

A Twenty-Four Week Course
based on
BASIC CHRISTIANITY

by John R. W. Stott

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BASIC CHRISTIANITY

By John R. W. Stott

A Note to Parents

In the preface to his book, John Stott establishes the need to reaffirm the basics of Christianity. That need is born of the fact that many people raised in the church, abandon the church when they reach their teen years – they are “hostile to the church, [but] friendly to Jesus Christ.” And so, even if they manage to retain their youthful faith in Christ, and not all do, they become antagonistic towards the institution of the church, or at least they become disillusioned with it. That means the church is failing in its primary responsibility to live its own “life” in accordance with Jesus’ teachings, even though many Christians who comprise the church may individually exhibit the love of Christ in a winsome way.

For those who abandon their faith as well as abandoning the church, it seems clear that they are unwilling to examine the claims of Jesus Christ, or the reality of his life, or the veracity of his teachings, independent of their church experience. They have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. The failure of the church to exhibit the life of Christ within its own community of believers is causing many to leave that community, and some of those to leave the faith. So what is to be done? Church reform is obviously in order. But that will take time. What are we to do about those who are *becoming* disillusioned and hostile towards the church? How do we prevent the next generation from joining those who have left? Stott is convinced that we need to instruct every believer in two inter-related basics of the faith:

1. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. The condition, redemption, and calling of sinners.

But instructing our youth in the *facts* of these things, or even in the *doctrines* concerning them, is not enough. It must be lived out. It must be *practiced*. We were not entrusted with the Gospel to get subscribers to the teachings of Jesus Christ, nor to increase the membership of our local churches. The Gospel contains the revelation of God’s nature, his plan of salvation, and his provision for godly living. Basic Christianity is Gospel basics: Who is Jesus Christ? What did he accomplish on the cross? *How must that affect my life?* The answers to these three questions encompass the entire depth and breadth of God’s Grace towards his people. If we instruct our youth in the fundamentals of *living* the faith, rather than engaging them in the activities of our church alone, then we might see the preservation of both – and the continuance of the next generation in the community of God’s people.

In this course, we intend to convey an accurate understanding of these fundamentals, especially living them out in community. By doing so, we hope to give students confidence in their own faith, competence in sharing it, and the desire to participate in the calling of God’s people – with grace, love, and truth.

Our Mission

*Our mission is to bring glory to God
through the transforming of lives
by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Introduction: The Gospel

Look at our mission statement above. *Our mission is to bring glory to God, through the transforming of lives, by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* Let's put it another way: *if the Gospel doesn't affect the way we live, then we cannot be transformed in a way that brings glory to God.* So what? The "so what" is that the purpose of our life is to glorify God. We glorify God by acknowledging his greatness in everything we do. The greatness of God is shown in his plan to save his people through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; we call that plan "the Gospel." So we glorify God by properly responding to his plan of salvation, and by proclaiming it in word *and deed*. Because the Gospel is so important, we need to know what the Gospel is. If we know what it is, and why it's important, we're more likely to respond to it properly. Give it a try.

What do you think "The Gospel" is? (If you don't know, leave it blank – we'll discuss it later)

We were born to glorify God. So was Jesus. "Glorify" means to give weight to someone (*e.g. to what they say to us*); it also means to praise, honor, or adorn (*to assign power and authority*) to someone (*like our parents*). What follows are some examples from the Bible of how his people have glorified him. Try to explain what you think God expects *from you* in each example; some are not very obvious:

Psalm 86:9 All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. _____

John 14:13 Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 16:14 [The Helper] will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you.

Rev 15:3-4 ³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." _____

Rom 15:5-6 ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. _____

1 Cor 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. _____

1 Pet 2:12 ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. _____

Here's a long one, but it's very specific in the things which God expects of his people, and it contrasts how the people of God behave, compared to those who don't belong to him:

Ps 50:14-23 ¹⁴ Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, ¹⁵ and **call upon me** in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, **and you shall glorify me.** ¹⁶ But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? ¹⁷ For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. ¹⁸ If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers. ¹⁹ "You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. ²⁰ You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. ²¹ These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you. ²² "Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver! ²³ **The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me;** to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!"

From the above passage, contrast five things that identify the righteous and the wicked, and how God says he will respond to each:

<i>The Righteous</i>	<i>The Wicked</i>	<i>God's Response</i>

Jesus glorified His Father in four ways that reflect his perfectly righteous nature:

First, by perfectly obeying the laws of God (*the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial laws of Israel*), so that everything which God required of men was fulfilled by Christ; **Hebrews 4:15** "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin." Why did Jesus have to be "perfect"? _____

Secondly, he died on the cross to pay for our sins (*our failure to obey perfectly*) so that we were completely redeemed from the penalty of death; **Gal 3:13** “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written: Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” In other words, Christ died in our place. **1Jn 4:10** “Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” “Propitiate” means to turn away anger. How did Jesus turn away God’s wrath from us?

Thirdly, by revealing God to us in human form so that we could tangibly “see” the power, wisdom, and love of God; **John 14:9** ‘Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”’ ^{NIV} **Jn 17:6** “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.” **Col 1:19** “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” Who is Jesus claiming to be?

Fourthly, by fulfilling the will of God in everything he did, so that his Father was always exalted. **John 8:28** “I do nothing on My own. But just as the Father taught Me, I say these things.” **John 10:37** “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me;” **John 17:4** “I have glorified You on the earth by completing the work You gave Me to do.” Did Jesus do the Father’s will easily? (Lk 22:42)

Now, what is the Gospel? _____

No human can do these things perfectly, and no one has to, because Christ’s work is finished. And yet, if we are to be Christ’s disciples, we must follow in his footsteps to glorify God (“If anyone would come after me, let him take up his cross daily, and follow me” Mt. 16:24). What work has God given us to do as a Church? (see Mt 28:18-20) This is a tough question but, how can **you** glorify God by the words you speak or the things you do? How can you “take up your cross” and “follow” him *this week*?

Next week, be prepared to share how well, or not so well, you did these things. Don’t worry about it either way. This course is designed to help you do them better over time.

Chapter 1 – The Right Approach

“We must commit ourselves, heart and mind, soul and will, home and life, personally and unreservedly, to Jesus Christ. We must humble ourselves before him. We must trust in him as our Savior, and submit to him as our Lord; and then go on to take our place as loyal members of the church, and responsible citizens in the community.”

John Stott

“**In the beginning: God.**” (Gen. 1.1)

This is the key to understanding the Bible as a whole. Before we try to find God ourselves, God has already sought out his people. He is not distant, uninterested, or indifferent to us. Before it ever occurs to us to seek him out, he has already reached out to us.

In each verse below, **describe God’s interest in you:**

Ps 139:13 For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.

Jer 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Rom 5:8 But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Ezek 34:11-12 “Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd looks for his sheep on the day he is among his scattered flock, so I will look for My flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a cloudy and dark day.”

John 10:14-15 ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Eph 1:4 He chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

When did God’s interest in you begin? _____

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I appointed you that you should go out and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you.

Why do you think God is interested in you? _____

God took the initiative in Creation

Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created... **Acts 17:28** for “In him we live and move and have our being.” **Col 1:17** And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Why do you think God created the universe? _____

God took the initiative in revealing himself to us.

Exodus 6:7 I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Why do you think God revealed himself to us? _____

God took the initiative in our Salvation

Ezekiel 11:19-20 ¹⁹ And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

Why do you think God *had* to save us? _____

Romans 9:23 And *what if* He did this to make known the riches of His glory on objects of mercy that He prepared beforehand for glory?

Who are these objects of mercy that God prepared for glory? _____

God has created; God has spoken; and God has acted – in Jesus Christ.

“Christianity is not just pious words. It is neither a collection of religious ideas nor a catalogue of rules. It is a ‘gospel’ (i.e. good news) – in Paul’s words ‘the gospel of God... concerning his Son... Jesus Christ our Lord’. (Rom 1:1-4) It is not primarily an invitation to man to do anything: it is supremely a declaration of what God has done in Christ for human beings like ourselves.”

John Stott

God Has Spoken - The Necessity of God’s Word

God speaks or reveals himself in two ways: through *general revelation*, which is the evidence that He is the Creator; and through *special revelation* (or *specific revelation*), which is the Bible. We are explorers by our nature. We’re always asking, “Why?” And so God has given us a universe to explore so that we may come to know the wonder and majesty of his own nature.

Psalms 19:1-6 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

Romans 1:19-20 ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Name three things you can learn about God from examining his creation:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

But nature, and creation, and the laws which govern them, do not reveal the Gospel, or even the need for the Gospel. They tell us that there is a Creator, but they don't reveal what he is like, or that he loves us, or that he has expectations of us. For that, we needed the Law, and the example of a people who have been called by God, and who live according to his laws. And so God called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he spoke to them. And he spoke to the generations of their children through the prophets, and he called these people his possession. **Psalm 135:4** "For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel as His treasured possession." And he revealed himself to his people, and what he said was recorded in the Scriptures, the Word of God.

2Pet 1:20-21 "No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

Even so, false prophets arose, and men ignored the Scriptures, and they lived in ways that were displeasing to God – because God was still somehow distant, and unseen, and unknowable. He spoke through prophets, and not directly to all men. And so God came to live among his people, so that they might see him, and hear him, and respond to him directly, and enjoy fellowship with God.

Ezekiel 37:26 - 38:1 ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. ²⁷ My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Jeremiah 31:33-34 ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Session 2 – God has Spoken

God Has Spoken - The Necessity of Christ

How did God come to his people? How did he live among them?

John 1:1-5; 10-14; In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ ¶ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:17-18 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

The name “Jesus” means “he will save his people.” His name is also Immanuel, which means “God with us.” (Mat 1:21-23). Those who knew and heard Jesus directly, who touched God-in-the-flesh, recorded their experiences, and his words, and his deeds, so that we have them recorded for us in the Bible.

1Jo 1:1-3 This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched (concerning the word of life – ² and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us). ³ What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ).

Why is the Bible precious to every Christian? _____

It isn't enough to have the Bible, however. All men have access to the Bible, but not all men respond to it with understanding or faith. They lack something in themselves. God reveals himself to his people, and to no others. His word is a living thing, and it is understood by living people – people who are made alive by the Spirit, who have been regenerated by God so that they may see, hear, and respond to his Word.

Jn 3:3 “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see [*perceive or grasp*] the kingdom of God.”

God's Spirit first touches man, and only then may man respond to God. Remember, God is the initiator of our salvation. He begins it; He empowers it; and He sustains it. And yet, we must respond.

God Has Spoken - The Necessity of Man's Response

It isn't enough just to know *about* Jesus Christ. *God has acted*; and we can *know* that he has acted by hearing it from God's Word and the proclamation of the Gospel. But *then* we must respond appropriately to what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Otherwise, we cannot receive the benefits of what

Christ did for us on the cross. So, how do we respond appropriately? Mankind is curious about the creation, and we are always asking, “Why?” But mankind is also lazy, and indifferent to things outside of themselves. We tend to be selfish, and self-centered. We don’t like to be told what to do, or how to do it. And yet God has provided a way to be saved from death, destruction, and eternal hell. So if we don’t do it God’s way, there is no other way to be saved.

Acts 4:12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”

Therefore we cannot respond in a way that’s pleasing to us. We have to respond in the way that pleases God, the way that He has provided; and we must respond with the heart and attitude that God wants. Yet, it must be something that we want as well. We must *want* to be saved. We must *want* to be with God forever. We must *want* to please God. We must *want* to do what is right in his sight. We must *love* Him.

Psalms 14:2-3 ² The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

If we *want* to be with God, then we must *seek* Him out. We must draw near to God; and if we do, then God will draw near to us (Jam 4:8). God takes the first step towards us by making provision for our salvation through Jesus Christ, and by regenerating our souls – by making us alive; by making us born from above. But we must also step towards God, now that God has enabled us to do that.

How can you seek God? _____

What does God want from you? _____

How does God love you? _____

How do you love God? _____

These are the things we’ll explore over the next few months. When you seek God, you need to seek him by putting away **apathy**, **pride**, **prejudice**, **sin**, and your **fear** of what others might think. Give the opposite word for each of these five words, and provide a short definition of each opposite word:

1. apathy (Heb 11:6):
2. pride (Ps. 119:130; Mt 11:25):
3. prejudice (Jer 22:21; 29:13):
4. sin (Jn 8:31-32):
5. fear (Gal 1:10):

Part One – Christ's Person

Chapter 2 - The Claims of Christ

Christianity is Christ. It is built on the person and work of Christ. Without Christ, Christianity is gutted. There's nothing left. If he is not who he claimed to be (the Son of God), and he did not do what he came to do (to reveal God and redeem his people), then there is nothing to place our faith in. And yet, if we can show that Christ is a uniquely divine person, then almost every objection to the Christian faith can be put to rest. Everything he did and taught would be true and carry with it the authority of God himself. To put this in context, let's say the President of the United States sent you to speak on his behalf before the United Nations. How would you show he sent you? We'll see how Jesus showed the Father sent him.

