

52 WEEK BIBLE STUDY



Volume 1

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This course is designed to support a Bible study group that meets once a week. However, it may be used on any basis desired. The material is not dated, so it can be started with the Week 1 page at any time in the year.

It is recommended that the Bible study leader, prepare in advance of the group's meeting by reviewing the scripture passages and even adding more passages to make the study as robust as possible. Each lesson contains discussion points meant to create discussion among group members and bring out other questions that may exist about a given lesson.

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DO-IT-YOURSELF CHRISTIANITY

Mark 8:38 – *For whoever is ashamed of me and my words...of him the Son of Man will be ashamed...*

When you read a newspaper, do you scan the headlines and read only the stories you find interesting? You need not feel cheated if you skip stories for which you have little interest. No one is hurt by your decision. After all, it is only a newspaper reporting past events, often from a biased perspective. However, if we read the Bible in the same manner, we definitely cheat ourselves out of important information that God wants us to learn, understand, and apply to our life. The Bible, though it contains many accounts of past events, is very much about the present and the future. Its importance is far greater than that of a newspaper.

Many believers select only Bible verses they like. The ones that make them feel good, or inspire them, or entertain them, such as Noah's Ark or Jesus' miracles. They skip Biblical passages that convict them of their sins. If a married man has a mistress, he will skip the Biblical condemnation of adultery. If a woman gossips, she will avoid the verses that call that a sin. If a man drinks too much, he will flip past the pages that call drunkenness a sin. All sins condemned in the Bible will be avoided by people who practice those sins. It is like selecting our Christian behavior from a menu, or do-it-yourself faith.

Paul tells us in Romans 7:7, that the Ten Commandments do not merely prohibit certain sins, they reveal sin within us. How would we know that it is wrong to steal, if there was not a commandment forbidding it? Christians who avoid parts of the Bible that convict them of sin, are making an appointment for chastisement by God. If we find in our Bible that we are doing something God forbids, we should repent of that sin and call upon the Holy Spirit to help us turn away from it. We must look at God's Word as our source of help, and the Holy Spirit as our guide and strength.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Galatians 3:19-25

The law guides us to Christ.

John 16:13

The Holy Spirit is our guide.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is the purpose of the Bible?
- What Bible verses apply to us, and which ones can we ignore?
- What is the purpose of the Ten Commandments?
- Is the Bible to be feared?
- Why is studying the Bible a life and death matter?

GOD'S CONDITIONAL PROMISES

Psalm 37:4 – *Delight yourself in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your heart.*

John 15:7 – *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*

There are two kinds of promises that God makes to us: conditional and unconditional. This study will focus on God's conditional promises which require something from us before they can be fulfilled, as we see in this study's two verses. God may give us the desires of our heart, but first we must be fully committed to Him, and living in total obedience to the instructions he has given us. God does not promise to bless those who do not submit to him.

John 15:7 uses the words "abide in me," which is a much deeper relationship with Christ than you might think. It means that we remain in the presence of Jesus and obey him, 24/7. The attraction of the world, temptations placed in front of us by satan, and our own sinful hearts, make that difficult. God chooses to not be in the presence of sin, so we separate ourselves from him each time we fall. Only repentance and receiving his forgiveness restores the relationship. We remain saved and secure for heaven when we fall. But over our lifetimes we usually drift away from God and then repent and return, back and forth, many times. That is not the way to ensure fulfillment of God's conditional promises to us.

When we obey God (in everything) and enjoy an intimate relationship with Christ, our potential for blessings is unlimited. We develop that intimate relationship by listening to the warnings and help of the Holy Spirit to avoid sin and disobedience. Receiving Christ as our Savior is like getting a new electric fan. It is not very useful until we plug the fan into the power source. In God's kingdom, our power source is the Holy Spirit. The decision is ours and the potential for blessings is great. Are you ready to abide in Christ...truly abide? Are you plugged in to his power source?

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

John 14:15-18

We must abide in Christ.

John 15:4-8

Our intimacy with Christ is demonstrated not only in us abiding in him, but him abiding in us.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is a conditional promise?
- What must we do to enjoy God's conditional promises?
- What can interfere with God's conditional promises to us?
- Who can protect us from sin and help us avail of God's promises?
- What is your spiritual power source?

KNOWING WE ARE SAVED

John 3:18 – *He who believes in Him [Christ] is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

Have you ever met someone who was raised in the church and went through the steps to receive Christ as their personal Savior, but was not certain they were saved? Is that person you? Do you have doubts about your own salvation?

When we take the step of faith to love and serve God, and sincerely confess to Him that we are a sinner, then we are genuinely saved. The assurance of our salvation comes through our friendship with Christ who assures us daily that we belong to Him. Plus, his Holy Spirit lives in us.

People who do not feel that assurance, are probably not living in obedience to Christ. Many of God's promises and blessings, and true friendship with Him, are only available to us if we obey his instructions. It is possible to be saved, but still suffer from a strained relationship with God because of our disobedience.

If you are wondering whether you are saved or not – even after confessing your sins to God and accepting his Son's death as payment for your sins – then you need to restore your relationship with Christ. For most of us, we need to confess our sins and seek his forgiveness daily because we sin daily. Plus, we need to live as Christ has instructed us to live.

So, those who have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus' sacrificial death for them, are saved. But those who feel distant from God should consider their lifestyles, the choices they make, and their disobedience to God's instructions. We are set free from doubt by committing to honoring God through obedience to his instructions.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Ephesians 2:1-10

We are saved through faith, and created by God to serve Him with good works.

1 Peter 1:13-21

Our lives are changed by the blood of Christ.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How is one saved from their sins?
- Can we be saved, yet still separated from Christ?
- What separates us from Christ?
- How do we restore our relationship with Jesus?

GRACE. WHAT IS IT?

Ephesians 2:8 – *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*

Christians often use and misuse the word “grace.” Sadly, many believers, including ministers, cannot define it when asked. Can you define it?

The simplest definition of grace is: The unmerited favor of God toward man. “Unmerited” means it is something we do not deserve and cannot earn. “Favor” is found in the blessings from God for which only Christians are eligible. It goes without saying that the best favor we can receive from God is protection from hell. We can also use the letters in the word itself to define it: GRACE = God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense.

Grace is God’s package-deal for us. Like a buy one-take one special at the store. By accepting Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, we get our ticket to Heaven. But, God offers us so much more. We can have a satisfying life here on earth if we serve God. We can have a very personal and joyful relationship with Christ if we trust Him. We can enjoy the promises of God (healing, protection, peace) when we nurture our relationship with Christ through daily prayer and obedience to Him. And, we can earn rewards in Heaven if we honor Him with our lives through service.

Some believers say, “I’m saved and that’s all I need.” Is that enough for you?

Is it not better to desire everything that God offers us? Desire all of the blessings God wants to shower you with. Pursue the full measure of God’s grace; the package deal, not only salvation.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Romans 5:15-21

Death came through Adam’s sin, but salvation and grace through Jesus’ sacrifice.

Ephesians 2:1-10

Our salvation is the gift of God’s grace.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How can we easily remember the definition of Grace?
- Is not salvation enough? Why would we want more?
- Who is entitled to receive God’s grace?
- What have you done to deserve God’s grace?
- Who has paid the price for the grace you have received?

THE SOURCE OF FAITH

Romans 10:17 – *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*

Romans 13:3 – *...God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*

Sometimes we encourage people to become better at something by telling them that “practice makes perfect.” A teacher tells students to practice writing the letters of the alphabet until they become good at it. The same advice can be applied to our faith in God. God gives us a tiny seed of faith at birth that we can use to pray to Him and accept Him as our Savior. After we have done that we need to cultivate and feed that faith so it will grow. But, if we allow the weeds of satan’s lies to crowd out that seed, it can die.

Many people pray for faith. But faith is not a gift. It is something we develop. God does not limit our faith or keep it out of reach. He demonstrates to us every day of our lives, all that we need to see and know to cultivate our faith. God guides, provides for, and blesses us to prove his majesty and love for us. That is the evidence on which we can grow our faith.

To develop great faith, we must cultivate that initial small measure of faith – that seed mentioned in Romans 13:3 – and let it grow. The amount of faith we have is up to us. As we open our eyes and begin to see the work of God in our life and the lives of others, our faith will grow. We grow our faith by witnessing the hand of God on our lives. Romans 10:17 suggests that our faith grows through seeing God’s promises come alive in our own life. Obviously, then, reading the Bible is a critical step in growing our faith. We growth our faith and make it more active in our lives, when we practice it. Exercise it. Feed it from the Word of God, and by observing his hand upon us every day. Our faith becomes weak when we live in disobedience to God. A corn seed will not grow if you feed it poison, and your faith in God will not grow if you feed it from a sinful lifestyle.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Matthew 9:18-26

Touching Jesus’ garment.

Romans 1:16-17

Faith and righteous living.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- From where does faith come?
- Why is faith important?
- Will God give us faith if we pray for it?
- How much faith is enough?
- How do we fix weak faith?

GOD'S DELAYS – PART 1

Psalm 37:7 – *Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him...*

Among the most common themes in the Bible, from cover to cover, is the topic of waiting. The scriptures are not necessarily clear on why we must wait on God, but through personal experience we will come to understand. God does not have to wait for anything. He can accomplish anything he likes instantly. From experience, however, we learn that we must sometimes wait for God to answer our prayers or deliver on his promises to us, because: 1) the delay is best for us, and 2) it is necessary for him to receive the glory.

Let us consider a clue found in today's verse. It links rest with wait. When we are waiting to start a trip somewhere, we may find it difficult to rest because we are too excited. We may pace back and forth, checking and double checking our preparations, making sure we are ready for our ride.

God takes two different and difficult challenges – resting and waiting – and combines them to make the challenge twice as difficult. While we wait for God to meet some need in our life, we must also rest. God makes one difficult challenge (resting) even more difficult by adding another challenge (waiting). This is God's way of conforming us to a model of behavior that he considers important.

We were created in God's image. God acts strategically, which means that our lives are linked to the lives of others. Strategic planning and execution requires patience, perfect timing, and deliberate actions. Therefore, if waiting is a trademark of God it must be our trademark, as well.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 64:4

Waiting for the Messiah.

Romans 8:18-25

Waiting for Christ's second coming.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- God can do anything, instantly. Why does he make us wait?
- Why is waiting and resting difficult?
- What does it mean that our lives are connected to one another?
- Why might the other lives we are connected to, be affected by our waiting for an answer from God?

GOD'S DELAYS – PART 2

Philippians 3:20 – *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

We usually must wait for God to take a specific action in our lives because he works according to his own plan; God is not bound by our schedules and demands.

The ultimate delay is the second coming of Christ. No amount of whining, worrying, or taking matters into our own hands will change God's schedule for Christ's return. So, why is there a delay? If we study prophecy in the Bible we find a number of steps that God is executing in precisely the right order before Christ's return. God does not change. His finely crafted and absolute plan has no shortcuts or alternatives.

