



The New Life in Christ

How to use This Bible Course

The 'New Life in Christ' Course has been written for students who have completed the 'Forty Lesson Postal Course' (and possibly other Bible courses) and also for newly baptized brothers and sisters.

It is designed to help you understand what discipleship really means in the lives of men and women who commit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It uses many Bible quotations and assumes a knowledge of the Bible which you should have from completing the Forty Lesson Course.

It will be helpful for you to have a Bible in front of you as you do the course so that you can turn up the passages for yourself.

This course consists of 14 lessons. Your tutor will probably send you one lesson each month.

Your tutor is:

Your Reference Number is: _____

Please use this number on *all* correspondence, answer papers etc.

Please send all your answers (and any questions) back to your tutor. It would help if you wrote only to your tutor, even though you may see other addresses on our literature.

The Bible quotations which you will find in this course are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

The English Standard Version is a modern version which is easy to read. If you cannot get hold of a copy, try to use a Revised Standard Version (RSV) or New International Version (NIV).

Bible References

When a reference from the Bible is given it will be written like this:

Genesis 1 —this means the Book of Genesis, chapter 1;

or

Genesis 1:1-7—this means the Book of Genesis, chapter 1, verses 1 to 7 inclusive.

Answering the Questions

We ask you to send your answers *every month* to your tutor, by airmail please. You should answer the questions in your own words. Do not just copy what the lessons have said. Try to say what *you* believe to be the truth. If you disagree with anything in the lessons, or have any questions, please say so. This is very important. Remember, we can help you much more if we know what you think. If for any reason you are not able to send the answers, then just send a note to say you are still interested and wish to continue to receive the papers.

Begin each session of Bible reading or study with a prayer to God, asking for His help in your understanding.

If we do not hear from you

We are sure that you will understand that there are many people around the world who wish to receive Bible courses. If we do not hear from you we will assume that you no longer wish to receive the course. We will then stop sending the lessons.

If you have any difficulties in replying or sending complete question papers please contact your tutor and explain. We will then continue to send you the course - we just need to know that the lessons are being received and are being used to assist you in your study of God's Word.

Schedule of Lessons

1. The Problem of Sin.
2. Baptism – A New start to a New Life.
3. The Word of God in our Everyday Lives.
4. The Importance of Prayer.
5. Fellowship and Ecclesial Life.
6. The Breaking of Bread Service.
7. The Ecclesia of God.
8. The Power of the Tongue.
9. Truthfulness and Honesty in our Lives.
10. Godliness and Self Control in our Lives.
11. Marriage and Family Life.
12. The Disciple and the State
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14. The Grace of God.



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 1

The Problem of Sin

The Addiction of Sin

There is an addictive power in the lives of each one of us that none can resist. It is much stronger than addiction to alcohol, gambling or drugs; it is addiction to sin. The problem of sin is that it takes a terrible hold of us. Once we sin, it is difficult to stop, yet many people deny that they are addicted to it. Just as an alcoholic might deny his addiction to alcohol and refuse to face up to his problem, so people refuse to face up to their addiction to sin. This has serious consequences for the Bible tells us that the result of addiction to sin is death – it is a killer for ‘the wages of sin is death’. In the Letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul tells us of this problem in his own life.

“I am of the flesh, sold under sin.
I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.
So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.
For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out...
Wretched man that I am!”

Romans 7:14-24

This is one of the most heart searching passages in the New Testament. Paul tells us that in his mind he wants to obey God’s laws but his actions are sinful. It is as if he is two different people; one is a man with a mind that understands that he must obey God, and indeed wants to do so, the other is a man who continually disobeys Him! This is one of the great problems of discipleship. Often we *know* what is right but we do not *do it* in our lives. Why are we like this? Part of the answer is that it can be a pleasurable thing to do! No one forces us to sin – we sin because we get pleasure from it even though we know it can only lead to the grave.

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,
choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.”

Hebrews 11:24-25

In Romans 6, Paul wrote of people being ‘slaves to sin’. It is a ‘master’. It reigns over people, it is a cruel tyrant and its effect in their lives leads only to death! On many occasions the Bible portrays sin like this, as a power that rules over us. We cannot escape from it by our own strength.

Another part of the answer is that we find it hard to obey God. Even when we know what is right and try to obey we frequently fail to do so. The desire to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ has to be in our hearts, if we try to follow him out of a sense of duty we shall fail. If we want to follow him because our hearts are full of love for him and his Father and for the salvation that God offers us, then we shall start our discipleship with the right motives.

“And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”
Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

Mark 12:28-30

What is Sin?

Sin is disobedience of God’s laws and the penalty for sin is death.

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-...
For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”
Romans 5:12, 19

We need to go back to the Garden of Eden to see the origin of sin. In the beginning, when God had created Adam, He gave him just one law to obey. Adam was forbidden to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). God told him that if he ate of it he would certainly die. Why was this law given? Adam and Eve were created to give glory to God by obeying His Word. They were created with free will; they could choose for themselves whether or not to obey God. The law tested their commitment to God, would they give faithful obedience to Him or would they disobey Him? Not only was God the Great Creator who had made the earth, He was also the Supreme Being whose word *must* be obeyed. When Adam obeyed God, he acknowledged and accepted this, when he disobeyed God, he denied God's power and authority over him.

In Romans 1 Paul describes the problems of sinful behaviour in his day. People had denied the power of the one true God and had turned to idols. This denial of God was followed by behaviour which was totally unacceptable to Him.

“For his (God's) invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.
For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.
Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”
Romans 1:20-25

Although these words were not written directly about Adam and Eve, many of the points made are applicable to their lives also and help us to see the way in which sin entered the world.

1. The power of God was shown to people in creation (Psalm 19). This was ignored by Adam and Eve.
2. Sin began in the mind of Eve as she decided that what she wanted was more important than obeying God's law. This temptation to sin touched her heart as well as her mind. She lusted after the fruit of the tree; she really wanted to eat it (Genesis 3:6).
3. Eve thought she could become wise through her own actions, by eating the fruit. In this she denied the power of God's Word to make her 'wise unto salvation' (2Timothy 3:15).
4. She decided that God's law was not really true but a lie, if she ate the fruit, she would not really die. So she ate and gave the fruit to her husband who ate also.
5. By their actions they put themselves and what they wanted before the commandments of God. They should have worshipped God, the Creator, by being obedient to Him.

This last statement tells us a great truth. *Worship* of God is by being *obedient* to him in our lives every day, not just by coming together to praise Him on a Sunday.

So sin is not just disobedience of God's laws; it is a denial of His existence as the Creator of us all. Once we realise this and accept it, it should change our whole attitude to life.

Blaming Someone Else!

Adam knew what would happen even before he sinned for:

“...through the law comes knowledge of sin.”
Romans 3:20

When God gave Adam that first law, He told him of the nature of sin and its consequence – death! Adam and Eve found it difficult to take responsibility for their own actions – and so do all of us. We all want to blame someone else for our problems. So Adam said:

"The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."

And Eve said:

"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

False teaching about the devil or satan comes from this desire to blame someone else for our sins. When we do something wrong, it is much easier to blame a 'Devil' than to admit the problem lies within ourselves. We deceive ourselves that we are not really to blame and say that it is the 'Devil' who is responsible! No wonder Jeremiah exclaimed that 'the heart is deceitful above all things' (Jeremiah 17:9).

But the Bible will not allow us to deceive ourselves in this way. Look at these two passages:

"And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him.

For from **within**, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

All these evil things come **from within**, and they defile a person." Mark 7:20-23

"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

But each person is tempted when he is **lured and enticed by his own desire**.

Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers."

James 1:13-16

The serpent first put the idea of eating the forbidden fruit into the mind of Eve. Throughout the rest of the Bible the serpent then becomes a symbol of the power of sin and its effect on our lives. This desire to please ourselves rather than God drives us on to disobey Him, to sin.

Look at these three passages which tell us similar things about people who disobey God.

"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the **sons of disobedience**."

Ephesians 5:6

"No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the **children of the devil**: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."

1John 3:9-10

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You **brood (offspring) of vipers (serpents)**! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Matthew 3:7

In the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8 Jesus tells us that 'the seed is the Word of God'. Therefore those who take the Word of God into their lives and hearts can be described as taking 'God's seed' into their being. It is the influence of this Word which helps them to be 'born of God' and to start a new life committed to God rather than remaining slaves to sin.

However, each of these passages tells us about another class of people. They are those who ignore the truth of God's Word and go their own way in life. They are described as "sons of disobedience", "children of the devil" and "offspring of serpents". They are like Adam who turned away from God and deliberately disobeyed Him.

We have seen that death is the punishment for sin. Every day as we get older and our bodies begin to wear out we show the truthfulness of God's word, we are dying! We might deny Him by our words and deeds, we might pretend that He does not exist, but we can do nothing by ourselves to overcome death, the sentence of God upon us for sin.

Sin separates us from God

However, there is another consequence of sin. It takes us away from God. The prophet Isaiah wrote:

“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”
Isaiah 59:2

When Adam and Eve sinned, they were sentenced to death. They were also sent away from God out of the Garden of Eden. This is the real tragedy of sin. When Adam left the Garden he left the daily fellowship he had enjoyed with God. The influence of God, and His Word, on Adam’s life grew less day by day. His mind became more easily filled with his own desires and so it became easier to sin. This is why James talks about being ‘dragged away by evil desires’ – he means that sin drags us away from God.

When we come to realise this true teaching about sin in the Bible it will have a great impact on our lives. We can summarise it like this.

1. Firstly we will realise that, whatever terrible things we do to each other, ultimately sin is committed against God. It is His Word we disobey. David understood this after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah, her husband, murdered. He acknowledged his sin to God with these words:

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

This should have a very great effect on our lives. When we behave badly to other people, if we realise that we are really sinning against God, then perhaps we might stop and think about behaving in that way.

2. Everything that is disobedience to God’s laws is unacceptable to Him and all of it is ‘sin’. A word that the Bible often uses for ‘sin’ means ‘miss the mark’. The ‘mark’ is the perfect example of Jesus, which we should aim for all the time. Whenever we miss that mark (whether we miss by a little or by a lot), that is a sin.
3. If we have committed our lives to God through His Son, Jesus Christ, we cannot ‘continue in sin’. That does not mean that we will become perfect, sinless people once we are baptized; only Jesus Christ was like this. However, God will not accept people who *say* they are disciples of Christ but who make no attempt to *follow* Christ in the way they live once they are baptized. Our lives must be changed by our knowledge of Christ.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”
Matthew 7:21

Finding the Way back to God

At the very beginning of his ministry Jesus went into a mountain and sat down to teach his disciples. He began with the lovely words that we know as the Beatitudes (the word means ‘blessings’). In the New English Bible, the first of these blessings is translated:

“Blessed are those who know their need of God; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”
Matthew 5:3

This is how our relationship with God must start. Once we understand our own hearts and how sin comes from within us and separates us from God, then we shall understand our need of Him in our lives. We shall be ready to begin the journey back to Him and to approach Him in prayer and seek His grace and forgiveness. If we approach Him like this then we know that He will accept us as His children through the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin will no longer be the master of our lives. At the end of that painful examination of his own conscience in Romans 7, the apostle Paul concluded with these words:

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”
Romans 7:24

The wonderful message of the Bible is of salvation from sin and its consequences through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. God will totally forgive the sins of those people who come to Him through His Son so that Paul went on to write:

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”
Romans 8:1-2

From our hearts we should thank God for this and rejoice! This is the Good News, the Gospel message of the Bible summed up in just one verse.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”
John 3:16

When we commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ as his disciples we begin a new life. Our sins are freely forgiven by a gracious and generous God who does not want anyone to perish but for all men and women to accept His Son and travel to His Kingdom.

The rest of this course explores Bible teaching about this ‘New Life in Christ’ and what it means for each one of us.

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

Psalm 19:7-11

Questions

1. Why do we sin?
2. What is sin? (there are two parts to the answer)
3. Where does the desire to sin come from?
4. What does the serpent represent in the Bible after the sin of Adam and Eve?
5. What are the consequences of sin?
6. How can we find the way back to God in our lives?