The primary source of our knowledge about Christ is found in the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are historical documents filled with eye-witness accounts of Jesus: his teachings, his actions, and most importantly, his death and resurrection. Their contents appear to be true, as recorded by honest Christian men. We can make that assumption, because honesty is part of every Christian's beliefs, and it's something these writers were willing to affirm by their own martyrdom.

We aim to gather enough evidence to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Son of God. We believe that he possesses an eternal and essential relation to God that is possessed by no other person. It is unique. He is not just God in human disguise, nor a man with divine qualities. He is the God-man, possessing two distinct and perfect natures. He is both God and man, without reducing the one or exceeding the other. As such, he is worthy of our admiration and worship, just as God is worthy of these things, for He *is* God; and yet he *is* man. The evidence for this initially consists in Jesus' claims about himself. He asserted that he was the Promised Messiah, and the eternal Son of God. These claims come in four groups:

1. ***His self-centered teaching*** – he constantly talks about himself as having a unique relation to God.
2. ***His direct claims to be the Messiah*** – he repeatedly identifies himself as the Promised One of Old.
3. ***His indirect claims of God's authority*** – he claimed to forgive sins, bestow life, and judge the world.
4. ***His dramatic claims*** – his parables and miracles testified of his unique power and authority.

Let's look at these one at a time, using just a few excerpts from the Gospels for each:

HIS SELF-CENTERED TEACHING

Jesus seems to be self-centered in many things that he says about himself. And so he appears egotistical, or mistaken, or else he is telling the truth. Would anyone else make the following claims about himself and not be considered a liar, or insane?

John 5:46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.

John 6:35 "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

John 8:12 “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 11:25 “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

John 14:6 “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 10:30 “The Father and I are one.”

Jesus says clearly that God is his Father, that they are one, and that he is the *unique way* to God. We'll get to the proofs he offers shortly, but how would you prove you belong to your family? What sorts of things *uniquely* identify you as theirs? _____

The unique question Jesus asks each one of us is this: Who do you say I am?

Mat 16:15-17 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

What does this verse say about how we come to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

Jesus described *his unique ministry* like this:

Luke 4:18-19 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

How do you think Jesus intended to fulfill this ministry? What role do you think you play in it?

Mat 4:19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Jesus described *his unique work* like this:

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 6:29 Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

John 12:32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

He didn't say they would be drawn to God, or to the Church, or to religion, but to himself. Such audacity! *Unless it is true.* How do these verses say you should respond to Jesus' claims about himself?

Jesus claimed that a *unique love* is due him:

Mat 10:37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Think of who you love in this world more than anyone else. Can you love Christ more than that person? (*That's all he means by “hate” others*) How would you show it? _____

HIS DIRECT CLAIMS TO BE THE MESSIAH

John 4:25-26 The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (*he who is called Christ*). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

The Messiah was the one the Bible says would be sent by God to redeem his people. He was the unique prophet whom Moses spoke of in Deut. 18:15 that would arise from among his people. He is the *Suffering Servant* spoken of in Isaiah 53. And so his relation to God is unique, and so is his mission.

Jn 5:37-40 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen,³⁸ and you don't have his word abiding in you, for you don't believe the one he has sent.³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and they that bear witness about me,⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

Jn 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And **I** will raise him up on the last day.

Jn 12:49-50 For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak.⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

Mat 11:27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

It is a *unique relation*. **Only** the Son knows the Father. **Only** the Son reveals the Father. **Only** the Son has the Father's authority. **Only** the Son gives life. And so Jesus makes this unique claim:

Jn 14:8-10 Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father...” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father...**”

Just as the Father sent Jesus, Jesus sends us into the world to proclaim the Gospel (*the Great Commission* Mat. 28:18-20). Does someone who sees you, see the One who sent you? How might that come to be?

1Jn 2: 6 “By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked”.

In the months to come, we'll discuss this issue of establishing our identity and authority as his disciples.

Session 2 - His Indirect Claims

Jesus exercised functions which properly belong to God alone: to forgive sins, bestow life, teach the truth, and judge the world. Let's go through a few verses for each to show that Jesus not only believed he had been given the authority to do these things, but the results demonstrated the reality of his authority:

Forgiveness of Sins

Read **Mark 2:1-12** – forgiving and healing the paralytic lowered through the roof.

Look at v. 5: *Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."*

What is the requirement for forgiveness here? _____

Now look at v. 10: *the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*. Turn to **John 20:21-23**. This takes place after Jesus' resurrection:

"Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

What has Jesus just given to his disciples? _____

Read **Luke 7:36-50** – forgiving the woman sinner after she anoints him with oil and worships him.

Look at v. 47: *"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."*

In the Lord's Prayer, we beg, "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." **Mat 6:12**

What are the requirements for forgiveness here? _____

How are these requirements the same or different than those in Mark 2:5? _____

Hint: how are faith, love, and forgiveness related to each other, and to Christ's identity?

Bestowing Life

John 5:21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

John 11:25 "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."

John 10:27-28 "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."

John 17:2 "You have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him."

According to these verses, to whom does Jesus give life? _____

Teaching the Truth

Jer 31:34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.

Luke 4:31-32 They were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.

Mat 7:28-29 The crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

John 6:45 "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me."

John 7:16-17 "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. ¹⁷ If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

What difference does it make whether Jesus spoke on his own, or under God's authority? Isn't **what** was said more important than **who** said it? _____

Jesus never hesitated or apologized. He never contradicted himself, never retracted anything he said, and never modified anything he said. Every other prophet said, "Thus says God," but Jesus never did. He spoke God's words directly, as if they were his own.

Mat 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said... But I say to you..."

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...

John 15:10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Mat 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

What is the connection between Jesus' words, and God's love? _____

What is the connection between Jesus' words, and God's wrath? _____

Judging the World

Christ said we will be judged by his words on Judgment Day:

John 12:47-48 If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

John 5:22 The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

John 5:27-29 And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Mat 25:31-33 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats... ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Luke 12:8-9 “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, ⁹ but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

Mat 7:22-23 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Who Judges the world? _____

Who bestows life? _____

What is death? _____

So what does it mean to be sent away from Christ at the Judgment? _____

What makes us righteous so that we are not sent away from Christ? _____

If we are judged by Christ's words, and the Bible contains those words, then how important is the Bible?

Session 3 - His Dramatic Claims

Jesus spoke through stories and miracles. Both revealed something about his identity and his authority. And both were more than what they seemed. Take the parable of the wicked servants:

Mat 21:33- “There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. ³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ ³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹ They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

In any parable, some things are the same, and some are different from reality. It isn't the same as a metaphor where everything stands for something, and yet some things do. Try to answer these:

Who is the “master of the house”? _____ Where is the vineyard? _____

What do you think the “fruit” stands for? _____ (*What does God expect of us?*)

Who are the “servants” that are killed? _____ (*Who served God in the OT?*)

Who is the son? _____ Who is coming to judge the servants? _____

Who are the “other tenants”? _____ For whom do Christians wait? _____

THE MEANING OF HIS MIRACLES

Jesus' miracles were signs as well as wonders. They stood for something else, and dramatized his words. Fill in the meaning of the miracles listed on the left, using the verses listed on the right.

Miracle	Meaning
Turning water into wine at the wedding feast – Jn 2:9	2Cor 3:6; Jn 4:26
Feeding the five thousand – Mt 14:21	Jn 6:35
Opening the eyes of the blind man – Jn 9:25	Jn 3:3; 8:12
Healing the deaf man – Mk 7:32	Ps 135:17; Mt 13:15; Jn 5:24
Raising Lazarus from the Dead – Jn 11:43-44	Jn 6:39; 11:25

Chapter 3 – The Character of Christ

Many people claim to be great, powerful, and famous, but few have the character to support their claims about themselves. Not so with Christ:

- *There was no discrepancy between his words and his deeds* – he did what he said he would do
- *His claims were exclusive* – they could only be made by God
- *His character was unique* – he has no equal in history; he is God only wise in human form

Christ stands apart in a category all his own. He is not the greatest man who ever lived, because he cannot and ought not to be compared with other men. He is not better than other men, or even the best of all men; rather, the only One to compare him with is God and the absolute goodness of God – for they are One (John 10:30).

“The importance of this claim should be clear. Sin is a congenital disease among men. We are born with its infection in our nature. It is a universal complaint. Therefore, if Jesus of Nazareth was without sin, he was not just man as we know men. If he was sinless, he was distinct from us. He was *supernatural*.”

Without Christ's virtue of absolute goodness, of sinlessness, he would not be qualified to be our Savior. Instead, like us, he too would need a Savior. His sinless perfection is a necessary attribute of Christ's character. It was demonstrated on the cross; it is exclusive to God; and it is unique among men.

What then is the evidence of Christ's sinless life, and his qualification to be our Savior?

1. What Christ thought of himself:

John 8:7-9 And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, *and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.*

Why didn't Jesus leave too?

John 8:45-46 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.⁴⁶ *Which one of you convicts me of sin?* If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?

Why didn't anyone accuse Jesus of lying, or of committing sin by saying the things he did?

What do Jesus' statements about himself indicate about his unique character? Who else could say them?

- I am the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11) who came to seek and to save what was lost (Lk 19:10)
- Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. (Mk 2:17) (i.e. *who else can heal the sickness of sin?*)
- I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (Jn 8:12)
- For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Mt 26:28)

Christ's Person – The Character of Christ

- I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (Jn 6:35)
- I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. (Jn 11:25)

We hear nothing of Jesus' sins. He never confessed any. He shows no consciousness of moral failure. He shows no sense of guilt or estrangement from God, until he is on the cross bearing *our* sins. John the Baptist indicated there was no need to "cleanse" Jesus with baptism (Mt 3:13-15). He seems to have lived in unbroken communion with his Father, which suggests that sin never separated him from his Father.

John 8:29 "And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I *always* do the things that are pleasing to him."

Can you say that? Try to convince yourself and then say out loud, "I have never sinned." What do you sense inside yourself? What does your conscience tell you?

"The Christian knows that the nearer he approaches God, the more he becomes aware of his own sin... So the more the Christian grows in Christlikeness, the more he perceives the vastness of the distance which still separates him from Christ."

How does that affect your relationship with God? _____

How does it affect your attitude towards Christ? _____

Why will there always be a gap between your goodness, and the goodness of Christ?

What have you learned about the character of Christ so far? _____

Why is that important? _____

Session 2 – What Others Said About Him

2. What Christ's Friends Said About Him

His disciples lived closely with Jesus for three years, eating and sleeping together, enduring the crowds together, sharing the work and the money purse, learning from him, observing him every hour of the day and night. Having been taught the Scriptures from their youth, they all knew the measure of a man, and how prone we are to sin – yet they never mention a single sin of Jesus, none. They don't try to prove he was without sin; they simply accept it as part of his character.

Peter says Jesus was “a lamb without blemish or spot.” (1Pet 1:19) “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.” (1Pet 2:22) John says anyone who claims to be without sin is a liar (1Jn 1:8); and yet he says of Jesus, “You know that He was revealed so that He might take away sins, and *there is no sin in Him.*” (1Jn 3:5^{CSB}) Paul writes, “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin,” (2Cor 5:21)^{ESV} and the writer of Hebrews says, “in every respect [he] has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb 4:15^{ESV})

What would your friends say about you? _____

What would you say about your friends? _____

Knowing how prone we are to gossip about others, *especially* our friends, how convincing is this testimony about Jesus from his friends? _____

What do you think their motive was? _____

3. What Jesus' Enemies Conceded About Him

Mark lists four accusations made against Jesus: (1) that by forgiving sins, he was committing blasphemy; (2) that he was a friend of sinners, tax collectors, and harlots instead of avoiding all contact with such people; (3) that he did not follow the strict rituals of fasting that the Pharisees established; and (4) that he broke the law by healing and thereby “working” on the Sabbath.

Even so, they had to hire false witnesses to testify of Christ's “crimes” at his trial (Mt 26:59-61). Pilate and Herod found no fault in him. (Mt 27:24; Lk 23:14) Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver saying “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” (Mt 27:4) The penitent thief on the cross rebuked the other thief by saying, “This man has done nothing wrong.” (Lk 23:41) The Centurion in charge of the crucifixion testified, “Certainly this man was innocent!” (Lk 23:47)

What would your enemies say about you? _____

What then do these comments say about Jesus? _____

4. What we can see about Jesus for ourselves

From what we read about Jesus in the four gospel accounts, Jesus was consistent: he had no moods and did not change; and yet everything seems to point to him as being a man rather than being super-human. He gets tired; he sleeps, eats, drinks, loves, and goes through other emotions like anger, joy, and sorrow. He was unselfish and humble, despite his self-centered teaching that we discussed before; his deeds were never self-centered. He is Lord of all, and yet he became servant of all – he “gave himself away” to sinners and harlots, lepers and lame. He healed all who came to him, and taught all who would listen.