When God delays in healing us, helping us get a job, or helping us financially, it is usually because the situation is larger than what we see and understand. A situation that we face may affect other people, perhaps without our knowledge. So, while we wait to recover from illness, or get a new job, or for money to pay a bill, God may be working in someone else's life in a way that is connected to our situation. Someone else may have to donate blood before we can have an operation. An employer may need to increase his profits before he can hire more workers. A debtor may need to pay off a loan before he can receive needed cash. Obviously, God does not need another person to meet our needs. He can and sometimes does supply us with solutions out of his abundance. However, the need in someone else's life and the spiritual lesson they need to learn, may be in the grand plan that God has for both persons.

The blessing of waiting and resting (see part 1) comes in God's promise and track record. He is never late providing for us according to HIS PLAN. He was not late in creating us, he was not late in saving us from our sins, and he will not be late in whisking us away to Heaven. That will occur in God's perfect timing and he is the author of perfection.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 Timothy 6:13-16

Waiting for the second coming of Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-7

Waiting for satan's removal.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why has Christ not yet returned?
- If God owns everything, why does he often work through others to meet our needs?
- Is God ever late?

ANXIETY IS CURABLE

Philippians 4:6 – *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*

Anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness or worry. It may last for a few minutes or a few years. It can be both a spiritual and psychological condition and anyone can be effected by it.

All anxiety is the result of us not allowing God to bless us with his peace. Christians have God available to cure them of anxiety, but unbelievers can struggle with it to the point where they sometimes take their own lives. Unbelievers lack the power of Christ to heal them of their worries. If we as Christians rebel against God and his will for our lives we, too, can become victims of anxiety, worry and depression because our rebellious behavior and sin interrupts our relationship with Christ. Even when we are living for God, are obedient, and serving him we can become anxious by holding on to fears and worries needlessly. God is willing to take our worries, but some people are too fond of them to let go.

Why do some people insist on worrying or being afraid? Some have learned that it gets them a certain amount of attention from friends and family. A young lady who is fearful will be more protected by her brother or parents and, therefore, feel loved. A person who worries about many things, may find his or her friends more thoughtful. However, most people are anxious simply because they lack the faith to believe that God is sufficient in all circumstances. And that comes about by listening to satan's lies instead of God's Word.

Anxiety is curable by turning our lives over to God and letting him take care of the problems that threaten to rob us of your joy. Some believers never fully trust God. It is a choice that only they and we can make. We can trust God, develop our faith, and leave our fears and worries behind; they are a dead weight on our shoulders and unnecessary baggage for our lives.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Matthew 6:25-34

Worry is fruitless.

Proverbs 12:25

Anxiety can produce depression.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Do Christians worry?
- If God can remove anxiety, why do we stubbornly hold on to it?
- How is anxiety and worry cured?

WEAKNESS IS A GIFT

1 Corinthians 12:9-10 – ...*'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me...For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

The Bible uses the words “weak” and “meek” to describe a person who is in need of something. If we are weak it is because we lack something important in our life even if we do not admit it. If we are meek it is because we are aware that we need something, are not afraid to admit it, and we are humbled by our inadequacy.

When it comes to our physical health, it is good to be strong. We need healthy, robust bodies to earn a living, care for your families, and enjoy recreation. It is also good to be strong when it comes to moral decisions; that strength helps us avoid mistakes and shame we can regret for a lifetime.

When it comes to our spiritual life, weakness or meekness can be a blessing because it is through weakness that we realize we need Christ. Through our weakness we come to understand that we do not have all the answers. We see ourselves through God’s lens as children badly in need of him, his strength and his power.

Today’s verse was written by the Apostle Paul who confessed that he was weak; he did not have it all together; there were things in his life that he had little control over. All of his weaknesses were his reasons for trusting God. He tells us that by admitting his weakness the power of Christ rested upon him. He concludes by testifying that with the power of Christ in his life he was made strong.

When we admit that we are spiritually weak and need God to save us, and when we understand that we need the Holy Spirit to help us through each day, we have humbled ourselves before God. Our admission of weakness allows us to enjoy his strength and help. We should do what we can to properly care for our bodies and minds, but our souls are the property of God and he is the best one to build us up.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

2 Samuel 22:1-4

Our strength is from God.

Psalms 37:11

God blesses the meek.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Much of the Bible tells us to be strong. What is the value of being weak?
- How did Paul receive the power of Christ?
- How did Paul become strong?

A DEATH SENTENCE

Romans 6:10-11 – *For the death that He [Christ] died, he died to sin once for all...likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin...*

Hebrews 7:27 – *... for this he did once for all when he offered up himself.*

In God's kingdom sin carries a death sentence. It was God's plan for Adam and Eve to live forever as His close friends. But their rebellion and sin interrupted that relationship, separating them from God. God was, of course, disappointed in them, but in his love for them he was not willing that they should die. To pay for their sins, God required man to sacrifice the blood of animals as a symbol of covering their sins. The sacrifice also humbled man and reminded him that God is supreme. God made the first sacrifice himself on behalf of Adam and Eve, when he killed an animal to make them clothes from its skin.

After hundreds of years people grew tired of the practice and high cost of sacrifices, so they stopped. God, knowing the unreliability of man in his sinful condition but not wanting man to go to hell, ended the practice of animal sacrifice by sending his own son to be killed for our sins; a sacrifice that only needed to be done once for everyone.

When people sacrificed doves or lambs, it covered only their sins since the previous sacrifice. A few months later they had to do it again for their new sins. This was repeated over and over again throughout their lifetime. The awesome thing about Jesus dying for our sins (instead of us), is that it applies to the debt we owe for sins in our past, for our sins today, and for our future sins. This is why the verses for this study remind us that Christ died once, for all; he died one time for all of our sins.

All that we need to do to avail of Christ's sacrifice for us, is to: 1) gratefully accept that gift, and 2) to confess and ask God to forgive our sins. If you do NOT do that, then the death of Christ is meaningless to you and you will not be spared from the death penalty yourself.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Genesis 3:8-21

The first sacrifice for man's sin.

Leviticus 1:1-5

God's instruction to Moses on sacrifices.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why did God impose a death sentence for sin?
- Did God hate Adam and Eve for their sin?
- Why did man have to sacrifice over and over again?
- Should we perform animal sacrifices?

BORN AGAIN

John 3:3 – ...*Jesus answered...unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.*

The teaching about “being born again” has been widely mocked over the years. Even Nicodemus, who responds to Jesus in the next verse, asks him in a ridiculing manner how a grown man can be born again. But these are the words of Christ and there is a good explanation. First of all, Jesus told Nicodemus in verse 5 that unless he was born of water and the Spirit (Holy Spirit) he could not enter Heaven. So, this clearly is a spiritual rebirth, not birth from his mother’s womb.

We are all descendants of Adam and Eve who were kicked out of the Garden of Eden for committing man’s very first sin. (Lucifer and his rebellious friends sinned, but they were angels.) Had Adam and Eve not sinned, they and us would already be living forever, as we will one day in Heaven. Their sin changed the rules, and we all now are born with sin as our first nature. A newborn baby demonstrates rebelliousness when it cries for food and does not get its own way.

The new birth is our only opportunity to escape the sin we are born into. It is a spiritual step that gives us a fresh start in life and the opportunity for a personal relationship with Christ. Our first birth only guarantees us life until we die (and eternity in hell if we reject Christ). Our spiritual re-birth sets us on a path to spend eternity in the presence of our creator and enjoy all the blessings he offers us.

Being born again is absolutely necessary for every person choosing to spend eternity with God.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

John 3:1-7

Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Your conversion makes you a new creation.

1 Peter 1:3

We are “begotten” or born again to a living hope.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why did Nicodemus argue with Jesus?
- What did Jesus mean when he said we must be born of water and the Spirit?
- Why are we born in sin?
- What should I do if my church does not teach that I must be born again?

THE CROSS – OFFENSIVE TO THE UNSAVED

Acts 2:23 – *Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.*

Jesus was arrested, tried, and killed by “lawless” men. But, it happened just as God the Father planned thousands of years in advance and according to God’s purpose. This is why we understand that God sacrificed his son for our sins. Jesus did not come to earth on a suicide mission. He was sent by the Father and sacrificed by his own Father for us. The parallel story is Abraham obeying God about two thousand years earlier, to sacrifice his son Isaac on the same mountain, Mt. Moriah. At the last minute God spared Isaac by providing a lamb, which shows us that Abraham’s faith and obedience was being tested. But the planned sacrifice of Isaac is the very model of Christ’s sacrifice: Isaac did not volunteer to die. He cooperated with his father, just as Jesus cooperated with the Father.

Jesus’ death constitutes a dirty story in that the people who arrested, tried, tortured and killed Jesus, did so illegally. Wrongful execution is the first offense of the cross. The cross was used by Romans for cruel executions and was offensive to Jews of that day, even though the cross has become an emblem of love, grace, and blessing to Christians. The blood of a murdered person is offensive. Jesus’ blood covered the cross to save us from hell. When we wear the cross or display it on our churches, we remind the unsaved of Jesus’ death, which offends them.

Whenever you hear of governments or societies attempting to remove the cross from public places, you are witnessing the offense of the cross in action. When you hear of Christians being martyred (killed for their beliefs) in other countries, that is evidence of the offense of the cross. It is a good thing. It is a God thing. The cross should offend all who fail to revere and accept its promise for salvation. There is no other way to God than through Jesus and the cross.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The cross is foolishness to unbelievers.

John 14:6

The cross gives us access to God.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why was it necessary for Jesus to die on a cross? Why not a hanging?
- What does the blood signify?
- Why did God not save Jesus from death?
- What Old Testament story is Jesus’ death similar to?
- Why might other people be offended when you wear a cross?

WHO KILLED JESUS?

1 Corinthians 5:7 – *...For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*

Today's question has been asked time and time again for thousands of years.

- 1) God established blood sacrifice to atone for man's sins. He killed an animal of his own creation in the Garden of Eden to make clothes for Adam and Eve, who committed the sin of disobedience. God instructed man to continue sacrificing animals to atone for his sins.
- 2) The story of Abraham being instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac, occurred thousands of years before Christ came. That is how long God was preparing to sacrifice his son for us.
- 3) When God declared mankind so disobedient that even animal sacrifices were not enough, God sent HIS own son, Jesus, to die for our sins — the final and ultimate blood sacrifice.

Who killed Jesus? We could say that we did because of our sin. During World War II, six million Jews were murdered, in part, due to the belief that Jews killed Jesus. The Roman government might be blamed because they conducted the crucifixion. However, it was really God who killed his son. The Jews and Romans were God's tools in the act.

The principle of sacrifice is that you give-up something important to you. An ancient Jew had to make a financial sacrifice to purchase an animal to be killed in the temple. Abraham was instructed to personally sacrifice his own son. God sent his son as His sacrifice for us. God used a court of Jews to try Jesus and the Roman government to perform the execution. But it was because of our sins that God sacrificed Jesus for us. This should remind us of the extremely high price that was paid for our sins, once and for all.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Matthew 27:11-26

The demand for Christ's death.

