



## The Teachings of Jesus Lesson 8 3<sup>rd</sup> Q 2014

### Lesson 8: The Church

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS:

**Come and Reason FREE APP** is now available for ios and android. The app allows access to our materials on your smart phones and tablets. Please download the app! **Be sure and type in Come and Reason Ministries** and search in your app store as another unofficial app with our logo is out there.

**Oct 2-4:** Dr. Jennings will be at the American Association of Christian Counselors National Convention in Branson, MO. He and Dr. Curt Thomson, will be conducting a workshop entitled, **Neurobiology and the Treatment of Mood and Anxiety Disorders**. Dr. Jennings will also be a plenary speaker and Come and Reason Ministries will have a booth to give away our materials.

**Oct 10,11:** Dr. Jennings will be speaking at Vallejo SDA church in Glendale, CA.

**Oct 24/25:** Dr. Jennings will be at Loma Linda University presenting a Spiritual Emphasis Weekend for the psychiatry residents and students. The Friday evening meeting will be open to the public

**Nov 16:** Dr. Jennings will be speaking at the First Baptist Church in Frisco Texas. Speaking for the three church services Sunday morning and then a seminar Sunday afternoon.

**AMAZON Smile:** Amazon now has a program that a percent of all your purchases will be donated to support a charity. Come and Reason Ministries is a registered Charity. So, you can select us, and whenever you shop in their **smile.amazon.com** site a portion of your purchase will benefit this ministry.

**NOTE: WARNING:** There is another ministry with a similar name called “Come Reason Ministries” and they are located in California. Please be sure and select **Come AND Reason Ministries Located in Collegedale TN**.

#### ~~SABBATH~~

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What is the church? Who makes up the church?

My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? 1Cor 1:12, 13

What is Paul saying? If he was speaking today what might he say, “One of you says ‘I follow Calvin,’ another ‘Wesley,’ another ‘Ellen White,’ still another ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided...?”

What is the church? Is it a denomination? Do we show we are growing up into maturity by divisions? Listen to Paul in Chapter 3 of 1Cor:

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. <sup>3</sup> You



are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men?

<sup>5</sup> What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. <sup>6</sup> I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. <sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. <sup>8</sup> The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. 1Cor 3:1-9

Heb 5-6 says those who are on milk “are not acquainted with righteousness” – in other words they are not righteous. Those described as being on milk are still worldly – and what is his description of this? Divisions within the church arguing over who follows who, would this include denominational divisions?

My paraphrase of 1Cor 3:1-9:

1 Corinthians 3:1 My dear brothers, I was not able to address you as grown-ups who have been enlightened by the truth about God’s character of love, whose minds have actually been regenerated to be like Christ’s. No, I had to speak to you as those still infected with the principles of the world, the survival of the fittest methods, people who are just starting God’s treatment plan, newborn babes in Christ. 2 Therefore, I gave you baby food, the a,b,c’s of God’s treatment plan. And instead of growing up beyond the basics many of you have preferred the elementary teachings and are still not ready to grow up in Christ Jesus. 3 In fact, the infection of selfishness, which the world loves, still dominates your lives. Is this not demonstrated by your persistent jealousy, arguing, bickering and infighting? Are you not acting just like the rest of the world looking out for yourselves and promoting your own agenda rather than surrendering all you have for the cause of Christ? 4 You even promote the spirit of division and competition, just like the world, and turn the mind away from Christ when you say, “I’m a follower of Paul,” and another says, “Yeah, but I follow Apollos.”

1 CO 3:5 What, after all, is Paul? Or what is Apollos? We are merely aides of God, conduits of his who have brought you the same healing Remedy – each doing the part in the healing process the Lord has assigned. 6 I planted the truth about God and Apollos watered this truth with the wisdom God has given him, but it is God who causes the truth to grow and bring forth fruit of a Christlike character. It is God who heals; it is God who restores. 7 So neither he who plants the truth about God nor he who waters this truth is of any significance – the only important thing is God, who is the only source of life, the only source of healing. 8 So you see, the man who plants the truth and the man who waters it have the very same purpose – to see God’s image fully restored in man, and such labor brings its own reward. 9 For we are co-workers with God; and you are the field in which we labor. You are God’s building upon which we work.