Why do you think he would do that? _____

In return, he was misunderstood and misrepresented, despised and rejected by his own people, and deserted by his own friends. He was flogged, beaten, spit on, crowned with thorns, and nailed to a cross. And yet he prayed for his tormenters, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” He never retaliated; he never grew resentful or irritable. Stott says, “He had complete self-mastery.” Christ said, “I do not seek my own will” (Jn 5:30) and “I do not seek my own glory.” (Jn 8:50)

How do you think you would have responded? _____

Jesus had utter disregard of self in the service of God and man. This is how the Bible describes his love. There is no self-interest in love, but self-sacrifice. Normal men may occasionally reflect this quality, but it pervaded every moment of Christ's life from birth to death to resurrection. “Jesus was sinless because he was selfless. Such selflessness is love. And God is love.”

So do you think Jesus was just an exceptional man, or was he unique? _____
Why? _____

Chapter 4 – The Resurrection of Christ

We've been looking at the claims made about Christ. This time we want to look at the physical evidence for Christ's uniqueness: his resurrection from the dead. *How important is it? Must* we believe that the resurrection actually took place in order to be a Christian? The short answer is, "Yes." But the reasons for that answer will take a little longer. Paul gave a core statement of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 and he made Christ's resurrection part of it. He went on to explain *why* he believed in the resurrection:

"For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." 1Cor 15:16-17

We'll get to why that's true, but for now we want to talk about why it demonstrates Christ's *uniqueness*. Christ's birth was natural, but his conception was *supernatural*. In the same way, Christ's death on the cross was natural – he physically died, just as you and I will die one day. But his resurrection from the dead was *supernatural*. Others had been raised from the dead, but they died again (Lazarus, for example). Christ, however, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, *still* alive, and *eternally* alive – that's how he could promise to go prepare a place for us there, and to come again to take us to himself (Jn 14:2-3). Without the resurrection, this promise is void, as Paul suggests.

OK. Maybe we can see the necessity of the resurrection, but how do we know it actually happened? We begin with the conviction that the Bible is true, and that it is actual eye-witness testimony. What is that testimony? The Bible clearly shows that Jesus predicted his death and resurrection (e.g. John 2:19-22), and the disciples testified to it (John 20:26-29). Their testimony is that the grave was empty (Mat 28:6; John 20:2), and that Christ was physically seen by them time and again *after* his crucifixion (John 21). How else do we account for the missing body of Jesus? The tomb was *empty*.

Christ's Body is gone –

Well, maybe it wasn't there to begin with. Maybe he wasn't dead. Maybe... Let's test some challenges to the claim that Christ rose from the dead. Are they plausible explanations?

1. *The women who testified went to the wrong grave.* It wasn't dark; it was after sunrise (Mk 16:2); they had seen for themselves where Joseph and Nicodemus had laid the body and watched the whole thing (Jn 19:39-40; Mk 15:47). They came prepared to complete the anointing of the body, and so they *expected* to find it there (Lk 24:1; Mk 16:1). They didn't (Lk 24:2-3). Their discovery of the empty tomb was confirmed by Peter and John, who had their own doubts (Jn 20:4).

2. *Jesus wasn't really dead; he only passed out.* So when he came to his senses in the tomb, he left. We call this the "swoon theory." The testimony concerning the crucifixion clearly shows he was dead. Pilate was surprised he was dead (Mk 15:44). The centurion confirmed it (Mk 15:45). The soldiers didn't break his legs because he was dead (Jn 19:33). The spear stabbed into his rib released water and blood from the sac around the heart (Jn 19:34). This can only happen if the body is dead. Joseph and Nicodemus believed his was dead because they had to ask for the body from the Romans, and they *buried* him! (Mk 15:43)

And if that wasn't enough, can a man who has endured the horrific torture that Jesus did (Mt 27:26-31), roll the stone away by himself? This is a massive round stone that was rolled down an incline to seal the tomb. It takes several men to move it using poles for leverage; and was he able to do this while a number of Roman soldiers sat there watching the tomb? He wasn't mostly dead; he was *dead*.

3. *Thieves stole the body.* Sure they did; with a bunch of battle-hardened Roman soldiers sitting there watching it? Not likely. But if that isn't reason enough, why in the world did they leave the grave clothes sitting there? Why not take the body *with* the clothes? (Jn 20:7) Thieves would be in a hurry. That makes no sense at all. It's not as though the guards had left the tomb unattended and came back to find it empty. They reported the earthquake and the moved stone and the empty tomb immediately (Mt 27:65-28:4,11).

4. *The disciples removed the body.* This was the very accusation that the Jews made to Pilate when they asked for the Roman guard in the first place. They had all taken steps to ensure it would NOT happen. The tomb carried a Roman seal on it (Mt 27:66), meaning anyone who broke that seal would die. The soldiers themselves could have been executed for letting the body disappear. Why would they report the body stolen under their noses, and why would the Jews bribe them to say that the disciples had taken it if in fact it was the disciples who took it (Mt 28:11-15)? All they had to do was tell the truth...

5. *The Romans or the Jews took the body.* The Romans didn't want riots, and the Jews didn't want any conversions to this new Christian sect – both of those would result from the news that quickly spread about Jesus' resurrection. The Jews threatened to punish the apostles just for saying it (Ac 4:17-21). Why would they help the apostles by taking the body themselves, and making it look like he was resurrected??

The grave clothes were undisturbed –

The clothes were not removed and neatly folded as some translations suggest (Jn 20:6-7). The linen was still “wrapped”, rather than “folded.” In other words, they had not been *touched*! They were still wrapped as they had been originally: they had been wound around our Savior's body. That's what the Bible says (Mt 27:59; Lk 23:53). The head covering, which was like a hood, was not folded and placed on top of folded linens, but was lying there separately. The eyewitness testimony indicates the grave-clothes remained as they had been, but collapsed, as if his body evaporated out of them, or passed through them, leaving them behind like the cocoon of a butterfly that has flown away. *They were the visible evidence that testified of the supernatural and unique event of Christ's resurrection.*

What other objections might you have to the resurrection? _____

How would you answer them? _____

Session 2 – Other Evidence of the Resurrection

Last time we looked at the empty tomb. We refuted some common objections to the resurrection using the evidence we found in the Bible. This week we'll look at other evidence for the resurrection besides the missing body.

The Lord was Seen

There are ten separate appearances of the risen Lord to those Peter calls "chosen witnesses" (Ac 10:41). These appearances may be found in thirteen instances from Scripture, some of which overlap. These took place over a period of forty days (Ac 1:3).

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) To Mary Magdalene {Mr 16:9} | 8) At the Sea of Galilee {Joh 21:1} |
| 2) To the other women {Mt 28:9} | 9) To five hundred brethren {1Co 15:6} |
| 3) To two disciples {Lu 24:15} | 10) To eleven disciples in Galilee {Mt 28:17} |
| 4) To the eleven disciples {Lu 24:36} | 11) To James {1Co 15:7} |
| 5) To Peter {1Co 15:5} | 12) At the time of his ascension {Lu 24:50} |
| 6) To the ten, Thomas absent {Joh 20:19} | 13) To Paul at his conversion {Ac 9:5 1Co 15:8} |
| 7) To the eleven disciples {Joh 20:26} | |

If you died and went to heaven, and God gave you a chance to show yourself to someone here, who would you show yourself to? Why? _____

Why do you think Jesus showed himself to believers, and to Paul, and not to others like the Pharisees?

There are three typical reactions to testimonies like those we read in the verses listed above. They are seen as (1) inventions; (2) hallucinations; or (3) factual. We'll look at those reactions one at a time.

Inventions – This means they were made up by the early Christians to support their beliefs about Jesus. But unlike other inventions, these are not embellished, contrived, or exaggerated. They have a lot of detail that made-up stories seldom include, and they haven't been toyed with to make them flow smoothly. So they impress us as eye-witness testimony. The four gospel accounts are not completely consistent; that's what we expect from eye-witness testimony. We tend to see things from our own perspective, and so we expect variations in emphasis and content. That's what we find in the Gospels. But what clinches it is the willingness of the disciples to die for the truth of the account they give. It goes against our grain to die for a lie, or for a made-up story. The writers were absolutely convinced of the truth of it all, and they were ready to die for it. These were different men, from different backgrounds, with different perspectives; and yet each one suffered for the same Gospel message of a risen Christ.

If you were to ask three people to tell you about some event they all experienced, like a fire, would they all include the same the things, and describe them the same way? Why is that?

If you told a lie just to make yourself look good, but someone you loved was going to be punished for it, or perhaps badly hurt because of it, would you continue to lie? Why? _____

Hallucinations – This suggests that the witnesses suffered from mass hysteria, hypnosis, or some form of mental illness. It means they saw something that wasn't really there. This sort of misperception is usually found in people who are neurotic or psychotic. They live in an imaginary world that they think is real. Such distorted thinking has two primary things associated with it: *first*, it is preceded by a period of exaggerated wishful thinking; *second*, it takes place under circumstances that tend to favor it. In other words, there must be both a strong inward desire to see what isn't there, and also a favorable external setting that helps us see it. But the biblical evidence shows that neither condition is present. Jesus was seen by one person, or two, or a whole group. So there was no consistency, and no social pressure that might induce a false experience. If anything, you'd expect the circumstances to produce silence and doubt rather than saying something that might lead to the person's own death or punishment.

If someone claimed they had an engine that ran on water and got 100 miles per gallon, what would you think about that person's claim? Why? _____

What if you were trapped in cave and someone claimed they found a way out? What's the difference between that and the engine? _____

What if you're the person making the claim? Why do you want others to believe you in each instance?

The Disciples were changed

The disciples went from being confused, weak, and frightened – like Peter denying Christ three times (Mat 26:72), to being eloquent, powerful, and bold – like Peter testifying to the crowds and even to the Sanhedrin (Ac 2:36; 4:13). It began three days after Christ's crucifixion. *What changed them? Who told them to wait for the infilling of the Holy Spirit? (Ac 1:4-8) Do you believe that?*

Part Two – Man's Need

Chapter 5 – The Fact and Nature of Sin

We've looked at the evidence for the unique deity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God. But he also came into the world to be the Savior of sinners. Those two things cannot be separated. Being our Savior depends on the divinity of his person: he cannot save us if he is not uniquely divine, and we have no need to be saved if we are not helpless sinners. This session we're going to explore why that's true. The answer lies in the fact and nature of our sin as human beings.

Christians speak about sin a lot, not because we're morbid and self-hating, but because we're realists. The history of the world for the past hundred years has convinced even non-Christians that the problem of evil is found in the nature of man himself. This flaw in our nature had led us into two world wars and caused various genocides around the world, and extensive crime in every culture. Modern man assumed at first that people are basically good, and not basically evil, even though Christians disagreed. Our social scientists therefore concluded that if evil exists – as it clearly does – then it must have arisen among us after birth. Maybe it resulted from poverty or ignorance. And so they tried economic and social reforms; many nations began nation-wide education for their children. But the atrocities continued and worsened. In the end, thoughtful people began to accept the fact that the problem is inside us, and not outside us.

It's clear that governments write laws based on the assumption that people are selfish and untrustworthy. They recognize this selfish and destructive tendency inside us. They force their citizens to conform to the law because the law helps to protect people from themselves. But instead of calling this tendency in us "sin", they call it wrong-doing or law-breaking, which refers only to the symptoms of sin rather the flaw within us that causes it. Perhaps that's because "sin" refers to an offense against God, not against men.

Psalm 51:4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

Modern governments often refuse to acknowledge God except as a formality, and thus they refuse to acknowledge sin as the cause of our social problems. Yet the Bible is clear that sin is universal. There are many passages that describe it, but here are several key passages:

Psalm 53:2-3 God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³ They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Isaiah 53:6 ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way;

Isaiah 64:6 ⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

Name someone you personally know who *never* does anything wrong or selfish: _____

How long can you go without doing anything wrong or selfish? _____

Why is that? _____

WHAT IS "SIN"?

Sin can be either negative or positive. The Bible describes it a number of ways.

Negatively, sin is falling short of something – what we call a “short-coming.” It’s a lapse in judgment, a skip or blunder. It means failing to “hit the mark”, like an arrow that falls short of the target. It’s also described as a tendency in us towards badness. We are prone to do wrong, and to fall short of doing good. It’s what we naturally fall into when we are not careful to do what is right.

Positively, sin is a transgression – it’s breaking a rule. It means going past a boundary, or ignoring the law. It’s doing something that violates an accepted moral standard or our sense of fair play. If we know what we’re supposed to do, and we don’t do it, we sin (James 4:17).

What are some bad tendencies you have when you deal with other people? _____

What are some bad tendencies you have when you deal with yourself? _____

What are some boundaries you go past on a regular basis? _____

The problem for most people is that they don’t think that the things they do are really bad. They may be wrong, but they’re not bad – at least, they’re no worse than what other people do. It’s a relative standard. Our sense of failure, or of sin, depends first of all on how high our standards are, and second of all on how we think about God’s standards. God doesn’t think like we do, and He judges not just what we do or don’t do, but the thoughts and motives behind our actions and inactions. Next session we’ll look at God’s standard of behavior in the Ten Commandments. But for now,

How do you feel when you do what’s right, but you know you’re only doing it because you have to?