Acts 2:22-23

The testimony of Paul that Jews contributed to the murder of Jesus.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What was the first animal sacrifice?
- Why did God decide that animal sacrifices were not enough to cover man's sins?
- Who killed Jesus?
- Do we have a role in Jesus' death?
- Will sacrifices ever be needed again?

POWER OVER SIN

Psalm 32:1 – *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

When we accept Christ's death as total payment for our sins, we receive a gift that keeps on giving. At the moment we receive Christ as your Lord and Savior, all of the sins we committed in the past, the sins we committed today, and the sins we will commit in the future, are covered by this priceless payment. It is our future sins that we will consider in this study.

The Bible tells us that we live in a world in which satan roams freely, tempting, harassing, and lying to us. Our world is full of people who do not know or want to know God, and they live in a carefree manner that reflects that. Although you may now be a believer, you also struggle with the sin nature you were born with. You want to sin. You know you do. But, one of the blessings of God's grace is His power over sin. If we ask God to protect us from temptation, He is faithful to warn us when temptation approaches. He will not stop us from sinning, but his Holy Spirit warns us that it is wrong. God uses those experiences – when we are torn between right and wrong – to mature us and help us learn the importance of submitting to God, rather than the tempter.

If Christ died even for the sins we have not yet committed, how do we avail of that forgiveness? In the same way we did when we became a Christian: we must confess and repent (turn away from sin) each time that we give in to sin. The greatest truth about God's power over sin, is that Jesus' death was a one-time event that convicted satan and sentenced him to Hell. At the moment, he's out on bail, but his sentence date is already recorded on God's calendar. The hand cuffs have been prepared, and arresting angels are standing by. Ultimately, the eradication of satan is the greatest demonstration of God's power over sin. But, his power is available to us every day of our life, we just have to want it and tap into it.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 Peter 5:8-9

Satan is looking for you.

Psalm 51:1-3

Continual confession.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Which sins does God forgive us of, just those from yesterday?
- Does God allow satan to tempt us?
- How can we be protected from satan's temptations?
- How many times must Jesus die for us?

THE EMPTY GRAVE

Psalm 49:15 – *But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me.*

The best stories have happy endings. Christ was arrested, beaten, tortured, sentenced to death by an illegal court, nailed to a cross, killed, and buried. If the story ended there, it would be heart-breaking. But Christ spent just three days in the grave before he returned to his friends alive. Now, that is a happy ending.

The resurrection is more than a happy ending for the story of Jesus. It is proof of his promise to us. Jesus could have invisibly gone from the grave back to Heaven without us ever knowing. That would have left us wondering if what he taught and told us was true. Instead, he proved all that he claimed about who he was and why he came, through his rejection of death and his empty grave. Not only that, but he met with his followers for about forty days before he finally returned to Heaven.

The payment for our sins was paid by Jesus at the moment he died, right there on the cross. But, in showing us that death could not hold him, he demonstrated that we, too, will not be bound by death. We, too, will be resurrected to live with him forever in Heaven and the new earth.

When a believer dies, his soul continues living and goes immediately into the presence of God in Heaven. The body dies and is buried, but our souls will never die. When Christ returns (in what we call the Rapture) to gather believers before the Tribulation begins, our old dead bodies will be resurrected from the grave (or the sea, or furnace, or from being scattered by animals) and instantly made new, whole, healthy, and perfect. Our restored bodies are then rejoined with our souls, just as Christ was after his resurrection.

When we commemorate the death of Christ we should not neglect to celebrate his resurrection. He died and rose again that we might have the same privilege.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Romans 6:1-9

Death has no power.

Philippians 3:8-11

Life in Christ.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is the importance of Christ's resurrection?
- What happens when a believer dies?
- Does cremation prevent resurrection?
- Does being eaten by an animal or being blown up in an explosion, prevent resurrection?

THE CROSS WE WEAR

Mark 8:34 – ...*Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

Catholics and Protestants usually wear or display different crosses. History tells us that unadorned (plain) crosses first appeared in churches and jewelry soon after Christ was crucified to commemorate his death and resurrection. That is the original cross and the one preferred by most Protestants. Artists introduced the Crucifix in the second century and that is the cross that most Catholics use. It depicts Jesus dead and nailed to the cross, and represents to Catholics a reminder of the pain and suffering Christ endured for us. We see some Protestants wearing Crucifixes, and some Catholics wearing plain crosses. It is a matter of personal preference and we do not believe that it matters to God as long as the believer wearing the cross understands the true story of Christ's sacrifice: That Christ died for our sins and rose alive again three days later.

Some Christians agree with Calvin, an early Protestant reformer, that displaying any version of the cross constitutes idolatry. While it is possible for any symbol created by man to become an idol, we can wear or display crosses for the purpose of reminding us of Christ's sacrifice, without allowing them to become objects of worship. God expressly forbids idolatry, even if it is about him.

As believers we honor the death of Christ and await our own personal resurrection. We should not allow disagreements to arise between Protestants and Catholics over which cross best portrays Christ's sacrifice for us, and his promise of resurrection. Regardless of the crosses we wear or hang in our churches, we should all be reminded that Christ's death paid for our sins, and his resurrection is proof that we will someday be resurrected from the grave, too. That is the most important thing we should celebrate.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 Corinthians 1:17-18

The cross reveals and releases the power of God.

Colossians 1:19-20

The blood.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Is it okay for a Protestant to wear a Crucifix?
- Why do Protestants wear plain crosses (without a dead Jesus on the cross)?
- Can a cross become an idol?
- Does God approve of worshipping the cross?

OBTAINING GOD'S GUIDANCE

John 16:13 – ...when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth...

Followers of Christ are not free of difficulties and trials. The difference between us and others in the world, is that we have a faithful God who loves to watch over us, guide us on safe paths, help us through the trials of life, and comfort us when we are sick or discouraged. You may be facing challenges, problems, or discouragement today, right at this very moment. Times like this demand greater wisdom and insight than you possess yourself. Maybe you need some advice for a decision you must make. Perhaps you carry a heavy burden for a wayward son or daughter. Scripture abounds with assurances that God wants to be – and needs to be – our guide in every step we take in life.

When a believer prays for guidance and advice, he is praying for a power that he already possesses: the Holy Spirit. But many times, we resist the guidance of the Holy Spirit because the answer we get, is not the answer we want. In our scripture passage today the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth. But often we don't want the truth (which is what God wants for us), we want what WE want. So we reject the Spirit of truth and look for other options.

The choice is ours, listen to God or listen to ourselves (or other men). There really is only one right answer for our situation. But as we have seen in other teachings about the Holy Spirit, we must give him the freedom to operate in our life. We received the Holy Spirit when we were saved, but listening to and yielding to the Him is a choice we must make...every day.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Psalm 48:14

God desires to guide us

John 14:16-18

Christ sent his own spirit to live in and guide each of us.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Who is The Spirit of Truth?
- Do Christians have problems?
- Why do we say that we already possess a source of guidance and advice?
- Will the Holy Spirit force us to do what he advises?
- If we have a hard decision to make, and our best friend gives us some advice that was different than what the Holy Spirit (or the Bible) guides to do, which advice should we choose?

WISDOM

Psalm 111:10 – *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do his commandments.*

James 1:5 – *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

The definition of wisdom is an understanding of what is true. The need for us to exercise wisdom is a basic principle of the Christian life. Along with the free will God gave us to decide our own destiny – to choose between good and evil, and heaven and hell – He also wants us to make good decisions about everything in our lives and to base those decisions on his truth. Satan offers us only lies, so don't expect wisdom to come from him.

God could have made us like robots with no minds of our own. However, He desires companionship and a relationship with us, something a robot cannot satisfy. When we love and worship God, He is pleased because we do it willingly, not because we are forced to. God is pleased when we use the truth of the wisdom He gives us, to make good decisions in our lives.

Psalms 111:10 explains that we begin the process of acquiring Godly wisdom when we fear (respect) Him and obey His commandments. In James 1:5 we see that God will give us wisdom if we ask him for it. Why? Because God insists that WE make the important choices in our lives. If God made our decisions and choices for us, then we would be that impersonal robot with no mind of our own.

We need wisdom to make the right choices between right and wrong. God will give us the wisdom we need when we respect and obey Him, and ask him for it. Unbelievers do not have that promise until they accept Christ as their Savior.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Job 28:12-28

Even in his suffering, Job told his friends that God is the only source of wisdom.

Psalm 111:10

Wisdom is available to those who fear God and obey Him.

Luke 2:52

Even Jesus as a boy, is said to have increased in wisdom and favor with his Father.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is wisdom?
- Why is wisdom important for us?
- Does God force us to love him? If not, why does God not force us to love him?
- Can Satan give us wisdom? If not, why not?
- What are the three things we must do to obtain wisdom?

HOW TO KNOW GOD'S PLAN FOR US

Ephesians 2:10 – *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

The Bible tells us that God has a specific plan for our lives, but many believers do not know what that plan is. God's plans are established at two levels: 1) His general plan for all of us, and 2) His personal plan just for you.

God's general plan for all believers is revealed throughout scripture. We are to: love Him more than we love anyone else (including our spouse, children, and parents), honor Him with our lifestyle, worship only Him, obey His instructions, and serve Him.

God's personal plan for you is in addition to His general plan for everyone. It might be to serve Him in fulltime ministry, or to serve Him by helping others, or to serve Him where you work by being an authentic witness of His transforming power. God did not make His plan for your life AFTER He created you. He planned your life and then He created you with the personality, character, and talents needed to fulfill His plan. When we agree to serve Him in the manner He designed, He equips us with skills and abilities to accomplish that plan. Many believers claim they cannot serve God because they are not qualified. But, God qualifies us AFTER we agree to serve Him.

To learn God's specific plan for us, we must: 1) commit to living a Godly life (God cannot use us if we are living in intentional sin), 2) make it our priority to live according to God's plans (not our own plans), and 3) we must already be fulfilling God's general plan that applies to all of us. Advancing from God's general plan to His personal plan is similar to a promotion. That promotion demands that our relationship with Christ be anchored in prayer and worship, and that we pass the trials He allows to build our faith. When these requirements are met, God will freely communicate His personal plan for our life. And that plan will be far superior, more satisfying, and generate more joy than any plan we could have made.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Psalm 33:10-11

God has a plan for you.

Proverbs 6:16-18

You can get into serious trouble if your plans disagree with God's plans for you.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- When did God make His plans for your life?
- What are the two plans that each of us is responsible for living by?
- Does God always equip us to serve Him before we agree to serve?
- What must we do before God trusts us with his personal plan for us?

CITIZENSHIP

Philippians 3:20-21 – *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body...*

The only kingdom that is fully committed to God and the teachings of Christ, is the Kingdom of God to which we automatically become citizens when we are born again (John 3:3). Though we may be national citizens of the Philippines, the 1-90 years we spend here are but a fraction of eternity we will spend in God's kingdom.

