment of the law (Rom. 6:23), while the repentant will not be. Jesus Christ is the means by which it is possible to be taken from being under the law. The unrepentant is “under the law,” while the repentant is “not under the law.” Not being “under the law” has nothing to do with the law having been voided or destroyed. It has to do with not being under the judgment to death.

Paul continues in v. 24 by saying that the law is our schoolmaster. The Greek term is paidagogos. The paidagogos was not a teacher or an instructor – regardless of the meaning of the modern term pedagogue. He was an attendant, custodian, guide, superintendent. He accompanied the child to school and back home and supervised his behavior wherever he was (BAG, p. 608). The law given to Israel was intended to represent the thoughts and ways of God. Israel, by imitation, could acquire those thoughts and ways by being faithful to them. The laws are the guide to what makes God holy (see Deut. 5:29; 6:25; 8:2, 3; 10:12-16; Lev. 19:2) and, thereby, what enables the true believer to become holy. That is the sense of Paul’s comment in Galatians 3:24, 25 about the law bringing us to Christ. What does he mean by that?

Read Philippians 2:5: “Let this mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ.” Now read 1 Corinthians 2:16: “...We have the mind of Jesus Christ.” Go now to Galatians 2:20: “...Christ lives in me.” Colossians 1:27 reads: “...God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (emphases added). Paul is not suggesting in the least that Jesus Christ would personally take up residence inside the believer and take over his/her thoughts and actions. It has to do with God’s thoughts and ways being entered into our minds and hearts.

All of this speaks to the goal, or outcome, of the law. Because the law embodies the heart and mind of Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ is the law just as surely as God is love. Once you understand and live by the holiness, righteousness, justice, spirituality, and goodness of the law (Rom. 7:12, 14; 8:1-4; Jer. 31:31-34), then you begin to enjoy the freedom given to you by God's truth and holy spirit (John 8:31, 32). You will begin to accomplish the goal set forth in Romans 12:1, 2 regarding getting out of the worldly mindset into God's mindset. You will begin to know more deeply the will of God and the righteous direction given to you by His law. Little by little, you will grow spiritually toward the point that you will not need a paidagogos because you will have come to the epignosis of God's thoughts and ways and have them deeply embedded into the deepest portions of your heart and mind. You will have grown to become a living manifestation of the love that God is (1 John 4:4-8). The term love sums up God's law (see Rom. 13:8-10).

Next, Paul explains in vv. 9, 10 the importance of belief and confession. Let's first examine the term belief because the belief is the precedent (that which justifies a following action) of the confession. Although Paul uses a form of the term believe several times in vv. 9-16, they do not all have the same meaning. In Romans 10:9, the term means that someone has become convinced – that is: persuaded by argument and/or evidence – that a thing is true. That is not all there is to it because Paul stipulates that one must “believe in your heart.”

The Greek term for “heart” is kardia, which is defined as being “...the center and source of the whole inner life, w[ith] its thinking, feeling, and volition...” This place in your inner life is the center of your feelings and emotions – the place in which your faculty of thought brings knowledge to the point of understanding and spiritual enlightenment (*BAG*, p. 404). This kind of belief is not mere mental comprehension; it is the fundamental component of faith (Heb. 11:1). You have become convinced that the belief you hold will produce the desired effect/result: your forgiveness and salvation.

Once that conviction is set in your mind and heart, then it should give rise to your confession with your mouth about the efficacy of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ relative to God's mercy, grace, forgiveness, redemption, and salvation. The Greek term is homologeō. This has to do with a public declaration that Jesus Christ is

your Lord and Savior (see also Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8). You will acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and died for sinners (1 John 4:2; 5:1; 1 Cor. 12:3; Ibid; p. 571). It is sad that not everyone who is shown God's truth actually lives by it.