How do you think God feels about what you did? _____

Session 2 – The Ten Commandments

Last session we talked about the fact and nature of sin, and how God looks at our behavior. This time we want to examine God's standards, and whether anyone can live up to them. If we can't, and if sin leads to our eternal destruction, then we need to be saved by someone greater than ourselves. Let's look at each of the Ten Commandments, and consider how well we have obeyed each one. Restate each commandment as a positive statement. For example, "You shall not hate your brother: you shall love your brother."

Negative Commandment – You shall not	Positive Commandment – You shall
1. You shall have no other gods before me.	1.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol to worship or serve.	2.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	3.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	4.
5. Honor your father and your mother.	5.
6. You shall not murder.	6.
7. You shall not commit adultery.	7.
8. You shall not steal.	8.
9. You shall not give false testimony about your neighbor.	9.
10. You shall not covet... anything that is your neighbor's.	10.

Now let's see how these commandments show up in the way we live. Here is a sample list of violations of the Ten Commandments. Put the commandment number that applies to each one in the column "Cmd#". Some may apply to more than one. If you've ever violated it, then put a check in the box next to it :

Cmd#	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Violation
		Pleasing others by doing things to impress them that don't please God
		Pocketing a fifty-dollar bill lying on the street without telling anyone you found it
		Giving someone else more obedience, love, admiration, or respect than you give to God
		Having sexual activity outside of marriage
		Wanting money or possessions more than serving God
		Saying, "Oh God" to express our frustration, or to be funny, but not to speak to God.
		Failing to respect your parents when they discipline you
		Wanting to live in a really expensive house that your family can't afford
		Trying to sneak into the back door of a movie theater for free
		Going down to a store or restaurant on Sunday expecting others to be working

Man's Need – The Fact and Nature of Sin

	Doing or saying something without considering what God thinks about it
	Looking at or wanting to see pornography to excite yourself
	Thinking about doing something wrong, even if you don't act on it
	Joining in gossip about others to undermine their reputation
	Being more interested in hobbies and other activities than in God's will for you
	Worshipping God by singing the top ten songs on the radio and reciting secular poetry
	Attending church to meet your friends instead of meeting with God
	Exaggerating some aspect of a person's appearance ("She's so fat..."; "He's so ugly...")
	Not congratulating someone who won against you fairly in a game
	Reading the Bible but not really caring whether you should obey what it says
	Not getting home at the time you told your parents you would be
	Staying busy every day of the week without taking a break.
	Wishing you had the same _____ (cell phone, X-box, etc.) that ALL your friends have
	Not paying someone back the money they loaned you
	Lying about someone else to make yourself look better
	Going to church every week without really worshipping or meditating on what you heard
	Disrespecting a teacher, police officer, or other adult
	Asking God to give you things you want, but not considering what He wants from you
	Hoping you get a fancy car when get your driver's license so you can impress your friends
	Losing your temper
	Avoiding somebody you don't think is "worthy" of your attention or part of your crowd
	Saying that "Jesus is Lord", but being filled with doubts and worry
	Fantasizing about having sexual activity with someone else
	Envyng somebody's popularity or good looks or athletic ability
	Not forgiving somebody who made you mad, even if they were right
	Pocketing a quarter lying on the street without telling anyone you found it
	Passing on a rumor about someone without checking to see if it's true

God's laws are not "gotcha" laws; they're not intended to catch us doing evil at every turn so we'll feel guilty and inadequate. We're not supposed to beat ourselves up or give up trying, because we'll never be good enough. That would be silly. God's laws are meant for our good.

- (1) They teach us how to live together in peace, as family members, as citizens of our community, and as dearly loved children in God's household, the Church.
- (2) They make us appreciate God's grace in sending Christ to the cross to clear the penalty for our sins. If we didn't have the Law, we'd never know how much Jesus has done for us, or how much God loves us.

So when we think of the Law of God, and how *un-worthy* we are under the LAW, we become truly thankful for how *worthy* we are under CHRIST as our Head. The Law shows us our great need for God's forgiveness, and for Christ's sacrifice, so that we can stand before God confident of our salvation. We need to admit our sin, confess it to one another and to God, and be cleansed of it by the blood of Christ. Next time we'll look at the effects of sin on our relationship with God, on ourselves, and on others.

Chapter 6 – The Consequences of Sin

There are three unavoidable consequences of sin: (1) alienation from God; (2) bondage to self; (3) conflict with others. We're going to look at what each consequence means, and why it is unavoidable. This week we'll focus on alienation from God, but we'll begin with an overview.

ALIENATION FROM GOD - *Sin cuts us off from God.* For a non-believer, that means eternal life in heaven impossible; for a believer, it means fellowship with God is impossible until the sin is confessed and forgiveness is granted because of Christ (**1John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*). We might be tempted to ask, "What difference does sin make to my relationship with God? I may feel guilty, but I don't see how that affects the way God looks at me." Hold that thought.

BONDAGE TO SELF - *Sin enslaves us to our fleshly desires.* For a non-believer, that means there is no real choice not to sin, because everything a non-believer does is for himself rather than God – it's like being enslaved to your desires. For a believer, it's like going back to prison voluntarily after being released! The more a believer sins, the more he wants to sin, and the less he cares about heavenly things. When we sin, our eyes turn from the cross, and turn towards the self to satisfy its desires. Last session we saw how easily that can happen, and in how many different ways.

CONFLICT WITH OTHERS – *Sin hurts those around us.* Self-centeredness damages those around us. It hurts our relationship with them, and it often hurts them personally. Sin will always cause collateral damage to our family, friends, and community – and that has to be considered when the opportunity to sin presents itself. We'd like to think we're only hurting ourselves; but in truth, there is no such thing. We are social creatures, defined by and governed by our relationships with others.

Four of the Ten Commandments concern our relationship with God. Six are directed at our human relationships. So you can see how vital all of those relationships are. But here's the catch. If we violate ANY of the first four commandments, we cannot help violating one or more of the other six – because we have turned our eyes from God to Self. Whenever we do that, we hurt others. Even when our sin is hidden in our mind, like coveting what someone else has without doing anything about it, the attitude that flows from that hidden desire will affect how we interact with them. Jealousy, envy, and competition show up in our thoughts, and then in our words, and finally in our actions. Here's why:

James 1:14-15 "...each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire once it has conceived, gives birth to sin – and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death."

So sin begins innocently enough with a desire. But the desire will not be still. It demands to be satisfied. And so it lures and entices us: "Wouldn't you like that? Wouldn't you like *more* of that? You *deserve* to have it." And when we succumb to our own desire, we begin to plot how to go about getting what we want. That's why Paul warns us: "Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." (Rom 13:14) That's when we lock it in; it's not the desire itself, but planning how to fulfill it that sends us downhill. Our thoughts about it multiply, and become stronger and clearer. We have conceived a plan to snatch

what we want. Then we begin to execute our plan by taking some action, no matter how “innocent” it seems at first. That’s what happened in the Garden of Eden. Listen to the description of The Fall:

^{ESV} **Genesis 3:6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

It describes her desire to be as wise as God; and when she saw that the fruit was good-looking, and heard that it would get her what she wanted by eating it, she took the fruit and she ate it. It says that she was not content to sin by herself; so she gave some to her husband. Let’s look at that in detail: Eve wants to compete with God (she wants His wisdom); her desire compels her to act (she begins to talk about it, to gather information about it, to “have a look” at it, to substitute her own judgment for God’s, and then she eats it); after “killing” herself, she decides to drag her husband into it: (1) she’s alienated from God; (2) she’s in bondage to herself and to her desire; (3) and she’s producing conflict with Adam.

You may wonder where the conflict is. Listen how Adam reacts in verse 12 when God confronts him: “The woman *You* gave to be with me – she gave me *some fruit* from the tree, and I ate.” He blames God, and then he blames her! Eve is no better in verse 13: “It was the serpent. He deceived me, and I ate.” It’s always somebody else’s fault, isn’t it? No one will admit that their own desire is what caused it all. You can imagine the discussions between Adam and Eve after they were expelled from the Garden: “It was all YOUR fault! If you hadn’t given me the fruit... Well, if got off your fanny and stopped me, none of this would have happened.” If, if, if...” But admitting their own sinful desires, and confessing their own parts in it, and asking forgiveness, is probably NOT what they discussed... because typically, it’s not what WE discuss when we sin and cause grief to ourselves and others.

Pick a sin, any sin, that you may have committed during the past year. Describe in detail the process of committing that sin. How does it match what’s been described above?

What does God have to say about what you did? (Remember last week’s lesson?) Did you try to hide it? WHY? Didn’t God see it anyway? **Look at Isa 33:14, Habakkuk 1:13, and 1Jn 1:5.** How does your sin separate you from God? These passages describe God’s holiness. What impact does considering His holiness have on your sin? Why is that?

Session 2 – Worksheet on Knowing God

ESV Psalm 119:11 I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

SV John 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,

How often do you read the Bible? _____ Why? _____

Psalm 119:14-16 I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. ¹⁵ I will meditate on Your precepts And regard Your ways. ¹⁶ I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.

How often during the day do you think about what you've read from the Bible? _____

Colossians 1:3 ³ ¶ We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

How often do you pray? _____ Why? _____

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 ¹¹ To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What do you pray for? _____

Why? _____

NET Isaiah 58:13 You must observe the Sabbath rather than doing anything you please on my holy day. You must look forward to the Sabbath and treat the LORD's holy day with respect. You must treat it with respect by refraining from your normal activities, and by refraining from your selfish pursuits and from making business deals.

How do you worship God? _____

Hebrews 12:28-29 ²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

Why do you worship God? _____

Isaiah 58:6-7 "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

How do you thank God for what He has given you? _____

1 John 4:10 ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (an atoning sacrifice made in payment for the guilt of sin – it clears the debt of sin: death).

What demonstrates God's love for you? _____

Hebrews 11:6 ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

2 John 1:6 ⁶ And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments;

What demonstrates your love for God? _____

John 13:34-35 ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

^{ESV} **Ephesians 4:32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

How do you physically experience God's love? _____

^{ESV} **Isaiah 66:13** As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 31:13** I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

When you're at odds with your parents and friends, do you turn to God for comfort? _____

Jeremiah 31:3 I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Why would God care for you when others don't? _____

Jeremiah 16:17-18 ¹⁷ For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes. ¹⁸ But first I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and have filled my inheritance with their abominations.”

Hebrews 12:7 ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as children. For what child is there whom his father does not discipline?

Now, how does it affect you to know that God will not look upon your sin, even though He loves you?

Session 3 – The Effect of sin on You and Others

Last time we discussed how our sin separates us from God. This time we'll talk about how it affects us and those around us. Think of a serious sin that probably only you and God know about.

1. How many people were upset or hurt by that sin? _____

2. *What about you?* How did you feel about yourself? _____

Let's assume somebody finds out about it, and tells *everyone* you know. Answer the two questions again.

Are your answers the same? Why? _____

Will you ever commit a similar sin again? Why? _____

Let's talk about that. How hard is it NOT to sin? Or to ask it another way, How much do we need Christ?

^{ESV} **Mark 7:21** For from within, *out of the heart of man*, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things *come from within*, and they defile a person.”

This verse says that sin isn't just the outward, visible act of sin – it says that every sin, whether visible or invisible (like envy and pride), come from the same source: the heart. Sin comes from within us. John Stott says, “Sin is an inward corruption of human nature” and so, apart from Christ, “we are in bondage” to our sin – we need to be set free from that bondage. Jesus said, “Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin.” Paul says that we “were once slaves of sin.” What enslaves us is not just the need to satisfy our fleshly desires at the expense of our relationship with God and others, but the fear of being punished for it (Heb 2:15). We prove that we are disciples of Christ by our obedience (Jn 15:10), by loving one another as he loved us (Jn 13:35), and by being led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14). So if we belong to Christ, and we choose to be led by his Spirit, and to enjoy our freedom from bondage, what does that look like?

Galatians 5:22-25 the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ ¶ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Yet every believer, on any given day, sins. Believers sin against God, against other believers, and against non-believers. Every believer's conscience reveals these sins. The weight of our sin can be too heavy to carry. We need to be relieved of it. We need forgiveness. Just as important, others sin against us, and they too need to be relieved of the burden of their sin. They too need forgiveness. And we are the ones to give it to them, in the name of Jesus Christ (it's our duty to them). Consider this when you're not in a forgiving mood: When someone offends us, and we refuse to forgive them, God won't forgive us!

^{CSB} **Matthew 6:15** But if you don't forgive people, your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing.