The Philippines claims to be the only "Christian" nation in Southeast Asia, simply because more people consider themselves to be Christians than Muslims, Buddhists, tribal animists or followers of other religions. We will not go to Heaven only because we live in a country that claims to be Christian. We are not spiritually secure or godly because we are Filipinos (or Germans or Americans or Australians or any other nationality). We are not saved because we had a godly mother, or because we belong to a certain church.

The only way to secure a citizenship in God's eternal kingdom is through personal confession of our sins to God, and the humble acceptance of Jesus' death in payment for those sins. No one can do that for us. Church membership does not guarantee our salvation. No earthly government can proclaim us a Christian. Only the Holy Spirit of God can assure us of our security in Christ when we become born-again believers. But, there are plenty of other voices in the world that will drown out the Holy Spirit's voice if we listen to them.

We follow Christ in obedience by using the Word of God (the Bible) as our compass and instruction. If we listen only to men instead of God's Word, we are likely to fall for false teachings and lies. If we do not read the Bible we will not know if we are hearing the truth. The Bible must be our map through life. Otherwise, we may steer a path to Hell instead of to Heaven.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

2 Corinthians 5:1-8

Our heavenly house.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Citizens of the Kingdom of God.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Is there such a thing as a Christian nation?
- Why does church attendance alone, not get us to heaven?
- How do we know that we are saved?
- How do we find God's truth?

DAVID'S FAVOR WITH GOD

Matthew 22:44 – *The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool.*

This verse does not directly present the life of David and his special relationship with God, but it does provide us an important clue. If Jesus quoted David, God must think highly of him.

King David began life as a young boy herding sheep. He loved God and God gave him special maturity, wisdom and courage, which he used to kill an oversized man who was terrorizing Israel's entire army. To protect his sheep, David killed wild animals with his bare hands. He grew up to lead armies into battle, and he was God's choice to be King of Israel. But David struggled with temptation just like us. He had an affair with a married woman and then had her husband killed to hide the sin. He also wrote most of the book of Psalms. David's life was good one moment, and sinful the next. Sounds like us, does it not?

How did David become the favored man of God when he made so many mistakes, and why did God choose David as the ancestor of Jesus the man (Mary was a descendent of David)? And, in today's verse, why does Jesus quote this sinful man?

David demonstrated what each of us must develop: a humble heart that is willing to break for the consequences of our sins, plus a determination to change. David fervently and repeatedly bowed before God to confess his sins and plead for God's forgiveness. Each time, God forgave him. When we are obedient to Christ, he will equip us to face the challenges of life just as God did for David. God may not give us the strength of a super-hero, but when satan throws the full force of his demons against us, God will make us equal to the challenge. But, again, only if we are serving God and living in obedience to him.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 Samuel 16:10-13

David is anointed king.

2 Samuel 11:2-5

David's adultery.

2 Samuel 11:14-17

David commits murder.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Is all sin forgivable?
- Must we face the consequences of our sins, even those God forgives?
- Why did God continue to love David, after he made so many mistakes?

TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR FINANCES

Proverbs 28:20 – *A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.*

Proverbs 28:25 reads: “He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered.” If we live according to the commandments of God and trust him for what we need, we will have plenty enough for ourselves and to bless others. But, if we make wealth our primary goal instead of serving God, or if we are stingy and fail to bless others, we will have nothing but problems.

The concept of prosperity in the Bible is not wealth beyond what we need. Instead, it centers around the concept of God giving us all that we need, plus just enough to bless others. In God’s Kingdom, when we give more, we receive more, not so we can become rich, but so we can give away even more.

Matthew 6:8 reads: “...your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask him.” If God agrees with you that you need a new motorcycle AND you have been faithful in giving to him and to others, you will receive a new motorcycle. Many believers become frustrated with God when they do not get what they feel they deserve. The reason is that they and God do not agree on what they need. And this relates to praying according to God’s will. If we have a healthy, intimate relationship with Christ because of our obedience to him, we will not pray for things that are not God’s will for us. If we are not praying for the wrong things, we will not be frustrated.

If we trust God enough to obey him, we will be satisfied and grateful with what God gives us, and he will give us more than we need so we can bless others. The Christian life is not about accumulating wealth, but sharing what God blesses us with. Joy comes not with what you have, but in what you give.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

2 Chronicles 26:1-5

King Uzziah prospered because of his obedience to God.

Proverbs 22:1-2

The rich and the poor have something in common.

Psalms 1:1-3

God blesses those who walk uprightly.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Is it a sin to be rich?
- What is the responsibility of the rich?
- If God blesses a poor person, what is his responsibility?

WHERE IS GOD'S GUIDANCE?

Psalm 32:8 – *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye.*

Many Christians pray for things that do not please God. Others pray for God's guidance, but reject it because they do not like it. Usually this is because they had certain selfish expectations of what God would do for them, or what he would give them. A believer may want a brand new, shiny mountain bike, but God gives him a second-hand bike instead. That makes him disappointed and frustrated with God. A mother may ask God to keep the police from finding her son, who is guilty of a crime. Unfortunately, a great many people ask God to help them hide their sins.

Other Christians ask God for guidance and never receive it. Why? Because God has certain prerequisites for people to receive his guidance, and many people skip that part. If we want God's guidance, we must make sure that:

- 1) Sin and unforgiveness is not blocking our relationship with him.
- 2) We patiently await God's timing.
- 3) We are praying for things that will please God.
- 4) We are reading our Bible for the answers we need.
- 5) We are willing to accept whatever answer God gives us, even if it is not the answer we want.

God is not trying to cheat us or be secretive. His guidance is ready and available to us, but we have to satisfy the prerequisites before we will receive it, and then we must commit to following it. How often are we asked for advice by our spouses or children, and then watch them do exactly the opposite of what we suggested? How do we feel when that happens? God is also disappointed when we ask for his guidance, then reject it and do our own thing.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Hebrews 4:14-16

Our helper.

John 14:15-18

The Holy Spirit

Isaiah 28:29

God: counselor and guide.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why might God not give guidance to someone?
- What are the two sources of guidance?
- How do we disappoint God?

REGULARLY SCHEDULED MAINTENANCE

Ezekiel 14:6 – ...*thus says the Lord God: ‘Repent, turn away from your idols [anything that distracts you from the Lord], and turn your faces away from all your abominations [sins].*

When we buy a motorcycle, boat motor or grass cutter, the owner’s manual informs us that it will require regularly scheduled maintenance. Why? It just came from the factory and everything is perfect! If our new car replaced an old car that required us to go out almost every day to fix things to keep it running, we may have expected a new car to be free from repairs and maintenance. But a new car will only run well if we maintain it properly. For instance, the oil must be changed every 7,000 kilometers.

When we give our life to Jesus, we might think that we are a new creation that requires no more repairs or maintenance. Think again. Once we are born again, we are a new person and safe from the penalty of Hell, but we still live in a sinful world with temptations that attract our attention and cause us to sometimes stumble.

God’s word – our owner’s manual – informs us that we require regularly scheduled maintenance in the form of Bible study, prayer, and repentance. Repentance is the act of confessing our sin AND turning away from it, with the intent to never do it again. We are saved once; repentance does not save us again. But, repentance will help us maintain a harmonious and joyful relationship with Jesus.

Just as regularly scheduled maintenance (oil and filter changes, greasing the joints, checking the tires) keeps a new motor running well, repentance – daily for some of us – keeps our new, born-again life with Christ in tip-top shape. We also contribute to our maintenance by reading our Bibles, praying, attending church and Bible studies. We must not neglect regular maintenance of our souls, or we might find them failing, like an old worn out motor.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Psalm 51:10-12

Renewing our spirit.

Ezekiel 18:21-22

Repentance: turning away from sin.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is man’s owner’s manual?
- Is repentance a one-time act, or does it need to happen repeatedly?
- How to do we maintain our relationship with Christ?

ALL OF OUR SINS

Romans 6:10-11 – *For the death that He [Christ] died, he died to sin once for all...likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin...*

Hebrews 7:27 – *...for this he did once for all when he offered up himself.*

In God's kingdom, sin carries a death sentence. Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, forcing God to punish them for their disobedience by kicking them out of the garden and forbidding them from eating of the Tree of Life, which meant they would someday die. At the same time, God instituted sacrifices, which was a way for man to humble himself and admit his sins. God performed the first sacrifice himself when he killed animals and made clothes for Adam and Eve from their hides. Those animals represented the first bloodshed in his creation.

God then commanded his people to perform regular sacrifices of animals as a reminder that sin results in death and requires God's forgiveness. However, most people eventually grew tired of the practice of sacrifices and stopped. So, God sacrificed his own son, Jesus, to be the final sacrifice needed to pay for our sins.

The death of Jesus for our sins, eliminates that punishment for us. It covers the sins we have already committed, plus those we will commit in the future. Animal sacrifices only covered past sins, which is why the Jews had to sacrifice often. Christ's death paid – once and forever – the debt we owe for all of our sins.

To avail of this blessing – God's sacrifice of his son for us – we must:

- 1) Graciously accept that gift, and
- 2) we must continue to confess and ask forgiveness for our future sins.

If we do not do that, then the death of Christ is meaningless to us and will not excuse us from the death penalty.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

John 5:24-29

Christ's power over death.

Romans 6:22-23

Unforgiven sin results in death.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why did God sacrifice an animal for Adam and Eve?
- Why did God demand that man performed animal sacrifices prior to Jesus coming?
- What sins does Christ's death cover?

OUR APPETITES

Proverbs 23:2-3 – *When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat if you are man [or woman] given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.*

The book of Proverbs often delivers wisdom in a clever way, which requires us to look beyond the literal text to find buried truths. In reading this passage we might have thought: “When was the last time I had dinner with a ruler?” or “Am I to slit my own throat because I am a big eater?”

Meat, fish, rice, and drink is not mentioned in this passage. It is speaking of appetites – or desires – that have nothing to do with food. You may have an appetite for studying the Bible, telling people about Jesus, playing basketball, or sewing. Another person’s appetite may be for fishing, hiking, watching television, or making new friends. However, many people have appetites for things that hurt them, such as violence, alcohol, or drugs.

Who is the ruler in this passage? In John 12:31 Jesus identifies the ruler of this world as satan. Satan can give us an appetite for wickedness.

Today’s verse tell us to “consider carefully what is before you” because nothing that the ruler of his world (satan) calls good, is really good. We see that in Genesis when satan deceived Adam and Eve. If you listen to satan and his lies, you might as well do as today’s verse says, and “put a knife to your throat,” because you are following satan to hell, which is just another form of suicide..

The nice things that satan offers you are the brief pleasures of sin. All of the temptations of satan amount to deceptive food. Please do not slit your throat (or that of anyone else). We must be mindful of our appetites: where they come from, what they are for, and what they could lead to.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

John 4:31-34

Something other than food.

