

The Sure Word Bible Study

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This is a study of biblical teachings designed primarily for use in a student / teacher setting as a study in preparation for baptism. However, this book contains many helpful studies that will be beneficial to anyone seeking to learn biblical truths.

This series of study topics include:

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The Sure Word Bible Studies

Lesson 1

The Sure Word of Truth

One thing is certain – we live in uncertain times. And as always, most people depend upon their fellowman for truth and spiritual guidance which leads to more uncertainty. The Catholic Priest, the Jewish Rabbi, and the Protestant preacher, all say they speak for God. They all claim to have the truth, yet they all are teaching different things! How can that be? Common sense tells us that all of them can't be right. In fact, the Bible warns us that even some ministers will be agents for Satan!

II Corinthians 11:14,15 *"And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."*

This being the case, how can we know for sure what is true? Jesus praying to the Father, said: *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth"* (John 17:17).

God's word is truth and is found in the Bible. The Bible is the only constant, unchanging guide we have to help us navigate the uncertain times in which we live.

Here are some important facts about the Bible:

- * The Bible is not one book, but a collection of books in one binding.
- * Over 40 different men wrote the Bible over a period of 1500 years.
- * Each Bible writer wrote in his native language, Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek.
- * These men came from various backgrounds, different levels of education and different cultures.

Scripture is not the thoughts and ideas of these individual men, but the Bible itself tells us: *"for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (II Peter 1:21)

The Bible is not a word for word dictation from God, but rather God speaking through the human mind with each writer expressing it in their own way.

The Bible was written in a way that enables it to speak to all men in every age, language and culture. Because of this we will find some difficulties which will require more than a casual reading to understand.

The Bible was first circulated as a complete unit during the 4th century and copied by hand until 1469 A.D. and the invention of the printing press.

The original writings had no chapters, verses, or punctuation. Punctuation was not added until the Bible was translated into the English language. Verses were added to the Old Testament in by Jewish rabbis in 900 A.D. The Bible was divided into chapters by Stephen Langston, professor in the University of Paris, during the 12th century and finally verses were added to the New Testament in A.D. 1551 by Robert Stephens.

The Jewish Bible has 39 books. (The Old Testament only)

The Catholic Bible has 73 books, the Old and New Testaments plus seven additional "apocryphal" (which means "hidden") books which were rejected by the Protestants as un-inspired.

The Protestant Bible has 66 books including both the Old and New Testaments.

The combination of books selected to be included in the Bible are known as the "canon" of scripture. They meet the criteria set by the church qualifying each one as an inspired writing.

Today the Bible has been translated into more than two thousand languages and many different versions. The versions can be divided into three different types of translations.

(1) "Word for word" translations. Examples are the King James KJV, New King James NKJV, New American Standard NAS and the English Standard Version ESV.

In these versions the translators have attempted to stay as close to the original wording as possible.

(2) "Thought for thought" translations. Examples are the New International NIV and New Living Translation NLT.

In these versions the translators have attempted to convey the thought the writer had in mind rather than the exact words.

(3) "Paraphrase" translations. Examples are the Clear Word, the Message, or the Living Bible.

These versions are usually done by one person rather than a group in which the translator puts into his own words what he believes the writer was saying.

The "word for word" translations are considered the best for study and teaching while the others are considered best for public and / or personal reading.

A casual reading of the Bible isn't enough. We need to know for ourselves how to study and correctly interpret and understand its contents.

If our study is to be fruitful it will involve work, effort, and patience. There will be times of discouragement, especially in the beginning, but we must be persistent. Because we do not understand or can't make sense of something should not cause us to lose confidence in the scriptures, if we keep studying – understanding will come.

Some of the problems we find as we study may be products of our inaccurate perception rather than actual mistakes in the Bible. We must be careful that we do not put God on trial when we come across a text that we cannot understand. Remember, God is infallible - we are not.

The following is a list of helpful tools for Bible study.

1. Different versions of the Bible for comparison.
2. Exhaustive concordance with Hebrew and Greek dictionary.
3. Bible dictionary.
4. Bible commentaries.
5. Computer Bible programs. (There are some free ones, like Bible Explorer and E-sword.)

The following ten principles will help us better understand the Bible and correctly apply it to our lives.

- 1. Before studying the Bible always first ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**

John 14:26 *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."*

The same Holy Spirit that inspired the writing of the scriptures will help us to understand them.

- 2. Approach Bible study with humility, an open mind, seeking to learn, never with preconceived ideas or pride of opinion.**

Matthew 18:3,4 *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

“Become as little children.” That is, being inquisitive, open minded and willing to be taught. No matter how old or how well educated we may be, that must be our attitude when studying the Bible if we are to know the truth.

3. Develop the practice of asking questions about what is read.

When we read the Bible or engage in conversations with other Christians, we will hear or read words and phrases we do not understand. There may have been times when we may have repeated them even though we couldn't explain them.

For example, can you clearly explain the meaning of the expression, *“covered by the blood”*? Or can you explain the meaning of words like *“justification, sanctification, and propitiation?”* If we can't explain it, it usually means we don't understand it.

Often the problem is that we don't ask, *“What does that mean?”* Because after all, a good Christian should know what all those words and phrases mean, shouldn't they? But if we don't know, we should set aside our pride and ask *“What does that mean?”* and diligently seek the answer.

4. Consider all scripture on a subject before drawing any conclusions on that subject.

A concordance is a must for this. We begin by looking up the key words of the topic or subject we wish to learn more about; for example, the baptism of Jesus. The key words would be “baptize,” “baptism,” or “baptized,” and “Jesus.” Next we look at the verses that include these words. In this example, we begin with a text in the book of Luke.

Luke 3:19 - 23 *"But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he*

shut John up in prison. When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age,"

These verses tell us 1) Jesus was baptized. 2) That the Holy Spirit came upon Him at that time, and 3) that He was 30 years old. But they do not tell us who baptized Jesus or where. So we look at another account of this event in the book of Mark.

Mark 1:9,10 *"It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove."*

This text has given us more detail; it tells us who baptized Jesus and where. Then reading another passage relating to this subject in the book of Acts we learn even more about Jesus baptism.

Acts 10:37,38 *"that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how **God anointed Jesus** of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."*

Here we learn that Jesus' baptism signified His anointing by God with the Holy Spirit prior to His beginning His ministry. This is when He actually became, the "Christ" or the "Anointed." (The word Christ means "anointed one.")

By looking at everything the Bible has to say on a subject we can better know the truth about that subject. Remember, never say, "The Bible says" until you've looked at everything the Bible says!

5. Word Studies.

Since the Bible was not originally written in English it must be translated. Translation is a difficult work because some Hebrew and Greek words have no equivalent in English. In addition to that, the translators may be strongly biased to a particular doctrine and unintentionally allow that to impact their translation.

Therefore doing word studies by examining the original Hebrew or Greek words used in scripture to better understand their definition and use is critical to Bible study.

The exhaustive concordance and Hebrew and Greek dictionaries are essential for this. This is especially true if you use the King James Version of the Bible. Hundreds of the words used in the translation of that version back in A.D. 1611 have completely changed meaning and some are no longer used at all.

An example of a word no longer used is found in Philippians 1:22 *“But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.”* (KJV - King James Version)

Few people know what *“wot not”* means. *“Wot”* is an old English word for *“know.”* He is saying *“I know not.”*

An example of a word that has changed in meaning is Luke 17:7 –

“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?” (KJV)

The phrase *“by and by”* is translated from one Greek word *“euthos”* which means *“immediately.”* Today the expression *“by and by”* means just the opposite, it means later on. These are just a couple of simple examples that show the benefit of word studies.

It also should be remembered that in the original languages of the Bible, just as in modern English, some words have more than one

meaning and only by the way the word is used can we determine which meaning to apply. Note the following examples of the word “day.”

In the first example, a day is a literal 24-hour period.

Genesis 1:5 *"God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day."*

In the next example, a day is an indefinite period. It could be a day, a week, months or even years.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 *"In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider:"*

The final example speaks of “a day for a year.”

Numbers 14:34 *"According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years,"*

The use of a “*day for a year*” only applies in the setting of Bible prophecy which relates the foretelling of future events found mainly in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

Word studies are essential in whatever version we choose to use for study. We want to determine as best we can what the writer of the text intended to say, and not necessarily what the translator determined he intended to say.

6. Consider the context

The “*context*” is the main subject of a certain passage (a passage is a group of verses). Read the following passage and look for the context.

Romans 14:1 - 7 *"Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all*

things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself."

Now think about what is being emphasized in these verses. It is obvious that the emphasis here is on judging others. Therefore judging others is the "context" of this passage. We must be careful that we do not take one or more verses out of this "context" and use them to teach something unrelated to the subject of judging others. Taking things "out of context" is how people can make the Bible say anything they want it to even though it may not be true.

7. Consider the cultural setting and time in which a passage of scripture was originally written.

By "cultural setting" we mean the way of life and customs of the people the writer of scripture was speaking directly to at the time he wrote. Once this is known, we can often times identify and apply the key principle of the text to our own culture and age. Note the following example.

I Corinthians 11:5,6 *"But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered."*

The context here is women being "covered" in public. If we look up the word "covered" in the Greek dictionary we find it is translated from a word meaning "a veil hanging down." Researching customs in Bible times in that part of the world reveal that it was considered disgraceful for a woman, especially a married woman, to be seen in public without a veil. This was seen as shameful to her husband which according to Ephesians 5:23 is her "head." *"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church:"*

We can apply this in principle to our modern day society. Today women do not wear veils in most parts of the world, but they can dress in sexually provocative ways that may bring shame upon them in the eyes of society, their husbands if they are married, and to Christ if they claim to be Christians.

8. The principle of interpretation of figurative speech or symbolism.

How do we know when a passage is to be understood literally or figuratively in the Bible? The rule is this: If it makes good sense as it stands – if it does not violate the laws of nature, then it can be understood as literal. However, if that is not the case, then it must be taken figuratively or as a symbol. Here are two examples of this.

Matthew 5:29 *"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."*

Common sense tells us we need to take this figuratively. Jesus would not have us poke our eye out! Now note the following verse.

Revelation 13:1 *"Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns,*

and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name."

We know a creature as described here does not exist; therefore it must be a symbol. To understand the meaning of this symbol we must let the Bible interpret it. For this we need a concordance. In the concordance we look up all the places the Bible mentions a "beast" until we find one that explains the symbol. In this case this can be found in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 7:23 *"Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, Which shall be different from all other kingdoms,"*

Now we understand that in Bible prophecy, a beast is a symbol for a kingdom or a political power. Using a concordance in this way is very helpful in other areas of Bible study as well. This is allowing the Bible to interpret itself rather than depending on speculation or guesswork.

9. Dealing with discrepancies in the Bible.

As we study the Bible we will find some discrepancies. One example is found in the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. As you read through them you will find differences in details of the same events. But that does not mean that the writers were untruthful. The four gospels represent the life and teachings of Jesus through the eyes of four different men. A similar situation would be four people witnessing the same accident. The four people would most likely give four different views of the accident depending on how they saw it from where they were. That does not mean that any one of them was untruthful or that an accident didn't occur.

It's the same with all the different writers of scripture. That's another reason we need to read and study the entire Bible, comparing text with text so that we get all the evidence rather than

looking at only one or two verses and possibly drawing the wrong conclusions.

The good news is that with study and applying the correct principles of interpretation, we can learn from the discrepancies we find in the Bible rather than be confused and discouraged by them.

But the main thing in Bible study is that we come to know the One the Bible testifies about. Speaking of the scriptures Jesus said –

“These are they which testify of Me.” (John 5:39) and *“this is eternal life, that they might know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.”* (John 17:3)

When we say "know" we mean more than just intellectual knowledge, we mean a personal, intimate relationship with Him and Bible study is key to that end.

10. Study with persistence.

A superficial reading of the Bible will only result in a superficial understanding of the Bible. We must study the Bible for ourselves.

II Timothy 2:15 *“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* (KJV)

II Timothy 3:16 *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* (KJV)

“All scripture.” Remember, we must study the Bible as a whole and that it takes time and effort to correctly understand the scriptures. And don't forget to take advantage of the many tools available to help us with this work. The concordance, the Hebrew and Greek dictionary, Bible commentaries, computer programs, all these will greatly enhance our studies.

The Sure Word Bible Studies

Lesson 2

The Origin of Evil

All of us are aware of the existence of evil in the world. All of us have experienced it first hand. But where did it come from? Most people would say that the Devil is behind it all. OK, but then where did the Devil come from? Did God create the Devil and his demons to torment and punish us? The Bible will help us find the answer to our questions. We begin in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 12:7 - 9 *"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."*

As a result of this war in heaven Satan or the Devil was cast out. Note the words of Jesus long ago -

Luke 10:17,18 *"Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."*

Jesus said He witnessed Satan's fall from heaven. This means that Satan would have been cast out of heaven before Jesus came to earth. But we can go back even further; there is another reference to a fall from heaven in the Old Testament book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 14:12 *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!"*

Here we find that the one fallen or cast out of heaven was called “Lucifer” which means the “shining one” or “light bearer.” This fallen angel was once an angel of light in heaven!

But titles and names can be deceiving and the devil never comes in his own “name,” he always comes in disguise, or in someone else’s “name.” In the following passage the King of Tyrus is addressed, but it becomes obvious the Lord is really speaking to the one who is behind the evil King of Tyre – Satan himself.

Ezekiel 28:12 - 15 *"Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, Beryl, onyx, and jasper, Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes Was prepared for you on the day you were created. "You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you."*

The king of Tyre was not in the Garden of Eden. There were only three persons in Eden, Adam and Eve and Satan disguised as a serpent.

Our question - Did God create the devil? is answered here. According to the passage in Ezekiel, God did not create a devil, but the most beautiful, glorious, powerful angel of all. Lucifer “*sealest up the sum,*” in other words he had it all. He was said to be “*perfect in thy ways from the day thou wast created.*” But unfortunately he didn’t remain in that state because “*iniquity was found in him.*” After a time as a light bearer, Lucifer began to develop a rebellious, sinful nature and is no longer called Lucifer, but is now called Satan.

He is now called by a different name because in the biblical accounts when someone's character changes they are many times given another name. Lucifer has "fallen" from his high position; therefore his name has changed from "light bearer" to Satan which means "accuser" and "Devil" which means "deceiver." In Revelation he is called the "Dragon," which means a "fiery serpent," a deadly poisonous snake.

What led up to Lucifer's fall? That is a question the Bible does not specifically answer. A thoughtful suggestion is that Lucifer was probably the first angel God created. As such, Lucifer would not have witnessed his own creation, but he likely would have witnessed the creation of all the other angels. Thus the possibility that Lucifer may have begun to think that he was not a created being as the angels were and that he was somehow equal with God and that God was not being truthful with him about that in order to keep him in subjection. If Satan thought himself to be equal with God, he would also have thought he should be worshipped as God. This would explain why he asked Jesus to fall down and worship him.

Matthew 4:8 - 10 *"Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"*

At this point it is important that we understand that God's character and trustworthiness is the central issue in the war that began in heaven. That can be clearly seen when that *"old serpent, the devil and satan,"* spoke to Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:1 - 6 *"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which*

is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' " Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."

Clearly the serpent, or Satan, is insinuating that God is selfish and arbitrary and that He has lied to them and therefore cannot be trusted to tell them the truth. It is obvious that the war that began in heaven was not about God's power, the fact that Satan and his followers (angels who sided with him now known as demons) were cast out of heaven is evidence that God is more powerful. But from this exchange between the serpent and Eve, we can see the key issue in the war is God's character and whether He can be trusted, and whether one can safely follow His word.

Eve knew what God had said about eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but as she listened to the serpent, she came to believe him and willfully ate of the tree, as did her husband. Now that they had joined Satan's side in the conflict the earth was soon filled with suffering, pain, disease and death as the result.

The Bible says that God knows the future.

Isaiah 46:9,10 *"Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,"*

This being the case many have asked, why didn't God destroy Satan before the war started? Didn't He see all the suffering that would result? Yes He did, and He saw that He would suffer far more than anyone else.

That's why Revelation 13:18 describes Him as "*The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*" God has been suffering since the very first sin.

Isaiah 63:9 *"In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them All the days of old."*

God has not changed, He is still afflicted and grieved with His wayward children and He still carries them in His heart of love.

God is love and created the entire universe to operate on the principle of love. But there can be no love where there is no freedom; you can't make someone love you, love must be given freely. And because of God's high regard for individual freedom, He must allow sin to run its course, as painful as it is. That's the only way Lucifer could have rebelled in heaven itself!

When someone does something terribly wrong – we ask, "Why did God let that happen?" But where would our personal freedom be if God stopped us dead in our tracks every time we started to do something wrong? God's insistence on our freedom is so absolute that He has granted us the power to live as though He did not exist if we so choose! Unfortunately most choose to live that way and thus this earth is now a dangerous place where even good people get hurt.

You may ask, why didn't God "nip this in the bud"? Why has He let it go this far? The angels, although they are supernatural beings, are not all-knowing as God is.

Therefore the destruction of Satan in the beginning of the war in heaven would have been misunderstood and seen as arbitrary and unfair. The consequences of sin would have remained unknown. As the result, in heaven, instead of peace and freedom, there would have been fear, doubt, and unanswered questions. The angels would be saying, "You had better be careful, remember

what God did to Lucifer!” Angels would not be freely serving God from love and admiration of His character, but from fear of His punishment.

God does not ask men or angels to take His word alone for His love and trustworthiness or for the nature of sin and death. Rather, God’s plan is that through demonstration, the entire universe sees for itself the answers to Satan’s charges. Then, with that first hand knowledge, everyone can freely make their own decision about who has the truth – God or Satan.

The way God has chosen to handle this conflict, when it is over, the result of *“eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”* will be clear to the entire universe. It will have become very clear that sin and rebellion against God’s way of love is the cause of suffering, disease, death and every kind of evil! When this war between God and Satan is over, no one will choose to go down that deadly path again.

Nahum 1:9 says *“What do you conspire against the LORD? He will make an utter end of it. Affliction will not rise up a second time.”*

Rebellion and controversy will never rise again and yet the universe will still be free. We will be just as free to rebel against God as Lucifer was in the beginning but we won’t! Not for fear of what God will do to us, but because we all will have learned from demonstration and experience, the pain, the suffering and death that is caused by sin! It will be understood that this is the reason sin is wrong, and we will want nothing to do with it ever again.

Even today, every human being, just as Adam and Eve in the beginning, must make a personal decision about God’s trustworthiness. We must decide whether we will follow God’s word or trust in man as our guide as to what we believe and how we live. Will we place our eternal future in the Creator or the creature?

What about you? Have you seen enough pain, sickness, hatred, cruelty and death? Have you seen enough to realize that God's way of love and peace is the best way to live?

This is not a war between God and man! It is a war between God and Satan. Yet, man has been caught up in it with the seed of evil being planted and taken root in his mind long ago.

Mark 7:21 - 23 *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."*

In spite of our condition, our gracious, all-powerful God has a plan to restore us to His likeness -

II Corinthians 3:18 *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

And then ultimately to restore peace, not just to earth, but to the entire universe.

Colossians 1:20 *"By Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."*

Today, the battle still rages here on earth and you and I must choose whose side we are on, Christ or Satan. God calls us in freedom to make our choice.

Deuteronomy 30:19 *"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;"*

In this conflict we cannot remain neutral. To refuse to make a choice is to side with the devil. Note the words of Jesus –

Matthew 12:30 *"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad."*

It is important that we be well informed so that we are able to make the right choices, because the closer we get to the end the greater the deceptions of Satan will be! Note the following texts:

II Thessalonians 2:9,10 *"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved."*

Revelation 16:13,14 *"And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."*

God is not the source of all miracles. Satan and his demons can perform miracles too. Satan works with power and signs and lying wonders to deceive. Therefore we must be careful that we do not rely on miracles, but trust only the Word of God as our guide in the last days.

Remember **II Corinthians 11:14,15** *"And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."*

As mentioned previously, we may not be able to trust every preacher or teacher who claims to speak for God therefore we

must learn to study for ourselves that God may speak directly to us through His word.

In conclusion, the answer our first question: What is the origin of evil? is answered in Jesus' words to the Pharisees -

John 8:44 *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."*

"A liar and the father of it." The word "father" is defined as "source" and thus Satan is the source of the lie and thus the origin of evil. And since the beginning his most damaging lies have been about God, which, to this day most of the world still believe.

Response questions:

1. Is it clear to you that there is a "spiritual war" being waged in the universe and this world is the battleground?

Yes __ No __

2. Is it clear to you that we must choose which side of this conflict we will be on and to make no decision is to be on the devils side?

Yes __ No __

3. Is it clear to you that we cannot trust miracles or preachers in the last days, but only the Word of God?

Yes __ No __

4. If you have not already - will you make the decision today to be on God's side in this conflict – to be a soldier of Jesus Christ?

Yes __ No __

It may be you need more answers before you make a decision. You may find the answers in the next lesson – "What is God Like?"

The Sure Word Bible Studies

Lesson 3

What is God Really Like?

We have learned that the Bible is God's Word and therein is the truth we can depend upon. We have also learned that Satan has deceived us about God. The good news is that God has answered the lies of Satan by sending His Son to reveal His true character and to show us that God really wants us to be His friends. In this lesson we will look to the Bible to get a better understanding of what God is really like.

Throughout Genesis chapter one, "God" is translated from the Old Testament Hebrew word "elohim," which means "gods," plural.

The concept of God being more than one person is seen throughout the Bible beginning with the creation story.

Genesis 1:26 *"Then God (The Hebrew is Elohim, "gods," plural) said, "let us (plural) make man in our (plural) image according to our likeness"*

In the New Testament we find evidence of three persons who make up the Trinity, or Godhead.

John 14:26 *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit (one person), whom the Father (two persons) will send in My name (Christ, three persons), He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."*

The three persons of the Godhead have taken specific "roles" in order that we human beings, though unable to see God, can understand and relate to Him and His activities.

We speak of the three persons of the Godhead as the "first" "second" and "third" person as a means of distinguishing them

from one another and in no way to assign them positions of rank as they are all equal.

The Father is the first person – He has taken the role of the Almighty God. He is understood as being seated on the heavenly throne. He is in total control of the entire universe. Nothing happens without His knowledge and permission and He remains on the throne continually.

I Corinthians 8:6 *"Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live."*

Ephesians 4:6 *"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

The Son is the second person – His role is to be understood as the embodiment or the express image of the Father God.

Hebrews 1:1 - 5 *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"?"*

The Son is the One who lives among God's creatures that they can better understand what God is really like. The Son once lived and walked among the angels and later He came to earth and lived and walked among men. He is "Emmanuel," which means, "God with us."

The Father is continually on the throne. The Son is the *"express image"* an embodiment of the Father God. Then the Bible says God is also omni-present, that is, everywhere at once. We are able to comprehend this truth through the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.

Even though God has all power, He prefers to use the power of the truth spoken to the human heart softly in love. *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord"* (Zechariah 4:6). This is the role of the Holy Spirit.