God is very concerned with the harm we do to others, not only by sinning against them, but also by our unforgiving attitude. *Love for others demands that we forgive them.* Listen to God's commandment:

Mat 5:23-24 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

What do you think that means? _____

When you would rather live with your sin, than give it up, *your sin owns you.* When you would rather satisfy yourself, before considering the needs of others, *your sin owns you.* You can tell, because you will not admit to your sin, or confess it, or try to be forgiven of it, because you'd rather be right and stubborn, than loving and humble. *That's sinful in itself.* We forget that we lie to ourselves about our own sin:

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

How does that affect how you look at yourself? Are you suspicious about your own motives, and why you say or do the things you do? Is it possible that you're the center of your universe? Do you believe the whole world revolves around you and your desires? How would you know? Re-read the verse above.

How reliable is your judgment about your own sin? _____

How does that affect how you react to what others say about you? _____

One last point about sin, and the harm we do to ourselves and others: It often begins with what we say:

James 3:6-8 The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

When we hurt others, more often than not it's because of something we say, not something we do. *Love demands that we consider the impact of our words on others.* We are to love others more than ourselves (Phil 2:3). When we don't love others more, or even well, we choose to satisfy our flesh. That's when we say hurtful things, and do hurtful things. What comes out of our mouth reveals our true heart (Mt 15:18). If our heart is vile, our speech and our behavior will be vile, and hurtful, and we'll soon regret it. *How can you control your tongue so others aren't hurt, so you're not embarrassed, and so you don't sin?*

And what if you can't do that? *Next time...*

Part Three: Christ's Work

Chapter 7 – The Death of Christ

In the previous two sessions, we explored the consequences of our sin: its impact on our relationship with God, the ongoing bondage that enslaves us to our sin, and its effects on those around us. At this point, we should be convinced of our need of Jesus Christ. This overwhelming sense of need is what prepares us to understand and accept what he offers. *Faith is born of need*. “Only when we have realized and faced up to the seriousness of our illness will we admit our urgent need for a cure,” – John Stott.

During the next two sessions we'll look first at why Christ's death was necessary (**Heb 9:22** “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins”), and how his death saved us from the eternal penalty of our sin (**1Jn 4:10** “this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins”). “Propitiation” refers to a sacrifice that turns away God's wrath. God sent Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins without being asked to do it. *This is the main theme of the Bible*. We could not take the initiative, because we were dead in our trespasses and sins; and so we were unable to respond to God in a way that pleased Him. Our sin crippled us; it cracked the image of God in which we were made. We had to be born again: we needed to be remade in the image of God's Son, our Savior, by the work of the Holy Spirit. Only then could we be fully restored to God. This is what we mean by “salvation.” It has three main aspects.

- (1) We have been reconciled to God by Christ's atoning sacrifice: God's wrath is satisfied.
- (2) We have been given a new nature: we're free from our bondage to sin, and we inherit eternal life.
- (3) We have the opportunity to replace the discord in our relationships with the fellowship of love.

The first is made possible by Christ's perfect life and by his sacrificial death. The second is made possible by the gift of his Spirit who lives in us. The third is made possible by the building of Christ's Church.

RECONCILIATION

^{ESV} **Romans 5:10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 5:18-19** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Colossians 1:21-22 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...

What does “reconcile” mean? How exactly did Christ “atone” for our sins? Why did God accept it?

First of all, God began the process, and he defined its conditions. God provided in the OT for a sacrifice to be made to protect the people of God from his Judgment on Egypt during the Exodus. The angel of death passed over every house on which the blood of a sacrificial lamb was painted on the door jamb. You can read about it in **Exodus, 12th chapter**. This was a picture of the promised Messiah who would come to save his people. The laws of the OT, found in the Book of Leviticus, also provide for an atoning sacrifice to remove the uncleanness of sin; and so it “saves” the person for whom the sacrifice is made. The name “Jesus” means “he will save his people,” Mat 1:21 – but he is himself the sacrifice. Jesus was referred to as the *Lamb of God* by John the Baptist (Jn 1:29). He was sacrificed at the end of the Passover feast in Jerusalem on Friday, April 7th, 30 AD. His blood sacrifice, applied to us through faith, protects us from the Judgment which will surely come upon the whole world at the Last Day. God will pass over our sins, leaving them unpunished against us, because he punished Christ in our stead (Isa 53:5; 1Pet 2:24).

^{NIV} **Romans 3:25** God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Fill in the right side of the chart below using an opposite word for the one highlighted on the left. The first one is filled in for you as an example.

<i>What Sin Did</i>	<i>What the Cross Did</i>
Sin created a <i>debt</i> we cannot pay	The cross was a <i>gift</i> to us that cleared our debt
Sin <i>crippled</i> our relationships	
Sin made us <i>enemies</i> of God, at <i>war</i> with Him	
Sin <i>separated</i> us from God	
Sin <i>enslaved</i> us to our fleshly desires	

God sent his Son to the cross to pay for our sins, to appease His own wrath, and to satisfy His own justice. Sin has consequences, as we learned. They are costly. And those consequences must be paid for: the debt which we owed to God had to be cleared. But because the corruption of our sin disabled us, we had no means with which to clear our debt. Everything good we did was tainted by our sin. So God sent his son to clear the debt for us, and to stand in our place as our representative. He was perfectly obedient on our behalf, and he paid the penalty for our sin by dying in our place.

Give some examples of someone standing in for another: _____

The difference in most of these kinds of examples, is that there is seldom a personal penalty to be paid by the substitute, or a personal benefit to be gained by the one who is substituted for. You cannot voluntarily go to prison or to the gas chamber in place of another person. Nor can someone take a school test or a physical exam on your behalf. But that's very much what Christ did for us. What does the Bible teach about this kind of substitutionary blood sacrifice? If you have time, fill in the blanks below:

What was the first blood sacrifice? Gen 3:21 _____

Who established blood as a sign to preserve us? Ex 12:13 _____

What is the effect of blood as a sign? Ex 12:23 _____

Why is blood needed for a covenant? Gen 15:7-18; Ex 24:5-8 _____

Why was blood sprinkled on the priests? Ex 29:21 _____

Why may we not drink the blood of animals? Lev 3:17; 17:14 _____

Why must we "drink" Christ's blood? Jn 6:53 _____

How is blood described with regard to sin? Lev 5:9 _____

Who is our sin-offering (propitiation)? Heb 2:17; 1Jn 4:10 _____

Why did priests offer sacrifices for sin? 2Chr 29:19-31 _____

Why did God reject blood sacrifices in Isa 1:11,16? _____

How often did priests make sacrifices? 1Chr 23:31 _____

How often did the high priest make a sacrifice? Heb 9:7 _____

How often must Christ make a sacrifice? Heb 9:12; 1Pet 3:18 _____

What does Christ's sacrifice do to us? Heb 10:10; 1Jn 1:7 _____

How do we offer Christ's blood as our sacrifice? Rom 3:25 _____

What is the effect of Christ's blood? Col 1:20 _____

How was the New Covenant sealed? Lk 22:20; Heb 9:19-22 _____

Why was it necessary to seal it? Eph 1:13-14; Heb 9:15 _____

This was just a partial list of biblical passages dealing with the effects of a blood sacrifice, and why it is needed to seal a covenant promise. God's promise to Abraham was sealed with blood, and so the promise was fixed and trustworthy (Gen 15:7-18). God's promise of salvation was sealed with Christ's blood, and so that promise is fixed and trustworthy as well. His sacrifice was sufficient in itself to obtain the promised rewards. Jesus was not a victim. The cross was not a mistake. Everything in Scripture points to it as the necessary means of our salvation. John Stott says, "***There is no Christianity without the cross.***" But why? What does it mean? We'll talk more about the nature of the cross next time.

Session 2 – The Meaning of the Cross

Last time we looked at Christianity as a “bloody” religion. We saw how the Bible uses blood to seal the covenant promises of God, and as a means to atone for sin. We saw the correlation between the sacrifices of the OT, and the sacrifice of Christ in the NT. But why the *cross*? Why did his sacrifice have to be on a wooden cross? Why was he not stabbed, beheaded, or flogged to death? John Stott points out that “*Without the cross there is no Christianity.*” OK. But why??

We’ll look at 1st Peter this week to better understand the link between the cross, which the Romans invented during NT times, and the “tree” upon which men were hung in the OT. Each one is the sign and symbol of being cursed. It was not a mistake, and it was not coincidental. Jesus was not a victim, and not a mere example. After the resurrection, Jesus spoke to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:25-27 And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

And again at his Ascension he said to his disciples,

Luke 24:44-49 “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, *I am sending the promise of my Father upon you.*

His death on the cross, and his resurrection from the grave, were fulfillments of prophecy, and of the promises made by God to his people, who by faith are the spiritual offspring of Abraham (Rom 4:13). That’s the gospel that has been entrusted to us. God designed it from the beginning: **Gen 3:15** “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” He was speaking to Adam and Eve of Jesus Christ. And then he clothed Adam and Eve with bloody animal skins, sacrificed to clothe them with His grace as the sign and seal of the Messiah to come, who would triumph over the serpent and his seed – on the cross.

Substitutionary Atonement

If Jesus was merely an example, his sacrifice was no different than the sacrifice made by the Greek philosopher Socrates. He drank poison hemlock as his punishment for telling the truth. When Jesus spoke to his father in the garden of Gethsemane saying, “may this cup be taken from me,” (Lk 22:42) he was not speaking of poison, or merely of his death, but of God’s cup of wrath poured out on the nations for their sin (Isa 51:17; Jer 25:15; Rev 16:19). And he was going to drink it on behalf of his people, so that they

would not suffer the wrath of God. How do we know that? It's the picture of the scapegoat in the OT, that was sacrificed on the Jewish High Holy Day called *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement (Lev 16):

Leviticus 16:20-21 ²⁰ ¶ “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. ²¹ And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.

And that's why our sins, because of Christ, are “as far as the east is from the west,” and remembered no more; “so far does he remove our transgressions from us,” (Ps 103:12; Heb 8:12). This is why he is in anguish in the Garden. **2 Cor 5:21** “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Our sins were pronounced on Him by God, and he was sent away from the presence of his Father. It is said of God, ^{CSB} **Hab 1:13** “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil.” And so the Father turned away from his son, and sent him “into the wilderness” – at which point Christ cried out, **Mat 27:46** “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” The consequences of your sin were placed on him – he endured them, and absorbed them, and cleansed them, for *you* in particular. He didn't just make a general sacrifice for all men. He saw you and removed your sins from you, taking them upon himself; and then he offered himself up as a sacrifice to atone for them, so that you were released from the debt of your sin, set free from the bondage of your sin, and made into a co-heir of the kingdom, with Christ (Rom 8:17). Every sin you commit carries with it a death penalty. “For the wages of sin is death.” Rom 6:23. And every sin you commit was paid for by Christ, with his life.

He was hung on a tree because he was cursed for our sakes. **Deut 21:22-23** “If anyone is found guilty of an offense deserving the death penalty and is executed, and you hang his body on a tree, ²³ you are not to leave his corpse on the tree overnight but are to bury him that day; for anyone hung *on a tree* is under God's curse.” It was the eve of a Sabbath, and Jesus was not left hanging overnight (Jn 19:31). This ties the event of his crucifixion to this passage from Deuteronomy; there is no doubt that he was cursed by God, and made a sin offering for us, as we discovered last time. Here is a comparison chart showing the correlation between 1Peter, and Isaiah 53 – Peter is explaining how Jesus is the Christ, the fulfillment of God's promise to be our Redeemer (Isa 44:6; Rev 1:8), and live among his people (Lev 26:11; Eze 43:7).

How is Jesus like the “suffering servant”, and like the scapegoat? Here are some passages from 1st Peter 2 on the left side of the chart. Read Isaiah 53, and then fill in the matching verses on the right.

v. 22 He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips	
v. 23 He was reviled	
v. 24 He himself bore our sins	
v. 24 By his wounds you were healed	
v. 25 You were straying like sheep	

It seems clear that Peter saw the link between Jesus and the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. He directs his readers to Isaiah by intentionally using the same phrases in his letter. Why does he do that? Why does he emphasize that our sins are borne by the suffering servant, and not by sacrifices made in a temple?

*We cannot save ourselves from eternal death by making temporary sacrifices. We need an acceptable and permanent atoning sacrifice. The sacrifices described in the OT all pointed to Christ. They portrayed how he would completely and finally pay for our sin and restore us to God. Nothing we could offer would be sufficient for that. These sacrifices pointed to God's future provision in Christ. Sin-offerings helped Israel see that it is GOD who saves, by grace alone (Eph 2:8); it is his willingness to accept a substitute on our behalf that saves us, and not the sacrifices in themselves. That's why we *need* Christ to be our Savior. He died once for all, putting an end to all those temporary sacrifices which were offered up by human priests (1Pe 3:18; Heb 7:27). He is our great High Priest who has eternal access to the Father (Heb 9). We are not saved just because of what he did, but because of who he is. Our salvation is *contained* in Christ himself as the eternal Lamb of God. That's why we must be joined to him, by faith. **HE is our salvation.***

^{ESV} **Hebrews 10:1** For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

However, we don't want to stop here, simply concluding that Jesus is the Messiah. We need to understand what "Messiah" means. If Jesus is the sin-bearer, and it's clear that he is, what does that mean for us?