Scripture is our Source for Godly Understanding

Many in mainstream Christianity believe that scripture is a reasonable guide for our behavior, but they do not accept the Old Testament on the same level as the New Testament. Much of this is because of a *misguided* concept that much of the Old Testament was rendered null and void by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In that framework, they often refer to themselves as being "New Testament" Christians. What they fail to understand is that all mentions of *scripture* in the New Testament actually refer to the *Old Testament* ... because the New Testament canon had not been fully written or settled. See Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Matthew 26:26-28 regarding the *new testament/covenant*.

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 that all scripture is inspired by God for several reasons that are explained below:

- (a) for establishing the tenets of instruction to be held in common by a body of believers ("profitable for doctrine");
- (b) for correcting faulty ideas, attitudes, and actions through evidence ("for reproof");
- (c) for testing all theories, theologies, and ethical teachings for correctness and truth relative to the thoughts and ways of God ("for correction");
- (d) for training the believer in righteousness... ("for instruction in righteousness") (so that)
- (e) the believer will become spiritually mature and thoroughly capable of doing the works for which God has called him/her into His truth ("perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"; see also Ephesians 2:10).

At that time, *Paul had only the Old Testament.*

Scriptures provide man entrance into the thoughts and ways of God – which are as high above the ordinary human’s thoughts and ways as the heavens are above the earth (Isa. 55:8, 9). In order for God to make this possible, He has used specially appointed men to record the appropriate history, theology, and prophecies to guide man into a prescribed pattern of thought and belief – what Jude, a brother of Jesus Christ, refers to as “...the faith once delivered to the saints....” (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-16; Jude 3).

According to both Old and New Testaments, there is but one true faith that is acceptable to God (Deut. 4; Isa. 8:16, 20; Matt. 4:4; 7:21-23; Eph. 4:4-6). Peter says that this inspiration – an influx of God’s Holy Spirit – gives us “a more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:19-21). This suggests two things: (a) scripture is authenticated by the action of God Himself and (b) it, therefore, needs no further confirmation because it is a faithful witness to the truth of the gospel (see also 1 Pet. 1:10). God’s word is timelessly authoritative because it is a timeless witness of God’s revelation of His plan, will, and purpose for mankind.

Review Questions

1. What is David’s point of his prayer in Psalm 38? How does he express his shame and guilt? Why is he concerned about his enemies? Based on v. 18, what do you think he intends to do?
2. Regarding 2 Samuel 11:1 through 12:23 and Psalm 51, what terrible sins did David commit? Was there *murder* involved? *Adultery*? What was God’s judgment for these sins? How did David react to his punishment? What special requests did David make of God?
3. What specific sin occurred in Corinth (1 Cor. 5:1)? How did the Church members there react to it? Why was Paul not pleased? What did he tell them to do about the situation? Why did Paul write them again (2 Cor. 7:9-11)? What is so special about *godly* sorrow?

4. In Matthew 3:8, 9, why did John the Baptist tell the Pharisees and Sadducees to “bring forth...fruits meet for repentance”? Why should you not think that your family relationships and friendships are sufficient to get you into God’s favor?
5. How did the people of Nineveh react to Jonah’s message from God? What reasoning did the Ninevite king employ in the face of such a sure event? How did God react to the king’s reasoning and actions? What great lesson does this teach us about deep, sincere repentance?
6. From Romans 2:4, explain how God leads us to repentance. What things will He do to make us realize our need for repentance?
7. Based on Jeremiah 44, briefly explain the Lord God’s actions when He has run out of kindness, patience, and tolerance.
8. According to Romans 10:3, 8-17, what prevents people from repenting? How does one get the epignosis of God’s righteousness? What is self-righteousness? Can a self-righteous person be a zealously religious person?
9. Write a brief explanation of God’s truth in 2 Timothy 2:15.
10. Briefly explain 2 Timothy 2:25. What does Paul mean when he says: “...if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (emphases added)? How does it suggest that God, who must open our hearts and minds to His truth in order to convict us of our sins, reserves the right to judge the level of and quality of our repentance? Think in terms of Matthew 3:8, 9 and 7:21-23.
11. Write a brief explanation of how you feel about your present understanding of the concept of repentance. How well will it serve you in your continued search for God’s truth?
12. What is your attitude now regarding C. S. Lewis’s claim that God does not demand that you should repent?