Isaiah 26:7-9

Desiring God.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Can you describe deceptive food?
- Who is the ruler of this world?
- Why might following satan to hell, be a form of suicide?
- What are some good appetites?

BORN IN SIN

John 3:18 – *He who believes in him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

Romans 5:19 – *For as by one man's [Adam's] disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's [Christ's] obedience many will be made righteous.*

No one likes to think that a cute and cuddly, new-born baby is a sinner. Which is why many believers ignore the portions of scripture that tell us differently; they find it too disagreeable to believe EVERYTHING the Bible says. The danger in accepting or rejecting parts of the Bible based upon what is comfortable for us, is that we then make all of the Bible subject to our own emotions, sensibilities, or likes and dislikes. If we doubt even one verse in the Bible, how can we trust any of it?

John 3:18 quotes Jesus who says that he did not come to condemn the world; it was already condemned by the sin introduced by Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. The verse in Romans confirms that Adam's disobedience also made us sinners, but that Christ's obedience (his death on the cross) makes it possible for us to be saved from our sins. We were each born a sinner and unless we accept Christ's sacrifice, we will die in our sin.

Our duty as believing parents is not to convince ourselves that our babies are perfect, but to guide our children into relationships with Jesus. Our children will one day reach ages when they are accountable for either accepting or rejecting Jesus. That age is different for each child because it depends upon their intelligence, maturity, and how well they have been taught. For one child it could be as young as 5, while another child may not be ready to make that decision until he or she is 12. Until a child is capable of making an informed decision, he or she is covered under the grace of God and is eligible for Heaven, should death take him or her prematurely. Our responsibility to be witnesses for Jesus to unsaved people, begins in your own home, to your own children.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Job 5:6-7

Man is born to trouble.

John 3:3-7

The necessity of being born again.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What does it mean to be born in sin?
- How much of the Bible can we trust to be true?
- Are you children saved simply because you are?
- When is a child responsible for making his or her own decision to follow Christ?

IT IS OUR NATURE TO SIN

Ephesian 2:3 – *...we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath...*

People are often offended when told that by ignoring God's demand for obedience and holiness, they are sinners. Regardless of how good we are, if we do not live for Christ, our life is a waste and we will someday face judgment. The scripture that proclaims we can be saved only through Christ, is not popular and is rejected by every other religion. But apart from obedience to the commands of Christ, we cannot be set free from our nature to sin, which we inherited at birth.

We do ungodly things because we are sinners. As we saw in last week's study, we were not born righteous. We were born sinners, which led us to do things not pleasing to God.

The high price that God paid to save us from our sins – killing his own son – illustrates for us the power of our sin nature. It is so powerful that it influences both the bad that we do, plus the bad we are capable of doing. The sin nature is an invasive cancer of the soul that takes a genuine miracle to cure. That miracle appeared by the arrival of our God (Jesus) in the form of a man to die in our place, and then to come back to life three days later. He then returned to Heaven to prepare a home for us who accept his death as payment for our sins.

Even after we are saved, our old sin nature will linger in the background, occasionally drawing us into temptation. But if our sin nature is still controlling our life most of the time, perhaps we have not fully surrendered to God. Consider again the promise for salvation through Christ's death in our place.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

John 10:9-11

The Good Shepherd.

John 14:6-7

Satan as a lion.

1 John 1:8-10

Making Christ a liar.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How important is it to obey Christ?
- What does it mean that it is our "nature" to sin?
- What does it mean that sin influences what we are "capable" of doing?

How Satan Operates

Job 1:12 – *And the Lord said to satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.’...*

Wise forest managers allow natural fires to burn through the under growth of a forest from time to time because it is nature’s way of restoring the forest’s balance of life. Well-managed fires burn brush and weeds that steal nutrients from the trees, and some forest managers intentionally start fires for that purpose. Within a few months of a fire, seeds from the trees germinate and new trees begin to grow.

A similar principle applies in God’s kingdom when our lives become overgrown with things that do not please God. We allow worldly pursuits to overshadow our pursuit of God, and unhealthy habits to replace Godly obedience and service. When that happens, God must burn away the distractions and unhealthy behaviors in our lives.

The book of Job demonstrates how God allowed satan to test Job’s faith. There are generally two reasons that believers might suffer hardship:

- 1) A person makes unwise decisions that land him in trouble, or
- 2) God uses satan to perfect one’s faith.

Note that we refer to hardships that affect “believers.” Non-believers may not be under God’s protection.

As believers satan stands outside our lives tempting us to sin. He tries to convince us that God cannot be trusted. Satan cannot possess us and take control of our minds, but God may allow satan to make our lives difficult to shift our attention back to him.

If we suffer, we should evaluate our lives and see if we are doing things that do not please God. He may allow satan to cause our suffering so we will change our minds and once again please God. Remember, too, it is not a sin to be tempted; every believer is tempted. Sin happens when we yield to temptation and take satan up on his offer.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Mark 1:13

Jesus is tempted.

1 Corinthians 10:13

Limits to temptation.

James 1:13

God does not tempt us.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why is satan allowed to tempt us?
- Is there value in being tempted? If so, what is that value?
- What power does satan have over us, if any?
- What are some reasons that we might suffer hardship?

THE CARNAL CHRISTIAN – PART 1

I Corinthians 3:2-3 – *I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able for you are still carnal.*

Carnal is defined as living according to the desires of the flesh; your sinful nature. Today's verse addresses believers who grow slowly in their faith and take a long time to reflect a godly lifestyle. We do not have to clean up our act before becoming a Christian. Christ taught that we can come to him as we are. However, after we are saved God expects us to give up bad habits and begin to live according to his plan. The Christian life is about surrendering to the Lordship of Christ. God then begins to transform a new believer through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in that new believer.

Some believers have been saved for years but are still living in an ungodly manner. If we condemn such a person we are judging them, which God forbids. However, if we are pleasing God in our life, his Holy Spirit might reveal to us that a friend needs advice and spiritual counsel. He or she may simply be unaware that their behavior could jeopardize their testimony or short-circuit their relationship with Christ, and our loving encouragement and discipleship could help them change.

A carnal Christian is a believer – someone who is genuinely saved – who still submits to many desires of his or her own flesh, or the world. That kind of lifestyle hurts God, but it hurts the believer even more. However, God can transform us and help us repel the appeal and power of sin. It is a process that, for some, takes a lifetime; for others it might happen overnight. Discipleship is a way for us to escort other believers through the transformation with a loving and helping hand, and by modeling Godly behavior ourselves. If the Holy Spirit gives us the discernment to see a believer at risk, we have also been given the task to disciple, not attack, that person.

In part 2 of this topic, we will consider how our own carnal lifestyle, habits, traits, and errors can cripple our testimony and rob us of peace with God.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Romans 7:14-25

Carnality.

Romans 8:1-11

The flesh.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What does the word “carnal” mean?
- How is a person transformed to be more like Christ?
- What is discipleship?

THE CARNAL CHRISTIAN – PART 2

2 John 6 – *This is love, that we walk according to his commandments...*

In part 1 of this topic, we described that a carnal Christian is a genuine believer who is confused or rebellious, and wanders through life with one foot in Heaven and one foot in the world.

We can violate our testimony by the choices we make. For instance, you might confess to an unsaved neighbor that before you gave your life to Jesus you had a problem with liquor, but Christ removed your desire to drink. Days later your neighbor sees you on your porch sharing a bottle of Rum with a friend. Even if you are not drunk, your testimony is now in conflict with your choices, and your neighbor may no longer trust you.

We can discredit our testimony by offending others. Some Christians believe that going to movies is wrong for them, and they may be offended if we try to talk to them about a movie we went to. Others choose to not eat meat, and they may be offended if we have them over for dinner and serve meat.

Must we refrain from doing things we feel are permissible, to avoid offending others who may have other views? The Apostle Paul says “yes.” He avoided eating meat or doing other things he felt were okay, in front of people who felt they were not okay. Strict rules about such things could lead to legalism, and that often develops into an emphasis on rules rather than a relationship with Christ. But sensitivity to the feelings of others is expected of us.

As believers we are being watched and studied by those around us. Other believers want assurance that we are authentic. Unbelievers want to find fault in our lives. We have a high calling to demonstrate the validity of Christ in our lives in all circumstances, in all places, before all people. We make mistakes from time to time because we are a work in progress. None of us will become holy in this life, but making holiness our goal is important.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Keeping our testimony valid.

2 Corinthians 6:1-3

Offending others.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is the value of our testimony?
- How do we avoid offending people that we want to lead to the Lord?
- If God allows us to do something, should we care about what people think?

BATTLES OF THE FLESH

Romans 8:1 – *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

When the Bible speaks of behaviors that are “according to the flesh,” it is a reference to the desires of men that are in opposition to the desires of God. These can include sexual misconduct, practices that harm our bodies, anger, bullying, and many more...anything that does not please God.

Before we were saved, our lives were an open door for satan to tempt us and draw us into any sinful practice he wanted. Please note, that being tempted is not a sin. Only when we yield to temptation are we sinning. Now that we are saved, we may still be tempted, but we have the Holy Spirit trying to guide us away from sin. The Bible makes it clear that even though we are saved, we will still sin. Hopefully you can testify that your life today is better and less sinful than before you were saved. As we mature in our faith and develop a closer relationship with Christ, we should find ourselves falling into sin less frequently and less deeply.

Battles of the flesh – the carnal nature we discussed in previous studies – affect us all. That is how satan tries to draw us away from God. Satan knows that when we sin our only recourse is to face our shame and confess it to God, which many people are reluctant to do. Satan’s goal is to draw us into a sin that is too shameful for us to bear, and cause us to try and hide from God, just as Adam and Eve tried to do. But, it is impossible to hide from God.

God allows satan to play that game to help us toughen up and learn to lean on the Holy Spirit to guard our minds against the temptations satan presents to us. Our proper defense is prayer, learning the truth from God’s Word, and listening to the Holy Spirit instead of satan. If we ask God to reveal to us the desires of our mind that he does not like, he will do so.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

Immorality.

Romans 1:20-27

Lust.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why do we not stop sinning when we become a Christian?
- Why does satan use shame to divert our attention away from God?
- How do we protect ourselves against temptation?

NOT PERFECT, JUST FORGIVEN

2 Corinthians 12:9 – *...My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness...*

Years ago a popular Christian slogan stated, “I’m not perfect, I’m just forgiven.” It is true for every believer, including Moses, David, and the most noble of Christ’s disciples. Only one man who ever lived was perfect. That was Jesus. He was perfect in Heaven when he created the world, he was perfect during the 32 years he walked this earth, and he is perfect today as he sits at the right hand of the Father.

The Bible contains God’s instructions, prophecies, and promises. It includes stories of people who served God with distinction to inspire us, and stories of people who failed him so we can avoid their mistakes. To please God and aim for Heaven, we do not have to become perfect in this life. In fact, it is impossible. God does not need us to be perfect. His strength is made perfect in our weakness. If we were perfect — if we never made a mistake, never had a bad thought, never said something unkind, never hurt someone’s feelings, and never disobeyed Christ — what kind of testimony would we have? No one would take us seriously; they would think us too strange.