While the Father continually reigns on the throne of the universe, the Son is ministering in the heavenly sanctuary (later lesson) and the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts and minds of men and women throughout the world.

Even though the three members of the Godhead have taken these different roles, they are yet the same. Note the words of Jesus in the following text -

John 14:8 - 9 "Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Jesus said if you have seen me you have seen the Father. The same as saying, if you've seen Jesus you've seen God, they are the same. Jesus then added -

John 14:15,16 *"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever"*

Jesus said *"another Helper"* – the Greek word is *"allos"* which means *"another of the same kind."* In other words Jesus said, *"I am just like the Father, and the Spirit is just like Me – We are all the same!"* All three persons of the Godhead are fully, equally, and eternally God!

If they are all the same, that means that they all love us in the same way and are all working together for our salvation. This is the Father's plan, carried out by the Son, impressed on our hearts by the Spirit, and witnessed by the angels.

Wherever you see the title "Father" or "Son" or "Holy Spirit," you can replace it with the word or title of "God." But no one word or name can describe the Infinite and Almighty God - therefore He is known by many names -

Isaiah 9:6 "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Note in this verse all the names listed for God apply to the Son, just as to the other members of the Trinity. In the following texts, we see the Son in His role as Creator.

John 1:1 *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."*

Verse 14 *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*

Ephesians 3:9 *"and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ."*

Colossians 1:16 - 18 *"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and*

in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church,"

The Son fulfills a significant role in relation to this world; Not only is He the Creator as confirmed in the previous passages, He is also the Lord God of the Old Testament as well as the Lord Jesus in the New. Read carefully the following passage:

Nehemiah 9:6 - 15 *"You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You. You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram, And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, And gave him the name Abraham; You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him To give the land of the Canaanites, The Hittites, the Amorites, The Perizzites, the Jebusites, And the Girgashites-- To give it to his descendants. You have performed Your words, For You are righteous. You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And heard their cry by the Red Sea. You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants, And against all the people of his land. For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So You made a name for Yourself, as it is this day. And You divided the sea before them, So that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; And their persecutors You threw into the deep, As a stone into the mighty waters. Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar, And by night with a pillar of fire, To give them light on the road Which they should travel. "You came down also on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven, And gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, By the hand of Moses Your servant. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, And brought them water out of the rock for their thirst, And told them to go in to possess the land Which You had sworn to give them."*

According to this passage the Son is the member of the Godhead through whom God created the earth. He is the One who led the

Israelites through the wilderness and gave the law on Mt Sinai. He is the Lord God in the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ in the New. That's what Peter had in mind when he said -

Acts 4:10 - 12 *"Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

And Paul in **I Timothy 2:5** *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"*

There is *"One mediator (intermediary or connector) between God and man."* It's not the Father – He remains on the throne. It's not the Holy Spirit – He's the Helper living in our heart. The mediator is the Son. He is the link between heaven and earth; this has always been His role. We can't go up to heaven to God – God must come down to us, and the Son did that as Creator and Savior. Christ is Savior in the Old and New Testaments!

Some picture Jesus pleading with the Father to forgive us. But if the Son has to plead with the Father on our behalf before He will forgive – then they are divided, they are not one! Two statements from Jesus should clear this up –

John 10:30 *"I and My Father are one."*

John 16:26,27 *"In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you."*

Jesus came to show us that God the Father loves us just as much, is just as kind and tender, just as loving and compassionate, merciful and forgiving as Jesus.

Those religions that don't accept Jesus as God, as One with the Father, have a difficult time understanding God's true character. They usually focus on God's wrath and judgment they see in the Old Testament. God the Father is thus understood as arbitrary, rigid and severe. As a result they also become rigid and severe! This is the picture of God that motivates the terrorists!

But since we now understand the Old Testament God is the Son, we might ask, "How could Christ Jesus do some of those harsh things we read about in the Old Testament?" Hebrews 13:8 says "*Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.*" That's true, God never changes – but people do. Note the following text.

Hebrews 8:7,8 *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because **finding fault with them**, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel"*

"Finding fault with them" – Again, God doesn't change, but people do! In the days of Moses, God could not have sent Jesus to preach the Sermon on the Mount to those hard hearted, rebellious people he led out of Egypt. They weren't ready to hear things like "*love your enemies and do good to them.*" They would not have listened to a God like that. God had to do some drastic things to reach them. But thankfully God understands the nature of men and meets them where they are and leads them no faster than they are able to follow.

That may be the reason the Bible rarely mentions Satan in the Old Testament. There the name "*Satan*" is found in only 15 verses of 4 books. The New Testament is some better, but there "*Satan*" is only mentioned in only 34 verses of 12 books. In fact, in the 31,173 verses in the entire Bible - the word "*Satan*" is found in only 49. All the biblical references to Satan under all his various names only add up little over a hundred.

But on the other hand, the name "*God*" is found in 3,876 verses, and "*Lord*" in 6,668 verses of the Bible. It is clear the Lord is

much more interested in revealing Himself than His adversary, Satan.

One Bible scholar wrote this thoughtful comment –

“When we talk of Satan’s strength, he fastens his power more firmly upon us. When we talk of the power of God, Satan is driven back. As we draw near to God, he draws near to us.”

(E.G. White, Youth’s Instructor)

Rather than studying Satan, God wants us to think and talk about Him and thus become more like him and less like the devil.

II Corinthians 3:18 *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

It is a basic law of life, that by beholding we are changed into the same image of that which we admire and revere. If we love and focus on the world, we will become more worldly, but if we love and focus on Jesus, we will become more like Jesus!

But in the book of Genesis we find a drastic loss of the knowledge of God. The descendants of Jacob (Israel) migrated to Egypt where they became enslaved for hundreds of years. When the time came for Moses to deliver the Israelites, their spiritual condition was very poor. Many of them had forgotten the God who had revealed Himself to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Ancient Israel came out of bondage contaminated with the pagan gods of Egypt and they gave Moses a difficult time. God called them *“stiff-necked.”* The Hebrew word is *“qasheh,”* meaning: hard, cruel, severe, obstinate or hard headed.

The pagan gods seemed very real to them and they were always on the verge of deserting the *“new”* God of Moses for the old familiar gods of Egypt. To tell them about Satan and his power would only put them in danger of worshipping Satan in addition to the pagan gods. So the first step that God asked His people to take

as they traveled in the wilderness was simply - *“Have no Gods before me - worship the one God who brought you out of Egypt”* (Ex. 20:2,3). The knowledge about the existence of Satan would have to come later when their faith in the true God was more stable.

And because the ancients were unaware of the existence of Satan, God himself took the blame for both good and evil. Note what the Lord said -

Isaiah 45:6,7 *“That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and **create** darkness: I make peace, and **create evil**: I the LORD do all these things.”* (KJV)

Because we have all the scriptures from which to learn about God, we know that God does not create evil. But God was meeting the Israelites where they were in hopes that once they came to see that He was the true God and there really is no other, then, they would be willing to listen and follow Him only. We can see this in the story of Job.

Job 2:1 - 10 *“Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, “From where do you come?” So Satan answered the LORD and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.” Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.” So Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!” And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown*

of his head. And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

Who brought all the evil calamities upon Job? Who smote him with boils? Satan. But who got the blame? God. Why? Because they were unaware of Satan's existence and God did not see it wise to tell them about Satan knowing some of them would have worshipped Satan as another pagan god.

Therefore in the minds of people in Bible times, if a woman was barren, it was because God had closed her womb. If a woman had a baby, God had opened her womb. If a nation came up against another nation – God sent them. If a man dies – God killed him. A good example of this is in the story of the death of King Saul.

I Chronicles 10:3 - 5 *"The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died."*

This clearly indicates that Saul killed himself by falling on his sword. But note what is said a few verses later -

Verse 13 - 14 *"So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. But he did not inquire of the LORD; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse."*

This is another apparent contradiction which we must think through to a logical conclusion. Did God kill King Saul, or did the King commit suicide? Saul clearly killed himself by falling on his sword, but as we noted, in the minds of many of the writers of scripture, what God allowed God is responsible for, good or bad, and they wrote it that way as we see in this story.

The Old Testament nation of Israel, though many were “*stiff-necked*” they were the only people in the entire world who acknowledged God at all – they were all He had! And because many of them were rebellious and hard headed, God had to do some harsh things or else lose the entire human race and God loved us too much for that.

It is a mistake to think that the way God reacted in the “emergency situations” of those days is the way He is all the time; to think that that it is His nature to be wrathful and judgmental. But just as a loving parent has to do some difficult things at times in order to discipline a child, though they hate doing it, their goal is always for the good of the child. God hated doing those harsh things as well, but they had to be done for the overall good. But the Bible records that when the time was right God sent His Son to clear all these things up.

Galatians 4:4 *"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,"*

John 3:16,17 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."*

Jesus shows us exactly what God is like in a way that everyone, both young and old can understand. That is what we all need to see and we see it perfectly in Jesus. And this is why it is so important to study the life and teachings of Jesus. So that one day it will be said of us, *"as He is so are we in this world."* (I John 4:17)

So the answer to our question - What is God really like? God is just like Jesus! If you've seen Jesus, you've seen God!

God is not what His enemies have made Him out to be, He's just like Jesus! This is the good news! This is the true, the everlasting gospel.

Response Questions;

1. I understand the God of the Bible includes three persons in their distinctive roles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Yes __ No __

2. I understand the three persons which make up the Trinity are the same in character and purpose.

Yes __ No __

3. I believe the good news is that God the Father is just like Jesus!

Yes __ No __

NOTES

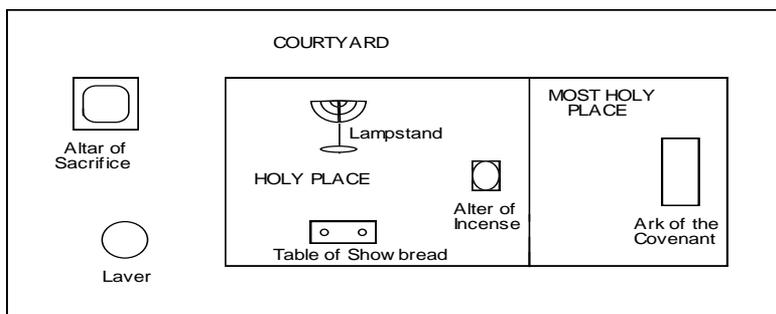
The Sure Word Bible Studies *Lesson 4*

God Wants To Be Your Friend

When man sinned in the Garden of Eden, in mercy God withdrew His glorious presence from the earth. God is recorded in Exodus 33:20 as saying *“No man can see my face and live,”* meaning that sinful man could not live in the literal presence (face) of God. So after they had sinned, God could no longer walk with Adam and Eve *“in the cool of the day”* as He had in the beginning. Sin had caused a separation between God and man, God did not choose to leave man – but man chose to leave God. And though sin resulted in separation, God still longed to be with the man He made and the time came when God said to Moses -

Exodus 25:8,9 *“And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.”*

The detailed instructions God gave for building the sanctuary are found in the book of Exodus. As seen in the diagram below, the sanctuary had three basic apartments. The Courtyard – The Holy Place – The Most Holy Place.



1. **The Courtyard** contained the altar of burnt offering and the laver (a type of basin used for ceremonial washings).

2. **The Holy place** contained the table of showbread, a seven-branch lamp stand, and the golden altar of incense.
3. **The Most Holy place** was separated from the Holy place by a veil and contained the Ark of the Covenant, in which was placed the Ten Commandments.

New Testament texts confirm that the furnishings in the sanctuary were symbols pointing to Christ. For example:

John 6:35 *“And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life: he who comes to me shall never hunger.”*

Symbolized by the table of showbread in the Holy Place.

John 8:12 *“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, I am the light of the world.”*

Symbolized by the lamp stand in the Holy Place.

Hebrews 10:19, 20 *“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,”*

Symbolized by the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

In Leviticus are the detailed instructions of how to perform all the rituals and sacrifices that were to take place at the sanctuary.

Certain things were to be performed by the priests every day on behalf of the people. These rituals were known to the Israelites as “The Daily.” These were a representation of the work of Christ on behalf of mankind.

Example: The most common sacrifice was called the “Burnt Offering.” This offering clearly represented Christ’s sacrifice as the “*Lamb of God.*”

Leviticus 1:3,4 *"If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD. Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him."*

This says that the burnt offering would be a "male without blemish" and, "he shall offer it of his own free will."

The Apostle Peter connected this part of the sacrifice with Christ when he wrote - *"But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (I Peter 1:19).

Verse 9 in Leviticus continues: *"but he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water. And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD."*

The Apostle Paul in the New Testament makes the connection to this when he wrote – *"And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma"* (Ephesians 5:2).

This sacrificial offering clearly represented Christ who came of "his own voluntary will" and "gave all of Himself for us."

Other ritual sacrifices listed in Leviticus included:

"The Meat or Meal Offering." This offering signified thanks - giving to God for His provisions.

"The Peace Offering." This offering signified thanksgiving for peace, either with God or with another person with whom there was once disagreement or conflict.

"The Sin Offering." This offering was made for atonement of sins of ignorance.

“The Trespass Offering.” This offering was made for atonement of willful sin.

The New Testament helps us understand that the sacrifices were intended to remind the people that sin leads to death and to point them to God, their Savior.

Hebrews 10:3 says, *“But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.”*

Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death.”*

John 1:29 says that Jesus is *“the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”*

In addition to the daily rituals, the book of Leviticus lists seven annual ceremonies. These ceremonies, called "feasts" in the KJV Bible, pointed to Christ's work in the plan of salvation.

- 1) The Feast of Passover pointed to His death.
- 2) The Feast of Unleavened Bread pointed to His burial.
- 3) The Feast of Firstfruits pointed to His resurrection.
- 4) The Feast of Weeks pointed to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost fifty days later.
- 5) The Feast of Trumpets pointed to the warning of a time judgment soon to come.
- 6) The Day of Atonement pointed to the time of judgment.
- 7) The Feast of Tabernacles pointed to the time when judgment was over and all God's people are gathered in their heavenly home.

All of these annual ceremonies and daily rituals were “a shadow of good things to come.” They all pointed forward to Christ’s coming and man’s salvation.

Hebrews 10:1 says *"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect."*

The “good things to come” was 1) the knowledge of the heavenly sanctuary of which the earthly sanctuary was only a model, and 2) a righteous, divine High Priest that would take the place of the fallible human priest.

Hebrews 4:14 - 15 *"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

Hebrews 8:1,2 *"Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man."*

Hebrews 9:1 *"Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service, and the earthly sanctuary."*

The earthly sanctuary and its services served as a visual aid until “the time of reformation.” It was the “old covenant,” or a better way to state it would be that it was the “old arrangement.” The old arrangement with all its visual aids and symbols would be replaced with a new covenant or a new arrangement which was much better because, instead of visual aids, God himself in the person of Jesus Christ came to show mankind the Way of Salvation.

Hebrews 9:8 - 12 *"The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-- concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."*

Christ did not enter into the earthly sanctuary as High Priest, but into the heavenly sanctuary.

What is the work of Christ's as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary today?

Romans 5:10 *"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."*

Two points to be made here.

1) We are reconciled to God by the death of Jesus. Being *"reconciled,"* means we are won back into relationship with God by the death of Christ. (Commonly referred to as *"being justified."*)

2) However, having been being won back, we still have the tendency to stray away. Therefore we need His help to keep us close to God once we have been won back. That's where the next text comes in. It helps us to understand what it means to be *"saved by his life."*

Hebrews 7:25 *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."*

Christ *"always lives,"* that is, He is always there in the heavenly sanctuary to *"make intercession for them."* Intercession is from a Greek word which means to communicate, to stay in touch with another. Jesus is not there pleading with His Father to forgive us, but rather Christ is pleading with us to stay close to Him, to remind us of His sacrifice that won us back to Him and to continually remind us that He wants to keep us with Him forever. That is what it means *"to be saved by His life."*

Hebrews 4:16 *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

We can go directly to God ourselves. It is not necessary to go to a rabbi, or a priest, or a preacher for intercession with God as many people believe.

Where did the idea that we must have a human intercessor with God come from? It came from the picture of God in the Old Testament, where some see God as a God of wrath. We see this in Exodus chapter twenty and the time that God came down on Mt. Sinai and gave the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:18,19 *"Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."*

In an awesome display of power, God got the attention of that "stiff-necked" people Moses led out of Egypt, and they listened. But they were afraid and wanted someone between them and God. Since they knew that Moses was close to God, they wanted him as a "go-between," to talk to God for them.

But think this through. Was Moses a man? Yes. Then who was between God and Moses? No one. What was the difference? The difference was that those people didn't really know God and not knowing Him they were afraid of Him as many are yet today because of the lies of Satan about God's nature.

As we learned in a previous lesson, we can't go up to heaven to learn about God, so God, in the person of the Son came down to make teach us about Him. This is what it means when the Bible says He is our intercessor or intermediary. Remember - Jesus came to show us what God is really like and to teach us that there is no reason to be afraid of Him. Jesus is the only "go between" we need.

Having said that, there is another who stands between us and God, but rather than trying to connect us with God, he is trying to separate us from God. He is an enemy. Who is this enemy? Satan, the accuser who continues to do everything he can to keep us from the truth about God.

Is God your friend? He wants to be – Jesus tells us exactly how God wants to relate to us:

John 15:14,15 *"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."*

It is wonderful to be God's servant – we want to hear Christ say to us *"Well done thou good and faithful servant."*

And we rejoice that we are considered the children of God – *"What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."*

But our Heavenly Father wants us to come even higher and closer still. He wants us to be His faithful, loyal friends! Proverbs 18:24

says “*there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*” That friend is God in Christ.

Through Christ, God is extending His hand in friendship to you! Will you reach out and grasp it? Will you continue to study to learn more about the God who loves you and wants to be your friend?

Response Questions:

- 1. Is it clear to you that God loves us and wants to be with us?
Yes __ No __
- 2. Is it clear to you that sin separates us from God?
Yes __ No __
- 3. Is it clear to you that Jesus came to show us what God is like?
Yes __ No __
- 4. Do you want to be God’s friend? Yes __ No __

NOTES

The Sure Word Bible Studies

Lesson 5

Sin, the Enemy of Good

What is sin? What does the Bible say? When asked this, many people immediately think of I John 3:4 which in the King James Version Bible says:

“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”

For many when the word “law” is seen in the Bible, the Ten Commandments automatically come to mind. But when the Bible uses the word “law” it is not always referring to the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments have the distinction of being the only words written by the finger of God Himself. However, God through Moses, gave other laws as well, such as civil law, health law, and ceremonial law. Looking at the following passages, we see that in the Bible law can be placed into one of five classifications.

1) Health law – Laws given to ensure physical health.

Exodus 15:26 *"If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you."*

Remember, we learned in a previous lesson that to the writers of scripture, what God does not prevent He causes. He did not afflict the Egyptians with disease, they were diseased because they did not follow good health practices. God gave the Israelites many

health laws, many of the “clean and unclean” regulations were meant for the prevention of diseases.

2) Civil law – Laws given to govern civil society, laws that act as a deterrent to crime.

Deuteronomy 21:21 *"Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear."*

The civil laws applied only to the ancient nation of Israel and ceased to be in force when Israel ceased to be an independent nation. The law to stone people became obsolete long ago.

3) Ceremonial law - Laws regulating the sacrificial services at the Sanctuary.

Numbers 9:3 *"On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it."*

These particular laws expired with Christ's death and the destruction of the temple.

4) Moral (right) law - Laws that deal with individual behavior.

Psalms 119:172 *"My tongue shall speak of Your word: for all Your commandments are righteousness."*

Moral means right, doing the right thing. The moral (right) laws will always be effective.

5) Law as a principle or a force -

Romans 7:23 *"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."*

This is not speaking of any written law or code, but the force or power of good or evil within the human being that causes a person to act in a certain way.

We should always consider the setting in which the word “*law*” is used to properly understand which class of “*law*” is being referred to. Otherwise we might “throw the baby out with the bath water” as some have done with the Ten Commandments, claiming they were discarded along with other laws given to the ancient Jewish nation of Israel.

“*Transgression of the law*” is a four-word phrase that is translated from one Greek word, “*anomia*,” which means, “*without law*,” most often translated “*law-lessness*” or *law-less*. It means more than breaking this or that rule. It is an attitude. It is an attitude rooted in selfishness, determined to have our own way no matter what. Without law everyone would be doing whatever he or she wanted to do regardless of others – this is known as anarchy. Anarchy would be a serious problem in a world full of selfish, sinful people.

Thus it is a problem in this world. The Bible says “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.*” (Isaiah 53:6)

The Old Testament tells how Moses counseled the children of Israel he led out of Egypt concerning this -

Deuteronomy 12:8 “You shall not at all do as we are doing here today--every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes”

The later Moses commended the same people -

Deuteronomy 13:18 “*Because you have listened to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep all His commandments which I command you today, to do what is right in the eyes of the LORD your God.*”

When you keep God's commandments – you are doing that which is right in the eyes of God. But why should we do what God says? Why should we keep His instructions or His law? Some people will say because God is the Sovereign – the most powerful being in the universe and that gives Him the right to tell us how to behave.

You have probably seen the bumper sticker - *“God said it, I believe it, and that’s all there is to it!”* Some would add to that, *“and if you don’t, you know what will happen to you!”* But is that all there is to it? Is there is no better reason to keep God's law?

We will find the answer to that question when we find the answer as to why God gave the law in the first place.

Romans 3:20 *“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight: **for by the law is the knowledge of sin.**”*

I Timothy 1:8,9 *“But we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully; knowing this, that **the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate**”*

The law is given to inform the lawless what it is to be lawful. For example, when kids are misbehaving, doing disorderly and hurtful things, the parents must “lay down the law” for the good of the household, in the same way our Heavenly Father has had to do that with the human race.

Deuteronomy 6:24,25 *“And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, **for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day.**”*

God is not arbitrary – He does not have a “my way or the highway” attitude. God wants only our good and His law is only given to help us. God's laws are expressions of natural principles rather than arbitrary pronouncements meant to control others.

Because heaven's laws are expressions of natural principles, the principles themselves inherently have their own consequences for compliance or violations. There is no need for external imposed punishments under such a system.

When we look at the Bible as a whole we can see that God's law forms a pyramid. In the book of Exodus we read that after bringing His people out of bondage in Egypt, because they needed them, God gave them many laws and commandments. Later in the New Testament, Jesus lumps them all into two commandments -

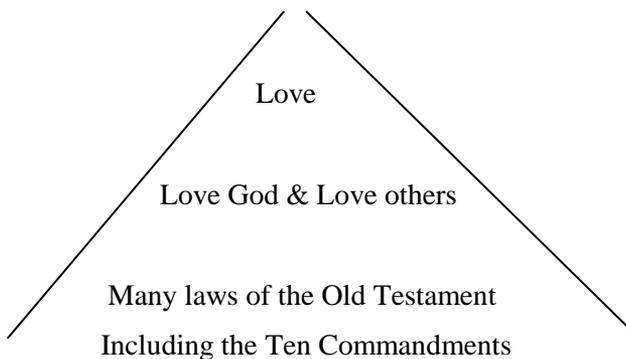
Matthew 22:36 - 40 *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' **On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.**"*

But then when we get down to the book of Galatians, all the law is condensed down into one – “love.”