It means he redeemed us from our _____ to God.

He liberated us from our _____ to sin.

He took our place and received our _____ as his own.

He paid for our sins by his _____.

He removed God's _____ from us.

He purchased _____ for us.

He put us back into a right _____ with God, so we are God's dearly loved _____.

Without the cross, without being cursed on a tree for our sakes, without dying in our place, without being a "lamb without blemish" (meaning he lived a perfectly righteous life), *none* of that would be true; *none* of that would have happened. We would still be *dead* in our trespasses and sins (Eph 2:5). The Cross is the symbol, and the means, and the provision of God for our salvation. *The cross is central to our faith.* But we can't stop there either.

Jesus didn't just pay for our sins with his life so that we would not taste death (Jn 8:52). He *redeemed* us (Gal 4:5; Tit 2:14). He purchased us *for* God, to be his children and his servants forever. ***We weren't only saved from something; we were saved for something.***

Next time we'll explore Christ's resurrection: why it was as necessary to our salvation as his death; and we'll also look at what our salvation is *for*.

Chapter 8 – The Salvation of Christ

The title is the *Salvation of Christ*, because salvation *belongs* to him; it is found only *in* Christ; it comes only *by* Christ's sacrifice on your behalf; and it is received only *through* faith in Christ as your Savior. That's what unites you to Christ so that *his* salvation becomes *your* salvation. And that's the reason why Christianity is exclusive: salvation is found *in* Christ alone. "Faith" means you believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah – the promised Savior; that by God's grace Jesus died for you in particular to pay the penalty for your sin; because of him, you are no longer enslaved to your sinful desires (you now have a desire and a choice not to sin); that you have eternal life because death is caused by sin; that Jesus rose from the dead to present you to God, holy and pleasing in His sight; and that at the Judgment you will depend on Christ's righteousness alone to satisfy God's law. You know that without Jesus Christ, you cannot clear your debt of sin, and you cannot be righteous in God's sight: apart from Christ, you will die.

In this sense, *you are staking your life and your eternal soul on him*, and on him *alone*. "There is no other name (authority) under heaven given to men by which we may be saved" Ac 4:12. When you're baptized, you're swearing to this as God's truth, and you're vowing to put away your sinful habits; you have begun to live for God instead of living for yourself. The folks you swore that to, and in fact the entire Church worldwide, will hold you accountable to your vow. And so, if a brother or sister in Christ comes to you with correction, counsel, encouragement, or instruction, you should receive it graciously. That's because other believers also swore to God at your baptism to equip you, and to help you stand firm in your faith, and to love and serve you, just as they would love and serve Christ himself.

Salvation has two parts. The first part is called *justification*. It means that God *declares* you holy and righteous because of Christ. The second part is called *sanctification*. It means you actually *become* more holy and righteous, more like Christ, as you walk in faith – it's the proof of your faith. And so, one part without the other cannot save you on Judgment Day. Let's look at them a little closer.

Justification – This is a divine act where God declares the sinner to be forgiven and righteous. It is not that the sinner is now sinless, but he is "declared" sinless, and therefore acceptable to God. Justification is based on the shed blood of Jesus, "...having now been *justified* by His blood..." (Rom. 5:9). When God sees the Christian, He sees him through the sacrifice of Jesus, and sees him without sin. What price was paid for it? _____ (Heb. 9:22). Jesus' sacrifice was an act of _____, that resulted in _____ (Rom. 5:18). So our penalty, and God's justice, fell on Jesus Christ. We receive **mercy**: *we are not judged according to our sins*. We receive **grace**, not death. We are justified _____ (Rom. 3:24; Eph 2:8-9), by _____ (Rom. 3:28), because Jesus bore our _____ and _____ for us (Isaiah 53:12)

Sanctification – Being "sanctified" means we're set apart for a holy use. God set us apart for His holy purposes, not for _____ (1 Thess. 4:7). We are called to do _____ (Eph. 2:10). Christians are to sanctify _____ in their hearts (1 Pet. 3:15). Every created thing is sanctified through the word of God and prayer (1 Tim. 4:4). Sanctification *follows* justification. In justification our sins are

completely forgiven in Christ. Sanctification is the process by which the Holy Spirit makes us more like Christ in all that *we* do, think, and desire. True sanctification is impossible apart from the atoning work of Christ on the cross. That's because only after your sins are forgiven can you begin to lead a holy life.

Why is that? Because you are _____ and _____ by the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5). And you don't receive the Spirit unless you confess your faith in Christ. The Spirit's ministry is the calling and the sanctification of every believer: he convicts and indwells them (Jn 16:8). He makes believers born again (*i.e.* he "regenerates" them – he makes them alive when they are dead in sin). He's the One who _____ you to Christ (Jn 6:44). He convicts you of your sin, so you realize your need for Christ. He opens your heart and mind to the Gospel (Lk 24:45). He gives you faith (Eph 2:8). He _____ you (Eph 3:16), and _____ you to the image of Christ as you exercise your faith (Rom 8:29).

What is needed to be sanctified, so we can be used by God for His purposes? Here's the principle:

Mat 7:17-18 Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit.

According to this principle, How do you get a bad tree to bear good fruit? _____

Then how do you get a good tree to bear bad fruit? _____

Without Christ, we are the bad tree, producing bad fruit. Our sinful nature that we inherited from Adam produces sinful and ungodly fruit (*thoughts, words, and deeds*). So if we are to produce good fruit, *we need a new nature* – we need to be a *different kind* of tree. Where do we get a new nature? How do we become a different kind of tree? **2 Cor 5:17** "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

This tells us that **we get a new nature from Christ** when we profess our faith in him alone. We are given the Holy Spirit, who plants a new nature in us. Jesus said, "He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive Him because it doesn't see Him or know Him. But you do know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you." ^{CSB} **Jn 14:17** "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 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 that I have said to you." **Jn 14:25-26** [God] "has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee [*or pledge*]." ^{ESV} **2 Cor 1:22**

So at conversion, we receive the Holy Spirit who gives us a new nature. Our new nature takes root and begins to grow in us, producing *new* fruit, *good* fruit (*God-pleasing*). But the roots of our sin-filled days are still with us in the form of sinful habits. We need to "root out" those sinful habits with the help of the Holy Spirit, and replace them with new godly habits. We replace habit for habit, thought for thought, deed for deed, new for old, in everything we think, say, and do, all our life. We "sanctify" it all to God: we put it to use for His kingdom and for His glory – becoming increasingly cross-centered. As we do, we become more and more holy, more and more useful, and more and more cleansed of our old ways. But we do *not* become more acceptable to God, or more loved by God. When we come to Christ, we are at that very moment *completely* perfect in God's sight, *entirely* pleasing to Him, fully acceptable to Him, and *infinitely* loved by Him. **Christ did everything necessary to save us**, permanently and completely. We can't add anything to what he did on the cross by what we do or don't do; and we can't take anything away from it by anything we do or don't do. That way, Christ gets *all* the glory for our salvation.

Session 2 – We are “Being” Sanctified¹

Last time we learned that there are two parts to salvation: our justification (being *declared* righteous), and our sanctification (actually *becoming* righteousness). And then we saw how important it is that we put away things that God hates (our old sinful habits), and do things that are pleasing to God (new godly habits). But why? So that we may *serve* Him, and be *useful* to him, so that *God receives the glory*.

Let's discover from God's Word how to replace old habits with new ones and be *sanctified*. Only then will our new tree produce good fruit that will grow and ripen.

Gal 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Who can crucify the passions and desires of the flesh? _____

If you have not received Christ as your Savior, you cannot crucify the passions and desires of the flesh.

Based on what you learned last time, why is that? _____

2Cor 3:18 And we all, ... are being transformed into the same image [of Christ] from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Where does transformation come from? _____

If our holiness is the work of the Spirit, how do we contribute? Is it done to us, or do we do it ourselves?

Rom 8:13-14 ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Can the Spirit lead if you won't be led? Whose duty is it to put to death the deeds of the body? _____

How do you put to death the deeds of the body? _____

So it's your responsibility to put to death the deeds of the body, but you must do it by the Spirit.

How can you be led by his Spirit if you do not have the Spirit of Christ? Christ is not just our example. He in fact lives in believers by his Spirit. How do you know you have the Spirit of Christ? *See 1Jn 3:24.*

Rom 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh *set their minds* on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit *set their minds* on the things of the Spirit. (*See Eph 4:20-24 as well.*)

Based on this verse, how can you be led by the Spirit so that you are transformed?

Eph 1:22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things **to the church**,

¹ Heb 10:14 (ESV and NKJ); “being made holy” (NLT)

Eph 5:25-27 Christ loved **the church** and gave Himself for her, to make her holy, cleansing her in the washing of water by the word. He did this so that he might present **the church** to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

So what washes or sanctifies us? (see also Jn 17:17) _____

How do you think that happens in a practical way? What do you need to do so that it *does* happen?

Why do you think Paul refers to “the church” and not to “believers”? (Eph 5:30) _____

How do you think the Church is involved in your sanctification? _____

Although you have a duty to be sanctified, and put away sin, who will bring this about? (See 1Th 5:23-24)

Next time we'll see what sort of response we ought to make to thank Christ for what he's done for us, and to return to God the same sort of love that He showed us in sending His Son to the cross to save us.

Part Four - Man's Response

Chapter 9 – Counting the Cost

Before we talk about how we should respond to what God has done, it might be helpful to review what we've learned so far about *what* God has done, and *why* he needed to do it.

1. God took the initiative in our relationship: he's the one who reached out to us: he created us; he revealed himself to us; he acted in Jesus Christ to give us a new heart and a new spirit.
2. Christ made claims about himself: he claimed to have a unique relationship with God; he claimed to be the promised Messiah who would save his people; he claimed to forgive sins, to bestow life, to teach the truth, and to judge the world; and his miracles demonstrated his unique power and authority.
3. There was no discrepancy between his words and his deeds – Jesus did what he said he would do; the claims he made were *exclusive* – they could only be made by God (e.g. being sinless and equal with God); his character was *unique* – he has no equal in history as far as his claims go.
4. He rose from the dead – he didn't just faint on the cross; he actually died and returned from the grave; there is ample physical proof and many testimonies of it, including the changed lives of his apostles.
5. All of this was done because of our sin, and the death penalty that comes from sin. Jesus Christ came to free us from our bondage to sin and death, and to offer us liberty and eternal life. Our sin is a fact, and it results from our sinful nature. The Ten Commandments clearly show that no person is without sin – we each violate one or more of those Ten Commandments on a regular basis.
6. Sin has consequences: it separates us from God; it enslaves us to our fleshly desires; and it creates conflict with others, hurting them and hurting our relationship with them. Unless we acknowledge our sin, and how it enslaves us, we cannot know how desperately we need Christ to save us and free us from it.
7. The death of Jesus Christ was a necessary blood-sacrifice, so he could become our sin-bearer, and so that the life which is in his blood would become our life under God's Covenant of Grace. God is the one who established the conditions of this Covenant. He reconciles us to himself in peace and acceptance.
8. Because of what Christ did on the cross on our behalf, salvation belongs *to him*; it is found only *in him*. We must be joined to Christ by faith to receive the blessings of the New Covenant (*such as eternal life*). And so, because of Christ, and in Christ, we receive a new nature and eternal life. This is entirely a work of God from start to finish: he elects who will be saved, calls them, regenerates them, converts them, and adopts them; he *makes* them his children by uniting them to Christ through faith.

OK. Now that we're up to date, let's look a little deeper at how we're supposed to respond to all this.

As we learned last time, when we are joined to Christ, we are given the Holy Spirit to sanctify us. He sets us apart for God's use (that's what "sanctify" means). He cleanses us through God's holy word as we read and live by it. And yet we are required to *set our minds* on the things of the Spirit, and to live by them. That's *our* responsibility. We must intentionally and actively *respond* to God's calling, or else we are not saved. Even so, God enables and empowers us to do it. That's a paradox. Let's look at this paradox a little closer. Our *salvation* is initiated and completed by God. But we cooperate with God in our *sanctification*: the ongoing work of His Spirit is to bind us to Christ in thought, word, and deed.

Christianity isn't just agreeing to a bunch of statements about who Jesus is and what he did. We can believe Jesus is God and that he saved us, and admit that we're sinners who need his salvation, but that alone will *not* make us Christians. We must personally *respond* to Jesus Christ; we must willingly *commit* ourselves to his care as Lord over our life, without reservations, exceptions, or excuses.

Christianity demands submission as well as offering salvation. If Jesus Christ is not your Lord, he cannot be your Savior. If you won't let him rule your life and your actions, you won't let him save you either. To reject one is to reject the other. Christians are sometimes called hypocrites because they *call* themselves "Christian," but they won't *live* as Christians (*as followers of Christ*); it's too costly for them.