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 2

Baptism—A New Start to a New Life

Washing and Worship in the Old Testament

Washing was an important part of worship under the Law of Moses in Old Testament times. We read about this law in the early books of the Bible – Exodus to Deuteronomy. It ruled the nation of Israel for 1400 years, although for most of the time they disobeyed it. In the Tabernacle compound, where Israel met to worship God, there was a large bronze basin full of water; it stood just outside the entrance to the Tabernacle tent. The priests were commanded by God to wash their hands and feet each time they went into the Holy Place and risked death if they did not do this (Exodus 30:17-21). There were many reasons for this and we shall consider just one. Each time they washed it should have reminded them that, just as their bodies became physically dirty, so sin contaminated and made them spiritually unclean inside. All of the ceremonies of the Law of Moses were designed by God to show His people spiritual lessons about sin and how it could be forgiven. So the priests, as they washed themselves, were reminded that ‘dirt’ represented ‘sin’ and ‘washing’ represented ‘forgiveness’. Since they went into the Holy Place at least once a day to make sure that the oil lamp was burning brightly, this ritual of washing was never ending. Just as their bodies became physically dirty every day, so sin contaminated them every day and the Law could *never* make them totally clean and free from sin; the ritual of sacrifice and washing had to be repeated day after day.

The Work of John Baptist

In the days of Jesus many Jews ignored this unpleasant fact. Ritual washing was quite common; they even washed themselves by full immersion in water but in their minds there was no link at all with sin. They believed that they were righteous (made right with God) by two things in their lives. Firstly by being Jews, descendants of Abraham, the man to whom God had made such great promises and secondly by their involvement in ritual worship of God in the Temple or synagogues. Imagine their shock when they first heard John Baptist’s message.

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,
‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’...
Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him,
and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

Matthew 3:1, 5-6

John made a very clear connection between washing (by baptism) and the forgiveness of sins. It is worth listing the main points of Matthew’s record like this.

1. “**Confessing their sins**” – they willingly and openly acknowledged their sins - that they had disobeyed God. It cannot have been easy to ‘own up’ to all the wrong things they had done, but when they did this, it lifted a great weight off their consciences and they felt relieved by their decision.

This is an *essential* part of our coming to God also for:

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

Proverbs 28:13

The Bible tells us that when we are honest before God in this way, we honour His name and give Him glory as we acknowledge the rightness of His Word. In the Old Testament version that Jesus used, the word which is translated as ‘confess’ in our English New Testament is sometimes translated as ‘praise’, especially in the Psalms. This is a lovely thought, that when we confess our sins to God, we give Him praise.

Look at what David said to God after his sins of adultery and murder.

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

When Achan sinned by stealing gold and garments from Jericho, Joshua asked him to confess what he had done and said to him:

“My son, **give glory to the LORD God of Israel** and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” Joshua 7:19

2. **“Repent”** – it was not enough though just to confess their sins, they had to renounce them; ‘he who confesses *and forsakes them* will obtain mercy’. Those who came to John the Baptist had to experience a complete change of heart; they needed a fresh start, a new life. There had to be *a sincere and total desire not to sin like this again*. This is extremely important teaching for us. There is no point in being baptized if we have not repented of our old lives. In Matthew 3:7-9 we read of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to John to be baptized by him. John was angry with them and warned them that their salvation was in peril because their hearts had not been touched by the Gospel message; they had not repented. They were willing to go into the water but unwilling to change their lives and this was unacceptable to God.
3. **“Baptized by him”** – *only after* this process of confession and repentance were people baptized (in a deep part of the river Jordan – chosen so that they could easily go right under the water, John 3:23).
4. **“For the Kingdom of heaven is at hand”** – the reason why people came to John and were baptized in this way was that they understood that the Kingdom of God was coming and that this was the *only* way to prepare for it.

Baptism into Christ

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Galatians 3:27

When the disciples of Jesus baptized people, they baptized them ‘into Christ’ or ‘into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’. This baptism brings men and women into a special relationship with the Lord God through Jesus; they belong to God as members of His family and, if they are faithful, the Lord Jesus Christ will give them immortal life in his Kingdom when he returns to the earth.

Nicodemus, one of the leaders of the Pharisees, came to Jesus to ask him about these things:

"Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born of water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" John 3:3-7

This is very clear language. If we want to be invited into God’s Kingdom when Jesus returns to the earth then we *must* be baptized by immersion in water and we *must* be ‘born of the spirit’. Jesus describes this change in our lives as being born again – it is as great an event as the birth of a little baby out of its mother’s womb. It is a new beginning, a new start to a new life and we must treat it very seriously indeed. Note that both parts of this change are essential. Being immersed in water is not enough by itself to ensure a place in God’s Kingdom; it must be accompanied by what Jesus calls being ‘born of the spirit’.

The Washing of the Disciple’s Feet

In the Upper Room, on the night before he died on the cross, Jesus tried to teach his disciples the need for this change.

“Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"
Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."
Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."
Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"
Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean."
John 13:5-10

We see Peter showing the old Jewish attitude – that washing was a ritual thing to be done more than once. Jesus explained that baptism was a ‘one off’ ritual, it only needed to take place once in the life of someone who really understood what it meant. Why then did Jesus tell Peter that he needed to wash his feet? This Bible record is a fascinating one. Jesus had sent Peter and John ahead to the Upper Room. They were to ‘make preparations there’- this would include greeting the other disciples as they arrived and washing their feet. This was a Jewish custom, but neither of them was willing to do it; neither was willing to humble himself to look after the other guests. In effect Jesus is saying to them; ‘You have been baptized once, that was enough, but if you are really my disciples you must learn to humble yourselves and follow my example in your lives’. If we really understand the true Gospel message when we are baptized then there is no need ever to be baptized again. Jesus died on the cross *once* and so we are baptized *once* into his death. When we sin after our baptism, then if we ask forgiveness of God in prayer, He will forgive us and continue to accept us as His children.

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
1John 1:8-9

In the Upper Room Jesus said to his disciples:

"You call me **Teacher and Lord**, and you are right, for so I am.
If I then, your **Lord and Teacher**, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.
For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."
John 13:13-15

Note the way Jesus changes the order of just two words. The disciples, like many people today, were willing to see Jesus firstly as a *teacher*. However, Jesus asks us to see him firstly as our **Lord**, someone whom we must obey. He has left us an example of a perfect, Godly life. If our baptism really means something to us, then it will be accompanied by a change of heart and a determination to follow this example, to try to serve Jesus as our Lord.

Born of the Spirit

What then does it really mean to be ‘born of the spirit’? Look at these two passages.

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. **The words** that I have spoken to you are **spirit and life**.”
John 6:63

“...love one another earnestly from a pure heart,
since you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, **through the living and abiding word of God**;
for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,
but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.
So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.
Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation...”
1Peter 1:22- 2:2

When we begin a new life in Christ at our baptism, God does not instantly and supernaturally change us so that we automatically behave in a loving and Christ like way for the rest of our lives. We are like new born babies. Babies need milk to feed on; it helps to make them grow up and to be strong. We need spiritual milk, food from God’s Word, to help us to grow spiritually strong.

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, **the word of God, which is at work in you believers.**” 1Thessalonians 2:13

It is by constantly reading and meditating on the Bible and through prayer that we learn how to behave as true disciples of Jesus Christ. As we do this we will find our minds and hearts being filled with God’s Word and His ways and this will help to push out of our minds and lives our own desires and sinful ways. This is not easy and it does not happen overnight when we are baptized – indeed it is a lifetime’s work and we will never change ourselves completely to be like Christ. This will only happen when he returns and uses the power of the Holy Spirit to change his disciples and make them physically like himself. This change can also be described as being ‘born of the spirit’ and the two ideas are linked. If we try to change our spiritual lives now to become like Jesus then he will change our physical bodies and make us like him when he returns.

“The Lord Jesus Christ... will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” Philippians 3:21

Many people learn the Gospel message by reading and studying the Bible. They accept it and are baptized into the name of Jesus. Sometimes it seems as if they believe that this is the end of a process and not the beginning of a new life. They stop reading the Bible; they do not change their lives; they do not become more like Jesus. They have been baptized of water but not of the Spirit. Their beliefs have had no effect on their lives and they continue to behave as they did before they were baptized. They are in mortal danger because of this; not only will they not be invited into the Kingdom of God but they will have to appear before Jesus at the Judgement Seat to explain their behaviour to him.

There are many passages which tell us how to recognise disciples who have been truly born again. Perhaps the best known is Galatians 5:16-23. The Galatian disciples are a good example of people described in the previous paragraph. They had willingly accepted the Gospel message; they had been baptized but as soon as Paul had left their city, they started behaving just as they had done before their baptisms. Note the points the Apostle Paul makes in this chapter.

Verses 16-18

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

They are encouraged to live by the Spirit (to let the Word of God work in their lives). If they fill their lives with God’s thoughts and ways then this will help to push out the desires of their sinful nature.

Verses 19-21

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

These are the things they were doing, it showed that they had not been ‘born of the Spirit’ and so if they continued to do them, they would not be in the Kingdom of God.

Verse 22-23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

This is how we know if we are born again. It is not just a matter of calling ourselves ‘born again Christians’. We show people what we are by how we behave as well as by what we preach. If we show qualities like love, kindness, gentleness and self control in our lives then we show that we really

believe God's Word and we are allowing it to change us into people more like Jesus Christ. God wants words *and* actions from us to demonstrate our commitment to Christ.

Questions

1. Why should we confess our sins to God and how does it effect us when we do this?
2. What does it mean when we repent of our sins?
3. What two things must we do if we want to be in the Kingdom of God?
4. What does it mean to be 'born of the spirit'?
5. What must we do for this to happen in our lives?



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 3

The Word of God in our Everyday Lives

Israel in the Wilderness

The Old Testament tells us the wonderful account of how God rescued His people, Israel, out of the land of Egypt. They had been slaves there for over two hundred years; they were cruelly treated by the king (called Pharaoh) who tried to kill all the baby sons born to the Jews. Israel cried to God to tell Him of their troubles; He heard their cry and sent them a saviour, Moses, to rescue them from Egypt. Their salvation depended on them obeying *exactly* God's words through Moses. Failure to obey would lead to death. They were commanded to keep the Passover feast together on one night. They were told to stay in their houses until God called them then, on that same night, they had to leave Egypt together. God told them that Moses would lead them to the land of Israel, the land He had promised to Abraham many years before.

When they left, they were pursued by Pharaoh's armies to the bank of the Red Sea. One of the great miracles in the Bible is that of God parting the water of the Red Sea so that Israel could cross to the other side – and then God drowned the Egyptian army as it tried to follow. The Apostle Paul tells us that this was a type of baptism:

"Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."
1Corinthians 10:2

Within months Israel had travelled to Sinai to receive God's laws. They eagerly promised Moses that they would obey this God who had just saved them.

"The LORD called to Moses out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel..."

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.

All the people answered together and said, "**All that the LORD has spoken we will do.**"
Exodus 19:3-8

It was in their everyday lives that God now tested them to see if they really meant what they said. When they were hungry and thirsty, would they remember God's words and trust Him or would they forget what He had told them? One of the saddest events in the Bible is the record of how all the adults (except two) who made this promise to God failed Him and died in the wilderness because of their sins. They never reached the Promised Land.

Just before he died, Moses taught the children of those who perished a great lesson for their own lives so that they too would not fail.

"Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it,

that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.
You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.
You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.
You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

This message is unmistakable; *God's words must be part of their everyday lives*. They were to talk about them continually and to teach their children about them. It was only by making the Scriptures part of *everything* they did that they would be able to remember the importance of God's words and to obey them.

Look at this comparison between the Children of Israel and ourselves. Our lives are like theirs!

The Children of Israel

They were slaves in Egypt.

The Passover lamb was provided by God as a sacrifice to save them.

Israel left a life of slavery in Egypt.

Israel crossed the Red Sea.

The people were given God's Laws.

They were told that these Laws must be part of their everyday lives.

Israel disobeyed God and died in the wilderness. They did not reach the Promised Land.

Disciples of Jesus Today

Before baptism we are slaves to sin.

The Lord Jesus Christ was provided by God. He died on the cross to save us.

We must leave our old life of slavery to sin.

We must be baptized.

We are given God's Word to guide our new lives.

We must read the Bible everyday and let it influence and guide everything we do.

If the Bible is not part of our everyday lives we shall not reach the Kingdom of God.

What Does the Bible Mean to You?