Galatians 5:14 says: *“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: **you shall love your neighbor as yourself.**”*

The word love in this text is translated from the Greek word “agape,” which is not the warm affection we feel for family or friend, but rather is defined as an unselfish decision to be concerned about the welfare of another, no matter what they've done or who they may be, spouse, friend, family or even an enemy. This is the unconditional love that originates with God.

As we move through the Bible, we find we have come from many “laws” and “commandments” to only one. So the abiding, eternal principal of God's law of love – formed by the ten, the two, and then the one, make up a pyramid of love!



Yet today some Christians have misunderstood this concept and are teaching that Jesus replaced the Ten Commandments with a “new commandment” found in John 13:34 where Jesus says: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

Saying this Jesus did not do away with the Commandments, but rather He magnified them! It is not God’s desire that the law of Ten Commandments be abolished – but rather that they are moved from the tables of stone to the tables of the heart.

Hebrews 8:10 says *“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”*

To illustrate – A loving parent doesn’t need a law written on the wall or in a book to remind them not to steal from their children. Why? Because they love them and wouldn’t think of doing such a thing. In the same way, when we come to love God and one another we won’t need the Ten Commandments displayed on the wall to remind us of how to behave towards God and one another, it will come naturally. That is what it means to be written in the mind and heart.

In the beginning of this lesson we read that the Bible tells us why we should do what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 6:24 *“And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, **for our good always.**”*

If God’s commandments are for our good always – then what can we expect if we ignore or refuse to follow them?

Galatians 6:7,8 *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”*

This universe is founded on physical and spiritual laws - the law of “reaping and sowing” or “cause and effect.” Bad actions = bad consequences. Right actions = good consequences.

The law of gravity is an example. The law of gravity is God’s law. He put it into place and it serves for our good. If a man ignores the law of gravity and jumps out of an airplane at 12,000 feet without a parachute he would be killed. Did God kill him because he violated His law?

No, he died because the law of gravity caused him to be pulled rapidly to the earth with such force he could not survive the impact. His death is the natural consequence of violating the law of gravity and not because God got angry and punished him for disobeying His law.

It is the same with spiritual laws. If we ignore or refuse to abide by God’s law of love, bad things will happen as result. If I commit adultery, someone gets hurt. If I bear false witness, someone gets hurt. And *every* time someone sins it hurts God. There are natural and unpleasant consequences to every violation of the law of love. Understanding this can help us understand how a person could claim to be free from the law as the Apostle Paul did when he wrote -

I Corinthians 10:23 *“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful: all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.”*

Paul is saying we are really free to do anything we want to - *but* - sooner or later there will be consequences, either good or bad, depending upon our actions. Note carefully the next two verses.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 *“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”*

Numbers 32:23 *“But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out.”*

Sooner or later, be sure *“your sin will find you out.”* The only way to stop the consequences of sin is to stop the sin! The word *“sin”* is translated from the Greek word *“harmatia”* and it means, *“to miss the mark.”*

Romans 3:23 *“For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;”*

And what is the mark we miss? The glory of God. What is the glory of God that we come short of?

II Thessalonians 2:14 *“to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

II Corinthians 3:18 *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

Being like Jesus is our goal, our target – and by beholding Him we are changed into the same image, we become more and more like Him! But we often fall short and “miss the target” – we do not do everything that is right, but if we are willing to listen, and if we

put forth our best effort, we are accepted by God just as if we were perfectly righteous, like Jesus.

We are not “*under the law*” – but rather we “*agree with the law.*” We agree that the law (God's law of love) is good and we do not willfully rebel against it (the basic definition of sin). We no longer keep the law just because God said so. We keep it because we want to behave that way! And if we are doing the things we want to do – we are truly free!

Here is the bottom line - remember what Satan told Eve back in the garden when tempting her to eat of that tree? He said, “*You will know good and evil, you will be wise*” – In other words, Satan was saying, you don't need God to tell you what's right and what is wrong, you are wise enough to determine for yourself what is right and wrong.”

Today, most people believe that lie too. But regardless of what Satan has said or men may think, the truth is that man by himself is not capable of knowing right from wrong. However, if we believe God is who the Bible says He is - the Almighty Creator - all wise - all knowing - knowing the end from the beginning. That He is good - He is love, and His love is an unselfish love that gave itself up at Calvary for us. If God is all that - wouldn't it be wise to listen to what He says? Wouldn't it be best to do those things He says we should do? Wouldn't it be foolish not to?

True faith is trusting God enough to do those things He says are right. We will not do it all perfectly, we will struggle and we will fail at times. But as long as we do not turn away from God and do the best we can, He will never leave us, and we have the assurance of eternal life.

Jude 1:24 “*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,*”

In conclusion, sin is not simply breaking God's law or some rule.

James 4:17 *“Therefore, to him that knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*

But sin is simply rebellion against what a person knows is good and right and deliberately chooses their own selfish way regardless of who may get hurt because of it.

God hates sin! Why? Because He wants things done His way? No - God hates sin because sin hurts and destroys His children! Don't let sin destroy you – God will help you overcome.

Response Questions:

1) Is it clear to you that sin is simply rebelling against what God says is good and right?
Yes __ No __

2) Is it clear to you that sin hurts and destroys?
Yes __ No __

3) Will you take a closer look at God's law of unselfish love and see if there is some area in your life that needs improvement?
Yes __ No __

NOTES

The Sure Word Bible Studies

Lesson 6

Understanding Forgiveness

In the previous lesson we learned that sin is “*missing the mark*” and that we all fall short of the glory of God. But even though we sin and fall short of God’s glorious ideal, the Bible assures us that He freely forgives.

I John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

As we look at God’s forgiveness, keep in mind the following text:

Isaiah 55:8,9 *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

As we study God’s forgiveness we should keep in mind that He does not think as man thinks. For example, when we read texts like Psalm 7:11 that says, “*God is angry with the wicked every day,*” we need to remember that God is not like us. When the Bible speaks of God’s anger it is not the same as ours – “*getting mad and getting even.*” In fact, one definition of the word anger given in the dictionary is “*extreme or passionate displeasure.*” Anger can mean “*getting mad,*” but it can also mean the passionate displeasure of anxiety and heartbreak a loving parent feels when his child does something terribly wrong. Most often, rather than getting mad, the parent is broken hearted. So in the same way, as God’s children, when we do something wrong, our Heavenly Father is not mad at us, but grieved and broken hearted.

Psalms 103:10 - 14 *“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward*

those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."

Verse 17 *"But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children,"*

This passage tells us two important things.

1) *"Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear him."* The Lord is like a loving father who cares deeply for his children and understands they make mistakes because they are immature with lots of learning and growing to do. Most of us, especially those who have children can relate to that.

2) *"His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting."* This says that God always has, and will continue throughout the endless ages of eternity, to constantly and compassionately forgive. That is the nature of true love and God is love.

It's important to realize the forgiveness of sin, as important as it is, is not for God's benefit. God does not need "closure" nor does He have a need to "get even." God does not hold bitterness, animosity and anger in His heart like men do. Neither is He waiting for us to come crawling on our knees begging His forgiveness and if we don't, there is *"hell to pay!"*

Forgiveness is for our benefit. First, when we forgive and we "let go" of those feelings of revenge, animosity and bitterness against those who have wronged us, it brings peace and healing to our own heart and mind.

On the other hand, when we are remorseful and are forgiven for the wrongs we committed against another, that helps free us from our own guilt that can eventually consume us. That's why we need

to know God forgives our sin against Him, so the Lord promises that “*all manner of sin will be forgiven men.*” (Matthew 12:31)

To forgive in the original languages of the Bible means basically to “*let go, to disregard, or set free.*” That means to forgive is letting go whatever we would normally feel one owes us or is obligated to do as a payment for an offense or a debt. If I “let it go,” that means they are not expected to do anything as a condition of my forgiveness for an offense against me. For example, if someone owes me money and can't pay and I forgive the debt, they are not expected to pay me back, ever. I willingly take the loss.

When we say, “*Father forgive me, I have done wrong!*” – God’s reply is always - “*you are forgiven.*” Actually we were forgiven before we asked. God doesn’t have to “let go” because He never held our sin against us in the first place (Psalm 103:10). The problem is, we have been deceived about God’s forgiving nature and don’t know that! How many times have we been reluctant to come to God because we fear He is angry with us, or He won’t forgive us even if we do ask?

But God wants us to know that we are forgiven - that’s why Jesus cried from the cross “*Father forgive them*” - when no one asked and no one repented! In the book, “The Story of Redemption,” E.G. White, a noted Bible scholar, said it this way –

“That prayer of Christ for His enemies embraced the world. It took in every sinner that had lived or should live, from the beginning of the world to the end of time. Upon all rests the guilt of crucifying the Son of God. To all, forgiveness is freely offered.”

When we go to the cross we can see that in spite of our sin God does not hold bitter or resentful feelings towards us, but always and only compassion and love. And if we don’t resist, seeing this self-sacrificing love will transform our heart and change our mind about the way we live and about the way we see God! We will see

for ourselves “*the goodness of God that leads to repentance*” (Romans 2:4). This is what it means to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb – to be reconciled to God.

John 3:16 “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*”

Jesus did not die to compel God to love those He otherwise hated or to forgive those who otherwise would not be forgiven. He died because of the love that already existed in His heart! To show that we are already forgiven.

Jesus didn’t die to change God’s attitude toward us, but to bring us to God, *that we might be changed!* To change our attitude towards God!

John 12:32,33 “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.*” This He said, signifying by what death He would die.”

1 Peter 3:18 “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,*”

Remember there are only two paths for us in this world -

Man’s way – Proverbs 16:25 “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*”

God’s way – John 14:6 “*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*”

While God loves us and freely forgives us – forgiveness, though it eases our guilt, will not cancel out the consequences of sin. The only way to stop the painful consequences of sin is to stop the sin. Then there can be no unpleasant consequences!

The problem is, we can't do that on our own. Only as we are willing to begin to trust and co-operate with God can this be achieved. God saves us – not by forgiving us – but by changing us! As discussed in a previous lesson, we need to change and only by consistently beholding Him can that happen.

II Corinthians 3:18 *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

This is why it is important that we understand what is called the "unpardonable sin."

Matthew 12:31 - 32 *"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."*

To understand blasphemy against the Holy Spirit we must first understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Note the following -

1. He teaches - John 14:26 *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things"*

2. He convicts / warns - John 16:8 *"And when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment"*

3. He guides to the truth - John 16:13 *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth"*

"Blasphemy" is the Greek word "blasphemeo" and it means "to abuse" "to denounce" or "to injure." That means that once a person is taught, convicted, and warned by the Holy Spirit, if they

then turn away and shun Him, He is injured, He is put down, He is grieved. Compare the following texts:

Isaiah 63:9,10 *"In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them All the days of old. **But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit;**"*

Ephesians 4:30 *"And do **not grieve the Holy Spirit** of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."*

"*Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*" has to do with how a person relates to the Holy Spirit's work. We cause grief and extreme emotional pain to God when we rebel and resist His work for us. In other words, it breaks His heart! It's not about breaking the law and making Him angry – it's breaking His heart and making Him hurt!

The Bible talks about this kind of behavior in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:1 - 8 *"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, **let us go on to perfection**, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned."*

“Let us go on to perfection” (Perfection is from the Greek “telios” which means to grown up or maturity). The danger for the Christian is that one becomes complacent and fails to grow to spiritual maturity.

Hebrews 10:26,27 warns: *“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.”*

This does not mean committing one sinful act. If it did none of us would have any hope. According to the Greek tense it means to willfully keep on practicing sin after we have been convicted by the Holy Spirit that it is wrong.

Therefore, the unpardonable sin is to be understood, not as a single act - but the continual, persistent rebellion against the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart as He tries to (1) teach us (2) convict us of right and wrong and (3) warn us of the consequences of sin.

When the Holy Spirit brings truth to the heart, one of two things happen: 1) The heart responds, or 2) the heart hardens.

When the Holy Spirit speaks, we usually hear Him the loudest the first time. And if we continue to resist the Holy Spirit long enough, His voice gets quieter and quieter and quieter and we will come to the place we can no longer hear Him at all. At this point there is no more God can do.

When we have resisted, made excuses and rebelled until there is no remedy, no way back, it is then that we have committed the unpardonable sin. This is a very subtle danger, anyone, even Christians, need to be aware of.

Matthew 7:21 - 23 *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your*

name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Even active Christians must be careful that they do not rationalize and justify some “pet” sin until they convince themselves that they are not doing anything wrong. Because once a person has completely severed their conscience the Holy Spirit can no longer reach them and there’s no more that God can do to save them.

Jesus spoke of people who did this -

Matthew 13:15 *"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."*

It is not that God won't forgive them or help them change, but that they don't feel the need because they think they're o.k. just as they are!

There are three basic reasons a person falls into this dangerous position, 1) They become indifferent – they simply don't care 2) they become too busy – won't take the time or 3) they become opinionated / hard-hearted and refuse to change.

But now let's go back to Matthew and answer our original question. This time let's notice the setting in which Jesus made His statement about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 12:22 - 24 *"Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."*

The point here is, when one comes to the place that they turn against the work of the Holy Spirit even to the point of calling it demonic, as these men had, how can God convict that person of sin and thus allow them to receive the forgiveness and help that He makes so freely available?

As previously stated, when we come to the place that we no longer hear God's Spirit speaking to us, there is nothing more God can do. The working of miracles or the fear of punishment will not change the heart. The Lord says: "*not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.*" It will only be by "*the still small voice*" of the Holy Spirit that we are convicted of the truth and our characters changed. Only by a willingness to listen and follow the truth will we be saved at last!

Let none of us think we are safe from this ever present danger. Today, while our hearts and conscience are still tender - Let us continue to submit to God's Sweet Holy Spirit - that still small voice inside that says - "*this is the way, walk in it.*"

In conclusion, remember, forgiveness, as important as it is to our well being, is not the key issue. We are not saved by being forgiven, but by receiving a "*new heart and right spirit,*" by being "*born again.*" (The Greek is "born from above.") A work done in us by the Holy Spirit.

Response Questions:

1. It is clear to you that sin draws us away from God.
Yes ___ No ___
2. It is clear to you that God has forgiven your sin.
Yes ___ No ___
3. It is clear to you that only with the help of the Holy Spirit can you overcome sin and live a righteous life.
Yes ___ No ___

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 7

The Wages of Sin

Romans 6:23 says *"The wages of sin is death."* But back in the beginning when God was literally present here on the earth, death did not exist; it had never been experienced. But even though death had never been experienced, God warned Adam and Eve that it could become a reality.

Genesis 2:17 *"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

When God told Adam the consequences of eating of the tree of good and evil, it is important to note that He didn't say you will burn in hell, nor did He say I will put you to death. God was not threatening them rather He was warning them of the consequences of that experience. He simply said, *"You will die"* which in the Hebrew is, *"dying you will die."* God was warning them of a process that would begin working within them that will ultimately result in their death if they choose take that path.

Was God really telling them the truth? Satan, disguised as a serpent in the Garden of Eden, questioned Eve about this.

Genesis 3:1 - 4 *"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' " Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die."*

In Satan's declaration to Eve that she would not die he implied that man is immortal, that he cannot die. And more than that, that God cannot be trusted to tell them the truth!

Surprisingly, most of the world believes Satan about this. Most people believe that man is immortal, except the atheist, who believes there is nothing after this life ends. But most people believe that life continues in one form or another after death. For example, the Hindu believes in re-incarnation and the Buddhists believe in nirvana. Most Christians and Muslims believe while a person's body does die, their soul is immortal and at death it leaves the body and immediately goes to heaven or hell for eternity.

If that is true – if immediately after death a person reaches their final destination – then why have a resurrection? If at one's death they receive their just reward, then why have a judgment day? This view can present more questions than it answers. If we are to find the truth we must go to the Bible and examine the evidence there.

After Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree, God no longer allowed them access to the Tree of Life.

Genesis 3:22,23 *"Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"-- therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken."*

God could have allowed sin with its suffering to go on for eternity, but He would not to do that, it's too painful. God is however, going to allow sin to run its course so that the universe can see beyond a shadow of a doubt what the consequences of sin are.

As the result of being banished from the "Tree of Life" (the symbol of the source of life), Adam and Eve became mortal,

which means they became subject to death and through their genes mortality was then passed from them to the rest the human race.

Romans 5:12 *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned"*

However, this death that comes to all people, good and bad, as the result of being cut-off from the Tree of Life is not eternal annihilation. Jesus said that everyone who dies this death will live again.

John 5:28,29 *"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."*

Yet most religions, including Christianity, teach that humans have an "immortal soul" that lives on after the death of the physical body. But the Bible does not say that. The word "immortal" is used only once in the entire Bible and that is in I Timothy -

I Timothy 1:17 *"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever."*

I Timothy 6:15,16 *"He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power."*

As you can see, the Bible says only God has immortality. This means only God possesses life within Himself. It is not given to Him by another.

However, the word "soul" is used more than 600 times in the King James Version Bible and is never said to be immortal. It does say it will die!

Ezekiel 18:4 *"Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; **The soul who sins shall die.**"*

Contrary to popular teaching, the "soul" is not implanted into the body as a separate part of a man or animal. Note the following:

Genesis 2:7 *"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (KJV)*

The New King James Version translates: *"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man **became a living being.**"*

Notice, man was not "given" a soul, but he "*became a living soul*" or "living being." The word for soul in the original Hebrew is "nephesh" and it means simply "a living creature," that is, a living body which can refer to either a man or an animal as it does in Revelation.

Revelation 16:3 *"And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every **living soul** died in the sea." (KJV)*

The New King James Version translates - *"Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every **living creature** in the sea died."*

The living being or living creature is made up of two parts that can only exist together – body and breath. Take away the breath, and you no longer have a soul or living creature, but only a dead body. The "soul" of the person simply no longer exists.

Many people speak of the soul and the spirit as though they were one and the same, but the "soul" is not the "spirit." These are two different words with entirely different meanings.

As we discussed, the word "soul" means a living creature including the body and breath. However, the word "spirit" is from Hebrew and Greek words that mean "wind" or "breath" or "moving air."

If the air in you is moving as when you breathe, it implies a life force is present, thus it is called the "breath of life."

The spirit, or the "*breath of life*" is given by God at the beginning of life and returns to God at death.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 *"Then shall the dust (body) return to the earth as it was: and the spirit (breath of life) will return unto God who gave it."*

We see an example of this in the book of Luke -

Luke 8:52 - 55 *"Now all wept and mourned for her; but He said, "Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead. But He put them all outside, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Little girl, arise." Then her spirit returned, and she arose immediately."*

Notice, her "soul" did not return, but her "spirit," that is, her breath, or life force did. Also note that Jesus said she was not dead, but "sleepeth."

More than fifty times in the Bible death is referred to as "sleep." The following are some examples:

Psalms 13:3 *"Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: enlighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death"*

Daniel 12:2 *"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt."*

Matthew 27:51,52 *"Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;"*

John 11:11 - 14 *"These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."*

Sleep is the perfect illustration for death which the Lord himself used. The following texts help us better understand this concept.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 *"For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing,"*

Psalms 146:4 *"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."* (KJV)

(Most modern translations of the Bible will use the word "plans" instead of thoughts. But, it is important to note that the Hebrew word is "eshtonah" and it has only one definition and that is "thought." It is a mystery as to why they chose "plans" instead.)

If the dead *"know not anything,"* and the very day they die their *"thoughts perish,"* that implies a state of mental unconsciousness. Just as when a person is sound asleep, they are unconscious of anything going on around them and have no awareness of the passage of time. Whether they sleep for one hour or ten, it is the same to them.

In the same way, the *"sleep of death"* is only a temporary unconsciousness while a person awaits the resurrection when all shall awake and come forth from the grave.

According to the book of Acts, that is true even for "saints" like King David -

Acts 2:29 *"Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day."*

Verse 34 *"For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"*

There are a few exceptions to this. Examples are Enoch, Elijah, and Moses as well as those saints mentioned in Matthew 27:52 who arose at Christ's death on the cross.

In the following passages, other than those exceptions, the Bible makes it very clear that God does not bestow immortality to the faithful at death - but at the second coming of Jesus.

I Corinthians 15:22, 23 *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming."*

I Corinthians 15:51 - 54 *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. (this is the second coming of Christ) For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

Another illustration of death being like sleep is to think of a computer. You connect it to a power source and it comes to life. The screen lights up and all kinds of information are fed into it. All that information is "saved" in the computer's memory. When it is disconnected from its power source it goes to "sleep." It may

remain idle for a long period, but once re-connected to the power source it lights up and all that information stored in its memory will come back up.

When we sleep the sleep of death, our bodies turn back to earth from which they came, but our spirit, the breath of life, returns to God. Our character or nature is stored in God's memory bank in an unconscious state until Jesus comes again and gives us a new body, reconnects us to the power source and we come back to life. We come back to life with the same spirit or nature as we had before we died, but with new, glorified bodies.

Philippians 3:20, 21 *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."*

The Bible refers to the body, soul and spirit. The following will help us understand these terms as they are meant to be:

Body – Refers only to the flesh and bone, the physical being of man or animal. At death it returns to earth.

Soul – Refers to the physical body *including* the breath of life, in other words, the entire living being. When the body dies, the soul or living being no longer exist, because in the Bible "soul" only refers to a living body.

Spirit – Refers first to the life force or breath of life itself. It returns to God at the death of the person. It also may refer to the nature or character of a person, which upon death, is preserved in an unconscious state until the resurrection.

Having studied this issue thus far, there remains the question about the thief on the cross; didn't Jesus say to him, *"Today you will be with me in paradise"*?

Before we look at that, remember there was no punctuation in the original languages of the Bible. That was added when it was translated into English. In the King James Version some mistakes were made in the punctuation. For example, note the missing comma in the following verse.

Acts 19:12 *“So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.”* (KJV)

There is no such thing as a “*sick handkerchief*.” Obviously a comma should have been placed after the word “sick.” Then it would read - *“So that from his body were brought unto the sick, handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them.”* (Modern translations have made the correction in this verse.)

Now re-examine the verse in Luke used to support the idea that when a person dies they immediately go to heaven or hell.

Luke 23:43 *“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, **To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.**”*(KJV)

Now move the comma putting it after the word “today” and read it again - *“And Jesus said unto him, **Verily I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with me in paradise.**”*

Structured this way, Jesus was making him the promise that day, the day they were there on the cross that he would be with Him in paradise at a future time. The evidence for this conclusion is found in the gospel of John.

John 20:1 *“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.”*

Verses 16,17 *“Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go*

to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' "

Jesus died Friday evening, this was Sunday morning. Jesus could not be with the thief in paradise that Friday he died when He did not go to heaven himself until Sunday. Jesus slept the “sleep of death” in the tomb from Friday evening until Sunday morning. Jesus as the “Son of man” lived the entire human experience “from the cradle to the grave” and then the resurrection.