Counting the Cost

Luke 9:23-26 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

"If anyone would [*or intends to*] come after me..." Do you intend to follow in Christ's footsteps? Why?

"let him deny himself..." In what ways might you deny yourself in order to follow Christ?

"and take up his cross daily..." What do you think that means in today's world if we're not crucified?

"whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." Do you think this literally means losing your life? How else might you "lose" your life? _____

"What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world..." What might you want for yourself instead of following after Christ and living for him? _____

“...but loses or forfeits himself?” What does this say the cost is if we ignore Christ’s call to follow him?

Luke 14:26-29 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him..."

This verse says that when we come to Christ, we choose to actually follow him, rather than trying to make somebody else happy (including ourselves) by *not* following him. If we choose to be a Christian in name only, and we want to remain “comfortable” by not actually doing the things he asks of us, then

this says we cannot be his _____ . What does that mean?

How would you define a good student?

“There can be no following without a previous forsaking. To follow Christ, is to [give up] all lesser loyalties.” – John Stott

Next time we’ll look closer at the *cost* of following Christ: what must we give up in order to follow him? What lessons did his apostles have to learn to be good students of their Teacher, Jesus?

Session 2 – Giving up Sin

Last time we learned that there is a cost to following Jesus. We have to make a choice when we come to him, whether we'll "die to self" in order to follow him. Christ died to himself *before* he went to the cross.

Mat 8:20 – "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

What Jesus he give up? _____

Mat 12:48-49 "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

What did he give up? _____

Phil 2:6-8 Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be clutched, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

What did he give up? _____

Mat 19:27-29 ²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" ²⁸ Jesus said to them... ²⁹ "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life."

What did they give up? _____

But what did they gain? _____

Mark 10:17-22 ¹⁷ ¶ And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." ²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Jesus at first was asking him if he was a moral man in the way he behaved towards others. And he was. *But that wasn't enough.* And so, by asking him to give up his possessions so that he could follow Jesus, he was actually asking him, "What do you *love* more than me?" He was asking him to make a *choice*.

Read Jn 21:1-19. "When they finished breakfast [*this was after the resurrection, when the apostles had gone back to fishing – they were on the shore of the sea*], Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, *do you love me more than these?*" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my *lambs*." This was repeated twice more.

What do you think Jesus was looking at when he asked, “more than these?” More than what, or who?

What response was Jesus asking of Peter as a sign of his love for him? What might *you* offer as your sign of love for Jesus? (see Rom 12:1-2)

In all these cases, something was sacrificed to gain something else. Being a disciple means there must be a change in course, a change in habits and behavior, a change in thinking, and a change in attitude as a *response* to the Gospel: (1) we must **give up sin**, and (2) we must **give up self**.

(1) “Giving up sin” is called *repentance*. It means turning away from every thought, word, deed which we know is wrong. We cannot follow Christ without giving up our sin. We must learn what is sinful, and turn away from it; to do that, we must learn what is godly, and then do it. We must turn away from doing what God hates, and begin to do what God wants us to do.

A. Repentance isn't a feeling – it's an action. We don't just feel bad about our sin, or think that saying we're sorry is enough to fix it. It is actually doing something about it. When our sin causes harm or loss to somebody else, repentance makes us confess our sin to them, **and** then make them whole again if we can: we need to replace their loss, and help restore their reputation if we harmed it. We want to correct the wrong we did to them. *In what ways have you “fixed” the harm you did to someone else by your sinful behavior? Or how can you fix any harm you've caused, if you haven't done that yet?*

B. Repentance is willfully changing our mind and our attitude toward sin; we do it in such a way that it leads to a change in our *behavior*. If there is no change, maybe there was no repentance. We identify sin using God's word as our standard; we adopt God's attitude towards sin using God's word to teach our conscience what sin is. When we begin to hate our sin the way God hates it, we'll learn to put it away under the power of God's Spirit. Repentance begins when *God's* will about sin becomes *our* will about it.

How has reading God's word changed your attitude toward something so much that you actually changed the way you acted after reading it? Why?

Next time we'll discuss how we can “give up self” so that Christ is First in all things.

Session 3 – Giving up Self

Last time we discussed how counting the cost must include *giving up sin*, and *giving up self*. To give up sin, we first have to learn what things God considers sinful, and then we have to repent of it. Giving up self is a little more complicated. It involves making choices against ourselves.

- (2) *Giving up self* is how we *make* Christ our Lord – that is, it's how we *submit* to Christ as our Lord.
- a. we deny ourselves by “disowning” ourselves, so that Christ owns us.
 - b. we take up our cross by crucifying our desires, so that Christ's glory is our only desire.
 - c. we lose our life by submitting our will to Christ's will, so that he is First in all things.

^{CSB} **1Pet 4:1-2** Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same resolve – because the One who suffered in the flesh has finished with sin in order to live the remaining time in the flesh, no longer for human desires, but for God's will.

And so there is both an inward commitment and an outward effort to bring every aspect of our private and public life under Christ's control. God calls every Christian to “ministry” – to *service* (Lk 12:37; 1Th 1:9; 1Pet 4:10). We become the servant of other people for the sake of Christ, so that Christ receives the glory for our service. We cannot continue to live for ourselves any longer (Gal 2:19-20). Every form of work is a *ministry* when we see ourselves as cooperating with God in the service of man. This is every Christian's purpose and calling – therefore no Christian may be lazy about doing it. We labor at our work, our ministry, with all our heart, “as serving the Lord and not men.” Col 3:23. *This leads us to choices:*

We are to honor our father and mother, but not to the point that we _____.

We are to love and care for our friends, but not to the point that we _____.

We are free to marry in the sight of God, but we are not free to marry _____.

Thus we are free to date someone, but we are not free to date _____.

We love non-believers and our enemies, but we don't _____.

Friendship means there is a bond of care and fellowship, and a sense of duty towards the other person that leads to mutual submission (Eph 5:21). If we engage in that level of mutual submission with a non-believer, when there is no mutual bond in Christ to direct it as our common Head, we make ourselves prone to sin – we may submit to our friend out of loyalty. Friends are chosen; we pick them. Be judicious in choosing your friends. Be sure you are “like-minded” in the things of God. Care for them, but do not bind yourself to them. ***How are you keeping Christ First in all your relationships and attitudes?***

Sex is God-ordained, but only between married couples, to produce godly children. When sex becomes an end in itself, it may lead us to use others, or think of them as objects for our personal pleasure; we fall into sin. Love requires us to consider the consequences of our actions on others, and even our attitude towards them. ***How might you entice others toward sexual misconduct?***

Money is not evil in itself. It is the *love* of money that is the root of all evil. When money becomes an end in itself, or when the things which money can buy become ends in themselves, so that wanting it so much makes us use someone else for our personal gain, or when we want to be envied by others, we fall into sin. Love requires us to consider the use of our money to benefit others more than to benefit ourselves.

How might you entice others to misuse their money?

The way you entice others, is the way they entice you. If you don't want to be enticed into sin, then don't entice others into it: "Do for others as you would have them do for you." Lk 6:31. *Do you love your sin, and yourself, more than you love Christ?* That's the choice that confronts every believer, every day. Pray for strength, wisdom, and self-control, so that Christ is glorified in everything you do, and so that you don't give Christianity a bad reputation. Sinful behavior doesn't just affect ourselves; it affects the whole Church.

What that means is that Christianity is not a "private" religion. It's public: it involves others. It's lived out in cooperation with and interacting with other believers. As you may remember from our first session on *Counting the Cost*, there must be a *public* profession of faith in Christ.

Luke 9: 26 "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

Mat 10:32-33 ³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Romans 10:9-10 If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

This public confession is part of the cost of following Christ: we must be up front and bold in proclaiming our faith in Christ. It's a *condition* of our salvation! There must be no "closet" Christians. We publicly profess Christ at our baptism, ***but it doesn't end there***. It impacts our family relationships, our church membership, our school and workplace behavior, and our community involvement. Our call was not just to be saved, but to be saved so we can *serve God*. Remember? We are each called to *ministry*, to service, in every area of our life. So what's the benefit? What incentives do we have to proclaim Christ?

There are three incentives. We serve God,

- (1) For our own sake – read John 10:10. *What do you think "abundant life" means?*
- (2) For the sake of others – read 1Cor 9:23. *What are the "benefits of the gospel" for others?*
- (3) For Christ's sake – read Mat 10:18,39; 16:25; Mk 10:29; 13:9. *What can you do for "Christ's sake"?*

"If you want to lead a life of easy-going self-indulgence, whatever you do, do not become a Christian."

John Stott

Chapter 10 – Reaching a Decision

Up to now, we've been looking at what Christianity is. What are its claims and basic beliefs? In Chapter 9 we considered the *cost of becoming* a Christian. But this time we're going to look at actually *deciding to be* a Christian. Knowing what you know, you cannot remain neutral. You cannot drift in Christianity by associating with Christians. Your upbringing in the church cannot make you a Christian. Acting like a Christian does not make you a Christian. Believing the creeds of the faith, or even agreeing with all the things we've studied so far, does not make you a Christian. Even believing that Jesus is the Son of God, and that he died to be the Savior of the world, and that you are a sinner who needs such a Savior, will not make you a Christian. *These facts need to be believed, but they don't save.* True faith will save you, but what is true faith? What is SAVING faith? *Saving faith* translates belief into a decisive *act of trust*.

“Intellectual conviction must lead to personal commitment.” – John Stott

You must decide for yourself that he is YOUR Savior. No one else can settle this for you. And what would keep you from making that decision? Remaining independent and self-reliant will keep you from committing yourself to Christ. If you don't recognize your absolute dependence on Christ to live, then you will remain dead in your trespasses and sins. You must acknowledge to God that you need **Christ's** righteousness *for yourself*, and **Christ's** atoning sacrifice *for yourself*. You must admit that, apart from Christ, *you are lost forever*. Only Christ can grant you forgiveness; Only Christ can pay for your sin; Only Christ can cleanse you; only Christ can give you eternal life; only Christ can give you peace with God; only Christ can give you lasting joy; only Christ can give you everything you need for life and godliness in this world. *And therefore you must trust in him alone for your salvation.*

If you have not committed yourself to Christ, and placed yourself in his care and keeping, *now* is the time to do that. He stands before you as a real living person, not as a figment of your imagination, not as a nice idea, not as a fiction or a myth – but as the Living God Incarnate. He calls for your decision. What will you *do* in response to his call? Will you *commit* yourself to him? Who do *you* say he is, *to you*? Like the jailer, you must ask, “What must I do to be saved?”

^{ESV} **Rev 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 eat with him, and he with me.”

1. You must hear his voice, and whenever you hear it, you must listen. Have you heard it? Did you listen?

How do you know? _____

2. You must open the door; you must respond to his call. It is a definite act. If the door is closed, then it must be opened; and YOU must open it.

a. *it is an individual act* – Christ addresses his church, but he calls to you in particular, right now.

b. *it is a unique act* – you take this step only once. Once you do this, he will never abandon you.

- c. *it is a deliberate act* – it is an intentional act of will; there's no need to wait on some light from heaven, or a visitation by angels, or for an emotional reaction to rise up before you answer.
- d. *it is an urgent act* – Don't wait; he's standing there now; he's calling now. There is no better opportunity than this moment. "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."
- e. *it is an indispensable act* – "There is no other name under heaven by which men may be saved." Call upon that name. There is no other way into the kingdom of God. Come into the narrow way of Christ. This is the necessary step you must take – there is no substitute: living a moral life cannot save you. Denying him is senseless. Christ alone can save you, and he *will* save you, if you will only come to him.

If you haven't done it yet, then open the door to your heart. Receive Christ as your Savior. Submit your life to him. Commit yourself and all your ways to him, entirely, without reservation or exception. Throw yourself at his feet: he loves you and has given his life for you. Respond to him. Answer him. Open the door to him, and be at peace.

If you have not committed yourself to Christ, if you have not responded to his call, and you are hesitating, then what is it that keeps you from making a decision *right now*?

If you want to make that decision for the first time right now, then come before God in prayer, and give yourself to Christ, *right now*. Or if you're not sure that you've ever made that decision about Christ *for yourself*, and you want to be sure, then come before God in prayer, and give yourself to Christ, *right now*. Do it intentionally, sincerely, and humbly. Go someplace private where there are no interruptions and nothing stands between you and God, except the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray. Confess your sins. Ask God to cleanse and forgive you in the name of Christ. Jesus loves you, and he died for you, to bring you to God. *You can pray in this way:*

Father God, I admit that I've been going my own way all my life. I realize and I confess that I have sinned in thought, word and deed. I turn away from those sins now, and I ask for your forgiveness for them.

I know I don't deserve it, but because of what Jesus has done on my behalf, I beg you to release me from my debt in his name. I believe that he died for me, bearing my sins in his own body, and receiving my punishment. I believe that he lived for me, offering you his perfect life in exchange for my imperfect life. I thank you for your great love that sent him to the cross for me.