Any thoughts on how we should view denominations?

John Wesley's Dream:

John Wesley had a dream which affected his life's work tremendously. He dreamed that he died and came to the gate of heaven. He was anxious to know who had been admitted, so he questioned the keeper:

"Are there any Presbyterians here?"  
"None", replied the keeper of the gate.

Wesley was surprised. "Have you any Anglicans?" he asked.  
"No one!" was the reply

"Surely, there must be many Baptists in Heaven?"  
"No, none", replied the keeper.

Wesley grew pale. He was afraid to ask his next question:  
"How many Methodists are there in heaven?"  
"Not one," answered the keeper quickly.

Wesley's heart was filled with wonder. The angel at the gate then told Wesley that there were no earthly distinctions in heaven. "All of us here in heaven are one in Christ. We are just an assembly who love the Lord".

Wesley was then taken downward, downward to the entrance of Hell. He met the keeper of the gate there.

"Have you any Presbyterians here?" asked Wesley.  
"Oh, yes, many," answered the keeper.

Wesley stood still, "Have you any Anglicans?" he asked.  
"Yes, yes, many", answered the keeper.

"Are there Baptists in there"? Wesley continued to ask.  
"Of course, many," replied the keeper.

"Wesley was afraid to ask the next question. "Are there any Methodists in Hell?"  
The keeper of the gate grinned. "Oh Yes, there are many Methodists here."

Wesley could hardly speak. "Tell me, have you any there who love the Lord?"  
"No, no, not one, not one" he answered. "No one in Hell loves the Lord"!



What about SDAs, will there be SDAs in heaven? What about in hell?

What do you take as the truth of this dream? It affected Wesley profoundly and his theology was shaped by it.

John Wesley's words:

"What then is the mark? Who is a Methodist, according to your own account?" I answer: A Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him;" one who "loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!"

**If any man say, "Why, these are only the common fundamental principles of Christianity!" thou hast said; so I mean; this is the very truth; I know they are no other; and I would to God both thou and all men knew, that I, and all who follow my judgment, do vehemently refuse to be distinguished from other men, by any but the common principles of Christianity, -- the plain, old Christianity that I teach, renouncing and detesting all other marks of distinction.** And whosoever is what I preach, (let him be called what he will, for names change not the nature of things,) he is a Christian, not in name only, but in heart and in life. He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written word. He thinks, speaks, and lives, according to the method laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ. His soul is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and in all true holiness. And having the mind that was in Christ, he so walks as Christ also walked.

Did Wesley leave out anything essential from this statement?

How many groups does the Bible describe when Christ returns? Two:

- Sheep and goats
- Virtuous woman and harlot
- Fruitful vine and withered vine
- Wheat and tares
- Saved and lost

Do we equate our denomination with the God's church on earth? Is it?

This is what EGW said:



There is a strife between the forces of good and evil, between the loyal and the disloyal angels. Christ and Satan are not at an agreement, and they never will be. **In every age the true church of God has engaged in decided warfare against satanic agencies.** Until the controversy is ended, the struggle will go on between wicked angels and wicked people on the one side, and holy angels and true believers on the other. {Christ Triumphant 28.2}

Satan is trying to lead men and women away from right principles. The enemy of all good, he desires to see human beings so trained that they will exert their influence on the side of error, instead of using their talents to bless their fellow men. **And multitudes who profess to belong to God's true church are falling under his deceptions.** They are being led to turn away from their allegiance to the King of heaven. {Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students 494.1}

What might it look like to be led away from God's true principles? What is a principle? A design protocol – and how do people get led away from principles? By replacing them with imposed rules, arbitrary commands – this is how Rome infected the church with the idea that God's law is a list of imposed rules.

**The life of Christ was a life charged with a divine message of the love of God,** and he longed intensely to **impart this love** to others in rich measure. **Compassion beamed from his countenance,** and his conduct was characterized by grace, humility, truth, and love. **Every member of his church militant must manifest the same qualities,** if he would join the **church triumphant.** The **love of Christ is so broad, so full of glory,** that in comparison to it, everything that men esteem as great, dwindles into insignificance. When we obtain a view of it, we exclaim, O the depth of the riches of the love that God bestowed upon men in the gift of his only begotten Son! {Christian Education 76.3}

What is the church militant? It is a church at war – whereas the church triumphant is the church when the war is ended.