Finally there's the verse that is often quoted - "*To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*" The problem is it is misquoted. Look closely at the verse as it is written.

II Corinthians 5:8 *"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.* (KJV)

Paul does not say “*is to be,*” but “*willing rather to be...*” Many people probably feel that way, willing to be with the Lord rather than going through the trials of this life. Paul knew that when a person died, *to them,* it would seem only a second until they were with the Lord. He is not saying that when a person dies they immediately go to heaven, contradicting all the other things the Bible says about death. Remember - don't say, “The Bible says” until you've looked at everything the Bible says.

The declaration of Satan to Eve in the Garden of Eden - "*You shall not surely die*" was the first teaching on the immortality of the soul and it was a lie! Yet this teaching, based solely upon the authority of Satan – is taught in most churches today. This lie of Satan came through the false teachings of paganism and Greek philosophy and then “*Christianized*” in the church during the dark ages.

Note the following quote under the heading of Greek Philosophy from Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia by Readers Digest Books Inc., published 1958.

“The philosophical concepts developed by the Greeks, particularly during the flowering of Greek civilization between the years 600 and 200 B.C., lie at the root of all later philosophical speculation in the western world. The intuitive hypotheses of the ancient Greeks foreshadowed many of the theories of modern science, and many of the moral ideas of pagan Greek philosophers have been incorporated into the body of Christian moral doctrine.”

One of the *“moral ideas of pagan Greek philosophers that was incorporated into Christian moral doctrine”* was the immortality of the soul as taught by the famous Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates. This is a verifiable part of church history.

You may ask – OK, but why is this important anyway? What difference does it make whether I believe one immediately goes to “a better place” at death or sleeps in the tomb until resurrection? The answer is that it is through the teaching that the dead are not really dead that men are enabled to have direct communication with the spirit world.

An biblical example is in the story of King Saul and the Witch of Endor.

1 Samuel 28:3 - 20 *"Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land. Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa. When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets. Then Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "In fact, there is a woman who is a medium at En Dor." So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Please conduct a seance for*

me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you." Then the woman said to him, "Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, "As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me." When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!" And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What did you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth." So he said to her, "What is his form?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down. Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do." Then Samuel said: "Why then do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy? And the LORD has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines." Then immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night."

Note verse 6 said that the Lord would not speak to Saul by prophets making it unlikely this would actually be Samuel because Samuel was a prophet.

Note verse 14 said Saul “*perceived*” it was Samuel; Saul just thought it was Samuel, he did not actually see him.

Note in verse 15 the so-called Samuel said, “*Why have you called me up?*” The Bible says a man’s spirit (breath) goes up to God, not down in the tomb.

Note in verse 16 the “spirit” said, “*the Lord is departed from you and has become your enemy.*” The Lord did not leave Saul, Saul turned away from the Lord and could have come back if he had only repented. But because of the discouraging words of this demonic spirit impersonating Samuel, Saul was driven to despair and finally suicide. (One of the likely reasons God forbids people to consult mediums who claim to communicate with the dead).

There are at least three other reasons why this could not have been Samuel come back from the dead to speak to King Saul.

First - The Bible makes it clear the dead cannot come back to communicate with us.

Job 7:9,10 *"As the cloud disappears and vanishes away, So he who goes down to the grave does not come up. He shall never return to his house, Nor shall his place know him anymore."*

Second – Being aware of Satan’s ability to deceive men in this way, God condemned calling up the dead. The people who did this were said to have a “*familiar spirit.*”

Leviticus 20:6 *"And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people."*

Third - If we seek answers about life we should go to God’s Word, and not to the dead to find the answers!

Isaiah 8:19,20 *"And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a*

people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Back in the beginning when God told Adam that sin leads to death He was telling the truth. God's word can be trusted!

The following texts make it clear that the spiritual warfare between God and Satan becomes more intense as we get closer to the coming of Jesus and we need to be clear on this issue.

II Thessalonians 2:8 - 10 *"And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved."*

Revelation 16:14 *"For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."*

Note there will be "*spirits of devils,*" that is, demonic spirits that will go to the "*whole world.*" These demonic spirits will impersonate dead loved ones as well as prophets such as Peter and Paul who will seem to have miraculously returned from heaven to communicate with us. But they will be "lying spirits" and the deception will be overwhelming! Are you ready for that?

But if we know the dead are "asleep" in the grave awaiting the resurrection, then we can't be deceived by a demon impersonating someone who has supposedly returned from heaven to tell us lies about God.

Today, let us decide that whether we live to see Jesus come, or whether we die and sleep until resurrection day that we will be ready to meet Jesus!

In this lesson we have spoken only of the sleep of death, the first death - but many will experience the "second death."

Revelation 20:14 *"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."*

What is the second death? How is it different? What is hell and the lake of fire? These questions will be answered in lessons to follow.

Response questions:

1. It is clear to me from the Bible that the dead are asleep in the grave awaiting the resurrection.

Yes ___ No ___

2. If someone were to appear to me from the dead, I know it would be a demonic imposter.

Yes ___ No ___

3. I know my only safeguard against Satan's subtle deceptions is to trust the Word of God.

Yes ___ No ___

NOTES

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 8

The Second Coming of Jesus

John 14:2,3 *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again** and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

Jesus is coming back! Because of the immense importance of this event, Christ gave a warning of deception concerning His Second Coming.

Matthew 24:3 - 5 *"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "**Take heed that no one deceives you.**"*

Verse 24 *"For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to **deceive, if possible, even the elect.**"*

Deception will continue until the end. The Bible warns us -

II Timothy 4:3,4 *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."*

Today we see many books written depicting the Second Coming of Christ and the events surrounding that great event. Though many of these books are best sellers, yet many of them are "fables" or "novels" and are not true to the biblical record.

Rather than reading novels, we should carefully examine all the texts in the Bible referring to the Second Coming to get it clear as to what the Bible really says about it.

There are three key points that the Bible makes clear -

First - The Second Coming of Christ will be literal.

Acts 1:9 - 11 *"Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, **will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.**"*

When Jesus went back to heaven after His resurrection, it was not a secret event that only those of faith could experience, but it was a literal and real event witnessed by all those who were there.

Second - Everyone will see Him.

Revelation 1:7 *"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him."*

Matthew 24:30 *"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."*

These texts are clear as they are written and there is no reason for them to be understood in some figurative manner.

Third - Everyone will hear Him

Matthew 24:30,31 *"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they*

*will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels **with a great sound of a trumpet**, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."*

I Corinthians 15:51 - 53 *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For **the trumpet will sound**, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."*

I Thessalonians 4:15 - 17 *"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven **with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God**. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*

Note that all these accounts of the Second Coming of Jesus are very similar. There is mention of a trumpet sounding, the dead being raised and clouds.

The Bible says at the second coming of Christ the heavens will be rolled back as a scroll, so where do these clouds come from? The Bible tells us that too -

Psalms 104:3 *"He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters, Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind,"*

This verse tells us that the "clouds" are His "chariot." A chariot is a mode of travel. The "clouds" are representative of thousands of angels who accompany the Lord -

Psalms 68:17 *"The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place."* (KJV)

Matthew 25:31 *"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory."*

The clouds are His chariot and His chariot is thousands of angels. This is saying that when Jesus returns He will be accompanied by thousands of glorious angels dressed in glowing white. At a distance they will appear as bright, glowing white clouds in the sky.

But many say He "comes as a thief?" Meaning He comes secretly. Let's examine those texts used to support this in their context -

Matthew 24:42 - 44 *"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."*

In this passage the expression, "coming as a thief," clearly implies coming unexpectedly and not secretly.

I Thessalonians 5:2 - 5 *"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness."*

This passage tells us that as Christian believers that day should not come to us as a thief, that is, unexpectedly, we should know when it is near.

II Peter 3:10 *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."*

This passage makes it clear that His coming, rather than being secret, will be a catastrophic event; It will not be secret, the entire world will be aware of it. Note the following texts that make support this -

Psalms 50:3 *"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him."*

Isaiah 13:9 - 11 *"Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. "I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible."*

What causes all the devastation and calamity when Christ returns to this world?

In the past when God visited our planet, He usually came veiled in the flesh because as the Lord told Moses, *"no man can see my face (that is, stand in His literal presence) and live"* (Exodus 33:20). But note how the literal, physical presence of God is described in the Bible as "fire" –

Exodus 24:16,17 *"Now the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel."*

Hebrews 12:29 *“For our “fire” God is a consuming fire.”*

The that is seen accompanying God’s literal presence is different from fire as we know it that burns fuels such as wood and gasoline. The fire that surrounds the presence of God is something we have never seen or can explain exactly what it is.

The Prophet Isaiah asked the question – Who can live in this “devouring fire”?

Isaiah 33:14 *“The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath seized the hypocrites: Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?”*

This question is answered in the next verse –

Verse 15 *“He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:”*

Since only the righteous can live in the presence of the “consuming fire,” the literal presence of God, the Bible tells us that the believer will be changed when Jesus Comes -

I Corinthians 15:52,53 *“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”*

The righteous are “changed” at His coming and are thus able to live in the literal presence of God as they are taken to heaven. But what will happen to those “left behind”?

Since “no man (in his corrupt, sinful condition) can see God and live,” they will be destroyed by the presence of the “consuming

fire,” that is by the “*brightness of His coming*” (II Thessalonians 2:8).

Jesus will not come veiled in the flesh when He comes the next time, but in power and great glory – a consuming fire! But, this will not be a willful act of vengeful retaliation, but simply the consequence of His coming in unveiled power and glory!

II Thessalonians 2:8 *"And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."*

The Second Coming as described in the book of Revelation –

Revelation 19:11 - 15 *"Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."*

The "armies in heaven" and the "clouds" are holy angels who accompany the Lord at His return as we discussed earlier (Matthew 25:31). But notice the wording, "He treads the winepress," "He strikes the nations", and "rule with a rod of iron." These terms are taken from the Old Testament, with each one denoting destruction. The following are examples -

Psalms 2:7 - 9 *"I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall **break them with a rod of iron**; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "*

Isaiah 11:4 *"But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; **He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.**"*

These texts imply Christ is ruling over the act of destruction, not ruling over people as a king over a nation.

Lamentations 1:15 *"The Lord has trampled underfoot all my mighty men in my midst; He has called an assembly against me To crush my young men; **The Lord trampled as in a winepress The virgin daughter of Judah.**"*

Treading the winepress and crushing the grapes, are a metaphor for destruction. Revelation chapter 19 confirms what happens to those "left behind."

Revelation 19:16 - 21 *"And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.** Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. **And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.**"*

In this passage the "rest" are those who are "left behind" at the Second Coming. Clearly they are destroyed, they are not left and

given another chance to repent, they become food for the vultures. Jesus spoke of this -

Luke 17:26 - 37 *"And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left." And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?" So He said to them, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."*

The “eagles” are vultures or other birds of prey. That can be seen in the book of Job.

Job 39:27-30 *"Does the eagle mount up at your command, And make its nest on high? On the rocks it dwells and resides, On the crag of the rock and the stronghold. From there it spies out the prey; Its eyes observe from afar. Its young ones suck up blood; And **where the slain are, there it is.**"*

God shows the prophet Jeremiah visions of the devastation that takes place at the coming of the Lord -

Jeremiah 25:30 - 33 *"Therefore prophesy against them all these words, and say to them: 'The LORD will roar from on high, And utter His voice from His holy habitation; He will roar mightily*

against His fold. He will give a shout, as those who tread the grapes, Against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise will come to the ends of the earth-- For the LORD has a controversy with the nations; He will plead His case with all flesh. He will give those who are wicked to the sword,' says the LORD." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Behold, disaster shall go forth From nation to nation, And a great whirlwind shall be raised up From the farthest parts of the earth. And at that day the slain of the LORD shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground."

Jeremiah 4:23 - 28 *"I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; And the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, And all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man, And all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, And all its cities were broken down At the presence of the LORD, By His fierce anger. For thus says the LORD: "The whole land shall be desolate; Yet I will not make a full end. For this shall the earth mourn, And the heavens above be black, Because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not relent, Nor will I turn back from it."*

Clearly this is a picture of total devastation upon the earth as result of the “*coming of the Lord.*” The earth will be “*broken down,*” the wicked will be “*slain by the brightness of His coming,*” and the righteous will be gathered by the angels and taken to heaven as Christ promised. “*If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that ye may be where I am.*”

It is critical for those living in the end times to know Jesus and the manner of His return because before the actual coming of Christ – there will be a great counterfeit.

Matthew 24:24 *"For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."*

The Bible tells us Satan will be transformed into an angel of light -

II Corinthians 11:14 *"And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light."*

And the Bible tells us there will be two "comings" -

II Thessalonians 2:8,9 *"And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His (Christ) coming. The coming of the lawless one (the Anti-Christ, Satan posing as Christ) is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,"*

Verse 8 is referring to the coming of the Lord and verse 9 is referring to the coming of Satan claiming to be Christ. Satan will come as the final and original "anti-Christ," the evil one who wants to be worshipped as God.

II Thessalonians 2:3,4 *"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."*

One day soon Satan will come claiming to be Christ himself, performing great miracles and with great demonstrations of power which will deceive the whole world. There is only one way we can be safe from this great deception in the last day. Read the words of Jesus in the gospel of John -

John 17:3 *"And this is eternal life, **that they may know** You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."*

We must "know" God as seen in Christ – we must know the truth about God from personal experience and personal study. The key will be understanding God's great character of love. Satan cannot

counterfeit that! God is not what his enemies have made him out to be! God is like Jesus! Jesus came to show us that! And only when we know the original, can we easily spot the counterfeit!

There will be signs of Christ's coming that indicate it is near, "*even at the doors*" but Jesus also said: "*But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only.*"

Though we cannot know the day and hour, we can know when it is near, and in what manner Christ will come. Jesus told His people - "*Watch therefore: for you do not know what your Lord is coming.*" (Matthew 24:42)

The key word here is "*watch.*" In the original Greek it means a "state of readiness." That means that everyday we should be doing those things that get us ready.

Those things that get us ready are Bible study, prayer, opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit that He may help us in overcoming our sin and selfishness. This normally leads to being involved in Christian witness and service, being actively involved in the body of Christ, the Church.

The Church we attend and serve should be selected with great care. The Bible says that God's Church is "*The pillar and foundation of truth*" (I Timothy 3:15). Therefore we should be careful that the church we attend and support is teaching and proclaiming truth and not fables and speculation.

Response questions:

1. It is clear to me that the Second Coming of Jesus will be –

- a. literal
- b. audible
- c. visible

Yes ___ No ___

The Sure Word Bible Studies

Lesson 9

The Millennium

The word millennium is not found in the Bible; it is a Latin word for one thousand. It is a word used to refer to the one thousand year period spoken of in Revelation chapter twenty. While there are many different ideas about the Millennium, there are only three major views among Christians.

1. Amillennialism. In this view, the one thousand years is a figurative time period that represents the "Church Age." That is, the time span between Christ's first and second coming. The "*binding of Satan*" is only a symbol of Satan's defeat at the cross which causes his activity to be so limited that he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel during that time period. Few Christians still hold this view.

2. Post-millennialism. This view teaches that the world will get better and better and eventually usher in a thousand years of peace at the end of which Jesus comes and sets up His kingdom on earth. This view, which was very popular in the church during the 17th and 18th centuries, has since been abandoned.

3. Pre-millennialism. This is the most popular view today. In this view, at the start of the one thousand year period Christ returns to earth to gather his people and take them back to heaven. However there are several different views among Christians as to what takes place after that.

As we have previously done in our studies, we set aside any pre-conceived ideas about this topic and honestly search the Bible to determine the truth for ourselves. We begin in Revelation chapter twenty, the only chapter in the Bible that specifically details the one thousand year period.

Revelation 20:1 - 5 *"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."*

The words "they lived" in verse 4 is translated from the Greek word "zao" which means "came to life." In other words, this group of people were resurrected in the first resurrection. In contrast, the group in verse 5 "lived not again," or did not come to life again until a thousand years later. This means there will be two separate resurrections.

The Bible speaks of two resurrections -

Daniel 12:2 *"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt."*

John 5:28,29 *"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."*

The dead in Christ are raised first -

I Thessalonians 4:16 *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."*

This is the first resurrection. And as we learned in a previous lesson, since the Son of God is God and Savior in the Old Testament as well as the New, this resurrection will include not only New Testament Christians, but all those people who from the beginning have trusted in God for their salvation.

We can conclude that the second coming of Christ and the first resurrection begin the one thousand year period, the millennium.

Revelation 20:5 *"But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."*

"This is the first resurrection" refers back to those previously mentioned in verse 4. And if the redeemed mentioned in verse 4 are resurrected first, that means that the *"rest of the dead,"* would have to be the unsaved, which, according to this verse, will not be resurrected until the thousand years are ended.

From the previous texts it should be understood that the Millennium will begin with the resurrection of the righteous and end with the resurrection of the lost.

The following is a list of the events that mark the beginning of the 1000 year Millennium:

1. The second coming of Christ.
2. The resurrection of the righteous.
3. The righteous taken to heaven.
4. The wicked slain by the *"brightness of His coming."*

We learned the details of this in the previous lesson – The Second Coming of Christ.

The following are events that will take place on earth during the millennium.

We begin this section by looking at the condition of the earth as the result of the second coming of Christ.

Revelation 20:1,2 *"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;"*

"The bottomless pit" is translated from the Greek word "abyss" which means, a dark, desolate place. The abyss is a symbol of the desolated earth after Christ's second coming as described in the book of Jeremiah also seen in the previous lesson -

Jeremiah 4:23 - 28 *"I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; And the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, And all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man, And all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, And all its cities were broken down At the presence of the LORD, By His fierce anger. For thus says the LORD: "The whole land shall be desolate; Yet I will not make a full end. For this shall the earth mourn, And the heavens above be black, Because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not relent, Nor will I turn back from it."*

The *"great chain"* that binds Satan during the thousand years is a chain of circumstances. Just as we may hear someone say, "I can't go shopping with you today, I'm all tied up," we realize that is not to be taken literally but rather as a figure of speech that means that circumstances will not allow them to go. The binding of Satan is to be understood this way as well; there is no literal, earthly chain that will bind Satan.

The binding of Satan means that he is no longer allowed to freely travel the universe, he is *"sealed"* and *"bound"* on this planet by a

chain of circumstances that resulted from the second coming of the Lord. The following text's help us understand the circumstances that causes him to be bound, unable to do what he would otherwise do.

Revelation 12:9 *"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, **who deceives the whole world;**"*

Satan's main goal is, and always has been, to deceive the whole world about God, but now...

Revelation 20:3 *"He cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should **deceive the nations no more** till the thousand years were finished."*

Now, due to the circumstances, the earth being desolated, the righteous taken to heaven and the wicked all dead, for a thousand years Satan is unable to deceive anyone. This is the "chain" that binds him in the "abyss," the desolated earth. But Satan will be "loosed" -

Revelation 20:7,8 *"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and **will go out to deceive the nations** which are in the four corners of the earth," Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea."*

At the close of the one thousand years, the "rest of the dead" (verse 5), the wicked, are resurrected and Satan is "loosed," meaning he is now able to resume his work of deception. He is able to deceive the wicked the same as he did before they died and under the leadership of Satan come up to fight against the "beloved city" (Revelation 20:9).

Events that take place in heaven during the millennium.

1. The Redeemed judge the lost -

Revelation 20:4 *"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them."*

Since it will be obvious at this point in time who is saved and who is lost, what is there to judge? "Judgment" in this verse is translated from the Greek word "krima" meaning - a sentence pronounced / ratified, or confirmed. The Bible refers to this judgment in another place -

I Corinthians 6:2,3 *"Do you not know that **the saints will judge the world**? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that **we shall judge angels**?"*

In this session of judgment the righteous will be able to "confirm" the decision previously made by each individual who is lost because of their rejection of God during their life on earth. They will also see the record of each of the fallen angels who sided with Satan and were cast out of their heavenly home.

As *"the books are opened,"* they will see all the details of the lives of the lost, and how God had done all He could to save them, but they resisted. They will understand that God had no choice but to give them up. By the evidence recorded in the heavenly records, the redeemed will clearly understand the lost were truly unsafe to save.

2. During the millennium the redeemed will "grow up" -

Malachi 4:2 *"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and **ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.**" (KJV)*

All believers redeemed from the earth will be at different levels of knowledge and spiritual maturity. But during the millennium everyone will sit at the feet of the Jesus and understand things that they had no time or opportunity to learn, things that while on this

earth were great mysteries. Everyone will be “brought up to speed,” so to speak in knowledge and spiritual maturity.

During the millennium God will prepare the redeemed to witness the Great White Throne Judgment and the destruction of those who are lost outside the holy city.

The following are the events that take place during the 1000 years –

1. Satan is bound.
2. Earth is dark and desolate.
3. Wicked are all dead.
4. Judgment in heaven by the Redeemed.
5. The redeemed “grow up.”

The events that close the millennium period –

At the end of the 1000 years the wicked are resurrected; they come back to life the same as before they died, the subjects of Satan’s clever deceptions.

Revelation 20:5 *"But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished."*

Verses 7 – 9 "Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city."

The references to “Gog” and “Magog” are simply symbols of the enemies of God’s people. This comes from ancient times as seen in Ezekiel 38:2 -

Ezekiel 38:2 *"Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy*

against him, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal."

"Gog" means the "chief prince" or leader of the enemies of God's people. "Magog" means the people who, as a nation, follow Gog. In this prophecy, Satan is "Gog" and his nation of wicked followers are "Magog." The wicked under the leadership of Satan come up to fight against the "beloved city," the "New Jerusalem" which is made up of all God's people and described in symbolic detail in Revelation chapter 21.

It is at this time the stage is set for the final judgment at the Great White Throne.

Revelation 20:11,12 *"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books."*

Satan again deceives the nations convincing them that because of their great numbers they can take the "beloved city" by force. They surround the city, and as they do everything comes into place for this final phase of judgment.

This is the only time in all the history of humankind that everyone that has ever lived on earth is alive at the same time in the same place.

Inside the "beloved city" will be the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the Holy Angels. With them will be all the righteous who have been redeemed from the earth.

Outside the city walls will be Satan and all his fallen angels and with them all the lost whose number is as the "sand of the sea." The Prophet Isaiah prophesied of this -

Isaiah 40:5 *"The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

"All flesh shall see it together" - The "glory" that is revealed to them is God's omnipotent power and majestic beauty, but it is more than that – Note what Moses saw when he asked to see God's glory -

Exodus 33:18,19 *"And he (Moses) said, "Please, show me Your glory." Then He (God) said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you,*

Exodus 34:6,7 *"And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."*

When the Lord passed by Moses, Moses didn't see the form or literal presence of the Lord described in the Bible as a "consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29), rather the Lord proclaimed His "name," that is, His gracious character. God's infinitely merciful, good, righteous and gracious nature. That is the "glory" of the Lord He wishes all of us to see.