It is sometimes surprising to meet disciples who are not really interested in reading and learning from the Bible in their everyday lives but who expect to be part of the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns. If we do not find God's Word exciting and inspiring now, if we do not want to learn from it *every* day, why should we expect a place in a future Kingdom in which the Bible will be the at the centre of life for evermore?

Please think about the following questions and try to answer them honestly for yourself.

1. Why is the Bible important to you? Does it just make you feel 'important' to own one or is it a precious part of your life?
2. How often do you open it and read it? Every day? Every week? Just sometimes? Do you read all of it or just your favourite passages?
3. Can you find your way around it? Do you know where the book of Psalms is? Where Jude is? Where Micah is?
4. Can you find Bible passages to tell other people what you believe?
5. Can you quote from memory Bible passages to support what you believe?
6. Does the Bible thrill and excite you as the Word of God?
7. Does reading the Bible help you to change the way you live and behave in your life? If so how?

Why is it Difficult to Understand?

Parts of the Bible are difficult to understand. God has not written it in a way that tells us all the answers as soon as we turn to it. Look at these words:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD."
Isaiah 55:8

In our last lesson we saw that repentance must lead to a complete change in our lives. We must leave our old life behind and begin a new life which is 'God centred' rather than 'self centred'. This is especially hard at the beginning. We find that we cannot easily understand God's words. His ideas and His thoughts are pure and lovely. Our thoughts and minds are sinful. We have to develop a new way of thinking – making God's thoughts and God's ways our own. Where do we learn of these – from the Bible, but we have to search them out. If we are to be kings – that is to share the Kingdom of God with Jesus Christ when he returns, then we need to search out from the Scriptures everything that God teaches us about Himself and His purpose. The more we do this, the more our faith in Him will grow.

"It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out."
Proverbs 25:2

The Inspired Word of God

The Bible makes a unique claim for itself; it is 'inspired' which simply means 'God breathed'. Just as we use the breath in our lungs to power our voice and make ourselves heard, so the Bible gives us a picture of God speaking words to us.

The Apostle Paul wrote about this in his letter to Timothy:

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

2Timothy 3:14-17

There are a number of very important points made in these verses.

1. **All of the Bible** is inspired; we find as much encouragement and help in Old Testament books as we do in the Gospel message. Without **every** word our spiritual development as disciples of Jesus will be incomplete.
2. How can we learn about the 'good works' that we should do in our lives unless we read about them in the Bible?
3. Timothy has **learned** about God from the Bible. His study has made him **firmly believe** the **truthfulness** of these things – his faith has been **increased**. (Note that he had been taught about the Bible from being a child. When we look at 2Timothy 1:5 it is probable that he was taught by his mother and grandmother. This is a very powerful lesson about how we should teach our children and grandchildren).
4. Now he must **continue** in the things he has learned. This is an important point. He cannot just say that he now knows enough and need not read and study the Bible anymore, Bible reading is an essential ongoing part of his everyday life.

No wonder Jesus taught that:

"Man shall not live on bread alone, but by **every** word that comes from the mouth of God."
Matthew 4:4

Why it is Important to Read the Bible

We know that if we do not eat regularly we will starve to death; physical food is essential for life. Spiritual food from the Bible is just as essential. Without daily spiritual food from the Bible we will die spiritually and God's Kingdom will be lost to us. If we feed on the Word of God every day then we will grow spiritually.

- It is a living and active word which helps us to examine our hearts honestly to see what really motivates us (Hebrews 4:12).
- It strengthens us to resist the desire to sin which is there in each one of us (Psalm 119:9-11).
- It is able to build us up and make us spiritually strong (Acts 20:32, 1Peter 2:1-2)
- It rebukes us when we are wrong (2Timothy 3:16)
- It helps us to keep ourselves separate from a wicked world (John 17:14-17)
- It increases our faith (Romans 10:17)
- It gives us examples of how we should live our lives as Godly men and women (Colossians 3:1-17)
- It reveals to us God's purpose for the earth and for the men and women who will live on it in His Kingdom (Psalm 72)
- Above everything else, it tells us about the love of God in providing the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation – and about how we must show this love to others. (1John 4:7-21)

The Word made Flesh

The most important reason for reading the Bible is that it teaches us about Jesus Christ. He is described as the 'Word made flesh'. By this we understand that he lived according to God's Word every moment of every day. For him indeed it was 'a lamp to my feet and a light for my path' (Psalm 119:105). It was his Bible which showed him how to live every part of every day in a way which pleased his Father. Just before he died on the cross, Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples (we find this prayer in John 17). He said that he had completed the work God gave him to do. He had taught his followers about God; he had given them both God's message and the exact words God had spoken to him.

"For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment- what to say and what to speak.

And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."
John 12:49-50

These things were vital for them because he was about to leave them and to ascend to heaven. What did they need to be strong in his absence? – The Word of God! 'Sanctify them (make them holy) by the truth; your word is truth,' he prayed.

This prayer is for us today as well. It is through the Word of God in our lives every day that we will grow spiritually to be like Jesus. It will help us to keep ourselves separate from an evil world and will help us to be ready to meet the Lord Jesus Christ at his return.

Checklist for Spiritual Growth

1. Read part of the Bible every day. Use the Bible Reading Planner or the Bible Companion provided by your tutor to ensure that you read all parts of the Bible.
2. Before you read, pray that God will help you to understand what you read.
3. If you have a family encourage them to read with you.
4. Keep a list of questions in a notebook about what you read and do not understand. You can then ask your tutor or any Christadelphians for help with the answers to these questions.
5. Meditate on (think about) what you read. If you can find a quiet time to do this, then this is the best way. Also, in your everyday life think about what you have read from the Bible and try to apply the lessons you have learned.



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 4

The Importance of Prayer

What is Prayer?

In previous lessons we have seen that baptism is essential for true believers. We also saw that we must confess our sins and be completely honest about ourselves before we are baptized. How do we do this? We are taught in the Bible that all sins are committed against God; it is His law that we break when we sin. So when we confess our sins we must do this before Him and we do this through prayer.

However, prayer is much more than this. The word for 'prayer' that is used in the New Testament simply means 'to present our desires towards (someone)'. So when we turn to God in prayer, we should take all the 'desires of our heart' (Psalm 37:4) to Him and these should include a deeply felt awareness of our sins and our need to be forgiven by Him.

The Need for Humility

There are some lovely verses in the Letter to the Hebrews which tell us of our freedom to approach the Lord God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,
by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,
and since we have a great priest over the house of God,
let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Hebrews 10:19-22

Although we are able to approach God freely in prayer, we must never do so in a proud or demanding way. Our prayers must always be offered with a humble mind and heart, recognising God's greatness and majesty and our smallness before Him.

When King Solomon came to the throne of Israel, he said to God in prayer that he was 'but a little child' acknowledging that even though he was a great king, before the Almighty God, he was totally insignificant. Years later the same king wrote:

"Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few."
Ecclesiastes 5:2

This sets the first principle of prayer that it brings us before the great God in heaven and we must speak to Him with the utmost reverence at all times.

How God answers Prayer

When we approach God in prayer we *must* believe that He hears us and that He will answer our prayers. This requires faith.

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

However, this verse does not mean that God will give us everything we ask for. If we pray in the right spirit then God will listen to our prayers and He will answer them in a way that will really benefit us. It is very important to understand what this means. God does *not* promise us that He will take away all the problems of this life *now*. He tells us:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for **good**, for those who are called according to his purpose."
Romans 8:28

God wants us to be in His Kingdom and our salvation is the **'good'** thing He has promised to faithful disciples. He answers our prayers in ways which help us in our discipleship and our preparation for the coming of the King.

There is a very good example of this in Psalm 102 which is a prayer of a man in trouble. We do not know who he was but we are told quite a lot about his problems.

Verse 2	He is in distress.
Verses 3, 11& 23	He feels like an old man, that his life is nearly over.
Verses 4&5	He cannot eat, he is losing weight and becoming very thin because of his problems.
Verses 6&7	He feels very lonely, like a bird alone.
Verse 8	He has enemies and they treat him badly.
Verse 17	He is destitute (it means that he has nothing at all).

These problems are so bad that he 'cries to the Lord' (verse 1) and he has absolute faith that God will answer him. Concerning God he says:

"He **regards** the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer."
Psalm 102:17

He then tells us that God **does hear** those in distress and answers them.

"He looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, to **hear** the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die..."
Psalm 102:19-20

Yet, although God answers them, He does not promise to take away all their problems immediately but promises that when the Kingdom of God came they will see the end of all their troubles.

"...that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD, and in Jerusalem his praise, **when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.**"
Psalm 102:21-22

This is why we have to live in faith. We believe that, whatever happens to us now, it is God working for good in our lives. We believe that He does hear our prayers; He does care about what happens to us; He will save us and will bring us into His Kingdom.

However, sometimes God hears our prayers and **does** take away our problems immediately. We do not know why God chooses to do this for one disciple but not for another. For example, one person may be healed of a disease whilst another dies, yet both may have prayed fervently for God to help and to heal them. We can only accept in faith that God knows best, however difficult this may be for us. For this reason, when we pray for God to intercede in our lives now and help us with our burdens, then we should always pray for 'His will not ours to be done'.

An Example of Prayer

A wonderful example of prayer in the Old Testament is that of King Hezekiah. He was a man who truly believed in God and followed His commandments. He was the king of Judah at a time when the kingdom was invaded by the Assyrians. Their armies were much stronger than his and defeat seemed inevitable. He was also very ill and was unable to lead his people. Hezekiah took both of these problems to God in prayer and we read about it in 2 Kings 19&20. This is a lesson in the effectiveness of prayer and we can learn much from the way that Hezekiah approached God.

1. He took the entire problem to God. He was totally honest with God and kept nothing back. He actually took the letter from the invading king and laid it before the Lord in the temple.
2. In his prayer he acknowledged the greatness of God:
"And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: "O LORD the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth."
2Kings 19:15

3. He also reminded God of his personal relationship with the Lord. He pleads with God because God is *his* God.

"So now, O LORD **our** God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone." 2Kings 19:19

These points are a vital part of prayer. It *must* give God the honour that is due to Him. It *must* also express faith that He is the God who is close to His children, who cares for them and will look after them.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that God *waited* for this prayer of Hezekiah. God wanted the king to approach Him in this humble way and He waited until the king's heart was right before Him before He answered the prayer.

"Therefore the LORD **wants** to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

For a people shall dwell in Zion, in Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry. As soon as he hears it, he answers you."

Isaiah 30:18-19

God did answer and sent His reply to the king by the prophet Isaiah. In one night the armies of Assyria were miraculously destroyed and God's people were delivered from their enemies.

Praying Constantly

The Bible gives us a picture of prayer as a pleading with God. We should not just ask something of Him once and expect an answer. In Luke 18:1-8 we are given a picture of prayer as "crying day and night to God". Prayer has to bring us to an understanding that no-one other than God can truly help us in our lives. Sometimes it takes many repeated prayers to reach this state in our hearts.

The record of Hannah in the Old Testament shows us this principle. She was a wife who was childless; she must have prayed for a child many times. God had heard her prayers but waited until the right occasion to answer her. Notice the words of Hannah "I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord". (1Samuel 1:15)

Now look at James 5:16-18. Here James refers to two prayers of Elijah the prophet. He lived amongst wicked people and his prayers brought God's judgements upon them. James tells us that Elijah's prayers are an example of effective prayer.

"The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

Elijah's desire that God's purpose would succeed filled his mind and heart. He constantly prayed that the Kingdom of Israel would turn to God. We also should pray for the Kingdom of God to come because of the wickedness of the world around us. Our minds should be filled with a desire for Christ to return; we should want it more than anything else and should let God know how we feel in our prayers. There is another important point to note from this example. Elijah is described as a 'righteous' man. This simply means that his relationship with God was right. *Our* relationship with God *must* be right if we want Him to listen to our prayers.

Death Bed Repentance

Solomon wrote that:

"The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous."

Proverbs 15:29

Sometimes we read of 'death bed' repentance when a dying man prays to God that He will forgive him. However, if he has not made the effort to put his life right with God, then God will not listen to him! It will be the same at the return of Jesus, many people will suddenly decide they need to pray to God, but it will be too late for them – God will not listen.

The Example of Jesus

We have looked at some examples of powerful and effective prayers in the Bible. Now we must look at the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Many of the short prayers that Jesus made to his Father are recorded for us in the Gospels. In other instances we are simply told that he prayed. Look at this example of prayer in his life.