Our salvation is fully covered under God’s grace. He expects us to make steady progress over the course of our lifetimes to be more like Jesus, but it will remain an elusive goal until we reach Heaven. While we are here, our charge is to introduce others to Jesus. To do that we must relate to their problems and struggles, understand their doubts (because we were once doubters, too), and empathize with their hardship and pain through the difficulties we have faced.

No one is better suited to share Christ with our friends and loved ones than us. In our weakness and imperfection, God is able to work through us to minister to others.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:6

The perfection of God.

Isaiah 40:28-31

Power to the weak.

2 Peter 1:5-11

Spiritual growth.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How do we become perfect?
- How does our imperfection help us lead others to Christ?
- Who is the best person to share Christ with your relatives and friends?

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR GOD'S PROMISES?

Psalm 37:4 – *Delight yourself in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your heart.*

John 15:7 – *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*

There are thousands of promises in the Bible. Some are conditional, some are unconditional. A conditional promise requires something from us before it can be fulfilled, as we see in the two scriptures above. God will give us the desires of our hearts, but first we must “delight” ourselves in the Lord, which means to fully commit to Him and live in obedience to his instructions. God does not promise to provide the needs of those who do not submit to him. Said in another way: God blesses only those who obey him.

The words, “abide in me,” in John 15:7 refer to a deep relationship with Christ. It literally means that when we live according to God’s instructions, we are constantly in Christ’s embracing arms 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Since God chooses not to be in the presence of sin, separation occurs between him and us every time we sin. Only repentance and receiving his forgiveness restores the relationship. We remain saved when we sin, but disconnected from our intimate relationship with Christ until we repent. Frequent separation from Christ because of our sins, also interrupts the flow of God’s promises.

When we do obey God our potential for blessings is unlimited. Our challenge is to develop an intimate relationship with Christ and then to fortify our protection from temptation by giving the Holy Spirit the freedom to empower our spiritual lives. Receiving Christ as our Savior is like getting a new rice cooker. It is not very useful until we plug the cooker into the power source. When we plug into God’s power source – the Holy Spirit – the potential for blessings is great. Are you ready to abide in Christ, to really devote yourself to him and live in obedience? It is the only way to enjoy God’s promises and blessings.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

2 Peter 1:2-4

God’s precious promises are ours.

Malachi 3:8-10

Tithes produce blessings.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Describe a conditional promise.
- Describe what it means to abide in Christ.
- What happens to a believer’s relationship with Christ when he sins?

EVERYONE LIVES FOREVER

Matthew 25:46 – *And these [unbelievers] will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous [believers] into eternal life.*

Have you ever heard a pastor invite people to become a Christian so they can live forever? While it is true that believers in Christ will live forever, so also will unbelievers (those who reject Christ as Lord and Savior). The difference between them is WHERE believers and unbelievers spend eternity.

The words “eternal,” “eternity,” “forever,” and “everlasting,” share a similar meaning: an event that never ends. We see birth and death often. It is a routine of life that we are very accustomed to, which might make it difficult for us to comprehend life that never ends. But the Bible promises that each of us – believers AND unbelievers – will transfer from this life into a second life that will continue forever without end.

Many unbelievers hope death is final, that nothing will happen after they die, that no one will hold them accountable for their mistakes and their rejection of Jesus. They want to believe that after taking their last breath, it will all be over; no memories, no joy, no regrets. However, their creator says otherwise. God promises to have the last word.

Christians will live forever in the presence of God. If we reject Christ we will also live forever, but in Hell, where there is no God to offer comfort or second-chances. We are duty-bound as servants of God to tell our loved ones the truth. We must not hold on to false hope that our loved ones who reject Christ, will simply cease to exist when they die. We must also not place our hope in last minute deathbed conversions because many people die instantly with no time to be born again. We must face the truth that once our unsaved loved ones die, they will face eternal punishment. We must not give up speaking to them about Jesus. The day is coming when it will be too late to reach them. You may be the only person they will ever meet who can speak truth into their lives and offer them a lifeline.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

John 10:27-28

Eternal life.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Everlasting destruction.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Who is guaranteed to live forever?
- Describe eternity and what it means to live forever.
- Why is a deathbed confession risky?

LIBERATION

Isaiah 61:1 – *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ... to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.*

This passage in Isaiah is prophetic. In fact, much of Isaiah is prophecy, which tells us of future events. For Jews living before Christ came to earth, the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel represented their hope; their promise of a Messiah. In Luke 4:18, Jesus quotes these words from the Old Testament in the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy. Jesus spoke these words, no longer as a future event, but the actual event that was predicted by Isaiah several hundred years earlier. He spoke them in a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth and told his listeners that he was sent to proclaim liberty to captives and set prisoners free.

What captives, and what prisoners? First, this is not a jail-break like we often hear about in the Philippines. Jesus did not bribe guards and judges to release criminals. Second, it is not about criminals at all. It is about you and me. Before we accepted the death of Jesus as payment for our sins, we were captives of satan. We lived from day to day according to satan's false promises and lies. That placed us in a continual state of sin that eventually would have permanently landed us in the worst prison of all: Hell.

Christ came to tell us there is a better way. Through his death he offered us a full pardon from the captivity of satan and the punishment we deserve for our sins. He offers us promises that work, and honesty that is proven. He offers us forgiveness for our sins and a future home in Heaven. We were all born into a sinful state that would have taken us to Hell. But, Christ came as the great liberator to set us free. All we need to do to be liberated from the prison of sin is to accept Christ's death as payment for our sins. That is the gift of salvation; saving us from hell.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Romans 6:7-10

Freedom from sin.

Romans 8:1-5

Free in Christ.

Galatians 5:1

Liberty.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- When the Bible speaks of us being prisoners and slaves, what does that mean?
- How does a pardon from Jesus affect us?
- How do we obtain our freedom from sin?
- What price must we pay to be saved?

ARE YOU EXCITED FOR CHRIST TO RETURN?

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 – *For the Lord himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

The Bible tells us Christ is returning. He came once before as a baby, so why is it difficult to believe he will come again? Yet, many people are willing to take a chance that his promise to return will be the first promise in the entire Bible to fail? Today's verse describes what we call the Rapture when Jesus calls believers to heaven. After we are gone, the earth will experience seven years of terrible misery, which the Bible calls the Tribulation. After that, Christ will return to earth with us and rule it.

Young people anticipating careers, marriage, children and other earthly pleasures, may not feel ready to go to Heaven. But, death is unpredictable and comes to everyone. We can just as easily die from an accident at age 14, as we can from a heart attack at age 74. It is, therefore, important that every person be ready for that event. Even a healthy young person can look forward to perfect health and unlimited joy that Heaven offers us.

We who are excited about Christ's return, are in the minority. The vast majority of people do not know Christ and, therefore, face judgment. They are in no rush for him to return. A pretty teenage girl is looking forward to marrying a handsome guy; she is in no hurry to go to Heaven. A young man about to graduate from college after years of hard work and sacrifice, is hoping to spend a few years in a rewarding career and earn some spending money before he goes to Heaven. A teacher about to retire is anticipating a few years of rest and relaxation; she may not be in a hurry to die and go to Heaven. Heaven awaits us all who follow Christ, while hell awaits those who reject Christ. We must make the correct choice.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Matthew 24:36-44

The time or the day.

Luke 25:25-28

Coming in a cloud.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- At what age should a person be prepared to die, and why?
- Why are some people not anxious for Christ to return?
- Are we guaranteed the right to retire?

EVERYTHING WE WANT

Job 11:7-9 – *Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than Heaven...their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.*

Young children can be difficult to satisfy for more than a few minutes. They play with a toy briefly then look for something else to do. Wise parents train their children to use their minds and imaginations, and cultivate their talents. Good training helps to prevent a spirit of dissatisfaction from blossoming into greed, selfishness and other problems later in life.

Children who develop a spirit of dissatisfaction can grow up exhibiting that as adults, making life miserable for everyone around them, especially their caregivers. When an elderly parent begins to behave like a child, it can be very difficult to care for them. Some adult children lose their patience and abandon their elderly parents.

Dissatisfaction occurs when we discover we cannot have everything we want. God promises to meet all of our needs if we live in obedience to him. But he did not promise to satisfy our desires that do not harmonize with his plan for our lives.

If God gave us every desire of our hearts, even those that are bad for us, they would eventually overshadow our relationship with him. We would spend more time enjoying our blessings than studying God's Word, talking to God, and listening to him. We would spend more time at the beach or admiring ourselves in the mirror, than attending church. Having fun might take the place of witnessing to others. Shopping might be more appealing than helping the needy, encouraging the weak, or caring for the sick.

God designed us to enjoy the deep things of God: His tender friendship, the richness of his love, and the reliability of his faithfulness. Those things out-last, out-perform, and exceed the value of any material thing God might give us.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Psalm 37:3-6

Delight in the Lord.

Deuteronomy 7:9

Faithful God.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- From where does greed come?
- Who can be afflicted by greed, only the rich?
- Which of our desires does God promise to satisfy?
- What might happen to us if God granted all of our desires?

CAN WE TRUST GOD?

Deuteronomy 7:9 – *Therefore know that the Lord your God, he is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commandments.*

Proverbs 22:19 – *So that your trust may be in the Lord; I have instructed you today, even you.*

The writer of today's verse from Deuteronomy is testifying to God's faithfulness and is convinced from his own personal experience, that it is God's nature to remain faithful to those who keep his commandments.

It is difficult to convince someone that God is good, solely by telling that person how good God has been to us. Trust is difficult to transfer from one person to another. If we trust someone simply because they insist that we trust them, that could be a mistake on our part. Blindly trusting someone can get us into a lot of trouble. Trust must be earned by what someone does, not only by what they say.

God invented the principle of earning trust. He tells us to trust him, but then he demonstrates to us that he himself is trustful. The message in the Proverb's verse is saying: Obey what I have commanded you, and you will find me faithful. God wants us to trust him, but he expects us to find out for ourselves that he can be trusted, which we do by obeying his commandments.

Some people go to their graves trusting no one, including God. They receive a lifetime of protection and blessings from God, but find it difficult to trust him in all things. Some even accuse God of being unfaithful when they do not get everything they want. God tells us we can trust him, but he also expects us to test him and see that he is trustworthy, which we can do by simply obeying him.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Jeremiah 17:7-8

The blessings of trusting God.

1 Corinthians 10:13

God is faithful.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How do we learn to trust God?
- How do we learn to trust people?
- Why do some people feel that God is not faithful?
- How do we test God's faithfulness?