The entire universe will see this together as God's glory is openly and accurately portrayed at the Great White Throne. There the truth about God's character, His righteousness, goodness, and love will clearly be seen by all. God's great name will be vindicated. No one will any longer doubt or question God's character or purposes then. All will bow in agreement, even Satan! The Scripture will be fulfilled that says:

Romans 14:10,11 *"But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (some inside the city and some outside). For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."*

Philippians 2:10,11 *"At the name (seeing the character) of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

As those outside the city look at Jesus seated on the Great White Throne they will clearly see the contrast between God's unselfish, self-sacrificing love for everyone, even His enemies, and their sinful love of self over others.

As they look at Jesus they will remember every sin they have committed, they will see just where their feet diverged from the path of right, just how far pride and rebellion have carried them in violation of God's law of love. The blessings perverted, the messengers of God despised, the warnings rejected, the waves of mercy beaten back by their stubborn, hardened heart. Then with an overwhelming sense of remorse and condemnation they realize there is no hope, that the *"wages of sin is death."* It is not God that condemns them - they condemn themselves. (The final end of the wicked will be studied in the next two lessons.)

Psalms 9:16 *"The LORD is known by the judgment He executes; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands."*

This final phase of judgment is for the benefit of all the universe - God wants all men and angels to know and understand that life and every good and perfect gift come from our gracious God...but the day by day decisions of those outside the Holy City have led to the hardening of their hearts until there is no remedy.

The purpose of the second resurrection is that the universe may see that if the wicked are given a second chance and are clearly shown all the evidence first hand so there can be no doubt or questions, they still will not repent! That the hardened heart is incurable! There's nothing else God can do for them! He will forgive them, but forgiveness will not heal the damage done - they are simply not safe to save!

And finally -

Revelation 20:9 *"And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."*

The wicked are devoured by a fire that comes down from heaven. The wicked suffer the horrible second death! (next lesson).

After the Great White Throne Judgment and the earth cleansed by fire, God will create a new heaven and new earth.

II Peter 3:10 - 13 *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."*

The events that close the Millennium -

1. The second resurrection.
2. New Jerusalem comes down to earth from heaven.
3. The wicked surround the city.
4. The execution of final judgment.
5. God creates new heavens and new earth.

Where will you be in that final judgment day? Safe, inside the city with Jesus, or outside looking in -

The same choice Moses gave God's people long ago is still available to God's people today –

Deuteronomy 30:19,20 *"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death,*

blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;"

It is your choice! Today is the day of salvation - but the “day of the Lord” will come – are you ready?

Response questions:

1. I understand the word millennium means one thousand years.
Yes ___ No ___

2. It is clear to me that the millennium begins with the first resurrection at the second coming of Christ.
Yes ___ No ___

3. It is clear to me that the millennium ends with the resurrection of the wicked and the Great White Throne Judgment.
Yes ___ No ___

4. It is my choice to be with the righteous inside the beloved city on that day.
Yes ___ No ___

NOTES

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 10

Lost Forever

The Bible says the wages of sin is death. We have learned the Bible teaches that all people, both good and evil, will sleep the sleep of death, but Jesus has promised He will awaken all of them out of that sleep. Some in the first resurrection at His coming, and the rest in the second resurrection at the end of the millennium. But then the Bible says at the final judgment some will face the “*second death*.” What is the “*second death*,” that many people refer to as “*hell*”?

According to traditional Christian belief hell is a place of unending anguish and pain reserved for the wicked. Islam, the religion of the Muslims, regards hell as a vast fiery crater that the souls of the dead cross on a narrow bridge. As they do the wicked fall off the bridge into everlasting torment. In Hinduism and Buddhism, a soul may descend into one of many hells as a result of wicked karma (thoughts, words, and deeds) but the stay in hell is not eternal. It lasts only until the effects of the evil karma have been removed.

In modern times, some Christian theologians have questioned whether a just and loving God would have created such a place as hell. According to these scholars hell is not a place, but a symbol of the anguish caused by the loss of God or goodness.

Obviously there are differences of opinion as to just what hell is. To discover the truth about this issue our question must be as always - What does the Bible teach?

Remember our rule... “*Don’t say “the Bible says” until you’ve looked at everything the Bible says.*”

We begin by looking at the original words of the Hebrew and Greek. In the Old Testament Hebrew, “hell” is translated from

“sheol” meaning - underworld, grave or pit. In the King James Version Bible (KJV) it is translated as “hell” thirty one times and as “grave” thirty one times, and as “pit” three times.

In New Testament Greek, “hell” is most often translated from the Greek word “hades” meaning – the Greek god of the lower regions or the realm of the dead, the grave. In the KJV it is translated as “hell” ten times and as “grave” once. Twelve times hell is translated from the Greek word “gehenna.” Gehenna was commonly known as the Valley of Hinnom, a place south of Jerusalem where trash and the bodies of executed criminals and dead animals were cast out and burned.

In II Peter 2:4, The word “hell” is translated from the Greek word “tartarus” which means the “deepest abyss.” This is the only time this particular Greek word appears in the New Testament.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary 1993 Edition, the English word “*hell*” came from the old English word “*hele*” which originally meant “to cover over - to hide.” It is evident that the word hell in all these languages originally meant primarily the grave, where the dead body is covered over or hidden.

However, over the years the word hell has come to mean a place of torment where the wicked suffer in flames through the endless ages of eternity.

In the KJV Bible the word “hell” is used 53 times, but only 12 times does it refer to Gehenna, the place of burning; all the others refer to the grave.

Since the word hell can imply either the grave or a burning place, when using the KJV we must look at the underlying Hebrew or Greek word in order to know how it is to be understood. For example, both of the following verses use the word Hades, but in one it is translated “*hell*” and in the other “*grave*.”

I Corinthians 15:55 *"O death, where is thy sting? O grave (hades), where is thy victory?" (KJV)*

Acts 2:31 *"He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in **hell (hades)**, neither his flesh did see corruption." (KJV)*

This may not be the case in many modern translations such as the New King James Version which translates these verses as follows-

I Corinthians 15:55 *"O Death, where is your sting? O **Hades**, where is your victory?"*

Acts 2:31 *"He, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in **Hades**, nor did His flesh see corruption."*

This version does not translate "hades" but leaves the original word in place, which assumes the reader is familiar with the meaning. (A good reason to keep those dictionaries handy.)

In any case, the majority of people think of hell as a burning place, therefore there are three basic questions we need to consider on the subject of hell.

First – when will it burn? After learning the truth about the state of the dead in a previous lesson, that the dead are not in heaven or hell, but asleep in the grave, logic will give us but one answer as to when they meet their final destiny and that is after the resurrection.

Then in the parable of the wheat and tares Jesus reveals when the wicked will be cast into the fire.

Matthew 13:37- 40 *"He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.*

Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age."

In this passage Jesus says the wicked will be burned in the fire "*in the end of this age*" or "*the end of this world.*" Then Peter adds to this these words -

II Peter 2:9 *"Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,"*

This passage makes it clear the wicked are "*reserved*" (in the grave) "*for the day of judgment.*" So from these verses we can conclude that no one is burning in hell now.

Our next question is where does the fire burn?

Some say hell is "*down yonder.*" That idea came from the ancient Greeks who believed that Hades was in the center of the earth. But what does the Bible say? Revelation chapter twenty speaks about the final day of judgment and the "lake of fire" at the end of the 1000 year millennium.

Revelation 20:7 - 10 *"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. **They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.** The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."*

According to this passage, the wicked were on "*the breadth of the earth*" when the fire comes down and devours them.

Now that we know when (end of this world) and where (on the earth), our third question is - how long will hell-fire burn?

The Bible teaches that man is mortal, saying, "*the soul who sins shall die*" (Ezekiel 18:4), but, if the wicked burn for eternity, that would be eternal life! The Bible says the tree of life is in heaven – not in hell. It seems clear that "*The soul who sins shall die,*" it will not burn forever.

But what about those expressions in the Bible like -

"Eternal fire" - Jude 7 "Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

The text does say "*eternal fire,*" but is Sodom and Gomorrah still burning today? No, the Bible says they were turned to ashes.

II Peter 2:6 *"Turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;"*

According to this we understand that the results of the fire was eternal not the fire itself. Those destroyed in that fire are never coming back, but the fire itself has gone out.

"Unquenchable fire" - Jeremiah 17:27 "But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."

Jeremiah 52:12 - 14 *"Now in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of*

the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire."

Is Jerusalem still burning today? No. It said the fire could not be quenched – meaning that man could not quench it, but when it burned up the city, the fire went out.

"Forever" - I Samuel 1:22 *"But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "Not until the child is weaned; then I will take him, that he may appear before the LORD and remain there forever."*

Verse 28 *"Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD."*

The Hebrew word Hannah used translated “for ever” is “*olam*” which means either a long duration, everlasting, perpetual, or a long time. As you can see, it has several meanings and does not always mean “never ending.” When Hannah said “forever” she only meant as long as he lives.

The Greek word translated “forever” is "*aion*" meaning - an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, period of time, or an age.

This word too can mean forever, but it can also mean only a period of time, whether long or brief as we see in the following verse -

I Corinthians 8:13 *"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."* (KJV)

In this verse the phrase, “*while the world standeth,*” is from the same Greek word, “*aion,*” here meaning only as long as the world stands, or at the most as long as he lives, and not for all eternity.

More than 50 times the Bible speaks of things lasting forever that have already ended, such as Samuel’s service or King Solomon’s reign. We still use this term in the same way today. You may hear

someone say - *"I sat in traffic forever!"* We know they only meant that it was to them a long time.

In the Bible there are 134 texts that state the wicked do not burn forever, but will be destroyed or annihilated. Before we look at those, remember, many of us are "programmed" to believe in eternal torment so we will need to look at these passages very thoughtfully. The following are a few examples:

Psalm 37:9 - 10 *"For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more."*

Verse 20 *"But the wicked shall perish; And the enemies of the LORD, Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away."*

Psalm 92:7 *"When the wicked spring up like grass, And when all the workers of iniquity flourish, It is that they may be destroyed forever."*

Destroyed forever – meaning they are gone forever.

Malachi 4:1 - 3 *"For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch."*

Burn them up - leave neither root nor branch - there is nothing left, it will be as though they had never been.

Matthew 7:13 *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."*

Note it says, *"Leads to destruction,"* not burning forever in hell.

John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

"Perish" – destroyed, not burning in the flames of hell for eternity.

Romans 6:23 *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

The wages, meaning the reward or the consequences of sin is death – not eternal life in hell or any other place.

James 1:15 *"Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

This verse clearly states that sin results in death.

Mark 9:43 *"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched--where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'"*

This verse says *"the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched,"* NOT the body that is thrown into it. The body will be consumed by the worms and the fire with nothing left.

Jesus probably had the following text in mind when He made the previous comment -

Isaiah 66:24 *"And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."*

Note it says the *"corpses"* of the men who have sinned. The fire and worms are devouring dead bodies, not burning living people to death.

Matthew 10:28 *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

Again, the word used is "destroy." The unrepentant sinner will be completely destroyed in the end. These texts are not speaking about the "sleep of death," but the "second death." The death from which there will be no awakening, no resurrection. The second death is an everlasting, forever, eternal, death.

Matthew 25:46 *"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

The result of the "punishment" is everlasting, but not the "punishing." We should be careful not to read more into the Bible than it says.

Now let's look at one of the key texts in Revelation that some use to support an unending fire in hell.

Revelation 20:10 *"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever"*

Now that we understand "for ever" comes from a Greek word that does not always mean without end, but a certain period of time, and according to the other passages we studied, even though the period of time may be short, the results will be everlasting.

But then what happens to Satan? Is he down there "prodding the wicked in the flames?" Is Satan immortal?

Ezekiel 28:13 - 19 *"Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I*

*have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; **therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth** in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.” (KJV)*

This must be Satan, because he (disguised as the serpent) and Adam and Eve were the only ones in the Garden of Eden. In the end Satan is “*devoured*” by a “*fire*” that comes from “*within*” him. What kind of fire could that be? We will discuss that in more detail in the next lesson.

From the beginning it has been Satan’s purpose to make our gracious Heavenly Father one to be feared and dreaded. A fact that should help us understand how these false teachings got into the church where Satan does his most deceptive work!

From Funk and Wagnalls Standard Reference Encyclopedia by Readers Digest 1958 under the heading “hell” we find this teaching was adopted by the Roman Church long ago:

“The second council of Constantinople, in 533 AD, a belief in the eternity of the punishments in hell became characteristic of both the Orthodox and the Roman churches. It also passed into the creeds of the churches of the reformation.”

In the dark ages, during an age of superstition and ignorance, the Roman Church developed the doctrine that hell was a place where the lost would suffer eternal torment so that people would fear God and the Church. It was a way of gaining power and control over them in hopes of better church attendance and more offerings. It appears some preachers still use this tactic today.

There are millions of people attending church every week, giving their money and saying, "I love the Lord," when in reality they are afraid of what God will do to them if they don't. The teaching that God will torture in hell forever those who do not do as He wishes or reject Christ, has actually turned thousands of people away from God and the church. But learning the truth about God will set them free of that fear.

In the next lesson we will continue the study on the punishment of the lost.

Response Questions:

- 1. Is it clear to you that there is no one burning in hell now?
Yes __ No __

- 2. Is it clear to you that hell is not a burning place in the center of the earth?
Yes __ No __

- 3. Is it clear to you God will not burn the wicked for all eternity?
Yes __ No __

NOTES

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 11

The Passion of Christ

Before we continue to study the final death of the wicked it would be helpful to study the death of Christ. Everyone agrees Jesus died the death of the sinner, and that being the case, if we want to know how the wicked die all we have to do is go to the cross and see how Jesus died.

Hebrews 2:9 *"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone."*

II Corinthians 5:21 *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

Jesus, being sinless, was somehow "*made to be sin for us*" in order for Him to "*taste death for everyone.*"

But how was Jesus death different from that of any other man? There have been many men who have given their lives to save others. There have been many good men who have suffered terribly being painfully tortured as they were executed. But dying in these ways does not make them the Savior of the world.

Yet it is true, one unique thing regarding the death of Christ was that He is the only one who has experienced what the lost sinner will experience in the end. The death God warned Adam and Eve about in the beginning was not the "sleep" from which all will be awakened, but the final and eternal cessation of life, the second death.

According to traditional church teaching, the unrepentant sinner will suffer the “wrath of God” against sin which is what Jesus suffered on the cross in our place. But remember God is not like us, His ways are not like ours. The wrath of God is not being beaten up or burned up, but rather God “giving us up” to the consequences of our choices in life. Note the following texts that make this clear beginning in the Old Testament –

Deuteronomy 31:16 - 18 *"And the LORD said to Moses: "Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and **they will forsake Me** and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, **and I will forsake them**, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, '**Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?**'"*

II Chronicles 15:2 *"And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but **if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.**"*

Note that it is only after men forsake God that He forsakes them.

II Chronicles 29:8 - 10 *"Therefore the wrath of the LORD fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and **He has given them up** to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes. For indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives are in captivity. Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us."*

In His "wrath," God had simply “given them up to trouble,” in other words He let them go their own way and suffer the consequences.

II Chronicles 30:7 *"And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, so that **He gave them up** to desolation, as you see."*

Psalms 81:11 - 12 *"But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me. So **I gave them over** to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels."*

We see the same principle in New Testament as well.

Romans 1:18 - 28 *"For **the wrath of God is revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. **Therefore God also gave them up** to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. **For this reason God gave them up** to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, **God gave them over** to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;"*

According to the Bible, God does not inflict pain and torture on the unrepentant sinner, but rather "gives them up" to suffer the consequences of their choices.

Galatians 6:7 *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."*

Therefore, God's "wrath" is simply giving the unrepentant sinner up to go his or her own way. God is love and this is the only way love can respond to rejection!

If this conclusion is correct, then there should be a text that says Christ was "given up" and there is -

Romans 4:24,25 *"It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, **who was delivered up** because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."*

Romans 8:32 *"He who did not spare His own Son, but **delivered Him up** for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"*

The phrase "*delivered him up,*" is translated from the Greek word, "paradidomi," which means "to give over" or "to give up" and translated in some modern versions as follows -

*"He who did not spare his own Son but **gave him up** for us all."*
(English Standard Version, ESV)

And if we look at the biblical record of the crucifixion we will find that is exactly what happened. Beginning with the prophet David writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as he foretold the crucifixion experience of Christ in the book of Psalms.

The following is a comparison of the verses in Psalms with the verses in Matthew's account of the crucifixion that demonstrate this -

Psalm 22:1 *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"*

Compare - Matthew 27:46 *"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

(Note: Jesus did not say, "My God, why are you killing me, or punishing me," but, "why are you forsaking me, or giving me up?")

Psalm 22:6 - 8 *"But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!"*

Compare - Matthew 27:39 - 40 *"And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."*

Psalm 22:16 - 18 *"For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots."*

Compare - Matthew 27:35 *"Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots."*

In comparing Psalms 22 with Matthew 27 it becomes clear that David is describing the experience of Christ as He is crucified centuries before it actually happened.

In the same way, the writer of Psalms chapter 88 also records the thoughts in the mind of Christ as He experiences the suffering of death.

Psalm 88:14 *"LORD, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?"*

Remember Jesus cry – *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Verse 15 *"I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught."*

"I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth:"

As we earlier read in Hebrews, Jesus knew from an early age that He was born a human for the suffering of death.

"While I suffer your terrors; I am distraught."

The word *"distraught"* is translated from the Hebrew word *"poon"* which means, "to be perplexed, confused, unable to think logically."

Though Jesus knew and foretold that He would suffer and die, yet as He actually suffered the terrors of this death He became distraught, perplexed, unable to think logically.

Verse 16 *"Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off."*

As Christ suffers the experience of being "forsaken" by God, He senses that He is cut off – separated from the source of all life and facing the second death from which there is no resurrection. This becomes clearer as we go back and read verses 3 - 8.

Psalm 88:3 - 8 *"For my soul is full of troubles, And my life draws near to the grave. I am counted with those who go down to the pit;*

I am like a man who has no strength, Adrift among the dead, Like the slain who lie in the grave, Whom You remember no more, And who are cut off from Your hand. You have laid me in the lowest pit, In darkness, in the depths. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, And You have afflicted me with all Your waves. Selah. You have put away my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; I am shut up, and I cannot get out;"

"Whom you remember no more." Christ senses he will be eternally forsaken and forgotten. *"I am shut up and I cannot get out."* He feels there is no hope of coming forth from the grave, no hope of resurrection from the tomb he is about to enter. We find more evidence of this view recorded in the book of Matthew -

Matthew 12:40 *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

Here Jesus is comparing the experience of Jonah in the belly of the whale with His own experience with suffering and death He knows is soon to come.

Jonah 1:17 – 2:1 - 6 *"Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me. "Out of the belly of Sheol (Hebrew for the grave) I cried, And You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me. Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; **The earth with its bars closed behind me forever;"***

Though the text says Jonah was in the belly of the whale only three days, how long did Jonah say he was there? Not three days

and nights, but “forever.” This implies that to Jonah this experience was like hopelessly being buried in the earth forever!

In the same way, though the Bible says in three days Jesus was tried, tortured, crucified and buried, Jesus says, just as Jonah did, that his experience of suffering and death would be to him like an eternity.

The thing we need to realize is this - as Jesus suffered the horrors of the crucifixion and separation from His Father, for a time He became distraught and could not think logically. While in this confused condition He lost sight of his own resurrection he had himself foretold. For a short time He actually lost any hope of coming forth from the tomb.

All those who have given their life for others did so believing they would live again. But Jesus did so feeling his death was eternal. That made His death different from any other.

Yet, even though He felt this death would be eternal, He refused to come down from the cross! He was committed to die the eternal death if it meant by His sacrifice that men and women would be drawn to God so that they would have eternal life!

Hebrews 12:2 *"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross"*

John 12:32,33 *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. This He said, signifying by what death He would die."*

I Peter 3:18 *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,"*

Christ's death was the perfect demonstration of God's unselfish, self sacrificing love in its purest form. When we comprehend that, if we do not resist, it will change us forever!

Romans 5:8 *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

If God did not execute Christ on the cross, then what caused His death?

First of all, Christ did not die as the result of being crucified. Note the following texts –

John 19:31 - 33 *"Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs."*

Crucifixion was a slow torturous death that usually took three or four days. In this case, because the Sabbath was approaching their legs were broken to hasten their death.

Mark 15:44 *"Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time."*

The reason Pilate “marveled that He was already dead” was because men simply did not die by crucifixion as quickly as Jesus did. The following verse gives us a clue as to what actually killed Jesus.

John 19:34 *"But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out."*

Physicians say that the fact that blood and water came from the opening in the chest made by the soldiers sword is evidence that Jesus actually died from traumatic shock. Today this is known as the “broken heart syndrome.” That is a condition that occurs when a person suffers from extreme stress, just as Jesus would have

during this experience. A condition which causes the body to release excessive amounts of adrenalin which accumulate in the sac that surrounds the heart eventually causing the heart to stop.

Just as Christ on the cross, the lost sinner will also be under enormous stress as they stand outside the walls of New Jerusalem at the Great White Throne Judgment feeling the terrible weight of guilt, despair, self condemnation and having no hope realizing they have cut themselves off from the very source of life and face only an eternal death. This weight is more than the sinner can bear and he will perish under its weight.

But there is a difference in their death and the experience of Christ. As Jesus experienced this awful death, no matter how hopeless things looked to Him, He still trusted God's word that had told Him he would be raised on the third day and as He died He cried, "*Father into your hands I commend my spirit.*" This is the "*Faith of Jesus.*" We all need that kind of faith, a faith that trusts in God no matter how hopeless and dark things may look to us.

The good news is this - Even though Christ would not come down from the cross that day – He did come up from the tomb on Resurrection Sunday and eternally reigns on God's Throne! Moreover, because He lives, you and I can be among those who will live eternally with Him in the earth made new.

In the next lesson we will continue our study in the final death of the wicked, the final end of sin and sinners.

Response Questions:

1. Do you understand that if one willfully continues to cling to sin eventually they cut themselves off from the source of life and will die the awful second death?

Yes __ No __

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 12

The Second Death

As we continue to study the subject of the final end of the wicked, we need to keep these two verses in mind:

Job 4:17 *“Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?”*

Isaiah 55:8 *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.”*

The teaching of the eternal torments of hell has turned more people against God than any other lie of Satan! Many people choose to be an atheist than to believe in a God who will torturously burn people for eternity. Unfortunately most Christians believe in an eternal hell, when in fact God’s great desire is that our relationship with Him be prompted from a heart of understanding and love, not superstition, ignorance and fear.

I John 4:16 - 18 *“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. **There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.**”*

In fact fear will produce the character of a rebel. We see that in young people who are anxious to leave home because of the constant fear of harsh discipline from overbearing parents. Fear may make a person behave in certain ways, but fear will not produce love and respect, only resentment and rebellion.

Punishment can be used in one of two ways:

1) Punishment as a means of “justice.”

According to the English Dictionary, over the years the definition of justice has changed from "rightness" to "retaliation." Justice is understood as giving a person what society feels they deserve for misdeeds or violation of the law. In this evil world there is a place for that. But at the same time there are laws against cruel and unusual punishment of even the worst criminals. There are also laws against parents exerting excessive punishment upon children.