“In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles:”
Luke 6:12-13.

Jesus prayed all night to God because the next day would be very important. He had carefully to select twelve disciples as his close companions for the remainder of his ministry. He did not try to do this alone; he asked for help. The lesson here is that when we are faced with difficult decisions we should always ask for God’s help through prayer.

After the Last Supper, on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to his Father. We read this prayer in John 17. Look at verses 9 and 20. Jesus prayed specially for those who were his disciples at that time. He described them as “Those you have given me”. When you come to verse 20 you will find that the prayer looks forward into the future and includes all future disciples as well. They are described as “Those who will believe in me”. This will include you if you accept God’s salvation through Jesus Christ and are baptized into his saving name. The most wonderful thing in life is to be called from the world to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus and to belong to him in this way; to understand that Christ prays for us as he prayed for the disciples we read about in the Gospels. This is a marvellous hope and we should be excited about it.

Jesus had already taught his disciples the importance of forgiving others. Part of this forgiveness is to pray for them. This is very hard to do but it is an essential part of Jesus’ message. God has forgiven us far more than we ever have to forgive others and if we are able to pray for those who are evil to us and who persecute us then we show the Lord that we have understood this. Note especially the consequence of such a prayer.

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”
Matthew 5:44-45

Praying for our enemies may have no effect on them; their hearts may be too hard to accept God’s Word. Yet such prayers will always have an effect on *us* – the people who make the prayers. When we pray for others it will always help us to become more Christ-like, children of God, in *our* lives.

If we look carefully at the prayer made by Jesus to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane we shall see how much he understood God’s purpose. He knew he had to die to save people from sin. We also see his absolute obedience to his Father’s will. Matthew 26:36-46 describes Jesus’ final moments before his capture, trial and death. He first prayed that he might be spared the terror and pain that lay ahead. If that prayer had been granted then there would be no hope for us in this world. In his second prayer, however, he acknowledged that God’s will was more important than his own desires and repeated that “Your will be done”. The third prayer repeated these same words and emphasised Jesus’ total obedience to the will of his Father, even though this would take him to a terrible death the next day. Luke tells us that Jesus was in an agony during this prayer – the only time in the whole of the Bible that this word is used. It tells us of the intensity of Jesus’ prayer, the way he poured out his heart and his problems to his Father, nothing was held back.

Jesus Christ our Mediator

There is another important lesson for us to learn about prayer. Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. We are told that:

“Christ has entered...into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”
Hebrews 9:24

He is the one who presents our prayers to God and if we ask for things which are in accordance with God's purpose then he will plead for us before his Father. The Bible uses the word 'mediator' to describe this work. A mediator is a 'go between'; someone who takes a message from one being to another. God is too holy and too righteous for us to approach Him directly in our mortal state but we should thank Him from our hearts that we can approach Him through the Lord Jesus.

Note that Jesus will not do this for all people. The verse says that he does this '*on our behalf*' and the Letter to the Hebrews makes it clear that he does it for those who are *called* by God. They belong to His family through their baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come... he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption..."

Therefore he is the **mediator** of a new covenant, so that **those who are called** may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant." Hebrews 9:11-15

When we pray therefore we need to address our prayers through Jesus - read John 14:12-14. The contact that you have with God and with Jesus through your Bible may have come as an answer to your prayers. You may already know how to pray but if you do not, then it is our hope that this short lesson will help you. Like the Psalmist who wrote the words below, you too can pray that God will help you to understand His Word.

"Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart."
Psalm 119:33-34

Daily Prayer

In Matthew 6:9-13 we find the prayer that Jesus gave for all his disciples through the ages. The order of the words of the prayer is very important.

- The name of God is praised.
- Requests are made for His Kingdom to come and His will and purpose to be fulfilled on the earth.
- Prayer is made for the essential things we need in this life.
- Prayer is made for forgiveness – as we have forgiven others.
- Prayer is made for guidance in the future as we journey towards the Kingdom of God.
- Finally the prayer ends as it began – with words of praise and reverence before God.

We must put God's will first in our prayers and pray for what *He* wants before we pray for what we need in life. If we think carefully about the words we use, and if we are truly interested in the Kingdom of God, then we shall find that there is no conflict between God's purpose and what we want.

We know that this was to be a daily prayer because Jesus said:

"Give us **this day** our daily bread:" Matthew 6:11

Every day of our lives we should pray to God and acknowledge Him in this way. This does not mean that we should just repeat the words of the Lord's Prayer every day; if we do this they will soon become so familiar to us that we shall stop thinking about them. We need to find simple words, in our own everyday language to express the ideas of the Lord's Prayer on a daily basis.

But we must take this further. Daily prayer does not mean praying once a day. We can pray at *any time* of the day and in *any situation* in which we find ourselves. The Bible tells us six times that the Apostle Paul prayed without ceasing. He was a man for whom prayer was an essential part of everything he did. For example:

"I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day."
2Timothy 1:3

If we have a difficult or dangerous journey to make we should pray for God's angel to keep us safe before we set off. If we have a difficult conversation with anyone we should pray for help from God's Word to keep our lips from saying anything wrong. We can take our worries, our joy, our sadness, our health, our sickness to God in prayer. Every part of our lives, however small, will benefit from God's guidance as an answer to our prayers.

Just as we can pray at any time to God we can pray anywhere and in any position. It does not matter whether we stand or kneel to pray. In the Bible we find examples of men who stood to pray (Nehemiah, Jesus), who knelt (Solomon), who sat (David), who were prostrate on the ground (Jesus, Solomon), who knelt with head on the ground (Elijah).

Checklist for Prayer

Before you pray make a list of things you want to bring to God. It can be in your mind or written down on paper. It should include:

1. Praise to God as the Maker of us all.
2. A prayer for God's Kingdom to come soon.
3. Thanks to God for His blessings to us every day and for all of the things He supplies for us.
4. Prayers for God's help for those we know are in need.
5. Prayers for our natural family, that God will look after them and help them to learn about Him and accept His Son.
6. If we are baptized, then we should pray for our spiritual brothers and sisters and their problems.
7. Forgiveness for our sins.
8. Guidance in understanding God's Word.
9. Strength from God to work for Him, preaching His Word.

Questions

1. When we pray to God, what should we present before Him?
2. What is the first principle of prayer?
3. What does God promise to those who love Him?
4. Why did God wait until Hezekiah had prayed to Him before He saved Israel?
5. What is a mediator? Who is our mediator?
6. What sort of things should we pray for?



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 5

Fellowship and Ecclesial Life

When Jesus Christ returns, he will set up the Kingdom of God on this Earth. It will be a wonderful time when those chosen by Jesus to share the Kingdom with him will be made immortal. They will sin no more and they will no longer be dying men and women. All the problems of mortality, such as pain and illness, will be removed. But God promises something even more wonderful than this. He tells us that these people will be made like His Son, like Jesus Christ himself.

“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

1 John 3:2

When we look at the character of Jesus and see how lovely and gracious he is, then we rejoice in the great and precious promise of God that, in the Kingdom, we will be made like Jesus if we believe and are baptized.

The Gospel of John tells us that the most important thing in the life of Jesus was his relationship with God, his Father. He was very close to Him and he said in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one”. Jesus filled his life with the Word of God. He and his Father had the same purpose and shared the same thoughts. He felt the presence of God with him in his life every moment of every day. It is difficult to find the words to describe how close were the Father and His Son. The Bible describes such a relationship as *‘fellowship’*. This is a special Bible word that means ‘sharing together’.

This gives a wonderful picture of life in the Kingdom of God and we can sum it up like this.

- In the Kingdom true disciples will be given immortal life.
- They will be made like Jesus Christ; they will fully share his character as well as his immortal nature.
- This will bring them into perfect unity with God Himself. His ways will be their ways, His thoughts their thoughts.
- So they will be in perfect and complete fellowship with God

However, God’s promise of fellowship with His children is not just for a future time in His Kingdom. When men and women are baptized they begin a new relationship with God and with His Son. Their sins are forgiven and they become part of God’s family, His sons and daughters. Just as human fathers love and care for their children, God cares for His family. He wants His children to be close to Him and have fellowship with Him now in their lives. Yet the fellowship that disciples have with God now is incomplete. Their human failings get in the way and prevent them being completely ‘at one’ with Him. As we have seen, perfect fellowship will only come in the Kingdom of God.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ

When we become part of the family of God we find that we have new brothers and sisters, men and women who have also been baptized into Christ. The name ‘Christadelphian’ means ‘brothers in Christ’ and it is taken from the opening words of the Letter to the Colossians.

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
To the saints and faithful **brothers in Christ** at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from
God our Father.”

Colossians 1:1-2

This is why Christadelphians call each other ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. It is recognition of the relationship enjoyed with each other as part of God’s family. This fellowship with each other comes through their relationship with God. Just as we care for our natural brothers and sisters and love them, baptized people are commanded to love and care for their brothers and sisters in Christ. They share the joy and happiness of knowing that they belong together in God’s family.

It is very important to understand that *all* fellowship, including our relationships with each other, is based on a believer's relationship with God.

"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have **fellowship** with us; and indeed our **fellowship** is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."
1John 1:3

In the New Testament, true disciples of Jesus who live in this way are called 'the ecclesia of God' (Acts 20:28). 'Ecclesia' is a Greek word and in the English Bible it is translated as 'church'. It means 'those called out'. True disciples have been called out of the world to belong to God's family and to have fellowship with Him and with each other.

This is an important point. We have to make a choice; we cannot have fellowship (share things) with the world and pretend to have fellowship with God and His Son. When we are baptized our standards should become quite different from those of unbelievers. The things which become important to us will not be important to them and we will be unable to have fellowship with them. However we shall find that we do have things in common with our new brethren and sisters because we share an interest in the Bible and share a common belief in the Gospel with them. This will help us to build new relationships and have fellowship with them.

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?
What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?
What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you."
2Corinthians. 6:14-17

For disciples, life in the ecclesia is helped a great deal by having others who believe the same things and who live nearby. They can talk and worship together regularly; they can help each other out on a daily basis, they can preach together. (Later in the lesson we shall consider those who do not live near other baptized members.)

Sharing Things Together

Fellowship is hard work. We have to learn to live with a new family – and not only to live with them but to love and care for people who may have been strangers to us before our baptism. The word 'fellowship' is only found twice in the King James Version of the Old Testament. One of the occasions is in Leviticus 6:2. Here the word translated 'fellowship' means 'something entrusted to another person'. We should trust our brothers and sisters with our feelings and thoughts. We should open up our hearts to them even though that will make us very vulnerable to them. If they let us down or reject us we may feel hurt and angry with them because we trusted ourselves to them and they failed us.

Sometimes we may find it especially difficult to get on with a particular brother or sister. Our natural instinct is to walk away, to have nothing to do with him or her and only to mix with those who are our 'friends'. This is wrong, we must remember that we are given to each other by God and that living in fellowship with every brother and sister is part of the way God develops our characters. We have to learn to be tolerant, to accept others and their points of view as brothers and sisters in Christ. God has called us to live and work together in this way. He chose each one of us; we are all precious to him. Look at these two passages.

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,
in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.
In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."
Ephesians 2:19-22

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” 1Corinthians 12:27

The believers at Ephesus came from different backgrounds. Before baptism they had nothing in common but then they found themselves to be part of the spiritual house (or temple) that God is building. It is made up of faithful men and women. Each disciple has a unique part to play and is needed for the house to be complete. If we understand how God values every brother and sister like this, then it will help us to appreciate each other and to enjoy fellowship together.

Men and Women – One in Christ

It is important to understand that this fellowship is for both men and women. God makes no difference between them in His desire to have people in His kingdom.

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.
For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”
Galatians 3:26-29

However, this does not mean that brothers and sisters have equal roles to play in the ecclesia. The Bible teaches us that women should keep silent in the ecclesia and that they should not teach men publicly. (1Corinthians 14:33-35; 1Timothy 2:11-14). This *does not mean* that women are inferior to men in God's sight. Men and women have different roles to play within the ecclesia and its healthy growth depends on both groups being involved in fellowship together. Brothers are responsible for the spiritual leadership of the ecclesia. They take the public roles of preaching and teaching. Sisters are responsible for supporting this work. By the way they dress and talk, by their personal example they can have a very special impact on the behaviour of the ecclesia. They have a role in teaching children in Sunday School, in pastoral work – looking after the sick, visiting the elderly. All of these things are part of our fellowship.