So, what kind of war is this and with what weapons do we fight?

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. <sup>4</sup> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2Cor 10:3-5

What kind of war is this? Where is it fought? What weapons do we use?

From the quote above “Compassion beamed from his countenance, and his conduct was characterized by grace, humility, truth, and love. **Every member of his church militant must manifest the same qualities,** if he would join the **church triumphant.**”



Why are these the weapons we use? Because they are the methods of God's kingdom, the opposite of the world, weapons designed to restore God's image in humanity:

- truth destroys lies and wins to trust
- compassion disarms guardedness
- grace overcomes prejudice
- humility defeats pride and arrogance
- love destroys selfishness and transforms the soul

How do we obtain and utilize these weapons?

We must choose them, we must develop an attitude of heart that loves and longs for the truth – and therefor spends time studying, searching, meditating, contemplating, considering, examining, praying, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. As we do so, studying and meditating on God's character and methods we are awed and want to be more like him and consciously and unconsciously begin incorporating His methods into our own lives.

But if we hold false view of God, then we study the Bible and come away with false conclusions and become more like the false god we worship.

When we consider the church do we find only those who are part of God's true church as members in the church? This is what our church founders thought of that idea:

Has God no living church? He has a church, but it is the church militant, not the church triumphant. [meaning what? the church is at war, and the war is for the hearts and minds of people, a war over two methods, principles of living, a war over love versus selfishness] We are sorry that there are defective members. . . .While the Lord brings into the church those who are truly converted, Satan at the same time brings persons who are not converted into its fellowship. While Christ is sowing the good seed, Satan is sowing the tares. There are two opposing influences continually exerted on the members of the church. One influence is working for the purification of the church, and the other for the corrupting of the people of God. . . . {FLB 305.2} [do you believe this? there are influences WITHIN the church that are working for the corruption of God's people? What would those influences look like? Would it not be those influences which are antagonistic to the truth about God? Those influences which represent God as severe, arbitrary, imposing laws, punishing, the source of inflicted torment and death?]

Although there are evils existing in the church, and will be until the end of the world, the church in these last days is to be the light of the world that is polluted and demoralized by sin...{FLB 305.3}

Then I found this perspective very interesting:



The church militant is not in this world the church triumphant. From generation to generation, the enemy has been marshaling his forces against God. **His enmity against the law of God has increased as time has passed.** And his followers are at enmity with any one who has moral courage to depart from evil, and bear witness to the truth. **They pay no respect to the divine law, but they are strict in enforcing human laws.** [How do you hear that statement? Do you hear it as, “They pay no respect to the design protocols of love upon which God constructed life to operate, but they strictly enforce imposed rules...”? And could those human rules be constituted around the commandments?] They are not in harmony with God. They are not attracted by his righteousness. In their human judgment they will condemn men who conscientiously keep the commandments of God. But God's children will not be frightened from their purpose by the proud, presumptuous opposition of evildoers. By faith they see a crown of life awaiting those who are victorious, and they press forward toward the mark for the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus. {RH, July 26, 1898 par. 8}

Does conscientious commandment keeping mean conformity to a checklist of rules? Or is it about a heart loyal to God?

Does conscientious commandment keeping mean we are being led by a clear conscious to live in harmony with God's design for life, which is to love God and others more than self?

Would this mean we would be willing to heal a person on Sabbath? Or would we instead, refuse to heal a person, in order to keep the Sabbath rule?

Is keeping God's law about focusing on self and what we must do or not do, or is it about focusing on God, understanding His kingdom, seeking to magnify His methods, revealing His character in how we conduct ourselves and thus how we treat others? Thus on Sabbath we are eager to do anything which would be a blessing to God and our fellow humanity? Or do we refrain if it violates a rule of the institution?

Why did Christ heal the paralytic on Sabbath – the man had been paralyzed for decades – could Christ not have waited a day, or gotten there a day earlier? Why did Christ instruct the man to pick up his mat and carry it on Sabbath? Could He not have healed the man without instructing him to carry his mat? Why did He do it?

Because Christ was demonstrating the difference between God's law, God's principles, God's design for life and Satan's infection of imposed rules.