Yet many people believe our loving Heavenly Father will torture His disobedient children for eternity for a brief lifetime of sin and that is not justice! And no matter how it may be sugarcoated - whether for eternity or a few minutes - inflicting pain upon a person for no other purpose than “*to make them pay*” for their past actions is not justice, it is torture!

2) Punishment as a tool in discipline or training.

A loving, responsible parent does not punish a child to “bring him to justice” or to “give him what he deserves.” But when other methods of corrective training have failed, the responsible parent punishes the child in appropriate ways to teach them that certain types of conduct will result in unpleasant consequences. The Bible speaks about this -

Hebrews 12:6 - 11 *"For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful;*

nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

The purpose of the "chastening," (the Greek word means "training children") spoken of in this text is to produce "the peaceable fruits of righteousness" – that is, right behavior that results from a right character.

But if God subjects the wicked to painful suffering after the final judgment, aware that they are hardened in their sin and will not change, what purpose would that serve other than saying to the rest of the universe "If you disobey Me this is what I will do to you!" Then the motive for obeying and loving God would be the fear of what He will do to us if we don't do as He wishes.

Which of these two methods we believe God uses depends upon our understanding of God's character. Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that the "spirit," (the nature of a person) that would painfully burn sinners alive is not of God.

Luke 9:52 - 56 *"And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village."*

It is at this point that many would naturally ask about the "wrath of God." This is a question that should be asked, but only as we let the Bible interpret itself will we find the correct answer. We studied this question in the last lesson, but it is worth going over again, take time to go back and review it.

According to the Bible God does not inflict pain and torture on the unrepentant sinner but rather "gives them up" to suffer the consequences of their own choices -

Galatians 6:7 *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."*

God's "wrath" is God sadly giving the determined sinner up to go his or her own way. God is love and this is the only way love can respond to rejection! We find more evidence of this truth in the following verses:

Psalm 9:15 - 16 *"The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made; In the net which they hid, their own foot is caught. The LORD is known by the judgment He executes; **The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.**"*

Psalm 34:21 *"Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned."*

Proverbs 11:5 *"The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way aright, But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness."*

Ezekiel 22:29 *"The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger."*

And does the Lord do to these wicked people?

Verse 31 *"Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and **I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,**" says the Lord."*

In these texts it is clear that God allows the wicked to suffer the consequences of their own actions. They suffer because of what they are and what they do – not because God is inflicting pain or trouble upon them to punish them.

If God intentionally inflicts trouble and pain upon those who reject Him – we have reason to fear Him. On the other hand, if we suffer and die as the natural consequence of sin, of ignoring God's warnings and going our own selfish way, we have no reason to

fear God, but every reason to fear sin! Every reason to cling to God - for He is our only help!

Make no mistake, there will be torment for the unrepentant sinner; but it will not be the physical pain of literal fire. The suffering of the wicked in the end will be a heart wrenching, agonizing pain of despair, terror, and remorse as they come to realize the truth of their hopeless condition.

Let's go again to the book of Revelation and take a closer look at the Great White Judgment to better understand the final fate of the wicked. Begin by reading verses 7 - 10 which portrays the period at the end of the one thousand year millennium.

Revelation 20:7 - 10 *"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."*

This is a summary statement of what John saw in vision. In the following verses he gives more detail of what happened prior to the fire coming down and devouring those outside the city.

Revelation 20:11 - 15 *"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."*

As hardened sinners gather themselves outside the “*beloved city*,” the “*The Great White Throne Judgment*” takes place. Picture again this scene in your mind. Every person who has ever lived on earth is alive at the same time and place with all the righteous inside the city and all the wicked outside the city walls. This is the time the Bible speaks of when it says, “*we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*” (Romans 14:10).

Christ describes the despair of the lost when they find themselves outside those walls.

Luke 13:28 *"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out."*

At last the terrible realization of the final consequence of sin will be visited upon them. For those who find themselves outside the walls the severity of suffering will correspond with the measure of guilt – because the measure of guilt depends on the amount of knowledge. The more knowledge of God and His righteous ways they have rejected, the more guilt and condemnation they will experience and the reality of that will be clearly shown to them at the Great White Throne Judgment.

The word “*name*” in the New Testament Greek is a word for “*character*.” When Christ is seen on the Great White Throne, His gracious “*name*” or character will be revealed to all present. As they see this, everyone, including Satan, will bow in acknowledgement of the truth.

Philippians 2:10, 11 *"That at the name (seeing for themselves the gracious character) of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

As the wicked witness the glory (gracious character) of God as revealed in Christ at the final judgment they will finally acknowledge the truth. All their excuses are gone, they have seen

it all with their own eyes and they will be speechless. The stark reality of their lost and hopeless condition is now before them.

Remember the text in Revelation says “*fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them.*” However, there is biblical evidence that the fire does not kill them, but that they are already dead and the fire devours only their dead bodies. This is not the first time that fire comes down from heaven and devours. One example is in II Chronicles -

II Chronicles 7:1 *"When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple."*

As we studied in a previous lesson about the sanctuary services, the sacrifices were to teach that sin kills. The sacrifice being killed by the sinner, was dead before being placed on the altar and burned. No sacrifice in the temple services were burned alive. A text from Isaiah confirms this concept -

Isaiah 66:24 *"And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."*

Jesus referred to this fire that would not be quenched (Mark 9:43). But note again this fire is burning “carcasses,” dead bodies, not living people.

And as we learned in the last lesson, intense emotional pain and stress can cause painful suffering and ultimately death. This is what killed Christ. Note the following report from the website, ReligionNewsToday.com

“During the January 17, 1994, Northridge/Los Angeles earth - quake, over one hundred Californians literally died of fright. This was the conclusion of Robert Kloner, cardiologist at Good Samaritan hospital in Los Angeles. Apparently a

terrorized brain can trigger the release of a mix of chemicals so potent it can cause the heart to contract - and never relax again."

As also mentioned in the last lesson, medical scientists have acknowledged a similar condition they call the "broken heart syndrome." This is a condition where under extreme stress the body secretes excessive amounts of adrenalin which build up in the sac that surrounds the heart, and unrelieved, will eventually cause the heart to stop beating. This could be what most of those outside the Holy City on that day will experience. This may be what Isaiah is speaking of in chapter 33 -

Isaiah 33:10 - 12 *"Now I will rise," says the LORD; "Now I will be exalted, Now I will lift Myself up.* (The Great White Throne judgment) *You shall conceive chaff, You shall bring forth stubble; Your breath* (Hebrew "ruwach" which also means spirit or character), *as fire, shall devour you. And the people shall be like the burnings of lime; Like thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire.*" (Words in parenthesis are mine)

Stubble is the short stalk left in the field after the grain harvest. The stubble is dead. Notice when the Lord is exalted the wicked "conceive" or "bring forth stubble." In other words, as a woman brings forth or conceives a child from within her body, the wicked, in the same way, bring forth or conceive a spirit or nature within themselves that is as dead stubble and "as thorns cut up" will be burned in the fire. Again the point is made that the wicked will be dead when the fire comes down and devours them.

Now note the question asked in verse 14 –

"The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

What or who is the "devouring fire"? In a previous study we learned that according to the Bible, it is God himself. Hebrews

12:29 was one among other texts that say *“Our God is a consuming fire.”*

So the question really is: Who can live in the literal presence of Almighty God? Who can dwell *“in the light which no man can approach unto”*? (I Timothy 6:16)

Now note the answer in Isaiah 33 verse 15 as to who can live in God’s literal presence –

“He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:”

Because the righteous have been changed, their *“corruption putting on incorruption”* (I Corinthians 15:53) at the second coming of Christ, they can live in God's literal presence; and they will rejoice as they *“see the King in His beauty.”* (Isaiah 33:17)

On the other hand, when the wicked witness the glory of God revealed they will perish. Not because God lashes out at them in anger but because they cannot bear the reality of what they are compared to what Jesus is! The enormity of their guilt will crush them. As we saw in the last lesson, the clearest evidence of how the sinner dies is seen at the cross.

As God at last reveals His glory and the wicked die (see note at the end of this lesson), the redeemed will stand at the walls of the city and watch. How will you feel as you see those people suffer and die the awful second death?

When we look back into the Father’s face as His lost children die, what will we see? A vengeful, vindictive God crying out *“Now at last My justice is satisfied!”*

No, we will see a loving Father weeping over His lost children!

Yet the Bible is clear, God “*will by no means clear the guilty*” (Exodus 34) - it would do no good. He must give them up - they are incurable. At the last, God will fully unveil His “*power and glory*” and “*fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them.*” The fire that consumes the already dead bodies of the wicked also purifies the earth.

II Peter 3:10 - 13 *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."*

This will be the end of sin and sinners! The universe will be returned to the state it was before sin entered – freedom and trust and unselfish love will abound throughout. When this is all over the redeemed will witness God’s mighty power as He creates a “*new heaven and new earth.*”

Revelation 21:1 - 5 *"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

No more sorrow, no more pain, no more crying - How can this statement be true if there's a place somewhere where the wicked are suffering in agony and pain as they burn for eternity?

What a glorious inheritance we have reserved for us!

I Peter 1:3 - 5 *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, **reserved in heaven for you,**"*

"Reserved in heaven for you", put your name there. God created no other one like you; you are an original! God will miss you if you are not there!

There will be an eternal void in His heart for all those who reject His gracious love. Be there! Make your reservations today!

END NOTE: It is clear from scripture that the wicked will perish in the literal presence of God. We have seen His awesome presence described in as "fire," "light" and "glory," but since no living human has experienced or seen it, exactly just what it is no one knows for sure. However, since we do know that the angels live in His very presence and that Adam and Eve also lived in it in the beginning before their fall, we can say with some certainty that the "glory" of God that would consume the corrupt sinner will actually be life-giving to the righteous.

So when God finally unveils His glory before the entire universe, no longer shielded by His grace, sinners will perish because of what they are, and not because God is punishing them by slowly burning them to death. The very fire that consumes the wicked is a good fire and gives life to the righteous, it is the "everlasting fire" that we never want to go out. But still the most important question is - How is God involved in the final death of His lost children? Hopefully that question has clearly been answered.

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 13

The Legal Model vs the Healing Model

What does a person have to do to ensure that they will have eternal life? The answer varies depending upon who you ask. Most people today understand the plan of salvation, or the way a person is saved, in the setting of a judicial, legal model. There are a number of reasons for this, but a man who may have had the most influence on this view was John Calvin. John Calvin was considered a leader among the great reformers of the Protestant Reformation. Calvin was originally educated as a lawyer, but later became a priest in the Roman Catholic Church with his legal training naturally influencing his views and ideas.

Many major doctrines held in mainline churches today can be attributed to a large four-volume work completed in the sixteenth century by Calvin entitled "*The Institutes of the Christian Religion.*"

These include doctrines such as pre-destination - the immortality of the soul - the eternal punishment in the fires of hell, and the topic we will study in this lesson, the legal view of the plan of salvation to name a few.

The word "legal" in this context means a system with laws which carry prescribed punishment for their violation. In order to avoid the penalty the violator must receive pardon.

Though there are variations, the following is a list of the basic points of the legal model.

1. God is the Almighty Sovereign Creator of the universe and as such has the authority proclaim a law or code of conduct to be obeyed by all His creatures.

2. Violators of God's law must be punished.
3. The punishment for violation (sin) is suffering and death.
4. God is the Judge and Executioner of the penalty against sin.
5. To avoid punishment, the guilty party must be pardoned.
6. All humans are violators of God's law – all are guilty and condemned to suffering and death.
7. The innocent son of God came and paid the penalty on behalf of the guilty.
8. If a person accepts Christ death on his behalf he is pardoned and will not be punished but granted eternal life.

The popular King James Bible, because it was translated at a time when the reformers such as Calvin were having such a great influence on the church, reflects this “legal model.” Because of this most people are taught that God as an awesome deity watching over the universe, a loving God, but yet a just God, one who will punish you if you break His law because justice requires it. That's the way the legal system works. With all mankind guilty before God then it stands to reason that the major focus in the legal model of salvation is forgiveness, or to use the legal term, pardon.

If a person is at the place in their understanding that they see God in this way, they need to know God will pardon them for breaking His law. So the Bible says – *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins”* (I John 1:9).

However, there are a number of problems with this legal model of salvation. The major problem is that with the legal model there is little or no focus on character change because it is preoccupied with forgiveness seeing that as all that is needed to avoid the penalty.

It also questions God's willingness to forgive, thus distorting the truth about His character. When asked why Jesus had to die, most will answer, Jesus had to die so God would forgive our sin. That only by the sacrificial death of His own Son could we be forgiven!

In saying that, they are saying that God requires the blood of His own Son before He will forgive us! This is preached from the pulpit, taught in Bible classes and written in the words of church hymns. The following quotes taken from a set of widely circulated Bible study guides demonstrate this view.

“Jesus had to die so God could forgive us of our sin.”

“Sin can be forgiven only by death.”

“When Jesus died, all our sins were forgiven.”

The problem is, this is **not** what the Bible teaches! For example; note the following text:

Psalm 40:6 *"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require."*

God does not require that the sinner appease Him in some way before He will forgive. That was not the purpose for the sacrifices in the Old Testament system. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, what did He cry out? *"Father forgive them...."* and no one had repented, confessed or asked to be forgiven!

If God required the death of Jesus as payment before He could forgive our sin that means God is not forgiving. For example, if you owed someone a million dollars and was unable to repay the debt and a friend, seeing your dilemma came to you and said "forgive my friend the debt, I will pay you the million dollars." So your creditor accepts the money from your friend and says to you "your debt is forgiven." But the fact is your creditor did not forgive your debt, he just accepted payment from someone else!

If God would only forgive us if Jesus paid our debt, then God has not forgiven us, He has only accepted payment from Jesus. If a person carefully thinks this through, it can readily be seen that Satan has artfully crafted a theory of salvation that makes God

look no better than the pagan gods of old who required a blood sacrifice before they would forgive and bless!

Therefore an important message from the cross is that God has forgiven us even before we ask as we learned in a previous lesson, but of course we don't realize that until we go to the Cross!

The expression, "*Jesus died to pay for our sins,*" which, by the way, is not in the Bible, is not a well thought out statement. If that statement is true, then all people will be saved whether they accept Christ's death or not. If He paid for all my sins, they are paid for whether I accept it or not. If the bill is paid, it is paid, and no longer owed whether I acknowledge it or not! Again, if these things are carefully thought through they do not make good sense! Another problem with the legal model is that it leads to presumption because it leads many to feel forgiveness is all they need to be saved. Since Jesus has secured that for them, that's all that matters. Thus they have no lasting motivation to change or to live a righteous life. This is the foundation of the "once saved always saved" doctrine.

Thought question: Will simply being forgiven save us? Will forgiveness change our nature? Will being forgiven make a violent person safe to live with?

The obvious answer to each of these questions is "No." Only a new heart and right spirit will make us safe to live with, now, or in the hereafter. When Nicodemus came to Jesus that night asking Him about salvation – did Jesus say to have eternal life "*You must be forgiven?*" or "*You must be born again?*" Jesus said we must be born again! (John 3:1-3) Jesus was saying that God's grace changes a person so drastically that it is like being born all over again. One becomes "*a new creature in Christ.*" (II Corinthians 5:17)

We need to re-examine the age-old question, "*What must I do to be saved?*" putting aside the old "*legal model*" and begin looking at salvation in a new way, within the setting of a "*healing model.*"

In the "healing model" model, instead of seeing all human beings as being born as guilty criminals under the sentence of death, all human beings are born with a terminal illness that will destroy them if they are not healed. This is a spiritual infection, they are "sin-sick." The major focus in this model is not forgiveness, but finding the remedy whereby one may be cured so that they will not die.

This model, as with any other teaching, must be found true to the scriptures to be accepted. The following verses are just a few that clearly demonstrate this model is biblical.

Isaiah 1:5,6 *"Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. **The whole head is sick**, And the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, There is no soundness in it, But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment."*

Isaiah 53:5 *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes **we are healed**."*

Jeremiah 17:14 *"Heal me, O LORD, and **I shall be healed**; save me, and I shall be saved: for you are my praise."*

Mark 2:17 *"When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

Matthew 13:15 *"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that **I should heal them**."*

It is clear that these texts are not referring to the healing of diseases of the body, but rather spiritual healing of the heart and

mind. We are all familiar with the New Testament term used for salvation, the word “*saved*.” The Greek word is “*sozo*” - and it means, “*to be whole*” “*to be well*” or “*to be safe*.” This word can be understood as “being healed,” as well as “being saved.” It is translated both ways:

Mark 5:22,23 *"And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that **she may be healed**, and she will live."*

In this verse the word “healed” is the Greek word “sozo.”

Mark 10:25 - 26 *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "**Who then can be saved?**"*

In this verse the Greek word “sozo” is translated “saved.”

In all these passages we can clearly see the Bible supports the “*healing model*.” By looking at salvation in the setting of this model we will begin to find answers to our questions that make sense. Questions like, how did we get in this sinful condition in the first place? As we learned previously, the sin problem began in the mind of Lucifer and then later spread to this earth.

Isaiah 14:12 *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;"*

“*You have said in your heart...*” A person’s thinking is not done in the organ called the heart, but in the mind. When Adam and Eve made the decision to follow the suggestion of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, their brains were changed, literally. This “brain damage” was passed on to their children.

Note the following statement from the book, **The New Brain – How the Modern Age is Rewiring Your Mind** by Richard Resak, M.D. Published by Rodale 2003

“We now recognize that our brain isn’t limited by considerations that are applicable to machines. Thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than mechanical laws, determine the health of our brain. Furthermore, we now know that the brain never loses the power to transform itself on the basis of experience, and this transformation can occur over very short intervals.”

The brain can transform itself, and that change can occur over very short intervals. When God created Adam and Eve they were created with their minds “wired” for righteousness. But when the serpent introduced the new thought to their minds that God could not be trusted, and they made the decision that Satan was right and ate of the tree which God said not to eat of, their brains were changed. Their brains were actually rewired and they began to think differently. As result, they had alienated themselves from God. If God had not intervened on their behalf, they would not survive the damage they had done to themselves.

Researchers have discovered that certain behavior affects the genes and can be passed on to the offspring - a proven example is alcoholism. In the same way the psychological damage incurred by Adam and Eve has passed through the genes and D.N.A. of every generation since that fateful day in the garden. As we read previously -

Romans 5:12 *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned"*

One Bible commentator described the problem in a book entitled God’s Amazing Grace, page 313:

“Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-

balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil. He was made captive by Satan, and would have remained so forever had not God specially interposed.”

“Selfishness took the place of love” and where did that happen? In the mind! This becomes clear as we realize every child is born with an inherited trait of selfishness. Things like greed, hatred, jealousy, lying, stealing, adultery, violence, murder - are only *symptoms* of the greater psychological disorder of self-centeredness.

Every sin can be traced back to self – its all about me – my needs - my wants – my rights! If not checked, this psychological disorder, like cancer or leprosy spreads and grows until it consumes its victim and in the end destroys him!

Most of us have seen enough in life to know this, so why do we cling to it - why do we justify it? Have we convinced ourselves we are fine just as we are – that we need no change? Thinking we can go on through life doing the same selfish, sinful things and yet somehow it will come out different for us? That is insane! It is insanity! In fact, that’s what sin is – it’s insanity!

This situation in the setting of the healing model can be likened to a father who has a child who is mentally ill and sometimes behaves badly. The child’s father hates what his child does, but he loves his child. He pities the child and he realizes the child doesn’t know what he’s doing. Therefore the father doesn’t punish the child, but does everything he can to help. This helps us to understand what Jesus had in mind when He said - *“Father forgive them – they know not what they do.”*

Understanding this helps us to understand how God loves the sinner while hating the sin. More than that, it helps us see better how we should relate to others whom we see as sinners. We should love them and pity them – the worse they are behaving, the more they need our sympathy and our help! We are all sin-sick, some more than others.

So in this healing model the question changes from “What must we do to be forgiven” - to - “What must we do to be to be healed – made well?”

What is the healing process? What must one do to be saved or to be healed?

I John 1:9 says *“If we **confess** our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

First Step - We must "confess," that is admit that we have a problem. Like an alcoholic in denial, some people insist that they do not have problem. So the first step, just as with an alcoholic, the sinner must “confess” they have a problem – they are sick!

Even then, if they try to correct their behavior by sheer will power they will fail, time after time. However, once a person is willing to admit they are sick (a sinner) and realize that they can't heal themselves then they are ready for the next step. Remember Jesus said - *“They that are whole do not need a physician, but those who are sick”*

Second Step - Next we need to find a physician. This needs to be done with great care. We don't want to go to a quack, or a doctor who has not proven to be reliable. We want to find one whom we can trust with our eternal life! The Bible says – *“Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”* (sozo - healed)

As the Lawgiver, Jesus forgives us. Then as the Creator, only He can *“Create in us a clean heart and a right spirit”* - only He can

re-wire our damaged brains. He is the Great Physician - the only One who can heal us.

Third Step - We must *go* to our physician. Jesus said, “*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*” – but He will not force us to be well. If we won’t come to Him – he can’t help us.

Fourth Step - We must faithfully keep our appointments. This includes - daily devotions - Bible study - prayer - witness - keeping the Sabbath. If we are too busy, if other things (even good things) take up our time and there is no time left for treatment, our recovery will be greatly hindered!

Fifth Step - We must do what our physician prescribes. Everyone wants to be well – to be saved, but some don’t want to do what the doctor says. The doctor may say they need a little surgery, or they may need to get some exercise or take some medicine. This is an important step. In order for us to get well, we must co-operate with our physician. If we refuse to do what the doctor prescribes can we expect to get well?

Doctors cannot save their patients who do not trust them, or have enough faith in them, to keep their appointments and do the things they prescribe. Doctors may love their sick patients; they may forgive them for not taking their medicine – but the patient will not get well, because love and forgiveness will not heal the damage.

The Bible says God has “*Loved you with an everlasting love*” and that “*His mercy endureth forever,*” but if we harden our heart and will not listen, if we will not follow God’s instructions, He will still forgive us and love us – but He can’t heal us – He can’t save us!

That means, if we don’t go to church – don’t study the Bible – don’t pray – if we don’t do the things the Bible says we should do, God will forgive us, but the changes in our brain that we need will

not take place. Our characters will not be changed and thus we will not be safe to enter the kingdom.

Ultimately, we are either in the recovery process and our sinful condition is in remission, **or**, we are getting sicker and closer not only to physical, but to spiritual death as well.

But again, we must trust and co-operate with the Great Physician, or healing will not take place and eventually we will be so hardened in sin that we will be incurable! Jesus says the same thing in a different way in the following passage.

Luke 6:47- 48 *"Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.*

Note the steps –

- 1) Come – Come to Jesus.
- 2) Hear – Carefully listen to what He says we should do.
- 3) Do – Co-operate, do the best you can to do those things He says to do, and you shall be saved. This is the simple formula Jesus gives us for salvation.