WHEN EVERYTHING IS GOING GREAT

Psalm 65:13 – *The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered with grain; they shout for joy, they also sing.*

As we near the end of this age and Christ's return, our world is becoming increasingly immoral and dangerous. Because of the gradual self-destruction of society and the increasing influence of satan, life is more challenging. We face hardship, disappointment, and illness more often than in the past. Our planet is experiencing more natural calamities and wars. These are the signs of the last days foretold in the Bible.

However, we can also experience good days when we feel close to God, when his promises are blessing us, when God is pleased with the decisions we make, and when we sense peace and fulfillment. We earn such days through our relationship with Christ, a relationship many do not have.

When we are desperate we run to God seeking his help because there is no other solution. But what do we do when things go well in our lives? Do we also run to God to praise and thank him? Sadly, many of us neglect to do that. When life is hard, we beg for his help and intervention. When life is good, we forget the source of that goodness and may even take credit for it.

Satan does not need to torment us if we are the victims of our own self-inflicted misery. We are already where satan wants us. However, when we are enjoying the blessings and victories God sends our way, satan will work overtime to make us discontent. When things are going well, we must be especially aware that we are a threat to satan and that we are vulnerable to his attacks.

We must give God the glory for our good days and not ignore our relationship with him. Our prayer life should be strong in the bad times AND in the good times. If we take credit for the good times, we give satan an opportunity to poison our heart. Bad days often follow good days, because we are not thankful.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 Timothy 6:6-7

Contentment.

2 Timothy 3:1-7

Last days.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Fulfillment.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What do we mean when we refer to "the last days?"
- What are some things we will experience in the last days?
- Why does satan not create trouble for some people?

WHY GOD MAKES PROMISES

Ecclesiastes 5:5 – *Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.*

Parents sometimes make promises to their children they fail to keep. They may not intend to do that, but it happens. Plans to do something special for their children are interrupted by unforeseen events. It is best to not make promises that you cannot keep, because it can lead to a child distrusting the parent, which leads to a breakdown in the relationship and, possibly, rebellion. We should look to God as our example. He never makes a promise he does not intend to keep; he never has and he never will.

God has made many promises in his Word. In fact, the Bible is predominantly a book of instruction, prophecies, and promises. God has unlimited power and resources to fulfill his promises, while we have little control over the circumstances of even our own lives, making it often impossible to keep our promises to other people.

God makes promises to give us hope and to demonstrate his sovereignty and power. You and I usually make promises for all of the wrong reasons: to get people off our backs, to buy time while we get our act together, to appease our children, or to impress others. As today's verse suggests, making promises we cannot keep is worse than not making promises. Our very word is a promise, even if we do not say "I promise." Example: "I promise to visit you tonight after dinner," is exactly the same as saying "I will visit you tonight after dinner." Both are promises.

We must be careful about the promises we make. God is perfect at keeping his promises, but we...not so much. God's promises demonstrate his perfection. The promises we break, demonstrate our unreliability. If we are not reliable, we also are not trustful and that destroys relationships between parents and their children, between best friends, between a worker and an employer, or between a pastor and his flock.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Joshua 21:43-45

Faithful God.

Romans 5:1-5

Hope.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is the difference between God's promises and man's promises?
- What is worse than not making a promise?
- What do God's promises demonstrate?
- What do man's promises demonstrate?

THE NEW EARTH

Revelation 21:1 – *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...*

Pictures often portray Heaven as a place where we will float on clouds playing harps all day, every day forever. If you do not find that appealing, join the club. Many people feel that would be a boring way to spend eternity. That portrayal is due to the ignorance or imaginations of artists who create such pictures. The Bible does not tell us Heaven will be like that.

The Bible tells us that, eventually, this earth we struggle on today will be restored to a permanent paradise such as it was before Adam and Eve sinned. Jerusalem will be the capitol and Jesus will be our King. Satan, his demons, and everyone who rejected Christ will be gone. We will live in perfect peace and joy, and enjoy the presence of our friends and loved ones who also accepted Christ as savior. We will have new bodies that will never hurt or get sick. We will never again experience anger, hurt feelings, sadness, criticism, confusion, bad dreams or tears. We won't have any needs to pray about and if we want to know something about God, we can ask Jesus directly.

Bible prophecy suggests we will have work to do, but that we will enjoy the work and never get tired, over-heated, thirsty, or discouraged. Perhaps we won't even get dirty. Think of that! Revelation 21:1 states that the entire universe will be remade when the new earth is formed. After Christ's resurrection, he walked through walls without using a door. We can probably expect to do the same.

Our future with Christ will not be boring. We will not play harps all day. Our life on the new earth will be familiar and similar to what we experience today, but with everything and every person made perfect, and unlimited joy and happiness...if you are a believer. People who die without accepting Christ will have the opposite experience and will suffer for eternity. That would be the wrong choice!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 65:17-19

New heaven and earth.

2 Peter 3:10-13

Righteousness of the new earth.

Revelation 21:2-4

God will dwell with man.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Where will the paradise be where we will spend eternity?
- What kind of work do you expect to do on the new earth?
- What does it mean to suffer in hell for eternity?

HE IS COMING AGAIN

Mark 13:26 – *Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.*

The greatest tragedy of human history is not the pointless wars that have been fought and the millions who died in them, nor is it the great epidemics and disasters that have killed millions of people. Even the murder of Jesus is not a tragedy, because God sent him here for that purpose; God's plans and his ways are always perfect and glorious.

The greatest tragedy is that most Jews missed the first coming of Christ (the birth we celebrate at Christmas). Even though their own scriptures foretold the coming of Christ in splendid detail, most of his own chosen people (Jews) thought Jesus was an imposter, not the real Messiah. And, they did it primarily because their ungodly leaders (priests and teachers) did not want their profitable corrupt businesses shut-down by the Messiah's coming. It is not unlike today in which some very wealthy persons at the top of society, deceive and oppress the poor for their own advantage. The good news is that God used Jesus' rejection by his own people to open the door to salvation for us (Gentiles).

The second most eventful event in history will be the second coming of Jesus. It will be good news for faithful followers of Jesus, because we will be swept up into the heavens. But it will be tragic for those who do not accept Christ as Savior. Some who miss the second coming of Christ will get one more chance to change their minds, but it will come during the horrible misery and persecution of the seven-year tribulation, the likes of which no man has ever seen. They will suffer much if they choose Christ then, but at least they will be saved.

We should thank God, not only for coming as a baby and dying in our place, but for his promise to return again. There is much to be thankful for.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Matthew 24:29-31

The second coming of Jesus.

Acts 13:45-49

Gentiles (us) given access to God.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Explain why the death of Jesus is not a tragedy.
- Why did most Jews reject Jesus?
- What is the difference between the first coming of Jesus, and his second coming?

WILL WE BE JUDGED?

John 5:24 – ...I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

Many believers live in fear of judgment, which is usually the result of poor Bible reading habits. They are frightened that they may one day “answer for their sins.” Today’s verse is a direct quote from Jesus who says that anyone who believes in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior, will not be judged.

Psalm 51:9 describes how God blots out our sins (covers them in heavenly white-out) from his record book. Some teachers claim that God forgets our sins, but that is not in the Bible. And, it would be rather embarrassing for God, who we know to be perfect, to admit he is forgetful. But the Bible does promise that God – once he forgives us – chooses to ignore our bad deeds and never hold them against us or speak of them again.

So, will believers be judged? No. Genuine Christ followers will NOT face judgment. However, those who do not surrender their lives to Christ before they die, will indeed be judged by him for their sins before being sent to hell. They will have no defense and will be forced to admit to each and every sin. Sadly, by then it will be too late to avoid conviction and sentencing. But most troubling about their conviction is that there is no execution. People sent to hell will live there in torment with no further access to God. Believers, on the other hand, will live in the joy, peace, and beauty of heaven in the very presence of Christ their creator and brother, along with their friends and family who were also born-again.

Believers must not live in fear of judgment. Fear limits our joy in the Lord. Instead, we submit to Christ, obey him the best we can, and confess our sins to him promptly. In that way, we please God and find peace of mind.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

John 5:20-23

Christ is the judge.

2 Timothy 4:1

Christ judges when he comes again.

2 Corinthians 5:10

Those who will appear before the judgment seat to be judged.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Do you fear judgment? If so, why?
- Explain why God blots out our sin record.
- Explain why people sent to hell will not be able to pray for help.
- Who will appear before the judgment seat of Christ?
- Who will be judged?

OUR UNCHANGING GOD

Numbers 23:19 – *God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good?*

We are most accustomed with the term “repent” in the context of sin. God calls us to repent – which means to turn away from sin – in order to enjoy fellowship with him. But the word has another definition, as in today’s verse where it describes God’s unchanging character: God does not repent (or turn away from) the decisions he makes, the instructions he gives us, or his plan for our salvation.

God’s unchanging nature gives us trust and confidence in his love, promises, provision, and justice. His unchanging character provides us with the steady hand of his guidance, the fullness of his gifts, and the certainty of our salvation. However, we can resist God’s plan for our lives so stubbornly that he might appoint a substitute believer to fulfill that plan. There might also be instances when we reject God’s assignment to serve him, and the task goes undone. Consider, for instance, that you might be the only Christian a lost person will ever hear the truth from. If you go to the bedside of a dying person who does not know Christ, and you fail to give him or her the opportunity to be born again, you might be serving as an usher for hell, instead a guide to heaven.

God’s unchanging character is his gift to us. It provides us with stability, rock-solid footing, and even-handedness. It dissolves any chance of him changing his mind about our salvation. It is the ultimate expression of his faithfulness to us. But we must not think that we can force God to change his plan for our life by resisting and refusing him. Not only will we miss out on a blessing and the satisfaction of serving God, but someone else might miss Heaven completely. There is no greater regret that we can heap on ourselves, than causing someone else to miss Heaven. We can count on God. Can he count on us?

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Malachi 3:6

God’s reliability.

Psalms 89:1-8

Faithfulness of God.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What does the word “repent” mean?
- What might happen if you reject God’s plan for your life?
- In what ways does God change?
- What can you do to change God’s mind or his plans?

FOLLOWING A CONVICTED LOSER

John 12:31 – *Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*

We anticipate the day when satan and his army of fallen angels will be judged by Christ for their evil deeds; when they will be silenced and sentenced to eternal punishment in hell. We tend to think of that moment of supreme justice as being in the future. However, today's verse, which is a quote from Christ, illustrates that the trial, conviction and sentencing of satan and his demons occurred at the cross.

In John 12 Jesus predicted his own death, the form of his death, AND the fact that his crucifixion was the actual court date of satan. Satan has already been judged and sentenced to eternity in hell. All that remains is for him to be sent there. Christ himself will do that at the end of his thousand year reign on earth which follows the seven year tribulation.

Many believers find prophecies about the end-times confusing. The events and their timetable are amazing, but somewhat difficult to understand. However, the one point we should absolutely understand is that people who reject Christ in this life and instead follow satan, are following a convicted felon. If we reject Christ and choose our own path in life we are, by default, following satan.