Which law is predominant in what you have seen in Christianity today?

Jesus had come to "magnify the law, and make it honorable." He was not to lessen its dignity, but to exalt it. The scripture says, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth." Isaiah 42:21, 4. He had come to **free the Sabbath from those burdensome requirements that had made it a curse instead of a blessing.** {DA 206.1}



**For this reason He had chosen the Sabbath upon which to perform the act of healing at Bethesda. He could have healed the sick man as well on any other day of the week; or He might simply have cured him, without bidding him bear away his bed.** But this would not have given Him the opportunity He desired. A wise purpose underlay every act of Christ's life on earth. Everything He did was important in itself and in its teaching. Among the afflicted ones at the pool He selected the worst case upon whom to exercise His healing power, and bade the man carry his bed through the city in order to publish the great work that had been wrought upon him. **This would raise the question of what it was lawful to do on the Sabbath, and would open the way for Him to denounce the restrictions of the Jews in regard to the Lord's day, and to declare their traditions void.** {DA 206.2}

**Jesus stated to them that the work of relieving the afflicted was in harmony with the Sabbath law.** It was in harmony with the work of God's angels, who are ever descending and ascending between heaven and earth to minister to suffering humanity. Jesus declared, "**My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.**" All days are God's, in which to carry out His plans for the human race. **If the Jews' interpretation of the law was correct, then Jehovah was at fault, whose work has quickened and upheld every living thing since first He laid the foundations of the earth;** then He who pronounced His work good, and instituted the Sabbath to commemorate its completion, must put a period to His labor, and stop the never-ending routine of the universe. {DA 206.3}

Should God forbid the sun to perform its office upon the Sabbath, cut off its genial rays from warming the earth and nourishing vegetation? Must the system of worlds stand still through that holy day? Should He command the brooks to stay from watering the fields and forests, and bid the waves of the sea still their ceaseless ebbing and flowing? Must the wheat and corn stop growing, and the ripening cluster defer its purple bloom? Must the trees and flowers put forth no bud nor blossom on the Sabbath? {DA 206.4}

In such a case, men would miss the fruits of the earth, and the blessings that make life desirable. Nature must continue her unvarying course. **God could not for a moment stay His hand, or man would faint and die. And man also has a work to perform on this day. The necessities of life must be attended to, the sick must be cared for, the wants of the needy must be supplied. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God's holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent.** God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour's pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day. {DA 207.1}

Read Memory text: “ ‘ I do not pray for those alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.’ ” John 17:20,21 NKJV



thoughts? What is Jesus describing? This is at-one-ment. This is the true Biblical meaning of atonement. This is restoring God's creation back into harmony, unity, oneness of heart and mind and motive and principle with God.

Biblical atonement is about regeneration, not about legal adjustment.

**The atonement of Christ** is not a mere skillful way to have our sins pardoned; **it is a divine remedy for the cure of transgression and the restoration of spiritual health.** It is the heaven-ordained means by which the righteousness of Christ may be not only upon us, but in our hearts and characters.--Letter 406, 1906. {7BC 464.2}

The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us. **Christ was the medium through which He could pour out His infinite love upon a fallen world.** "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." God suffered with His Son, in the agony of Gethsemane, the death of Calvary; the heart of Infinite Love paid the price of our redemption--The Home Missionary, April, 1893. {7ABC 472.5}

What does it mean "Infinite Love paid the price of our redemption"? What is the price? What was necessary for our salvation – which is the perfect life and death of Jesus – why is this the price?

Well it depends on your developmental level as to which answer you give. If one is still an infant, as we talked about in the beginning of the lesson, a person on milk, not acquainted with righteousness then the answer one gives as to the price is different.

1. **Reward and punishment** – most basic level of understanding whether something is right is if we receive reward and wrong if we are punished. This is a slave mentality. Nazi soldiers who put people in the gas chamber, why did they do it?
  - a. Why did Christ have to die? Because God said don't do something, they did, God got offended and responded with angry vengeance taking the life of Jesus. Jesus had to pay the price of our punishment to God.
2. **Marketplace exchange** – quid pro quo, you do something for me in exchange for something of equal value in return.
  - a. Why did Christ have to die? Because Satan now had rights to this earth; to the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, and Christ had to pay the death penalty to Satan. Or Aslan had to give his life to the white witch to free the son of Adam.
3. **Social conformity** – at this stage right and wrong is determined by community consensus. This is the child who says, "Everyone else is doing it." Right is deemed right by the approval of peers.
  - a. Why did Christ have to die? To win the approval of His Father for the human race.