The following chart will help to compare the two models

The Legal Model	The Healing Model
God as the Sovereign Creator of the universe has arbitrarily proclaimed His law by which the universe is to be governed.	God as the Sovereign Creator of the universe has established the law of love by which the universe is to be governed.

Violators of God's law must be punished.	Violators of God's laws will suffer the natural consequence of violating those laws.
The ultimate punishment for violation (sin) is death (hell).	Sin punishes sin. The ultimate consequence of violation is death by sin, not at God's hand.
God is the judge and the executioner.	God is the Great Physician and only source of life. He alone can heal the sin sick and restore life to the dying.
To avoid punishment, we must be pardoned / forgiven.	To avoid suffering and death one must be healed; forgiveness only being a part of that process.
Since all humans are violators of the law – all are guilty and condemned to death.	All human beings have been infected with sin - sickness, thus subject to death.
The innocent Son of God came and paid the penalty for the guilty so God could pardon us.	God sent His Son that by His life and death we may be won back to trust God and thereby healed of our deadly infection.
If a person accepts Christ as savior he is pardoned and will not be punished but granted eternal life.	If a person will come to God (the Great Physician) and follow His divine instructions (prescriptions) he will be healed and will never die.

In the healing model, God does not stand as the executioner of the sentence against the wicked just as medical doctors do not kill their diseased and dying patients. They do everything possible to heal and save them! In the same way, God, the Great Physician

does not kill His sick and dying children either! Remember the following text from the lesson on the final death of the wicked.

James 1:14,15 *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

Sin is the ultimate source of death – just as a deadly disease like cancer. God is the ultimate source of life, and rather than condemning us, God is trying desperately to save us – not so He won't have to punish us – but so that sin will not destroy us! Sin kills! God heals! God gives life! Sin takes it!

We must realize who our enemy is so that we are not fighting the wrong battle. We blame sin and evil on Satan and rightly so, but if the devil died today it wouldn't change much – the seeds of evil he planted in the minds of Adam and Eve took root and have been passed down from generation to generation to everyone of us. Our worst enemy is within us! Our worst enemy is our selfish, sinful nature and it will destroy us if we don't have help!

Today, if you realize you are sin-sick – if you are not doing well, may I recommend Jesus? He accepts walk-ins - you need no appointment – and He still makes house calls. He can heal any illness – no matter how hopeless it may seem to you, but you have got to call on Him. You have got to trust Him - *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."*

Response Questions:

1. It is clear to me that I need more than God's forgiveness to be saved.

Yes ___ No ___

2. It is clear to me that sin is like a deadly disease.

Yes ___ No ___

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 14

The Sure Blessings of Health

Today there is a lot of emphasis on health and it seems whenever this topic comes up there usually are a lot of counsel given on diet. With some religious groups one might be led to think that even our salvation depended on what we ate! At the same time others scoff at the idea that we should be particular about diet or any other lifestyle issues. In the view of these people, these kinds of things have nothing to do with the spiritual aspect of our lives. To help us find the balance to this issue we must turn to the Bible.

I Corinthians 6:12 *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”*

This goes back to cause and effect, which include both physical as well as spiritual law and principles.

Galatians 6:7 - 8 *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”*

God does not punish those who follow poor health practices, but they will suffer the natural consequences of violating the principles of good health.

And it is a fact of life that regardless of how healthy a lifestyle people live, some will not live out their normal life expectancy. Accidents and unavoidable diseases can strike those who are in the best of health and cut their lives short.

The Bible teaches there is a more meaningful reason for doing our best to be healthy other than simply living longer. Let's look back to something Jesus said recorded in the book of Mark.

Mark 7:18 - 23 *"So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."*

Remember one of the rules of Bible study from lesson one was asking the question: Who is the primary audience the speaker is addressing? To whom is Jesus speaking in this verse? The answer is the Jews, and to the Jew in those days, eating unclean meats, hormones and chemicals in meats, processed foods, not drinking enough water – lack of sleep – lack of exercise, none of these things were a problem so Jesus did not mention any of these as things they should avoid.

But, what would Jesus say to us today here in America? Could what we eat and the lifestyle we live affect what comes from within, that is, affect the way we think and our ability to make good decisions? Absolutely!

The main reason to maintain good health is so that we may protect the mind, the control center of our being.

From the book *"Why God Won't Go Away"* - Ballantine Publishing Group Copyright 2001 by Andrew Newberg M.D.

"The brain is a collection of physical structures that gather and process sensory, cognitive, and emotional data; the mind is the phenomenon of thoughts, memories, and emotions that arise

from the perceptual processes of the brain...The mind cannot exist without the brain”

“Every event that happens to us or any action that we take can be associated with activity in one or more specific regions of the brain. This includes all religious and spiritual experiences.”

“If God appeared to you in some incarnation, you would have no way of experiencing his presence, except as a part of a neurologically generated rendition of reality. You would need auditory processing to hear his voice, visual processing to see his face, and cognitive functions to comprehend his meaning, and input from the brain’s emotional centers to fill you with rapture and awe... There’s no other way for God to get into your head except through the brain’s neural pathways. God cannot exist as a concept or as a reality anyplace else but in your mind. Even if there were a soul through which God could communicate, it would have little cognitive meaning to us without a brain.”

This helps us to understand the importance of the proper function of the brain, which of course relates directly to the working of the mind.

We all know alcohol and drugs can cause problems with the brain’s ability to function. But what we may not realize is that things like overeating - eating a lot of processed foods - too many sweets - animal products - caffeine - lack of fresh air and sunshine - lack of exercise, all these things pose a health risk and thus can cause problems with the brain’s ability to function properly.

For example, if our arteries are restricted with cholesterol and our blood flow is sluggish because of fats, there will be lack of blood to nourish the heart and the brain.

In the book – “*Exploring the World of Psychic Powers*” Southern Publishing Assoc. copyright 1971 by Fernando Chaij, Ph.D., Dr. Franz Volgyesi speaking about hypnosis states:

"A lack of blood to the brain induce the hypnotic state...the activity of the control centers of the cerebral cortex is suspended... and one's individual consciousness and will power are therefore replaced by those of the frontal cerebral region of the brain of the hypnotist..."

The lack of blood to the brain makes it easier for someone else to "get into our head." Satan gets in our head this way! This is why diet and exercise and lifestyle are so important. Diet and exercise promote healthy blood as well as proper blood flow to the brain so we can think clearly and make good decisions that would be of benefit to us and pleasing to God.

Galatians 5:22 *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."*

Note the last virtue in this list of fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control. We all need self-control, the power of mind over body. That is, the ability to do what is best regardless of how much our "flesh" may crave those things that are harmful. Let's look at some texts that relate to this.

Luke 10:26 - 27 "He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,*"

II Corinthians 8:12 *"For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have."*

1 Peter 1:13 *"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"*

Romans 7:25 *"I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the **mind** I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."*

Romans 12:2 *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your **mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*

Living on earth as a man, Christ knew the importance of this health principle in relation to the mind -

Matthew 27:34 *"And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink."*

Vinegar mingled with gall was a potion given to men who were being crucified to help deaden the pain. But as with all painkillers it also deadens the ability of the mind to think clearly.

The Desire of Ages, Pacific Press Publishing, pg 746 brings out this point -

"To those who suffered death by the cross, it was permitted to give a stupefying potion, to deaden the sense of pain. This was offered to Jesus; but when He had tasted it, He refused it. He would receive nothing that could becloud His mind. His faith must keep fast hold upon God. This was His only strength. To becloud His senses would give Satan an advantage."

Jesus needed His mind to be clear so that He might stay focused on His mission. What about us? As the followers of Christ, isn't that important for us too?

Right health principles promote:

- (1) Mental superiority and Intellectual power
- (2) Physical strength, and longevity

All of these things depend upon unchangeable laws. There is no happen-so, no chance, about this matter. Nature's God will not interfere to preserve men from the consequences of violating nature's laws. We will reap what we sow!

There are a number of reasons why this is especially critical for us living at this time.

1) Because “*every wind of doctrine*” is blowing today (Eph 4:14), we need clear minds to discern the true from the false. We need to be able to clearly hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit that says “*This is the way, walk in it.*” (Isaiah 30:21)

2) In our world today obtaining food untainted by contaminants is difficult. That being the case, our greatest safeguard is a strong immune system to fight off the diseases that may attack our bodies. Only with proper diet and exercise can we be assured of a healthy immune system.

3) If our blood flow is sluggish, laden with fats and contaminated with chemicals, if our arteries are restricted with cholesterol build up, if our blood pressure is high from gluttony and lack of exercise; We will be like the drunk who thinks he's ok when he's not. If we can't think clearly, our ability to reason will be crippled.

4) If our mind is clouded in this way we may not be able to correctly understand God's Word and be more open to Satan's subtle temptations. These problems may lead us to make poor decisions and in the end be lost because of it! Perhaps even worse, we may confuse someone else and cause them to be lost too!

There are seven basic keys to good health –

1. Rest.

Proper rest is essential for health of mind and body. Overwork should be avoided, and getting 7- 8 hours of sleep per night is vital. Periods of rest provide much needed quietness and communion with God. The Sabbath plays an important role in rest.

2. Pure Water

The human body is 75 percent water, but this vital fluid is being lost through exhaled air, perspiration, and waste products. Therefore drinking plenty of pure water every day is needed to maintain efficient health. Another important function is its use in cleanliness, daily bathing, and washing hands often.

3. Sunlight

Sunlight is essential to life; it powers the process that provides the nutrients that nourish and energize our bodies and releases the oxygen we must have to live. Sunshine is the best source of vitamin D which promotes health and healing. But, too much exposure to the direct rays of the sun can be dangerous.

4. Fresh Air

Impure air hinders the blood from carrying the oxygen required for the best function of every cell, including that of the mind which makes a person less alert and responsive. It is important that we secure a generous supply of fresh air every day. The following is a list of things that help provide your body with optimal oxygen.

1. Give the body an oxygen flush by frequently taking slow deep breaths.
2. Don't smoke and don't breathe anybody else's smoke.
3. Air out your house often.
4. Surround yourself with green plants.
5. Be active, exercise.

5. Exercise

Regular exercise results in increased energy, a firm body, stress relief, weight control, healthier skin, improved digestion, and reduced risk of heart disease and cancer, and self-confidence. Exercise is not an option; it is essential to maintaining good health!

Note the following quotes from Time Magazine's Health Report -
(Sources: American Journal of Medicine; Institute of Medicine; Cancer Causes and Control)

“Tobacco is the primary non-genetic contributor to death in the U.S.; among other things, it doubles the chance of having a stroke. Poor diet and lack of exercise are second, alcohol abuse is third, microbes and viruses are a distant fourth.”

“Score another point for healthy living. Half of all fatal cancers are linked to poor diet, smoking and lack of exercise – all factors that individuals can control.”

6. Stimulant free, Drug free life

There are many harmful drugs through which Satan destroys lives everyday, speed, heroin, cocaine - but more commonly used drugs, drugs people try to justify, are just as deadly! Alcohol and nicotine are both toxic (poisonous) substances. Do not use them in any form. Caffeine is another widely used addictive drug that causes many physical and mental problems.

Note the following:

Quote from Time Magazine Health Report :

“A survey of 22 published studies shows that heavy coffee drinkers face a 40% greater risk of heart attack than non-drinkers.”

Quote from Self Magazine:

“We found that caffeine impaired recall ability by about 20%.”

Quote from the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry:

“In a study of the demographic characteristics of the people who use caffeine, it was found that high consumers were also less active in religion.”

Where do we get caffeine? The most common sources are coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate.

Since God communicates with us through our minds, it is well to remember that nicotine, caffeine and alcohol adversely affect its

function. A Christian who is truly, sincerely seeking to know God better, will abstain from using these or any mind-altering drugs.

7. Nutritious Food

Food produces blood, and blood nourishes the mind, therefore what we eat is very important. To the first humans on earth, the Creator gave the ideal diet. According to the Bible, in the beginning there was no death and thus humans were given a vegetarian diet. Man's body was designed to function best on that kind of food.

Genesis 1:29 *"And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food."*

While it is true that God later allowed men to eat flesh foods, it was not the best diet for them. Today eating of flesh foods and other animal products including dairy products is much worse than in the past. Considering the hormones, chemicals, and other harmful things used in the food of animals raised for human consumption, as well as the fat and other harmful substances contained in animal products, nutritionists today agree that the vegetarian diet is the most healthful diet.

There is too much material to provide all the information and evidence for this in this study guide. There are numerous materials available for that purpose. It would be best to research those materials and keep abreast and follow the best diet available to you.

An excellent book on this topic is **The China Study** by T. Colin Campbell, PhD Published 2005 by BenBella Books.

The New York Times commenting on this book issued this statement -

“The most comprehensive large study ever undertaken of the relationship between diet and the risk of developing disease are challenging much of American dietary dogma.”

Two helpful sources of information on health and nutrition are the following -

McDougall Wellness Center - drmcDougall.com

NutritionFacts.org

Both these websites have helpful newsletters, weekly videos, books and other health resources available.

3 John 1:2 *“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.”*

Response Questions:

- 1. The reason for a Christian to be concerned about physical health is clear to me. Yes ___ No ___

- 2. I will study to learn more about good health habits. Yes ___ No ___

- 3. I will commit to the practice of good health habits that my mind may be alert to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to me. Yes ___ No ___

NOTES

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 15

The Sabbath Rest - Part One

Throughout these studies we have talked about trusting in God's Word. What we mean by that is that we believe what God says is true, that following His word is for our best good, it is right, it is life. The Bible teaches that there are a number of things that demonstrate whether or not a person really trusts God's word. The next two lessons are concerned with one of those issues and that is the Sabbath, the Lord's Day.

There is apparently some confusion about this day that needs to be cleared up. For example, it is common knowledge that ALL Jews believe Saturday is the Sabbath. At the same time ALL the Muslims believe Friday is the proper day of worship, but, some Christians keep Sunday while others keep Saturday as the day of worship.

Have you ever given any thought as to why this is? Does it matter? Maybe the most important question is - who is truly trusting and following God's word on this issue? To answer that we must once again turn to God's Word.

Revelation 1:10 *"I was in the Spirit on **the Lord's day**, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet"*

This text tells us the Lord has a day, but it does not tell us which day is the Lord's Day.

Mark 2:27 *"And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore **the Son of Man** is also Lord of the Sabbath."*

This text tells us the Sabbath is the "*Lord's day*," but it does not tell us which day is the Sabbath. We need another text.

Exodus 20:10 *"But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates."*

This text tells us that the seventh day is the "Sabbath of the Lord." By the way, note it is the Sabbath of the Lord, not the Sabbath of the Jew or my Sabbath or your Sabbath, but the Lord's.

But some argue that we don't know for sure which day is the seventh day, assuming it has been lost track of back in ancient times. But the Bible has never lost track of the seventh day from the Creation even to the time of the Apostles.

Genesis 2:2,3 *"And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."*

In establishing the seventh-day as the Sabbath at Creation, God "sanctified it." That means that He set aside the seventh day to be honored and observed. It was not set aside for a certain people, but as we just read Mark 2:27 where Jesus said it was "made for man" (the Greek word translated "man" is "anthropos" meaning "mankind," or all people including men and women.) The fact that there were no Jews at the time of Creation is evidence that it couldn't be just for the Jew.

Then before Moses and the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, where they would be given the Ten Commandments, God reminded His people of the seventh day Sabbath that was established back at the Creation. We find the story in Exodus.

Exodus 16:4 *"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not."*

Verse 26 *"Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none."*

Keeping the Sabbath was to “prove” or test them to see if they would trust God’s Word and follow it. That was God’s purpose in withholding the manna on the seventh day. But note what happened -

Verses 27, 28 *"Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?"*

Why did those people go out on the seventh day to gather when God had told them there would be no manna that day? Because they did not trust His Word. They failed the test.

When they finally arrived at Mount Sinai God himself then wrote the Sabbath commandment on the tables of stone to indicate its permanence. God has continued to watch over the Sabbath day throughout the ages; it has not been lost.

We have evidence in the New Testament that clearly shows which day is the Sabbath. Note the following verses. from the record of Christ's crucifixion.

Luke 23:50 - 54 *"Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. **That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.**"*

This is what later became known as “Good Friday” – the day Christ was crucified.

Verses 55,56 *"And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment."*

This is the day following Good Friday, which would be Saturday or the seventh day of the week.

Luke 24:1 *"Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."*

This was Sunday morning, the first day of the week, what the Christian world now celebrates every spring as "Easter Sunday."

What day lies between Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Saturday or the seventh day Sabbath. The seventh day has not been lost.

If the Jews had been keeping the wrong day as Sabbath, Jesus would have told them. As we learned in a previous lesson, as the Son of God, Jesus is the Creator and Lawgiver as seen by the following passages.

Ephesians 3:9 *"And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ"*

Nehemiah 9:6 *"You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You. You are the LORD God"*

Verse 13 *"You came down also on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven, And gave them just ordinances and true laws,*

Good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, By the hand of Moses Your servant."

The Lord who created the world also blessed and sanctified the seventh day as a day of rest. But who needed rest that first Sabbath? God never gets tired, Adam and Eve were just created, so they didn't need rest. However, having just been brought to life they would not have known who God was. Surely they had many things to learn. Therefore, God set aside that first seventh day for Adam and Eve to get to acquainted with Him. One of the primary reasons for the Sabbath is to spend time with God, getting to know him better. This is so important that when God wrote this precept He began it with the word "*Remember.*"

Exodus 20:8 - 11 *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."*

This day was to be a weekly reminder that God is the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them, thus keeping men from developing other theories of how this world came into existence eventually leading them into atheism.

The seventh-day Sabbath was not a part of the ceremonial law of the sacrificial system that was a "*shadow of good things to come*" (Hebrews 10:1) pointing to the coming Messiah. The Sabbath is part of the moral (right) law that points back to the Creator and Lawgiver.

Approximately 4000 years after Creation, as Christ died on the cross, He declared, "*It is finished,*" and rested in the tomb the seventh-day Sabbath.

Note according to John 20:17, the morning of His resurrection, He told Mary He had not yet gone to the Father, which means He had remained in the tomb during the Sabbath hours.

John 20:17 *"Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' "*

Just as the Creator rested the Sabbath after His work of Creation, the Redeemer rested in the tomb on the Sabbath after His work of redemption.

The Hebrew noun "Sabbath" comes from the verb "sabat" which means, "to take intermission." The Sabbath day is a day of "intermission," a time for us to stop and remember - both our Creator AND our Savior!

Some teach that the Apostles, acting on a commandment from Christ, changed the day of worship to the first day for the Christian believer because Jesus was resurrected on that day. If the Lord had given them a commandment that important they would have told us! It would be in their writings, as Luke tells us in the book of Acts.

Acts 1:1,2 *"The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."*

According to Luke's own words, if Christ had commanded a change in the day of rest and worship from the seventh to the first day in honor of the resurrection, we should be able to find it in his writings, either in the Gospel of Luke or the book of Acts.

In a careful reading of both books there is no record of such a change. However, the following are some of the verses in Acts that clearly show the apostles worshipped on the Sabbath.

Acts 13:42 - 44 *"So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God."*

Acts 16:13 *"And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there."*

Acts 18:4 *"And he (Paul) reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks."*

There is one text that does mention Paul's preaching and breaking bread on the first day of the week.

Acts 20:7 *"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."*

Think about what is being said here. Does breaking bread or communion make a day a Sabbath? No, churches have communion on different days of the week. Does preaching make a day a Sabbath? Again, no, preaching services are held on different days of the week as well.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary makes the following comment on Acts 20:7:

“This is the earliest clear reference to the Christian practice of observing Sunday as a day of worship. The first Christians, as Jews, probably continued to observe the Sabbath as well as the first day of the week. **We are not told when or how the practice of Sunday worship arose in the church.**”

(From The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1962 by Moody Press. All rights reserved.)

This is true, we are *not* told in the Bible “*how the practice of Sunday worship arose in the Church,*” the reason being that the practice of Sunday worship did not begin until many years after the Bible was written!

The fact is that all the New Testament books were written 20 to 90 years *after* Christ’s resurrection – in those writings the Jews argued with the Christians about Moses’ law, fasting, circumcision, and the traditional teachings of the Pharisees. But if the Christians had made an attempt to change the Sabbath day there would have been a tremendous controversy over that and it would have been faithfully recorded in the Bible just as the other issues were. But there is no mention of changing the day of worship in the entire New Testament.

Note this honest admission of a Baptist theologian, Herschel H. Hobbs from his book, “The Baptist Faith and Message” copyright 1971 – Convention Press, page 94 -

“There is no specific command in the New Testament to change from the seventh to the first day.”

If the change is not in the Bible, then who, when and by what authority was the seventh day Sabbath changed to the first day Sunday? Before we answer that question read the following verses.

Psalm 89:34 *“My covenant will I not break, nor alter the word that is gone out of my lips.”*

Ezekiel 22:28 *“Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD had not spoken.”*

In these verses God says that He will not change His Word but some church leaders will. Church history tells us the change from the seventh day Sabbath to the first day Sunday came about during the fourth century long after the scriptures were finished and all the Apostles had died.

The change was subtle and prompted by two things. The first was compromise – the blending of pagan holidays making them Christian Holy Days in the Church. Note the following excerpts from a book written by the Catholic scholar - Charles Panati.

“Sacred Origins of Profound Things” Published by Penquin 1996
Page 216 Under the heading “Christmas.”

“It is important to note that for two centuries after Christ’s birth, no one knew, and few people cared, exactly when he was born. Birthdays were unimportant.... On December 25, pagan Romans, still in the majority, celebrated “Natalis Solis Invicti,” (Latin for) “Birthday of the Invincible Sun God,” Mithras.... Mithraism was so popular with the masses that the Emperor Aurelian proclaimed it the official state religion. In the early 300’s the cult seriously threatened Christianity, and for a time, it was unclear which would emerge victorious. Church fathers debated their options. It is well known that Roman patricians (high society) and Plebeians (common people) alike enjoyed festivals of a protracted (prolonged) nature. The Church, then, needed a December celebration. Thus, to offer converts an occasion in which to be proudly celebratory, the Church officially recognized Christ’s birth. And to offer head-on competition to the sun worshippers’ popular feast, the Church located the Nativity (Christ’s birth) on December 25th.”

And then on Page 204, 205 Under the heading – “Easter Sunday.”

“In the Christian faith, Easter is the most sacred of holy days because it commemorates the cornerstone miracle of the faith...But the holy day’s name derives from an ancient pagan festival and is the name of the Saxon goddess of spring and offspring (fertility), Eastre. It just so happened that Eastre, a fertility goddess, had as her earthly symbol the prolific hare, or rabbit. Hence the origin of the Easter bunny. Named “the Lord’s Day,” Sunday became a symbol by which Christians differentiated themselves from the Jew. However, it was not until Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the early decades of the fourth century that the Lord’s day took over the full significance of the Sabbath, and that the observance of the seventh day was dropped and left entirely to the Jews.”

The second thing that prompted the change was hatred for the Jews whom many people blamed for the death of Christ as well as for the Jewish-Roman War in the first century. The following is a statement made in the fourth century by the Roman Emperor Constantine which reflected those feelings among many early Christians.