The New Testament has many examples of things we share together in true fellowship. Here are a few of them.

1. A common calling (Hebrews 3:1)
2. The same faith (Ephesians 4:5)
3. The hope of the Kingdom (Ephesians 4:4)
4. Suffering together (Philippians 3:10, 1Peter 4:13, 2Timothy 1:8)
5. Each others burdens (Galatians 6:2)

Fellowship in the Acts of the Apostles

The very first mention of fellowship in the New Testament is in Acts 2:42.

“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.
And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers...
And all who believed were **together** and had all things in common.
And day by day, attending the temple **together** and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. “
Acts 2:41-47

This is a picture of the disciples in Jerusalem after the Day of Pentecost. Notice that fellowship was as important to them as Bible study, the Breaking of Bread service and prayer. From the very beginning of the ecclesia ‘sharing together’ was part of the ‘glue’ which helped them to stick together through some very difficult times. Notice the way the word ‘together’ is used three times to emphasise this point.

This is a very important principle for us today. When we are baptized we should make every effort to attend *all* of the meetings organised by the ecclesia. Sometimes when there are problems we

want to stay away from the ecclesia but the message from Acts is that this is exactly the time when we should most want to be *together* with our spiritual family, our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

We are also told that they had 'all things in common'. This does not mean that there was no private property and that the disciples immediately sold everything they had and gave it to the ecclesia. It does mean that they felt a sense of responsibility for each other's welfare and were willing to give what they had if it was needed to help poor disciples. Later on the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian ecclesia about these things telling them to hold a weekly collection for those in need (1Corinthians 16:1-2). This principle still holds good today and ecclesias should take up weekly collections for the running of the ecclesia and the welfare of the needy.

This fellowship that brethren and sisters in Christ have together is a truly wonderful thing, uniting believers from all parts of the world. They have this in common, whether male or female, black or white. It is a very special relationship that is more important than any other. It brings a responsibility to love and care for each other and to share the wonders of the Word of God together.

Disciples Living in Isolation

There are people who believe and have been baptized but who do not have other brothers and sisters living near them with whom they can have regular fellowship. However, because they are members of God's family, they are *never* really alone because they share the things of their new life with God and His Son and they will feel the presence of the Lord Jesus in their lives.

There are some practical things which will help believers who live isolated lives like this.

- Brothers and sisters overseas will not forget their isolated brothers and sisters but will write to them and try to visit them on Bible Mission visits. Brothers and sisters within their own country should also make a special effort to visit them, to pray for them and to support them whenever possible.
- It is important both to pray and to read the Bible every day, even if this is done alone. If they use the Bible Companion then they know that throughout the whole world their brothers and sisters will be reading the same passages that day.
- Every Sunday, preferably at the same time each week, they should carefully set out the bread and wine to break bread and drink wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. They will know that all over the world many thousands of their brothers and sisters will be doing the same thing and this will be a source of great comfort and strength to them.
- They can continue to write to their tutor who will send them Bible study courses and letters.
- They can receive exhortations, lectures and Bible Class papers from the Isolation League in the UK.

To all his disciples, but especially those who feel lonely, Jesus said:

"I will never leave you or forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

So we can say with confidence,

"The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:6

Questions

1. How do we have fellowship with each other?
2. Why should we work hard to have fellowship with a disciple we find difficult?
3. What is the role of men in the ecclesia?
4. What is the role of women in the ecclesia?
5. Why was fellowship important to the ecclesia in Jerusalem (Acts 2)?



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 6

The Breaking of Bread Service

In Lesson 2 we saw that baptism marks the end of our old life and the beginning of a new life in Christ. We become members of God's family, His sons and daughters, and so become brothers and sisters together in Christ. We become the disciples (the word means a student or pupil) of Jesus and commit our lives to following his words and his example.

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.
You are my friends if you do what I command you.
No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing;
but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known
to you."
John 15:13-15

This is very important; our relationship with Jesus depends on doing what he *commands* us to do. One of the most important things he has commanded us to do is to meet regularly with our brothers and sisters to share bread and wine together in remembrance of him.

"The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,
and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."
In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant
in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."
1Corinthians 11:24-26

The worship together of true Christians is very simple and, apart from baptism, this is the only ritual act the Lord Jesus Christ has asked us to do – we must take it very seriously indeed.

We know that, after the ascension of Jesus, the disciples met daily in the homes of disciples to share bread and wine in remembrance of him (Acts 2:46-47). Later the ecclesias met weekly, on Sunday, the first day of the week, to do this.

"On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul
talked with them."
Acts 20:7

Under the Law of Moses the Jews met together on Saturday, the last day of the week, for a day of rest – the Sabbath. The disciples of Jesus decided to meet on the first day of the week as this was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. This decision to meet weekly in this way probably looked to the Scriptural example of the weekly meal of the Shewbread by the priests in Old Testament times (Leviticus 24:5-9). When Jesus said 'do this in *remembrance* of me', he used quite a rare word which is also used in the Greek version of the Old Testament in Leviticus 24:7 where it is translated '*memorial*' in our English version. Just as this meal was holy and precious to the priests in Old Testament times – only they were allowed to eat it, so the Breaking of Bread meal is holy and precious for the true disciples who share it together today. They do not share it with other 'Christians', only with those who truly are their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Throughout the whole world, Christadelphians meet every Sunday to share bread and wine together in this way. They usually do this in a hall or rented room but sometimes in the home of a believer. The place is not important. The service is always very simple and is very similar wherever in the world it is held. It is the most important part of our fellowship together and Christadelphians know that wherever they are, they can go to an ecclesia to share bread and wine with those who worship there.

Jesus gave us a number of instructions about this service and we shall consider them individually.

‘Do this in Remembrance of Me’ (Luke 22:19)

It is Jesus who must be at the centre of our thoughts when we meet to share bread and wine. If our thoughts are on disagreements with other brothers or sisters or on problems we have in our daily lives, then we are failing to follow this command. The word remembrance does not mean ‘to remember something we have forgotten’ but has the idea of ‘filling our minds’ with Jesus. We remember that he died at Passover time. This was the time of year when Israel remembered the way in which God had rescued His people from Egypt, the land of slavery. He chose Moses to lead them out on the morning after Passover night when they had sacrificed a lamb and shared a meal together to celebrate God’s deliverance.

The Bible teaches us that Christ is the true Passover lamb; he died as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Therefore we share the bread and wine each week to remember that through his death we are saved from slavery to sin and death.

“For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.
Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” 1Corinthians 5:7-8

When we drink the wine we remember that the sacrifice of Jesus brought a new covenant, a new relationship, between God and His people. This covenant is the fulfilment of all the promises God made to men in Old Testament times. Jesus is the mediator of this covenant and is there in heaven to take our prayers to God and to ask Him for forgiveness of our sins as we pray about them.

“Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.” Hebrews 8:6

These are the things concerning the Lord Jesus with which we should fill our minds at the Breaking of Bread service.

But there is something more. The apostle Paul wrote these words:

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” 1Corinthians 11:27

To whom do we proclaim or show this, surely to the Lord God and to each other. As the bread and wine is passed from disciple to disciple each of us shows our need of the sacrifice of Jesus for our own sins. We each see that Jesus died for our brother or sister as well as for us. This helps to bind us together in fellowship and unity. We become one united body of believers living together and worshipping together as we await the return of Jesus.

“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” 1Corinthians 10:17

‘Let a Man Examine Himself’ (1Corinthians 11:28)

Jesus did not say that we should examine each other! We do not go to the Breaking of Bread service to look at the faults of other disciples! We should take a careful look at ourselves, at our own motives and thoughts to make sure that we are genuine in our worship. We remember Jesus and his perfect life of obedience and then compare ourselves with him, this should make us feel very humble before God. If we have any thoughts about being ‘better’ or ‘more worthy’ than our brethren and sisters we must get rid of them before we take the bread and wine (see Matthew 5:23-24).

Sometimes brothers and sisters cannot do this. They bring quarrels to the Breaking of Bread or they stay away from it. They do this because they have a grievance against another brother or sister. The apostle Paul wrote very strong words against those who do this.

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.
Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.
Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." 1Corinthians 11:27-30

He does not mean that they were physically ill but spiritually ill and dying. Just as we need physical food to keep our bodies alive, so we need spiritual food at the Breaking of Bread service to keep ourselves spiritually healthy.

It is always easier to see other people's failings rather than our own (Matthew 7:1-5) but when we come to take the bread and wine we must be totally honest about ourselves before God.

Jesus examined himself in this way just before he died upon the cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he was in an agony as he struggled with his own will. He prayed passionately for God to help him so that he could do God's will and purpose and not give in to his own will. This is the model for us to follow as we examine ourselves before we eat and drink in remembrance of Jesus.

The Bread and Wine

We now turn to the bread and wine. Luke records these words about the bread:

"And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Luke 22:19

When we take and eat the bread, it does not miraculously change and become part of the body of Jesus. There is no such thing as 'holy' bread which must be used. We use ordinary, everyday bread in our worship. The bread is a symbol of the body of Jesus. It represents to us his whole life, the way in which he shared our nature and was tempted to sin as we are tempted, yet he was sinless in everything he did. Jesus delighted to do the will of God (Psalm 40:8), even though this took him to the cross for our sins. These are the things we remember as we eat the bread.

"And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Luke 22:20

The Bible makes it very clear that the shedding of blood is essential for the forgiveness of sins by God.

"Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

Hebrews 9:22

Under the law there were sacrifices of animals, but they could not take away sins for ever. It was the death of Jesus and the pouring out of his blood which God accepted for the forgiveness of sins. Each time we drink the wine we remember this. It reminds us of the very high price paid for our sins. As we drink it, there is no room for pride in ourselves, no room for anything other than absolute humility that God loved us so much that He gave His Son to die that we might be forgiven.

"Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

1Peter 1:18-19

Until He Come

"And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him.

And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

For I tell you I will not eat it until it is **fulfilled in the kingdom of God.**"

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves.

For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine **until the kingdom of God comes.**"

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood..."

"You are those who have stayed with me in my trials,
and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom,
that you may **eat and drink at my table in my kingdom** and sit on thrones judging the
twelve tribes of Israel."
Luke 22:14-30

So far we have seen how the Breaking of Bread service reminds us of the death of Jesus Christ. Those who regularly eat and drink in this way fill their minds with the memory of him and this helps them in their discipleship day by day. Worship in this way is essential to keep us spiritually strong. However, there is another part of the Last Supper which we often forget. Jesus looked forward to his return and the setting up of God's Kingdom on earth. When Jesus returns, he will sit down with his disciples and eat and drink with them in his Kingdom. So the Breaking of Bread service will be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.

Every true disciple wants to be in the Kingdom in that day and so every true disciple should attend the Breaking of Bread service regularly in their lives now. It is this worship which strengthens us as we look forward to the return of the Lord.

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,
by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,
and since we have a great priest over the house of God,
let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.
Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.
And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,
not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another,
and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."
Hebrews 10:19-25

Questions

1. Why is it important that baptized disciples of Jesus should take the bread and wine regularly?
2. Why should they 'examine' themselves before they do this?
3. What does the bread represent?
4. What does the wine represent?
5. How does the Breaking of Bread service look forward to the return of Jesus Christ to the earth?
6. What should disciples be thinking about when they take the bread and wine?
7. Explain what Hebrews 10:19-25 means.



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 7

The Ecclesia of God

The Ecclesia of God

When men and women are baptized into Christ they belong to God as part of His family. God has commanded that His children should be organised into a community of believers and He tells us clearly how this should happen – there should be one body or world wide community of disciples.

“For just as the **body is one** and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

For by one Spirit **we were all baptized into one body**—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free...”
1Corinthians 12:12-13

In our English Bible, this organisation is called the church or assembly or congregation. However, in the Greek language, which was used to write the New Testament, a special word was used, the word ‘ecclesia’. An ecclesia is a group of people who are brought together for a special purpose and there is a use of the word in the New Testament which illustrates this. Acts 19 tells us of the time Paul spent in Ephesus and of the problems he had with some of the people of the city.

“For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen.

These he **gathered together**, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth...”

Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the **assembly** was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.”
Acts 19:24-25&32

These people were *gathered together* by an evil man to oppose the Apostle Paul. God has *gathered together* men and women into His ecclesia to worship Him and to belong in His family.

The first use of the word ‘ecclesia’ in the Greek version of the Old Testament is in the book of Deuteronomy. It describes the way in which the Children of Israel were separate from all the other nations surrounding them. They had been brought out of Egypt by God and He wanted to lead them to the Promised Land; they were called for this purpose and so they were His ecclesia. So it is with God’s church today. It is made up of people who are special and who have been called out of the world so that God can lead them to His Kingdom.

This privilege of belonging to the ecclesia of God is only for those who have been baptized into ‘the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God’ (Acts 8:12). True disciples separate themselves from the world and also recognise that they cannot truly worship God with other men and women who call themselves Christians but who do not understand and accept the true Gospel message. The call to belong to the ecclesia of God is a call to be *separate*. The apostle Paul wrote about this to the Corinthian ecclesia and said:

“For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Therefore **go out from their midst, and be separate from them**, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,

and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”
2Corinthians 6:16-18

It is a great honour to belong to the ecclesia of God and when baptized members meet to worship they should always remember this fact. God has called them to these things and they should not neglect them.

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,
not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another,
and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:23-25

In his Letter to the Ephesians Paul described the ecclesia as a place in which disciples grow spiritually; he used a word which means ‘to be built up.’ He wrote that, within an ecclesial organisation, brothers and sisters would be able to:

- Grow in knowledge and understanding (4:13-15)
 - Grow in love and so strengthen and build the ecclesia (4:15-16)
- However, he tells us that this will only happen if every member of the ecclesia is involved and contributes to it (4:16).

Paul used a special phrase to describe the ecclesia. He wrote that the people in it are ‘one body’ and he used this phrase in this way ten times in his letters, for example:

“For as in **one body** we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,
so we, though many, are **one body in Christ**, and individually members one of another.”
Romans 12:4-5

This phrase ‘one body’ describes the very close way brothers and sisters live and worship together as part of God’s family and Paul writes the following things about it.

1. Just as we have different parts of our own, human bodies e.g. eyes and hands, so there are different parts to the spiritual body – not every brother and sister is the same and is able to do the same tasks in the ecclesia. However everyone is essential and valued by God and has an important part to play in the body of Christ. We all need each other just as we need all the different parts of our own physical bodies in order to function properly. (Romans 12:4-5, 1Corinthians 12:12, 20)
2. The head of this body is Christ (Ephesians 4:15-16). He is in charge of it and there is no human authority on earth which is in charge of the ecclesia.
3. Racial or tribal background or gender is unimportant, God values all His children equally (Galatians 3:26-29).
4. Although there is one body, one ecclesia, of which Christ is the head (Ephesians 5:23), it is described as having many branches. So Paul wrote to ‘the church (ecclesia) of God which is at Corinth’ (2Corinthians 1:1). Wherever the true disciples of Jesus meet in worship, it is the ecclesia of God.

We need then to look at all the different roles within an ecclesia and to consider what the Bible tells us about them.

Ecclesial Business Meetings

After the ascension of the Lord Jesus, the ecclesia in Jerusalem grew rapidly and it soon became clear that it needed extra people to organise and look after it. The account of this is found in Acts 6:1-7 and it sets the pattern for our ecclesial organisation today. We can list the main points mentioned like this.

1. The responsibility of the senior leaders of the ecclesia (the apostles) was to preach, pray and teach the Word of God, nothing should get in the way of this.
2. However, they needed help, particularly in pastoral matters, to look after the brothers and sisters in the ecclesia.
3. They did not make the decisions themselves but called all the brothers and sisters together for a business meeting to discuss it.
4. The apostles gave guidance on what they thought should be done but it was the whole ecclesia that made the decision and chose the men whom they wanted to do these jobs for them. No

doubt not everyone voted for the same men, but everyone accepted the majority decision and supported it.

The result was that a disagreement in the ecclesia was solved and everyone felt that they were looked after fairly. This allowed the ecclesia to continue to preach and so Luke says that ‘the Word of God increased’.

This is a very important lesson for us; good and fair ecclesial organisation, which involves every brother and sister in its decisions, helps to bring peace and to create an atmosphere in which disciples can concentrate on preaching the Word. Once a decision has been fairly made by a majority within the ecclesia, all members should support it.

We read of another business meeting in Acts 15, this one involved the elders and apostles from many ecclesias. They came together to discuss something that many of them strongly disagreed about, there was ‘much debate’ and again there are lessons for us to learn about how we deal with disagreements in our ecclesias.

1. They met to talk about the matter; they did not send letters or just stay at home. Although there were strong and opposing views, they listened to each other.
2. There was time for everyone to speak.
3. When the respected brethren, Peter and James, spoke everyone was quiet and listened.
4. They based their decision on the Word of God, not on their own views.
5. Once a decision was made, they all accepted it and lived by it.

The Responsibilities of Elders

When the apostle Paul went on his preaching missions, the organisation of ecclesias was very important to him. He knew that newly baptized brothers and sisters needed ecclesial organisation and he chose men in each town to be elders (Acts 14:23). It does not mean that automatically he chose the oldest, most senior man to be the elder in an ecclesia. Timothy was a young man but he was the elder of the ecclesia in Ephesus, chosen because of his spiritual nature and Paul tell us a lot about the qualities we should look for as we chose brethren to be the elders of our ecclesias.

We should note that it is not wrong to want to be an elder in an ecclesia – it is the motives behind the desire that are important.

“If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.”
1Timothy 3:1-6

“For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” Titus 1:7-9

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”
1Peter 5:1-3

These passages give us a very clear picture about the attributes of an ecclesial elder. He should be like this:

- A man who knows his Bible and can teach others about the Gospel message.
- A man who lives according to the Gospel.
- A man who is self controlled and moderate in his behaviour and who deals in a calm and thoughtful way with ecclesial problems however difficult they may be.
- A man who is not angry or violent.
- A man who does not get drunk.
- A man who is hospitable and welcomes other people into his home.
- A man who does not take money for the work of being an elder nor does he steal from the funds of the ecclesia.
- A man who is not arrogant or proud.
- A man who has developed spiritually and is not newly baptized

Some elders see themselves as ‘in charge’ or as ‘the leader’ of their congregation. This leads them to be arrogant and unkind in the way they treat people and this gives a very bad example to the ecclesia. After Jesus had washed the disciple’s feet in the Upper Room he said:

“For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” John 13:15-17

An ecclesial elder (a Recording Brother or Secretary) should be the *servant* of his ecclesia. He should be like a shepherd looking after his sheep and helping them on the way to the Kingdom of God.

The Roles of Men and Women

Paul wrote that:

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:27-28

These are wonderful words and confirm the idea of the ‘one body’. The colour of our skin, whether we are man or woman, all these things are irrelevant to God when we become members of His family. However the Bible is quite clear that there are different roles within the ecclesia for men and women. Within the ecclesia the men are to lead the prayers and worship of the congregation. It is their responsibility to teach and to lead the public preaching of the Gospel. The sisters are to listen quietly to the men and to be subject to them (1Timothy 2:8-15). Paul says that the reason for this is that Adam was first formed by God. He should have taken the lead in worship of God together with his wife but the woman (Eve) was deceived and took the fruit, gave it to her husband and transgressed God’s law. By obeying God’s commandments about the differing roles for men and women in the ecclesia, we restore the pattern that God gave from the beginning.

This does not mean that there is no role for sisters. Their influence is vital within any ecclesia. It was Lydia (Acts 16) who set an example of hospitality and kindness which influenced the ecclesia in Philippi. Dorcas was a sister in Joppa who was well known as a disciple who did many good deeds and looked after the poor (Acts 9). Sisters teach in Sunday School and often have ability with little children that men do not. Sisters also have a very great influence in their own homes in the way they behave and set a Godly example both for their children and their husbands (Titus 2:4-5).

One public acknowledgement of these different roles for men and women within the ecclesia is the way in which men are told to worship with uncovered heads and women are instructed to cover their heads for worship and prayer (1Corinthians 11).

Ecclesial Meetings

Every ecclesia should meet weekly, on Sunday if possible, to share bread and wine in memory of the life and death of Jesus (see Lesson 6) and a suggested programme for this service is shown at the end

of this lesson. However, it is a weak ecclesia that just meets in this way. The ecclesia, and individual members, must grow spiritually.

“...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, **when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**”
Ephesians 4:14-16

It is careful reading and studying of the Word of God with prayer which helps us to grow (1Peter 2:1) and the ecclesia should meet weekly for Bible study at a Bible Class. This should help brothers and sisters move on from first principles to consider what the writer to the Hebrews calls ‘the meat of the word’. There should also be a meeting weekly to preach the Gospel at which the ecclesia looks outward to share with the people who live round about the wonderful news of the Gospel. These meetings are not easy to organise and run, especially when the ecclesia is small. However, help is available and the Christadelphian Isolation League will send out by post written Exhortations, Lectures and Bible Class papers that can be used by ecclesias.

Suggested Order of Memorial Service for Christadelphian Ecclesias

Hymn

Prayer

Two Daily Bible Readings from the Bible Reading Companion

Hymn

Exhortation (a talk based on the Bible which will be of comfort and help to the brothers and sisters)

Introduction to Bread and Wine

Prayer for Bread

Prayer for Wine

Hymn

Collection for the ecclesia and announcements about future arrangements

Hymn

Prayer

Questions

1. What does the word ‘ecclesia mean?
2. What do people have to do to belong to the ecclesia of God?
3. How should disciples behave when they meet to discuss the affairs of the ecclesia?
4. What sort of man should disciples choose to be an elder?
5. Within the ecclesia what are the roles of:
(a) brethren (b) sisters
6. What do we learn from 1Peter 5:1-5?



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 8

The Power of the Tongue

The Judgement Seat

When Jesus Christ returns to set up God's Kingdom, everyone who knows and understands the Gospel message will be called to meet him and will be judged by him. Those who have been faithful to him in their lives will be given a place in the Kingdom, those who have been unfaithful will be rejected by the Lord and will be sent away to die.

The basis of the Judgement will be how we have put the Gospel into practice in our lives (Romans 2:16) and Jesus will be particularly interested in how we have used our tongue.

"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,
for by **your** words you will be justified, and by **your** words you will be condemned."

Matthew 12:36-37

Jesus will not listen to what other people say about us; amongst other things he will judge us on what **we** have said about **other** people, on how we have used our tongue. If our words are 'careless'; if they are thoughtless or hurtful then we shall have to answer for them to Jesus.

Words that Work!

There is another lesson in these words of Jesus that we must think about. The idea behind 'careless' words is of words that are lazy or idle. Jesus used the same word in a parable when he spoke of workers who stood idle in the market place (Matthew 20:3). We need to think carefully about what we say to each other, we should use words which help to build up our brothers and sisters; we need to put our tongue to work in his service! There are many ways that we can do this.

1. We use it to worship together with our brothers and sisters, giving praise and thanks to God. (Colossians 3:15-17).
2. We can speak words of peace and comfort, bringing calm where there was anger. (Proverbs 15:1, Matthew 5:9).
3. By words or by letter we can give help and support to those who are in distress or trouble. (2Corinthians 1:1-11).
4. We can feed those who are spiritually hungry with the Word of God. (Proverbs 10:21).

There are many examples in the Bible of men and women who changed the way they spoke when they became convinced of the Gospel. The apostle Paul wrote 'let your speech always be gracious', a lovely idea telling us that in all of our words we should be conscious of the wonderful thing God has done for us, saving us through His grace.

Perhaps the best known example is that of Peter. When Jesus was arrested he cursed and swore, denying that he had ever known Jesus. However, years later he wrote some wonderful words about how we should use our tongues (1Peter 3:8-16) and he summed up how we should speak in these words:

"Always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you;
yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame."

1Peter 3:15-16

This is the example for us to follow!

The Power of the Tongue

In the Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul wrote:

“...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”
Romans 12:1

It is clear from the letters he wrote that these words had a real, practical meaning for Paul. When he was baptised he became a ‘slave of God’ (Romans 6:22) and understood that he should obey his new Master in all things. In everything he did and said Paul tried to obey God. This is the example we try to follow in our lives when we become baptised disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, like Paul we find it very difficult; we constantly disobey God and seek His forgiveness through Jesus.