Now Lord Jesus, I willingly open the door to you. Come into my life as my Savior and my King. Cleanse me from my sins. Take control of my life. Give me your Spirit. And I will serve you all my days as you give me the strength to do it. Amen.

Chapter 11 – Being a Christian – Privileges and Responsibilities

Whether you just came to Christ, or you've been a Christian all your life, you may be wondering what the privileges and blessings are that come with having Christ as your Lord and Savior. What is the work that he expects of you? Understand that when you come to Christ, it is by God's grace alone. Without that grace, without God's enabling power, without rebirth, you could not have repented and believed. You may not have been conscious of anything happening; there was no flash of light from heaven. Even so, **you became a new creation**. Part of growing as a Christian is becoming more and more aware of who and what you are as a believer. Moreover, once you come to Christ, your faith is no longer a private thing. *You need to publicly confess Christ and be baptized*. If you haven't done that, then it may be time. You need to be set apart from the world of darkness in which you once lived, because you are now a child of light (Eph 5:8), and a child of God (Jn 1:12) – you have been adopted by God's favor and will (Eph 1:5). You once were a child of wrath (Eph 2:3); but now you are dearly loved (Eph 5:1; Col 3:12); and you are precious in God's sight because of Christ (1Co 6:20).

What are some of the privileges God gives to his children because He loves them?

Heb 4:16 _____

Heb 12:6 _____

1Pet 1:3-5 _____

1John 2:25 _____

2Tim 1:12² _____

Rom 8:38-39; Mat 27:28 _____

Eph 2:19 _____

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN? The biggest mistake new Christians make is to think that they ought to *feel* like they're a Christian. They ought to *feel* like they're close to God. And when they don't feel like it, they think they're lost, or that God has abandoned them, or that they were never a Christian to begin with. *Christianity is not an emotion. It is a fact*. It is objectively true or objectively false – but it is never conditioned on our emotions. Our relationship with God isn't based on whether we *feel* like children of God. It is based on the fact that God *says* we are His children.

^{ESV} **John 1:12-13** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

So the only question on the table is whether you believe Jesus is the Messiah, and you have personally received him as your Lord and Savior – as we discussed last session. If you believe and trust that Jesus is

² Translations for this verse vary. The KJV/NKJV, NIV, NJB, and NAS contain the traditional translation.

your savior, and you have received him as your Lord and King, and you're submitted to him by striving to obey his commandments (*as visible proof of your faith*), then you're a child of God, all feelings aside.

PROOFS OF "CHILDHOOD" –

1. *God promises in his written word to give forgiveness and eternal life to those who receive Christ.* 1Jn 5:11-12; John 6:37; John 10:28; Heb 13:5,6; 1Jn 1:9.

2. *God speaks to our hearts.* The outward witness of the Holy Spirit in Scripture is confirmed by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit in our experience. This isn't talking about *feelings*; it is a deepening conviction as we are more and more assured of God's love for us.
Rom 5:3; 8:15-16

3. *The same Spirit who bears witness to our adoption in Scripture and experience, goes on to complete His testimony in our character.* If we are born again into God's family, then God's Spirit dwells within us and He transforms us more and more into the image and character of Christ.
Rom 8:9-17; 1John 2:3; 3:10,16,24; 4:6,7,13; 5:2.

4. *We're embraced in the Body of Christ.* At our conversion, we were baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ (1Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27-29), living stones in God's House (1Pet 2:5), members one of another (Rom 12:5), and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17). *Together*, we're the household of God (1Tim 3:15).
Rom 12:4-8; 1Cor 12:7; Eph 4:4-6; 11-16; 1John 4:20; Heb 3:13; 10:25; James 5:19-20; 1Pet 4:8-10.

HOW SECURE IS OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD? Assuming we're members of God's household, what happens when we *continue* to sin? Do we lose our membership and get thrown out of the house? Are we no longer a child of God? Can we be a child of God one day, a child of the devil the next, and then back again? If a child in a human household offends his parents by being rude and disobedient, what happens? There is tension, silence, and punishment. Their fellowship is broken, but not their relationship. The son is still their son; the daughter is still their daughter. Their relationship is not based on their behavior. As soon as the child apologizes, and repents, he or she is forgiven and fellowship is restored. The parents' love is never withdrawn, even when they disapprove of the child's behavior. That's because their love isn't earned by the child's behavior – it exists because of their parent-child relationship. It's the same way between God and His children. We were born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God (1Pet 1:23) – God's love for us is born of that relationship; in fact, it *caused* that relationship; it can never die because God initiated it, God sustains it, and God wills it.

But **fellowship** with God, *and with each other*, suffers because of sin. We must confess and repent of sin.

What happens then? 1Jn 1:9 _____

Why is that? 1Jn 2:1 _____

How does God regard forgiven sins? Ps 103:10-13 _____

How often are we forgiven? Lam 3:22-23 _____

Next time: Our *responsibilities* as children of God.

Session 2 – Our Responsibilities as Children of God

We not only have privileges as God's beloved children, but we also have obligations. Our great *privilege* is our **relationship** to God; our great *responsibility* is **growth**. Children must grow up. It's their nature to grow up. We cannot remain children forever. Our birth must be followed by growth. The *crisis* or turning point of our salvation must lead to the *process* of our sanctification: we must become a holy people.

We must learn God's expectations in order to be equipped and set apart for God's use.

There are two main areas in which we are commanded to grow: (1) understanding (what we know about God's holiness); and (2) holiness (how we respond to what we know of God's holiness). These are co-dependent, meaning we cannot do one without the other. We cannot become holy if we don't know what holiness is; and we cannot truly understand what holiness is, if we are not striving to become holy. So knowledge and practice are essential to understanding. Knowledge is *intellectual*; it grows in our mind. Holiness is *practical*; it grows in our experience. The combination of the two leads to our understanding. *We must live out the Christian life as a practical expression of what we know to be true. That's* how we grow Christ-like; **that's** how we are conformed to Christ's character and behavior.

Why must we grow in *knowledge*? 2Pe 3:18 _____

Why must we grow in *holiness*? 1Pe 1:15-16 _____

We must strive to obey God's commandments in every aspect of our life, and to do the will of God in all things. *Our life as a Christian is a life of righteousness*. We have been given the Holy Spirit to enable us to be righteous; because we are his holy temple in which he abides. But we must submit to his authority, and follow his leading each time he reminds us of the truth of Scripture.³ As we do that, he subdues our tendency to sin, and he produces his fruit in us: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Gal 5:22,23) *What duties will cause us to grow up in Christ?*⁴

THREE SECRETS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH = THREE RESPONSIBILITIES

- Our Duty to God
- Our Duty to the Church
- Our Duty to the World

Our Duty to God

Our relationship to God is secure, but it isn't static; it doesn't stay the same. As we grow up, we come to know Him more and more intimately (John 17:3). The principal way to do that is to wait on God every day in a time of **Bible-reading** and **prayer**. This is the indispensable pre-requisite to spiritual growth. We have to arrange our priorities in order to make time for it. This is where we begin to produce one of those fruits of the Spirit listed above: self-discipline. This, "together with a legible Bible and an alarm clock that works", will ensure that we are well on the road to victory.

³ John 14:26

⁴ Eph 4:15; 1Pe 2:2

“Pray *before* you read, asking the Holy Spirit to open your eyes (literally), and illumine your mind. Then read slowly, meditatively, and thoughtfully. Read and re-read the passage. Wrestle with it till it yields its meaning. Use a modern translation... Then go on to apply to your own circumstances the message of the verses you have read... It is helpful to keep a notebook and write down what you learn. *Above all, look for Jesus Christ. He is the chief subject of the Bible.*

“Prayer *follows* naturally. Begin by speaking back to God on the same subject on which He has spoken to you. Don't change the conversation! If He has spoken to you of himself and his glory, *worship Him*. If He has spoken to you of yourself and your sins, *confess them*. Thank Him for any blessings which may be revealed in the passage, and pray that its lessons may be learned by yourself and your friends.”

Lift up in prayer *all* the pieces of your life, *all* your relationships, *all* your provisions, *all* your needs. Come before Him boldly in the name of Jesus (Heb 4:16), and let your requests be made known to God (Phil 4:6). Make a prayer list as you become aware of needs and praises so you may pray about them.

How often do you study your Bible? _____

How often do you pray about what it says? _____

Why? _____

Our Duty to the Church

As you've learned, the Christian life is not a private life of your own. If we are born again into God's household, not only has God become our father, but every other believer in the world and in all ages has become our brother and our sister. The relationship that cannot be broken with God, and the love that will not end because of it, is just as true of our relationship and the love that we share with other believers. Every Christian place, wherever Christians are found, is an outpost of the Church, and its members celebrate the Presence of God in and among His people. Yet *every Christian's place is in a local church*, sharing in its worship, fellowship, and witness. That is where he or she has been called to personally serve and to minister the Word of God to other believers.

WHICH CHURCH? A true church rightly administers the Word of God, and the sacraments of baptism and communion. Does the pastor submit to the authority of Scripture so that his sermons strive to explain its message, and to relate its principles to everyday living? Does the congregation strive to live in harmony and in fellowship, displaying their love for Christ, for one another, and for the lost of the world? Do they practice baptism and the communion on a regular basis? If so, and if you have not been baptized, then you need to be instructed and baptized (Act 2:38). Allow yourself to be drawn into the fellowship of that local body. Be joined in communion with other believers, in all generations. Allow yourself to come under the instruction and guidance of the church, and begin to fellowship with other believers there, regardless of their age or background. We have something to learn from *every* believer. You will discover new depths of friendship and mutual sharing in the most unlikely places. Your closest friends will probably be Christians; and above all, your spouse must be a Christian too. For “what has light to do with darkness?” (2Co 6:14). What about someone who becomes a Christian *after* marriage? (1Co 7:12-16)

Our Duty to the World

EVANGELISM: Christians are not meant to be a group of smug and selfish snobs, interested only in themselves and their churches. Christianity is not exclusive; it is inclusive. It reaches out with the truth of Christ to every nation, every race, every social level, every age, every language, without distinction or favor. God's grace knows no boundaries, no national borders, no disqualifications because of heritage or even past behavior. The call goes out to the *whole* world. And so *everyone* who responds, *everyone* who comes to the door at Christ's knock, is welcomed into the household of God to sit at his table. They enjoy the same love, the same mercy, and the same privileges as every other believer. *Who do you know that you could evangelize this week? What about a complete stranger?*

PHILANTHROPY:⁵ We are to care for the poor, needy, orphaned, widowed, hungry, homeless, and neglected people of the world, whether friend or enemy (Luke 10:30-37 – the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*). We are to care for them as we would for our own family (Ex 12:45; Lev 19:34; Mat 5:44; Lk 6:27-35), and to minimize pain and suffering wherever we encounter them face to face (1John 3:17-19; James 2:15-16).⁶ It is as if serving Christ himself (Mat 25:31-46). *How will you be charitable this week?*

WITNESSING: Although not every Christian is called to be a minister of the Gospel, or a missionary to foreign lands, every Christian is indeed called to testify of the truth of Christ. This is sometimes done by speech, but more often we do it by our behavior in our home, at school, or at work. And if we are asked why we behave differently (*righteously*), then we verbally testify to the truth of Christ as our motivation for godly living. If the person who asked wants to know more, then we *evangelize* at an appropriate time and place. *How will you be a witness to the truth of Christ this week?*

PRAYER: As with Bible-reading, we reach out to the world by *beginning* with prayer. This is the key to awakening our conscience to the needs of others. We pray for others to gain a heart for others. When we don't know enough about their situation to pray intelligently for them, we begin to ask questions, to probe them for their greatest need, so that we know how to pray. And in probing, we come to know them, or at least to know about them. We begin to care for them deeply, and sincerely. We reach out to them to comfort and encourage them. They start to weigh on our mind, and we actively seek ways to help them in their struggle. That's the foundation of true fellowship and friendship: to care for them as we would care for ourselves, and to love them as we would like to be loved. *How would you pray for the lost and needy?*

CHRISTIAN TENSION: We are citizens of heaven, but we are sojourners (foreigners) on earth. We have duties in each realm. We cannot retreat from either one. We are not to love the world or anything in the world; we are not to store up treasures for ourselves on earth; we are not to be selfishly ambitious for earthly fame and fortune; we are not to live by earthly standards; we are not to be unreasonably burdened by earthly sorrows. And that means we are either tempted to withdraw into Christ and neglect the world, or we become so involved with the world that we neglect Christ. *Neither is genuinely Christian.* We live in the tension between the two realms. We are to live equally and simultaneously 'in Christ' and 'in the world.' (John 17:15) This is what we have been called to do. This is what it means to follow after Christ. *Devote yourself to him, in this world, this week – and don't ever quit doing that.*

⁵ The voluntary promotion of human welfare; charity work.

⁶ "Who is my brother?" is the same question that provoked the parable of the Good Samaritan: "Who is my neighbor?"