A news story told about a woman who plans to marry a prisoner who is awaiting execution. She fell in love with him by becoming his pen pal and is now his biggest supporter. She is a fool because the man admits to murdering several people and has no regrets. Many people are similarly following satan, a mass murderer of billions of persons over the ages. We must not be like them. We can have no future hope or glory in Christ by hitching a ride with the greatest deceiver of all time. It is foolish to follow a convicted loser right into hell.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

John 16:7-11

The world's ruler is judged.

Revelation 20:1-3

Satan's first imprisonment.

Revelation 20:7-10

Satan's final punishment.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- When was satan's trial?
- When will satan be sent to hell?
- If we reject Christ, who is our god, and who do we automatically follow?
- Why does the Bible call satan "the world's ruler?"

A JUST GOD

Deuteronomy 32:4 – *He [God] is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is he.*

Many Filipino churches preach a common message about “the love of God.” In fact, some churches teach nothing but that topic. The love of God is very real and it is entirely correct to teach about it, but we must not ignore the instructions of God, or his justice. While believers have no need to fear judgment, unbelievers have every reason to fear it and the church should diligently teach all of the message of the Gospels.

God’s purpose for us is to introduce others to him. We should desire to take as many people to Heaven with us as possible, because those who reject Christ will face his justice (judgment).

We must not look forward to the judgment of unbelievers with a sense of satisfaction, even if there are people in our lives who cause us trouble and pain. We must not gloat over the lost, even those who have earned their punishment. Instead, we must try to imagine the unkind, mean people in our lives as they might be if they were believers; as people who could be full of joy and forgiven for their mistakes. We might have been like them, had we not found Jesus. So, our aim should be to see even our worst enemies find Christ and be reconciled both to God and to us.

God will love all of us – saints and sinners – to the very end. However, if we die without accepting God’s gift of salvation we will find ourselves standing before the judgment seat of Christ guilty of our sins and destined for hell. It will be Jesus’ darkest hour – heartbreaking – as he sends his own creation to eternal punishment. But it will also be the fulfillment of his promise: The righteous to heaven, unrepentant sinners to hell. As we bathe in the love of God, safe and secure in the promise of a heavenly reward, we should be reminded of the fate of those who reject him. It must motivate us to share our testimony.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 John 1:5-10

Faithful and just.

Psalms 9:7-8

The judge is coming.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why is it necessary to teach all of God’s Word, instead of the love of God only?
- How should we think about our enemies?
- What motivates us to share Christ with others?

GETTING WHAT WE DESERVE

Psalm 28:3-4 – *Do not take me away with the wicked and with the workers of iniquity, who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts. Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors; give them according to the work of their hands; render to them what they deserve.*

We are familiar with the phrase, “Getting what we deserve.” If we live in obedience to Christ we deserve his mercy. But, if we live in disobedience we deserve his judgment. When we pray for something that does not please God, we are asking God to violate his own character and his will for our lives. For example: When a girl asks God to keep her from getting pregnant when she is having sex with her boyfriend. Too few of us pray for a deeper relationship with Jesus, which God will gladly grant if we are sincere.

If our desires are outside of God’s will, we may take matters into our own hands and pursue them anyway. But there are consequences for going against God. Embezzlers eventually get caught. A school head who liquidates MOOE funds for personal use will someday receive justice. Taking fruit from a neighbor’s tree without permission, vegetables from her garden, offerings from the church, books from the library, candy from the store, office supplies from municipal hall, or another student’s lunch, will eventually result in punishment and shame. Employers, schools, neighbors, churches or friends may not realize they are being robbed, but God knows. Only fools think they can get away with sin unnoticed. The gavel of justice will one day fall when they do not expect it.

Blessings we receive from God in humility, will also produce peace of mind, a tranquil spirit, and an intimate relationship with Christ. However, the greed of our own hands results in our shame and humiliation, and a broken relationship with Christ. Getting what we want – whether good or bad – always results in getting what we deserve, whether blessings or chastisement.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Matthew 6:25-31

Priorities.

2 Corinthians 5:7-10

Pleasing the Lord.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Who will get what they deserve at the judgment seat of Christ?
- How might we convince God to change his mind?
- What does our greed produce?

LORD, LORD

Matthew 7:20-21 – *Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.*

If you walk into a doctor’s office, does that make you a doctor? If you walk through a garden can that make you a watermelon? These are silly questions, but the same principle can be applied to our standing with God. In the same way that we do not become a fish when we swim in the ocean, we are not Christians simply because we attend church. Today’s reading is Jesus saying that not even those who call him by name are guaranteed salvation. According to Jesus, our security in him is based upon our obedience to his instructions and living according to God’s plan for us.

Salvation is available to us when we enter into a personal relationship with Christ who died to pay the penalty that we deserve for our sins. But His death is meaningless if we do not confess our sins to him and follow him obediently.

Verse 20 says we will know who belongs to Christ by their fruits – or, by how they live. Church attendance is good and recommended for everyone. But that is not proof that someone is a Christian. Some people attend church out of a sense of duty or because a parent or spouse forces them to. Some people attend church to impress their neighbors or to earn votes. Some people attend church to hear music or see their friends. None of these motivations will get us to heaven.

The Holy Spirit helps us identify those who are not born-again because those are the persons we are to witness to. It is not judgmental to identify an unsaved person. It is only judgmental when we accuse him or her of being a sinner, or when we reveal that to others. We should attend church for the right reasons (to worship God and learn to share Christ with the unsaved). Plus, we can only secure our future in heaven through a personal relationship with Jesus. A pastor or priest cannot do that for us.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

2 Corinthians 1:9-11

Sincerity.

Psalms 1:1-3

The fruit of our faith.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Is salvation available to us only if we attend church? Why?
- Why does the Holy Spirit reveal to us people who are not saved?
- What are some of the wrong reasons that people attend church?
- How do we secure our future in heaven?

THE SCARS OF SIN

Proverbs 26:27 – *Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him.*

There are at least two results for every sin we commit: 1) God's punishment, and 2) the scars that remain from our mistakes. Doctors may be able to fix the broken bones of a man who falls from a Coconut tree, but scars will remain on his body until he dies. When we confession our sin to God and repent, we are spared God's punishment. But we will bear the scars of our sins, and even our friends and family can be affected by our sins. For example, Adam's sin led to death for each of us.

If a Christian gets drunk then drives his car and kills someone, God will forgive him of that sin when he confesses and repents of it. However, he will retain the awful memory of his mistake for as long as he lives. He may end up crippled from the crash or spend years in prison. He will be required to pay the victims. God forgives him but his life is forever changed by the consequences of his sin and he bears the scars of that mistake to remind him of God's mercy and grace.

A girl who gets pregnant before marriage, will be forgiven of her sin if she confesses it to God and repents of it. However, she may have to give-up her dreams and quit school, spend the rest of her life without a husband, cause her parents humiliation and great expense, and be trapped in poverty. God forgives her but her life is forever changed by the scars of her sin.

Every sin we commit leaves us with some kind of consequence which cannot be reversed or erased. They are scars that last a lifetime, even when God forgives us. We may lose friends through dishonesty or get kicked out of school. We can lose the respect of our spouses or children. Our mistakes may cause us to suffer crippling injuries, or even hurt or kill someone else.

Intentionally sinning because we expect God to forgive us later, is a terrible way to live. Our sins may cost us and others horrible suffering. But just as important, that attitude offends God and demonstrates that we may not be saved at all and, therefore, are not eligible for God's forgiveness.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Psalms 32 (all verses)

Sins forgiven and covered, not removed.

Romans 5:12-15

The effect on us because of Adam's sin.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why must we die?
- If God forgives us of our sin why do we still remember it?
- How do we offend God when we sin?

OUR PAST

Psalm 32:10 – *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him.*

Picture a Caribao with a yoke on its neck pulling a plow through a field. Its head is low, it is pulling with all of its strength. It has no choice. It is the slave of its master, the farmer.

Some people carry around their neck, a weight of sin that has already been forgiven by God. It is possible that some of your past sins were very serious. You may have hurt someone very badly, destroyed a life through a vicious act or foolishness, or altered the course of either your own or someone else's life through a bad decision. Until we repent of our sins and obtain God's forgiveness, we should expect to suffer lingering pain and misery from them. That is called: guilt. But, upon receiving God's forgiveness our focus on the past should change.

When God sees our genuine remorse and desire for forgiveness, he immediately responds. He forgives us AND he promises to never mention it to us again, even on the day of judgment. But, God will not erase our memories of our sins, nor the pain we and others suffered because of those sins. God leaves us with memories to help us avoid making the same mistakes again. Mistakes can also be an important part of our testimonies. However, if we carry that forgiven sin like the yoke a Caribao has around its neck, and allow it to pull us down and make our life miserable, we disrespect God's mercy that he extended to us when he forgave us. God puts our past in the past, but we often have trouble doing the same. Some people insist on punishing themselves by carrying around guilt that God has already forgiven.

We all live with the consequences of our mistakes, even after they are forgiven. But we also live under the mercy and compassion of God. We should remember our failings to keep us from failing again. But we must also celebrate the mercy of God that gives us victory over our sins and our past.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

1 John 1:9

Forgiveness.

Colossians 1:13-14

Redemption.

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

Old things are passed away.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How does God remove the guilt of our sins?
- What does God promise to do about the sins he forgives us of?
- How do our former sins affect our testimony?

SATAN IS A BELIEVER

James 2:19 – *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!*

Adolph Hitler lived and millions of people died because of him. Gandhi lived and he said many wise things. Osama Bin Laden lived and is responsible for ordering the deaths of thousands of innocent people. Mother Theresa lived and ministered tirelessly to the poor and sick. We would be fools to claim that any of these people did not live, or that they did not affect many lives, either good or bad.

Our verse today says that even demons believe there is one God and that they tremble because of that. Why would a demon believe God exists? Because God created them. Not as the demons they are today, but as the perfect angels they once were. Satan and his demons were at one time angels who rebelled against God and were cast out of Heaven for their rejection of God's sovereignty.

Satan (whom the Bible also calls the devil) and his demons have been eye witnesses to God's power since creation, and they feel God's restrictions on their activities every day. They are frontline observers of God's perfection, of God's faithfulness to his Word, and to his truthfulness, even though they still rebel against him. Satan and his demons have seen the bottomless pit that they will someday be confined in, and can already feel the heat from the fires of Hell in which they will burn forever, along with all of the people they convince to join them.

We also believe God exists. However our belief in God is not because we were eyewitnesses to creation. Rather, our belief is based on faith in Christ and the loving work of his Holy Spirit in our lives. Satan will be forced to acknowledge the sovereignty of God, but we are privileged to honor God. Satan rebelled against God in disobedience and will burn in Hell because of that. We, however, have the gift of salvation and a promise to spend eternity in Heaven with Christ.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 14:12-15

Lucifer.

Revelation 12:7-12

Satan cast down.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What advantage does satan have over us in believing that God exists and is all powerful?
- From where did satan and his demons come?
- Why can satan not be forgiven and saved from eternity in hell?