4. **Law and order** – right and wrong at this stage is determined by a codified system of rules, external judges and imposed punishments. Respect for properly elected or otherwise constituted authority.
  - a. Why did Christ have to die? To pay the legal penalty the law demanded and the heavenly judge imposed.
5. **Love for others** – right is seeking the best interest of others, realizing people have value in who they are irrespective of the rules. Right is determined, not by a checklist of rules, but by doing what actually is helpful for another.
  - a. Why did Jesus have to die? Because He loved us too much to let us go and His death was the means to reach us with His love.
6. **Principle based living** – realizing the design protocols, principles upon which life is designed to operate and living in harmony with them.
  - a. Why did Christ have to die? It was the only means to fix what sin had done to God’s creation – “he who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God.” 2Cor 5:21 As the early church fathers taught, Justin Martyr, Ireneus, Jesus died to destroy sin, death, the devil and take man broken off in Adam and restore humanity back to God’s original design. Why? Because only in harmony with how God constructed life to operate is life possible.
7. **Enlightened Friend of God** – Realizing the truth about God, His character, nature, God’s design for life, the origin of evil, the nature of sin, the weapons of Satan, the original purpose for the creation of humanity, the fall, God’s working through human history, the purpose of the Cross, and the ultimate cleansing of the universe from sin.
  - a. Atonement becomes at-one-ment with God, being restored to God’s full ideal, having the law written on the heart, and operating with the mind of Christ. Doing right because it is right and right doing is pleasing to God.
  - b. Why did Christ have to die? It was the only means whereby God could expose the lies of Satan, reveal the truth about Himself, destroy the infection of selfishness, restore the human species back to His original design, destroy death, and ultimately destroy Satan and sin.

During moral development a person is only capable of comprehending one level beyond their current level of operation. The majority of people operate at level four or below and level four people persecute those operating at level six. Worse, they don’t comprehend level six and claim what they teach doesn’t make any sense. This was what hap

How do we experience the unity Christ prayed for?

Turn to **MONDAY** and read fourth paragraph, “This kind of unity...” This is well said – we can only have unity, as we have God’s character reproduced within us.



As I tell patients in relationships, that healthy relationships require healthy people – consider Christ and Judas – how healthy was that relationship? Did Christ need to be kinder, more patient, more understanding, more gentle? No, Christ was perfect, but the relationship was still unhealthy.

We cannot have healthy relationships with unhealthy people – likewise people cannot have healthy relationships with us if we are unhealthy.

Thus, the number one action a person can take to have healthy relationships is to focus on becoming, through God's grace, the healthiest person they can be.

So, as we think about unity in the church, our responsibility is to grow ever more Christlike in our character, that is our responsibility. It is not our responsibility to ensure others grow like Christ.

And we can only have God's character reproduced in us as we come back to the truth about God's character. If we hold to lies about God, the lies obstruct the healing of our minds and characters.

## TUESDAY

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Read second paragraph, "If we have Jesus..." Is the lesson suggesting unity requires we have the same doctrinal beliefs? Like a creed?

I suggest that creeds, fundamental beliefs, cause division, not unity. It provides fodder for argument, disagreement, and taking our focus off of Jesus.

For instance – how many groups fight over:

- the right way to baptize
- the right foods to eat
- the right way to hold communion
- the right form of music
- the right understanding of the Trinity
- the right day to worship upon etc.

But in doing so have either taken their focus off of God and His character and methods, or both groups hold to the same false view of God and His methods.