The Bible teaches us that the tongue plays a very important part in this struggle with our human nature. How we speak and what we say can show people, more than anything else we do, whether or not we are true followers of Christ.

“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, **for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**”
Luke 6:45

However hard we might try to disguise the fact, our words tell people what is really there in our hearts, the things we truly believe in.

James, who was probably the half brother of the Lord Jesus, wrote some very powerful words about the tongue. Please read **James 3** before proceeding further with this lesson.

We can summarise what James teaches us like this:

1. We should not be too eager to teach others – to use our tongues to tell others what to do. God will judge the words of those who do this (verse 1).
2. Although the tongue is a very small part of our bodies, it guides the whole direction of our lives (Verses 3-5).
3. What we say can cause so much trouble it is like starting a fire which then burns out of control. If we upset someone by our words, they may say something harsh back to us and more and more angry words are spoken; no-one knows how to stop it (Verses 5-6).

James says that this is so serious it is like being ‘set on fire by hell (or Gehenna)’. Jesus is the only other person in the Bible who used the word ‘Gehenna’. We know that Gehenna was the rubbish heap outside Jerusalem where the Jews put their rubbish and burned it. The fires never went out and James is telling us that the anger and disagreements we can cause by careless words are like a fire that never goes out.

4. No-one can control his/her tongue; it is full of poison (Verse 8). These are similar words to those of the Psalmist:

“The wicked are estranged from the womb;
they go astray from birth, speaking lies.
They have **venom like the venom of a serpent**, like the deaf adder that stops its ear,
so that it does not hear the voice of charmers or of the cunning enchanter.”

Psalm 58:3-5

Just as a snake bite is venomous or poisonous and can kill, so the words of a wicked person can cause great spiritual harm.

5. We use our tongues both to praise and worship God and then to curse men (Verse 9)
6. Our tongues show what is in our hearts, when we boast or speak selfish and hurtful words, we are ‘false to the truth’ (Verses 14-15).
7. We should speak words which show God’s wisdom and His character in our lives and always seek to make peace. (Verses 17-18).

Anger

It is when we are angry with someone that we tend to say hurtful words. Perhaps we have been hurt by what has been said to us and we want to hurt someone back. King David was a man who understood this. He had been hurt many times in his life by what wicked men said about him. When he was an old man he wrote:

“Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!
For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.
Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.
Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.
He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.
Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!
Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.
For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.
In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.
But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.”
Psalm 37:1-11

What good advice there is in these words! We should trust in God and not worry about what other people say. Those who are gentle and peaceful will inherit the earth but wicked people will perish for ever. We should leave judgement of others to God who knows all things and not condemn others by what we say about them.

The Apostle Paul adds something more to this advice.

“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger...
Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.
And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”
Ephesians 4:26, 29-32

Just as we daily pray to God that He will forgive us our sins, that He will not remain angry with us for what we have done, so should forgive others every day for what they may have said or done to us. Each night, before we fall asleep, we need to clear our hearts of any anger we feel against other people. We must also learn to apologise to those we may have hurt.

Gossip

Gossip is when we tell idle, malicious stories about people behind their backs. It may be something that is true or it may be a lie, it makes no difference, gossip is sinful and we should avoid it totally. We should not gossip with our own tongues and we should not listen to the gossip of others.

The Bible is clear in its message about this.

“A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a **gossip** separates close friends.”
Proverbs 16:28 (NIV)

“They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are **gossips**, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.
Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practise them.” Romans 1:29-32

“But refuse to enrol younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also **gossips** and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.” 1Timothy 5:11-14

We find stories about other people interesting, especially if they contain information which is ‘spicy’ or concerns bad behaviour. Whenever we are told gossip we should stop the teller and say that we are not interested. There are two key questions we should ask ourselves about gossip.

1. Would we say this if the Lord Jesus Christ was present?
2. Would we tell this story if the person we are talking about was present and listening?

Blasphemy

The most serious misuse of our tongue is when we say things against the Lord God Himself or against His Son. In the Ten Commandments God said:

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” Deuteronomy 5:11

The New Testament is equally clear in its teaching.

“But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.” Colossians 3:8 (KJV)

We should treat the names of the Lord God and His Son with great respect in our lives. We should not use them in a careless or casual way. We should not use them as part of ‘bad language’ or swearing. The word blasphemy means ‘treating with contempt’. When we misuse the name of God, it is as if we despise Him or treat Him with contempt.

Jesus takes it further than this. He said that we should not make an oath at all. We should not ‘swear that something is true’ (Matthew 5:33-37). Today, if people want to impress that they are really telling the truth, they may ‘swear an oath before God’ but we should not do this. This is particularly true if we are ever called upon to give evidence in a court of law. As a witness we may be asked to swear on the Bible that what we say is totally true. Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will not take such an oath but will merely ask to affirm that they will tell the truth.

“But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.” James 5:12

Foolish Talk

It is very easy to use our tongue in a foolish way. We might be tempted to tell a ‘dirty story’ – one with element of sex in it. We might tell a joke which makes people laugh but which does so by mocking other people. We might get involved in a pointless argument about something which really is not important. All of these things are foolish talk, they do not help us to become stronger disciples of the Lord Jesus and they do not set a good example to others.

“Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.” Ephesians 5:4

“...To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people...

But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” Titus 3:2, 9-11

The Example of Jesus

When we really want to know how we should speak to each other, then we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was perfect in every way; every word he spoke was godly and right.

“He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;
a bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not quench, until he
brings justice to victory.”
Matthew 12:19-20

Jesus did not shout or quarrel. The idea of the bruised reed and smouldering wick is poetic language for those who are weak in their faith. Jesus did not extinguish or break their faith by hard words; he did his best to keep their faith alive by his compassion.

People mocked and jeered at Jesus. The drunks made nasty songs about him (Psalm 69:12). People laughed at him and ridiculed him as he hung on the cross dying yet he behaved in this way:

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth...
And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”
Isaiah 53:7, 9

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.
He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.
When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.
He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.
For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”
1Peter 2:21-25

This is how we should use the power of our tongue. We are not given the power of speech by God to defend ourselves or to cause raging arguments. We are given it to speak the words of God, to follow the example of Jesus in our every day lives so that our speech is always gracious and pleasing to God.

Questions

1. Give three positive ways of using our tongues to speak helpful words.
2. Why are our words important? What do they reveal about us?
3. What should we say and do when people are angry with us and say harsh things?
4. What is blasphemy? Why is it wrong?
5. Give three examples of the ways in which Jesus spoke to people.
6. What do the following passages from Proverbs teach us:
a) 10:21 b) 16:32 c) 18:21 d) 21:23



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 9

Truthfulness and Honesty in our Lives

The Faithfulness of God

In the book of Deuteronomy we have the last words of Moses, spoken just before he died. Nearly forty years before he had seen the goodness of God who had passed by him and proclaimed:

“The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and **truth**...”
Exodus 34:6 (KJV)

Now, in Deuteronomy, Moses describes God to the Israelites who will cross over the River Jordan and enter the Promised Land. This is what he says:

“I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a **God of truth** and without iniquity, just and right is he.”
Deuteronomy 32:3-4 (KJV)

In both of these quotations God is described as truthful. For Moses, God was like a rock, absolutely dependable in all His ways and in everything He said. David also used this expression to describe God in one of his Psalms.

“Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD **God of truth**.”

Psalm 31:5 (KJV)

We know that the first part of this verse was quoted by Jesus, indeed they were the very last words he spoke on the cross, just before he died, and they tell us of his absolute trust in God. It is possible that the second part of the verse was the phrase he spoke immediately he was resurrected from the dead. For Jesus, every word God spoke was true, God had promised to raise him from the dead and his resurrection showed that God could be trusted absolutely.

It is interesting that, in some modern versions of the Bible, the word ‘truth’ is translated as ‘faithfulness’. The apostle Paul picked up this idea when he wrote to the Corinthians that ‘God is faithful’, he was reminding them that God would keep His word; He can be trusted and He will bring His children to His Kingdom. Paul took this from the book of Deuteronomy, look at this verse.

“Know therefore that the LORD your God is **God, the faithful God** who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations...”
Deuteronomy 7:9

Disciples of the Lord Jesus depend absolutely on this aspect of God’s character. We believe with all our hearts that He is faithful and true, that He will never lie to us or deceive us. Indeed, Paul wrote ‘Let God be true though every man be false’; even if every man in the world is a dishonest liar, God will remain true! (See also Titus 1:2)

Honesty is Essential

These ideas about the truthfulness of God are important for God wants us to be like Him, our characters like His character or as He says:

“You shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy.”
Leviticus 19:2

Being holy means being separated from the world around us and dedicated to God. We are holy when we obey Him and when we use our tongue to speak only honest words. God also told Israel that if they disobeyed these laws then they would profane (dishonour) His holy name.

This chapter in Leviticus (chapter 19) develops the principles behind the Ten Commandments and shows how the Children of Israel were to apply them in their lives. We should note how many of

God's commandments relate to truthfulness and honesty in their lives and our lives. God is true and honest and He wants us to be like this also.

- You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. (Verse 11)
- You shall not oppress your neighbour or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. (Verse 13)
- You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour. (Verse 15)
- You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people. (Verse 16)
- You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights. (Verses 35-36)

Honesty is an essential part of a believer's life. If we cannot trust each other then it becomes impossible to live and worship together. It is important to realise that the Bible tells us of the importance of truthfulness in our actions, not just our words. For example, the next chapter in Leviticus goes on to tell us about the need to be faithful and true to our wife or husband. It is just as dishonest to have sex with another man's wife or another woman's husband as to steal or lie. God demands that we are honest in all our ways.

"Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who **act faithfully** are his delight."
Proverbs 12:22

There are many examples in the Bible of men and women who were dishonest before God and who had to learn the lesson that this is unacceptable to Him. One such example is in Genesis 27 where we read how Jacob, and his mother, Rebekah, deceived Isaac, his father. He pretended to be his brother Esau; he lied to his father to gain something that was not his by right. The consequences were severe. Esau became his enemy for the rest of his life. He had to flee from the family home and never saw his mother again. When Jacob later became the father of many sons, they in their turn lied to him, telling him that his favourite son, Joseph, was dead. We learn from this example that, if we lie and cheat in our lives, we may cause terrible pain and distress in our families. If we do this we may have to live with the consequences for many years and our bad example may be followed in turn by our children.

Honesty before God

When we lie, we do so because we think we can 'get away with it'. We think that no-one will know that we have not told the truth. However, God *always* knows what we *do* – and indeed, what we *think* in our hearts.

"O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue behold, O LORD, you know it altogether."
Psalm 139:1-4

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read about a man and wife who thought they could cheat their brothers and sisters in the ecclesia and cheat God.

"But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.
But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?
While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**"
When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it."
Acts 5:1-5

These people appeared to be doing good. To their brothers and sisters in the ecclesia in Jerusalem they must have seemed righteous because they gave money to help others. But they lied about the amount of money; they boasted that they had given everything from the sale of the property when they gave just part of the money to God - they deceived their brothers and sisters.

It is very easy to appear righteous as a disciple of Jesus Christ when really we are lying in our hearts. We must not pretend to give God everything but hold back part for ourselves. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not a lack of generosity, if they had said 'we are giving God half of the money and keeping half for ourselves' then this would have been honest, and God would have accepted it. What was wrong was to lie to Peter and to God.

When we sin, it may hurt other people but the real consequence is that we sin against God. When we lie, we may think we are just lying to another man or woman, but we need to recognise that we are trying to deceive God.

The problem is that some people do not believe this. They know that many are dishonest and get away with it – God does not strike dishonest people dead today as He did Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. However, dishonesty does get noticed and when it occurs amongst disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ it causes serious spiritual damage both to the people who are lied to and to the one who has told the lie.

David recognised this and wrote about it in Psalm 37.

"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.

But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace."

Psalm 37:7-11

When Jesus returns to set up God's kingdom, dishonest people will be punished just as surely as God judged Ananias and Sapphira.

Honesty in Everyday Life

The Bible teaches us to be honest not just in big things but in things which may seem very small and trivial. Some people think that it is acceptable to tell little lies; they say that they do not matter. The Bible makes no such distinction, God says:

"No one who practises deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes."

Psalm 101:7

All lies are wrong and if we are continually untruthful people we shall not find a place in God's Kingdom, He will not allow us into His presence.