Chapter Seven

Some Final Thoughts

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, Paul emphasizes the cost of retrieving man from the consequences of sin. The emphasis is on a purchase that changes the ownership: the true believer becomes God's property through Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 7:22, 23, he says that those called of Jesus Christ are to be servants, who are freemen – someone with all the rights and privileges of citizenship (in God's Kingdom). They are not to allow themselves to become the servants (slaves – Romans 6:11-23) of men in the future. Having been redeemed from the curse of the law (that is, from the death from which there is no recovery), we must think and act more like God (Galatians 3:13).

But ... notice what Paul says God ultimately does with our servant status (Galatians 4:4-7; see also John 15:13-15). It is a great honor to be called the friend of Jesus Christ and the child of God!

Man has to be redeemed through Jesus Christ out of the state of sin into which he has fallen. That sinful state is a slavery from which man cannot escape by his own power. He must have the intervention of Christ in order to do so.

That redemption requires the payment of a price. If man were to pay his own price, then all of mankind would be brought to death, and God's plan to create man in His image would come to nothing. Instead of man paying his own price, Elohim devised the plan whereby the Redeemer

would be provided – whereby Christ would become a substitute for sinful mankind (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

The resultant state of the true believer is a paradox: something that seems wrong, but is actually right. *We are redeemed to freedom ... but, this freedom means servitude to God.* True believers are redeemed to do the will of their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Repentance and forgiveness imply deliverance from the second death – not necessarily the built-in consequences of the sins themselves. In other words, you can be forgiven for being a robber, but you should not expect God’s forgiveness to be a “get-out-of-jail-free card” so you can continue to sin against Him without penalty ... or escape certain consequences of your offense.

With that in mind, learn to focus on three important qualities of God:

- (1) There is no question about the moral standards which God’s will imposes. They are not based on whim and fancy;
- (2) There is no doubt left about why He gets angry with mankind; and
- (3) God’s anger is not removed except through the intervention of Jesus Christ and the subsequent changes made in the sinner’s life to be more in line with God’s thoughts and ways.

In a world without a supreme moral will (God’s), there would be no difference between good and evil. When each individual is allowed to do what is right in his own sight, the possibility of a supreme moral will is destroyed. That is the essence of what Adam and Eve did in eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.

The psychology (mental operation) of this is quite simple when you think about it. Men find it difficult to prostrate themselves before God because they are either unwilling or too proud to admit that they are at the end of their resources for a remedy. What does that mean? It means that *we cannot ask for divine assistance unless we truly believe that we cannot do without it.* We cannot invoke God unless we share with Him the spiritual awareness of the human weakness from which our problems arise. We cannot be truly repentant unless we believe that: (a) the

penalty for sin must be paid; (b) our sins merit God's sentence of death; and (c) we will surely die the second death if we do not change.

L. Morris, in his book *The Apostolic Preaching*, says this:

Unless we give real content to the wrath of God, unless we hold that men really deserve to have God visit upon them the painful consequences of their wrongdoing, we empty God's forgiveness of its meaning (p. 185; emphases added).

In other words, how thankful would you be for God's forgiveness if you thought He really would not let you die and the memory of you be forgotten forever? Would you be concerned about repenting if you felt that God did not demand it of you – and was not willing to severely punish you if you did not do it? In Galatians 6:7, Paul ascribes the consequences of our sins to a personal God who refuses to be mocked by our wrongdoing. May God give you the eyes to see and the ears to hear His truth in this matter.



Straight Talk ... Plain Truth

THIS BOOK IS NOT TO BE SOLD

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