“We ought not therefore have anything in common with the Jews, for the Savior has shown us another way. We desire dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews.”

Quoted from the Council of Nicea 325 A.D.

The change from the seventh day Sabbath to the first day Sunday was officially adopted by the Church fathers in A.D. 338 at the Council of Laodicea as noted in the Revell Bible Dictionary, Wynwood Press, New York, N. Y. 1973. Under the heading of “The Lord’s Day.”

“However, there was no transfer of the concept of a day of rest from Sabbath to Sunday. In the first century, the first day of the

week was a normal work day. Yet the tendency to transfer elements of Sabbath observance to Sunday soon appeared and is reflected in the pronouncement of the fourth council of Laodicea that while “Christians must not Judasize by resting on the Sabbath, they should, if possible, rest on the Lord’s Day.”

Later, in A.D. 1234, Pope Gregory officially mandated Sunday rest for all Christians. The Roman Catholic Church claims to have made the change from Sabbath to Sunday as recorded in the following church document.

The Converts Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, by Rev. Peter Geiermann, C.S.S.R, pg 50 –

Q. What is the third commandment?

A. The third commandment is: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Q. Which is the Sabbath day?

A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.

Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

A. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.

It is a historical fact that the Church made the change, not based on the Bible, but based on the authority of the Church. But does the Roman Church, or any church, have the authority to change the commandment of God for any reason? The Apostle Peter answers:

Acts 5:29 *"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."*

If the commandment to keep Sunday is not in the Bible, then it is clearly a precept or a law of man. The dictionary defines the ideas of men as “tradition.” Jesus warned us about keeping the traditions of man in place of the commandments of God.

Matthew 15:1 - 9 *"Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"-- then he need not honor his father or mother. 'Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"*

Though most Christians do not realize it, Sunday is a tradition that has replaced the commandment of God, *"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."*

This brings us back to the initial point – the Sabbath command is an issue that can demonstrate whether or not we trust God’s Word. It is a test in the sense that if one knows the word of God and refuses to honor it, that is evidence that they:

1) Don’t trust God’s Word, just as those people in the Old Testament who went out on the Sabbath to gather manna after God told them there would be none.

Or, 2) they possess a rebellious spirit – they will do only that which they want to do or what they find convenient for them, regardless of what God says.

The bottom line is that the issue here not about this or that day – it’s about trusting God and being willing to follow His Word. And instead of being a sign that we are attempting to work our way to heaven, keeping the Sabbath is a sign that we “rest,” or trust in God’s Word.

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 16

The Sabbath Rest - Part Two

In the previous lesson we learned that the Bible teaches the seventh day Sabbath is the Lord's Day, the true Sabbath. Yet many churches still keep Sunday as the day of worship. Does the Bible in any way support this? To be honest in our search for truth we must look at all the biblical passages that may support the first day as the day of worship. We will begin by looking at all the texts that mention the first day –

Matthew 28:1 *"Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb."*

This text tells us the Sabbath was past. Two days are mentioned, the Sabbath and the first, drawing a distinction between the two.

Mark 16:1,2 *"Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen."*

Verse 9 *"Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons."*

Again two days are mentioned, the Sabbath and the first day. But no change is made.

Luke 23:54 - 56 *"That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment."*

Luke 24:1 *"Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared."*

This passage "lines up" the two days before the first day -

1. Preparation Day (Good Friday) - verse 54
2. Sabbath (Saturday) - verse 56
3. First day (Resurrection Sunday) - verse 1 of chapter 24

These were the events that the yearly "feast days" we studied in the sanctuary service pointed forward to:

1. Feast of Passover, which pointed to Christ sacrifice.
2. Feast of Unleavened Bread, which pointed Christ's burial.
3. Feast of Firstfruits, which pointed to Christ's resurrection.

Next - John 20:1 *"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb."*

John is restating what the other gospel writers have already mentioned. But note verse 19 where he mentions a meeting held on the first day:

Verse 19 *"Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

It is clear that this was not a worship meeting. John writes they were *"assembled for fear of the Jews."* The disciples were afraid the Jews would have them crucified too! In fact, up until that time, they did not believe Jesus had been resurrected.

Compare Mark 16:9-11 *"Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. She went and told those who*

*had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, **they did not believe.**"*

The disciples did not believe until they saw Him themselves later that day. The next passage that mentions the first day is in the book of Acts which we discussed in the last lesson.

Acts 20:7,8 *"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together."*

There are three points we need to recognize in this account.

1. It was nighttime - "*there were many lamps*" - Paul spoke "*until midnight.*"
2. This could have been the beginning of the first day which would be a Saturday night meeting (in Bible times the days began at sunset).
3. Breaking bread does not make it a holy day or a Sabbath, this is a Jewish term that simply meant they ate together. According to Acts 2:46, they "*broke bread*" everyday.

This was a farewell meeting for Paul. They sensed they would never see him again as this was to be his last missionary journey. In no way does this text suggest that Sunday was a holy day.

The next passage is found in I Corinthians.

I Corinthians 16:1 - 3 *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem."*

This was not a Sunday school offering being taken up in church. Note the following points.

1. The term "*lay something aside*" - refers to keeping it at home.
2. "*storing up*" - meant it was to be put aside until Paul came to gather it. Paul was calling for a collection for the saints suffering in the famine in Jerusalem at the time. This is confirmed in the book of Acts also.

Acts 11:27 - 30 *"And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."*

In none of the previous texts mentioning the first day is there any evidence of a change made regarding the day of worship by Christ or the apostles.

Now we will look at some other texts used to support Sunday worship even though neither Sunday or the first day are mentioned in them.

Colossians 2:16 *"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,"* **Verse 17** *"which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."*

Before we draw any conclusions on this verse, note verse 17 says, "*which are a shadow of things to come*" – These are the ceremonial days celebrated in the annual feasts. Note the following evidence.

Hebrews 10:1 *"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these*

same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect."

This text in Hebrews is also speaking of the laws concerning the sacrifices made in the sanctuary services and ceremonies which pointed forward to Christ and *"the good things to come."*

Read chapter 23 in Leviticus that describes these yearly ceremonies. After reading the entire chapter, note the following verses.

Leviticus 23:37 *"These are the feasts of the LORD which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, everything on its day--"*

These feasts described in Leviticus 23, because they were holydays and no work was to be done on those days, they were called sabbaths. But they were not to be confused with the seventh day Sabbath of the fourth Commandment. Note verse 38.

Verse 38 *"besides the Sabbaths of the LORD, besides your gifts, besides all your vows, and besides all your freewill offerings which you give to the LORD."*

The Hebrew word translated *"beside"* means "separate." In other words, these feasts or annual sabbaths were to be separate from the weekly seventh day Sabbath. Plus the ceremonial "sabbaths" could fall on any day of the week. Note the next verse.

Verse 39 *"Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath."*

Just as Christmas falls on a different day of the week each year, so the *"fifteenth day of the seventh month"* would fall on a different day each year. These ceremonial sabbaths were to be celebrated

until the Messiah came. Then when the good things which they pointed to, Christ, came, they were no longer necessary.

Again, this is speaking of the annual ceremonial sabbaths and not the weekly seventh day Sabbath contained in the law of the Ten Commandments. Next passage is used to say it doesn't matter which day we keep as the Sabbath -

Romans 14:1 - 6 *"Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks."*

As discussed in Lesson #1, the context of this chapter in Romans is judging others. But some quote verses 5 and 6 out of their context and use them to argue that it doesn't matter which day is kept as the Sabbath day. They quote the following -

"One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it."

This is verse 5 and only part of verse 6. They leave out the part about judging others and in doing so they are clearly taking this out of context. The truth is that neither the Sabbath nor the first day is mentioned in this passage and Paul's intentions were not to say it didn't matter which day was kept as the Sabbath.

Today many preachers read things into these texts they do not say and in doing so they are saying *“Thus says the Lord – when the Lord has not spoken.”* (Ezekiel 22:28)

Many say the reason for not keeping the Sabbath is that it is not mentioned in the New Testament as the others are. But the Sabbath is mentioned in the New Testament.

Luke 23:56 *“Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.”*

Hebrews 4:4 *“For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”* **Verse 9** *“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.”*

The word translated *“rest”* in this verse is the Greek word *“sabbatismos”* which literally means *“Sabbath rest.”*

Hebrews 4:9 **actually says,** *“There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,”* and many of the modern translations of the Bible correctly translate it this way.

In this study we have looked at the texts commonly used by many Christian preachers and teachers to support worship on Sunday. In a previous study we looked at all the biblical evidence for keeping the seventh day Sabbath.

Now it’s up to you to make an intelligent decision based on the evidence. Again, it is more than just a day - it’s a holy day which was given to us *“for our good always.”* There are blessings in keeping the Sabbath according to God’s commandment.

Many people after learning the truth about the Sabbath have become concerned about the past. The Bible gives us assurance that the past is not counted against us when we, after learning the truth, choose to do what’s right.

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 17

Commitment and Baptism

Mahatma Ghandi once said – *“I like your Christ. I don’t like your Christians. They are so unlike Christ.”*

Too many people are Christians in name only. There is no real change in the life, no surrender of self, no commitment to God.

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

Christ committed himself to God. And Christ, being our example, means that we are to be committed to God as He was. A sign of that commitment is baptism. Baptism is usually thought of as a ceremony signifying a person’s joining a church, and it is that, but much more.

I Corinthians 12:13 *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.”*

Baptize is translated from the Greek word *“baptizo”* which means to dip under or to submerge. Due to the lack of understanding on this issue, some churches have endorsed "sprinkling" in place of immersion. This is not biblical, but rather another tradition.

In the early centuries most came to understand baptism only as a symbol of the washing away of sins, so many waited until they had committed all their sins and were on their death bed and then

called the priest to baptize them. Since they were bed-ridden, the water had to be poured on them in bed which made a big mess. So the decision was made to sprinkle them with "holy water." Later they reasoned if it's good enough for the dying, it's good enough for everyone so the Catholic Church officially adopted this method of baptism for reasons of convenience at the Council of Ravenna in 1311 A.D.

However, the Bible teaches only one method of baptism. We find that John the baptist baptized by immersion. Phillip the evangelist baptized by immersion. Jesus was baptized by immersion.

Matthew 3:13 - 16 *"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

Many ask the question, since He had not committed any sin, why was Jesus baptized at all? He didn't need His "sins washed away." Jesus asked to be baptized to "fulfill all righteousness," that is, "right doing," or doing what is right.

He was baptized to set an example in right doing for His followers as well as to identify with the message of John the Baptist.

Note that when Jesus was baptized, He "went up out of the water," which implies He first went under the water as He was baptized.

Baptism by immersion is the biblical symbol of a person's acceptance of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection on their behalf and their willingness to follow His example in life.

The evidence for this is in Romans chapter six.

Romans 6:3 - 5 *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection"*

When a person is baptized, the eyes are closed and the breath suspended as they are lowered, or "buried," beneath the water. Then they are brought up out of the water – "resurrected" as a new creature in Christ, committed to a new life, a new way of living.

Note verses 10 through 13 of the same chapter -

"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

Baptism is a perfect illustration of the death and burial of the old way of life and resurrection to new life in Christ. The main purpose of baptism is to identify with Christ and to confirm a person's commitment to live for and serve God just as Jesus gave us example.

Acts 10:38 *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."*

To live a life of service to God one needs the power of the Holy Spirit within. And just as the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus at

His baptism, we too are anointed with the Spirit when we are baptized.

Acts 2:38 *"Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

When a person is baptized they "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" to be a helper to them just as He was to Christ. They are given special power to be His witnesses.

Acts 1:8 *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Mein Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

The Spirit and the gifts that accompany the Holy Spirit's presence are given to believers that are needed to do God's work. That work is to witness His love and grace to others.

I Corinthians 12:7 - 11 *"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills."*

This is only a partial list of the gifts of the Spirit. But the point here is that every person is given gifts from the Holy Spirit for the purpose of witnessing for God in their lives.

The "baptism of the Holy Spirit" is not necessarily a separate baptism as some teach. The Bible says there is only one baptism and that is by water and the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:4,5 *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

John 3:5 *“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*

There is only “*one Spirit*” and only “*one baptism*” and that one baptism is with the water and the Holy Spirit! Being “*baptized with the Spirit*” is simply being given the power to live a righteous life and be an effective witness for Jesus.

All committed believers who are baptized have that Holy Spirit power available to them. Some “*receive it,*” that is, they are aware of it and take advantage of it immediately after baptism but others aren’t.

Others, because they do not understand, or do not feel they are ready, may not take advantage of it until later in their Christian walk. But when they do, big changes are seen in their witness for God. They are not “*baptized in the spirit*” later by means of some kind of sudden miracle, but they have just come to the place that they are ready to take advantage of the power that has been theirs all along!

Often the question is asked, is water baptism necessary? The words of Jesus help to answer that.

Mark 16:16 *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*

Baptism is necessary only for those who “*believeth,*” that is, those who are converted or born again. Without conversion baptism is worthless. Why? Because there is no real change or commitment in the life.

When we commit to live for God, there is a ceremony that confirms that commitment - a public declaration of one's acceptance of Christ and their commitment to live a new life for God. Baptism is as necessary to the Christian believer as the wedding ceremony is to the married couple. Just as the married couple makes vows to one another publicly, the believer is making a public vow as well. He is saying before witnesses: *"I love the Lord, and I am committing my life to Him"*

If a person is not willing to make this public commitment it is evidence that the relationship is weak and there is no real commitment! That is why baptism is necessary. It is not the ceremony; it's the commitment! Without total surrender and commitment to the Lord we cannot be saved.

Of course there are exceptions to the necessity of baptism. There may be circumstances that will not allow the ceremony to take place, but the heart must be willing just the same. Like the thief on the cross for example, if he could have come down from the cross and been baptized he would have gladly done it.

Re-baptism

The question often comes up regarding re-baptism. Is it biblical? And if so, when is it appropriate? The Bible gives us an example -

Acts 19:1 - 5 *"And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."*

These were not disciples of Jesus, but of John the Baptist. The baptism of repentance was a type of baptism that was done before Jesus' death and resurrection. Later after these men learned about Jesus and the Holy Spirit from the teaching of Paul they were re-baptized with a new commitment to follow Christ and be identified with Him.

There are two reasons for re-baptism:

1. After learning significant, life-changing truth that a person now wants to be identified with as these men had.
2. After a person has drifted away from the Lord and for years lives apart from Him and by all appearances are counted with the worldly. But one day the Lord touches the heart and they return to Him and then want to re-commit their lives to God.

Three steps a person should take before being baptized:

1. Taught - Matthew 28:19 - 20 *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

2. Believe - Acts 8:35 - 38 *"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him."*

3. Repent - Acts 2:36 - 38 *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to*

the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

How many of them did Peter say should be baptized? *"Every one."*

When you have been taught the truth and you believe it and are committed with God's help to put away sin and live for Him - you are ready for baptism. This is why babies need not be baptized; they are not capable of making this decision.

A person should not wait until they feel they have victory over all their sin to be baptized – baptism is not a graduation – it is a new beginning. Jesus says *"come as you are"* - *"come as a little child"* - willing to listen and anxious to grow up to be like Him.

Jesus is calling –

Revelation 3:20 *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."*

Jesus will not come in uninvited – Will you open your heart and invite Him in today?

Do not put it off – make that commitment today - today is the day of salvation!

Response questions:

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 18

The Church

In the New Testament the English word "church" is translated from the Greek word "ekklesia" which basically means "an assembly." In the Old Testament, the words "convocation" or "congregation" is used instead of the word "church." The Hebrew word from which they are translated is "miqra" which means "called out - as a public meeting," similiar to the Greek word "ekklesia." Note the way it is used in Leviticus Chapter 23.

Leviticus 23:3 *"Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings."*

In this verse the Bible says we are to have a holy "convocation," meaning a meeting together, an assembly, or gathering, on the seventh-day Sabbath. It is God's plan for His people to assemble together on the Sabbath and should not be neglected. Note what the Bible says -

Hebrews 10:24,25 *"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."*

Matthew 18:20 *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

The church, meaning the collective body of people who have responded to God's calling, are to be held in great respect for they are the object upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard, calling them His "Bride."

Believers become members of His body, the two become as "one" and have been divested with divine authority by Christ.

Matthew 18:18 *"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

This does not mean that the Church has been given the authority to modify or change God's word as some have done. The Bible says, *"For ever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven"* (Psalms 119:89).

What Jesus is saying in Matthew 18 and in similar texts is that the Church will be in complete harmony with heaven's principles as taught in God's Word and that it has the authority to administer that Word, but only within the body itself, the church has no authority over those "in the world."

Today there is *the visible* and the *invisible* church. The *invisible* church is composed of all God's people throughout the world whether or not they belong to any organized religious institution. The *visible* church is God's organized church, a group of people organized for service. The organization enables it to better fulfill the great commission, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15).

Even though many feel that organized religion is not needed, the fact is that without organization it is very difficult for any institution or movement to prosper. It is also important as to what kind of governmental organization the Church utilizes. There are four basic forms of church government.

1) Episcopal - Church government and authority is vested in its ministry, usually with three orders of ministers, as bishops, priests, and deacons.

2) Papal - Church government in which supreme authority is vested in an individual such as the pope. From him, cardinals,

archbishops, bishops, and priests govern the church. The local church or church member has no authority in church administration. An example is the Roman Catholic Church.

3) Independent - Church government that makes the local church congregations supreme and final in its own domain. An example is the Southern Baptist Church.

4) Representative - Church government that recognizes that authority in the church rests in the church membership, with executive responsibility delegated to representative bodies and officers for the governing of the church. The leaders administer the policies of the church and do not make the policies.

An example is the Seventh-day Adventist Church which has a representative form of government and works within the "sisterhood of churches" - that is, each church is responsible to the others to adhere to certain biblical standards.

Often God leads His people from the invisible Church into union with His visible church. In the visible Church, many find they are more able to fully experience God's love and fellowship. Just as there can be no living, active human body unless all its members are united and functioning together under a central control, the human head, so there can be no living, growing, prospering church unless its members are organized into a body, all performing their God-given duties and functions under the direction of their divinely constituted head, Jesus Christ.

Thus God has given gifts to the Church in order to edify, build-up, comfort, and encourage, individually, as well as corporately.

I Corinthians 12:4 - 7 *"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:"*

Verses 25 - 27 *"That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."*

For a listing of specific gifts see both I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Those and other needed gifts are to be found in the Church. As members of the Church, all of us should ask God to show us our specific gift and make an effort to find the ministry God has in store for us.

Church members are to support the church not only with their spiritual gifts, time and talents, but also with financial support as well in tithes and offerings. This is a principle that goes back to the beginning. Just as the Sabbath was instituted before the law was given, so was the tithing principle. Abraham gave tithes long before Israel reached Mount Sinai.

Genesis 14:18 - 20 *"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all."*

The word tithe means tenth. The tithe of our total income God instructs to be set apart (the meaning of the word Holy) as His. This is the portion that we are to return to God.

Leviticus 27:30 *"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S. It is holy to the LORD."*

Verse 32 *"And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD."*

Note in Malachi that God refers to tithes and offerings –

Malachi 3:8 - 10 *"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' **In tithes and offerings.** You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it."*

There is the tithe which we "return" because it belongs to God, and then in addition, there is the opportunity to "give" offerings which are to be given from a heart of love as we desire and are able.

Deuteronomy 16:17 *"Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you."*

Jesus confirmed the giving of the tithe in the New Testament.

Matthew 23:23 *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done (tithing), without leaving the others undone."*

The tithe is to be used to support the ministry of the church. This principle was established in the Old Testament. The tribe of Levi were the ministers of the tabernacle and were to be supported by the tithe -

Numbers 18:21 *"Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting."*

This principle is also found in the New Testament.

I Corinthians 9:13,14 *"Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel."*

The Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver. We should give cheerfully as Christians because the words of David are true – *"All things come of You, and of your own have we given You."* (I Chronicles 29:14) All things do come from God; we are only stewards of His property and goods.

Being part of the church and claiming to be Christians, that is, being Christ-like, the way we act, talk and dress is very important.

II Corinthians 5:18,20 *"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, **we are ambassadors for Christ**, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."*

As Christians, we are ambassadors, the representatives of Christ in this world. Next we will examine some of the guidance the Bible gives for the Christian living in our world today.

First, our speech should be honest and clear.

Matthew 5:33 - 37 *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair*

white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

We should be thoughtful about what we put into our minds.

Philippians 4:8 *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things."*

This applies to the music we listen to, the books we read, and the TV and movies we watch. These have great power of influence and the Christian should avoid music, novels, and shows with suggestive words, melodies, and pictures that bring thoughts of sex, drinking, drugs, and violence.

Movies and TV have a greater impact on the mind and life of an individual than does any other single activity in America. A clear biblical principal relating to this is found in Psalms -

Psalms 101:1 - 4 *"I will sing of mercy and justice; To You, O LORD, I will sing praises. I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness."*

David says that he will do what is right even when he is at home and no one would know any different. He says he will set no wicked thing before his eyes because he knows that will eventually affect his mind and influence his character.

He says he will not "know" wickedness, or a wicked person. The word "know" in the Hebrew is "to esteem" or "idolize" a wicked person as some idolize some movie stars and sports heroes today. Sincere Christians will not "idolize" any man but *"the man Jesus Christ"*!

The committed Christian who wants to protect his mind will turn away from unwholesome, violent, sensual movies or TV programs, computer games, and novels.

These things are harmful in three ways:

1. They consume our time.
2. They influence us to do wrong.
3. The mind and health are wearied by over-stimulation.

A good rule to follow as a Christian is to ask yourself - If Jesus were with me would He approve?

Next, as Christians, the way we dress will reflect on Christ's good name; therefore we will dress moderately and modestly.

Christians do not do this as a legalistic requirement, but realizing we are His representatives in this world. The Bible gives us guidance on dress.

I Peter 3:3,4 *"Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel--rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."*

I Timothy 2:9,10 *"In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works."*

Christians, men or women, are not to mar the beauty of their characters with styles that arouse the "*lust of the flesh*" (dress provocatively) or the "*pride of life*" (with expensive worldly fashions). Christians will influence unbelievers, not by looking and acting like the world, but by revealing a refreshing difference!

Worldly fashions and jewelry have no purpose except that of prideful adornment. Much money is spent on fashion and luxury items that would be much better spent on spreading the gospel and helping the poor. Mother Teresa once said speaking of the poor and starving children in India –

“They don’t starve because God does not care for them. They starve because you and I don’t give, because you and I don’t care!”

If we are spending our money on fashionable and expensive clothes, houses, furniture, cars and other material goods, neglecting the church and the poor, what does that say about where our heart is? Jesus said –

Matthew 6:19 – 21 *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

It could be said the following way as well – *“Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also.”*

The Church is organized to accomplish God’s plan to fill this planet with the knowledge of His glory, grace and love. The visible church has the great responsibility to provide the number of functions vital to meeting this end. But to accomplish this, the church needs all its members actively involved. If you haven’t already, will you make that commitment today?

Response Questions:

1. Do you see the importance of church organization today?
Yes ___ No ___