In the professedly Christian world many turn away from the plain teachings of the Bible and build up a creed from human speculations and pleasing fables, and they point to their tower as a way to climb up to heaven. {CTr 70.4}

The question is, "What is truth?" It is not how many years have I believed that makes it the truth. **You must bring your creed to the Bible and let the light of the Bible define your creed and show where it comes short and where the difficulty is.** The Bible is to be your



standard, the living oracles of Jehovah are to be your guide. You are to dig for the truth as for hidden treasures. You are to find where the treasure is, and then you are to plow every inch of that field to get the jewels. You are to work the mines of truth for new gems, for new diamonds, and you will find them. {FW 77.1}

**Do not carry your creed to the Bible, and read the Scriptures in the light of that creed.** If you find that your opinions are opposed to a plain "Thus saith the Lord," or to any command or prohibition He has given, give heed to the Word of God rather than to the sayings of men. Let every controversy or dispute be settled by "It is written." ... {OHC 207.3}

When God's Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. **The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union;** all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible. Instead of wrangling with one another, let men exalt the Lord. Let us meet all opposition as did our Master, saying, "It is written." Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline.-- The Review and Herald, Dec. 15, 1885. {1SM 416.2}

We have made a creed in our church, but we call it a set of Fundamental Beliefs, so people will not realize we have a creed. The definition of a creed, is a set of fundamental beliefs.

And we do injury to people with this, cause division, make it a test of fellowship and burden people making obstructions in salvation. We are divided as a body of believers over doctrines such as, state of the dead, which day to worship upon, how to baptize, how to perform communion etc. When we should be putting the truth about God at the center.

When we evangelize we do not baptize people when they surrender their heart to Christ – instead we require them to first, give up their Sabbath job, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, porn, or whatever other identifiable sin we can perceive, and then study and then affirm the 28 beliefs before we baptize. Thus we:

- Require them to overcome sin before baptism into Jesus Christ – can we overcome sin in our won strength?
- Merge baptism into Christ with membership into an institutional/denominational church, not the church universal. Thus, if a person becomes hurt by something in the institution and leaves the institution, often they feel as if they have left God. This is not so.

Doctrines are only truly important as they inform us about God and reconnect us to Him. When we separate them from God and make them stand alone tenants, with proof texts, and tests of fellowship we place barriers between people and God and obstruct the healing and transformation God would have us experience.



## WEDNESDAY

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The lesson points out that gossip is a great barrier to unity.

Why do people gossip? Primarily it is driven by fear and insecurity and not love.

Fear is part of the infection of sin – people gossip because they feel insecure and want to be valued, be important, be special, be recognized as worthwhile, so they bring tales to ingratiate themselves with others.

Such action is not motivated by love – gossip injures – it injures:

- the one gossiped about by hurting their reputation, undermining trust, closing doors and opportunities
- the one gossiping by damaging their character, searing their conscience and destroying love
- the one who hears the gossip because they are now faced with temptation; they must wrestle with the tale, do they allow the gossip to alter their attitudes, thinking, beliefs, associations, do they spread the tale
- the group, who will often be divided into factions and subgroups

What is the best way to handle gossip?

- reflect back at the gossiper –
  - Why did you tell me this?
  - What is your motive?
  - Have you gone to the person to discuss your concerns with them?
  - Do you love the person you are talking about?
  - How is this protective of them?
  - Do you realize you are telling me I can't trust you, that you will share private information in ways that can hurt and destroy?

What do you think would happen if you responded to someone gossiping like this? Do you think they would come back and share more very eagerly?

Maybe that is why we often don't respond this way because some part of us likes hearing the latest tidbits?

## THURSDAY

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Read first paragraph, "There were..." Were the animal sacrifices necessary, in reality, to experience reconciliation with God, or only necessary within the drama to act out reconciliation with God?



What is the limitation on making things right with others before being reconciled to God? It is one of heart, not action.

If, in your heart, you retain bitterness, hatred, resentment a desire for vengeance toward others, then your heart has a barrier to God operating within it. However, if, in your heart, you have a desire for the good of the other, for their healing, their restoration to righteousness, then you have no barrier with God.

Whether to actually interact with another person however, is determined by wisdom and circumstance. If your action would actually cause harm, or introduce temptation, or incite hostility then one refrains.

When did Christ seek those who were His enemies to initiate a conversation to bring them to reconciliation with Him?

If you committed adultery 20 years ago with your best friend's wife, but you both realized your sin and repented 20 years ago before God, but never told your spouses. Should you go today and tell your spouse or your best friend?

Why or why not?

## **FRIDAY**

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read and discuss questions