Consider these words from Proverbs.

"A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight."

Proverbs 11:1

Just imagine shopkeepers with scales that are deliberately adjusted to give less than the customer has paid for. The shopkeeper may think he or she is smart and clever but God hates this hidden wickedness.

Each of us can be tempted to give 'short measure' even if we are not a shopkeeper. Perhaps we lie to our employer telling him that we are ill and cannot go into work when this is not true. Perhaps we steal little things from him – such as a pencil or some paper. We may even try to justify this by telling ourselves that we need it for the good of others. It may be possible to hide our deeds from other men but we cannot hide them from God.

Bribery is one of the worst forms of dishonesty that we meet in our everyday lives. We may be asked for money in order to receive a favour or we may offer dishonestly to pay someone money to

get something we want. This is corruption and in some countries it is very common. God hates it and again He tells us that those who are involved in bribery will not be in His Kingdom

“O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart;
who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbour, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;
in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honours those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change;
who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.” Psalm 15

The Psalmist asks a question and then answers it. He asks ‘Who will be in the Kingdom of God’ and then he tells us of the character of those men and women whom God will choose. They are like this.

- They do right things in their lives, following the commandments of God.
- Not only do they speak the truth but they think it in their hearts also. Their lips do not say one thing whilst their hearts hold a lie.
- They do not say bad things about other people and are faithful to their friends.
- They do not slander their neighbours.
- They honour those who fear and worship God.
- They turn away from those who despise the name of God.
- They do not go back on their word, even if it means that it costs them a great deal to keep a promise.
- They do not defraud other people.
- They do not take bribes to hurt innocent people

These are the kinds of people who will be in God’s Kingdom!

There is a very powerful lesson in the Bible – that God deals with us as we deal with each other in our lives. David wrote of this in a very straightforward way in Psalm 18.

“On him who has mercy you will have mercy; to the upright you will be upright;
He who is holy will see that you are holy; but to the man whose way is not straight you will be a hard judge.” Psalm 18:25-26 (BBE)

We want God to be merciful with us at the Judgement Seat and to accept us as holy people, worthy of a place in His Kingdom, therefore we need to be merciful, straight and honest with others now.

“Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!”
Job 31:6

God always deals justly and fairly with people, how can we expect Him to accept us into His Kingdom if we have been unjust and dishonest to others in our lives?

An Example to Others

There is another very important reason why a disciple of Jesus must be totally honest. Non-believers look very carefully at our lives to see if we ‘practise what we preach’. If we live honestly and preach God’s Word, then people will see that we really believe what we preach. If we preach about honesty but live dishonest lives, then people will not believe our message. This was a problem in the days of the Apostle Paul and he wrote about it to the Romans.

“If you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,
an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-

you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?

You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

You who boast in the law dishonour God by breaking the law.

For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."
Romans 2:19-24

This is a terrible consequence of dishonesty in the life of a believer – that people outside the ecclesia will blaspheme the name of God when they see it.

Once again it is the Apostle Paul who sums up what we have been thinking about in this lesson. These are things we need to practise and to fill our lives with if we are to journey towards the Kingdom of God.

“Finally, brothers,
whatever is true,
whatever is honourable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely,
whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me- practise these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:8-9

Questions

1. What does it mean for a disciple to be ‘holy’?
2. Give three examples of how the Children of Israel were to be honest in their lives.
3. When we lie to each other, who else knows about it?
4. Give three examples of how we should be honest in our everyday lives.
5. Give three characteristics of the type of person who will be in the Kingdom of God.
6. Explain the teaching of Psalm 24:3-5



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 10

Godliness and Self Control in our Lives

Running the Race

In New Testament days people were very interested in athletic sports, just as they are today. Runners trained hard before races and the one who won was crowned with a wreath of leaves as a mark of honour. Twice in the New Testament, this picture of a runner in a race is mentioned when describing the life of a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”
1Corinthians 9:25

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”
Hebrews 12:1-2

Athletes who train to run races live very disciplined lives. They do not smoke cigarettes or take drugs; they do not abuse their bodies with alcohol. They ‘exercise self-control in all things’ because winning the race is so important to them. This is a very helpful example for men and women who become true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 12, preparing for the Kingdom of God is described as running a race. Just as an athlete lays aside his everyday clothes because he cannot run fast in them, so a disciple of Jesus ‘lays aside every weight and sin’. Just as an athlete will give of his best in a race right up to the finishing tape, so a disciple will ‘run with perseverance the race that is set before us’. Look at these words of the apostle Paul.

“Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”
1Timothy 4:7-8

Godliness is a very practical attribute, a simple definition of it is ‘honouring God in our everyday lives’. It is something we have to practise, to train at everyday. Just as an athlete will become unfit and unable to win a race if he does not train daily, so disciples of Jesus will become spiritually unfit if they do not practise godliness daily. We need to consider how we can do this practically in our lives.

The Use of our Leisure Time

When we become a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, we make a commitment that should affect every part of our lives. One of the biggest decisions we have to make is how we spend our leisure time. In the world people spend their time and money doing things which are designed simply to please themselves and to satisfy their desires. They put what *they* want *first* and they choose friends who think in this way. They smoke and drink alcohol. They gamble. If they are young men then they will be interested in girls and having sex with them, if they are girls then they will be attracted to sex with boys.

However the Bible tells us that a disciple of Jesus Christ will put *God first* in his or her life, Jesus taught his disciples ‘seek first his (God’s) kingdom and his righteousness’. Therefore we have to make a choice about what is really important to us in our lives and this involves thinking about how we spend our time and with whom we spend it.

“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” James 4:4

How then should our lives be changed practically by our commitment to Christ?

Smoking and Drug Taking

The problem of smoking and drug abuse did not exist in New Testament times and therefore there is no direct teaching in the Bible about these things. We know that cigarettes and drugs are addictive, once people start to use them most cannot stop easily and some are hooked on them for life. We also know that they damage the health of those who use them, many people who smoke die from lung or heart disease caused by their cigarettes.

The other point to consider is that these things cost a lot of money. People spend money on drugs or cigarettes instead of using it to look after themselves and their families.

The Bible tells us that when we are baptized we 'put on Christ'. By this it means that he becomes the example we should follow in our new life as a disciple. The dedication of Jesus to God's word took him to a terrible death of crucifixion and Paul says of us:

"And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."
Galatians 5:24

Obviously Paul does not mean that physically we need to be crucified as was Jesus. He does mean though that we should try to put out of our lives the things which we crave to do and which we know are sinful. Paul uses strong language here; the word 'desire' has a meaning of longing, craving for that which is forbidden. Smoking and drug taking are part of this. They become things we crave for and *must* have. They bring about a loss of self control, the addiction means that we are not in control of ourselves – we *have to* give in to the desire to light a cigarette. It is possible to get a short term feeling of happiness and peace from using these things – but it does not last, unlike the peace of God which 'passes understanding' and which will fill the life of a disciple who looks to God as the source of happiness and fulfilment in his life.

Alcohol

Some people teach that drinking any alcohol is sinful and is against Bible teaching. This is not true but we must make a distinction between drinking alcohol sensibly and getting drunk. Under the Law of Moses, wine was seen as a blessing from God (Deuteronomy 7:13) and indeed the nation of Israel was described as a vine (Ezekiel 15). However, it seems that the Bible describes the sensible use of alcohol as part of a meal or feast, for example the marriage feast in John 2 or the Last Supper (Luke 22:17-20).

However, there are many Bible passages which warn us of the dangers of drinking too much alcohol.

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise."
Proverbs 20:1

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery."
Ephesians 5:18

"Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."
Romans 13:13-14

"Wine and new wine... take away the understanding."
Hosea 4:11

The interesting point about these passages is that they tell us about the behaviour of people who get drunk. Too much alcohol makes us lose control of ourselves (which is what debauchery means) and then we do things which are wrong and may later regret such as quarrelling or fighting or immoral behaviour. We may spend money that we cannot afford and later have none to feed ourselves or our families. This is wrong in the sight of God. One of the most awful things that drunken people ever did was to make up songs about Jesus that they sang in the streets (Psalm 69:12).

Above everything else we are told about drunkenness is that those who are drunkards will not be invited into the Kingdom of God.

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21

“But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,'... and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 24:48-51

There is another aspect to drinking alcohol though. One person can take a drink and then stop, another cannot stop and some people become physically addicted to alcohol. As disciples of Jesus we have a great responsibility for other people. Jesus tells us that we must do nothing to cause them to stumble (Luke 17:1-2). If we have friends who are addicted to alcohol, we should give up alcohol altogether in order to set them a good example and to try to help them with their problem.

There is also a good example for us to follow recorded in Leviticus 10. In Old Testament times, the priests who were on official duty at the Tabernacle were commanded by God not to drink alcohol at all (Leviticus 10:9). They needed clear minds and total control of themselves as they served God. In Romans 12, Paul wrote of our worship and service of God as if we are continually on duty before Him and so we need to have clear heads and minds at all times in our lives so that we are acceptable to the Lord.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:1-2

Money and Gambling

Most of the people in the world are poor and do not have much money. A few are extremely rich. It is interesting that the writer of some of the Proverbs prayed to God that he would be neither rich nor poor. It is as if he understood that both poverty and wealth bring temptations to our lives that may cause us problems.

“Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.” Proverbs 30:7-9

It is difficult to be poor, to worry about how we will look after our families, how we will pay our debts. Sometimes poor people become desperate for money; they think that if only they were rich, then their problems would be solved. Yet the apostle Paul wrote:

“Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” 1Timothy 6:6-10

Often this passage is misquoted as ‘money is the root of all evil’ but Paul says it is the *love* of money that is the problem. People become greedy for money, they believe that it will solve the problems of this life but we know that they can only be solved by the return of the Lord Jesus and by the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. Paul also wrote that those who are like this will not be in this Kingdom.

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of **greed**, because these are improper for God’s holy people.

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or **greedy person**—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

Ephesians 5:3-5(RSV)

For these reasons we should avoid gambling which people do to get rich quickly without the effort of work. People gamble out of greed, they covet something that is not theirs and seek to get it quickly. Many men waste money on gambling and do not support their families and the Bible has strong words about this.

“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” 1Timothy 5:8

We saw earlier in this lesson that the message of the Bible is to ‘seek first the Kingdom of God’ in our lives and to trust in God that He will take care of us as we wait the coming of His Son. This requires faith to live each day believing that, whatever happens to us, God will never leave us but will guide us to the Kingdom.

Sexual Relationships

In the next lesson we shall consider this topic in detail. However it is an important part of how we spend our leisure time. Casual sex outside of marriage is a part of many people’s lives yet the Bible is quite clear that sex outside marriage is wrong; the teaching of Jesus himself is:

“A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh

So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Matthew 19:5-6

Sexual relationships should be reserved for marriage and so we must be very careful about our use of leisure time and friendships with the opposite sex.

Making the most of our Time

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:15-16

As we get older we realise how quickly time passes. The days seem to fly by and we understand that God gives us only a limited time in this life. For most people the majority of our time is spent in working in one way or another. This is right in the sight of God; we all have a responsibility to care for ourselves and our families if possible. There were brothers and sisters in the ecclesia at Thessalonica who were so excited about the return of Jesus that they gave up work and spent their days talking to each other. The Apostle Paul wrote strong words of advice to them that this was unwise and that they should work to keep themselves (2Thessalonians 3).

How then should we use our time? Paul goes on to answer this question at length in Ephesians 5 and 6. He writes about our relationships with each other within our families and within the ecclesia. He writes about our attitudes to work both as employers and employees and he tells us to be ‘strong in the Lord’. The point he makes is that our discipleship should be evident in all the everyday things we do and spend time on. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not about saying to ourselves; ‘I must not do this, I should not do that’. It is about trying to follow the example of Jesus from our hearts in the ordinary things of our everyday lives - in everything we do. As we turn more to the example of Jesus and try to behave as he did, then we shall find pleasure in doing so, in spending our time on godly things. Our relationships with each other will become happier and more loving, our friends will be people who share our love of the Bible and who await the return of Jesus. We will spend our time on things which help us to grow spiritually and which we find deeply satisfying in our lives.

The Temple Of God

As we have seen already, a disciple of Jesus Christ has to make a decision to leave behind the things of the world and to follow the example of Jesus in his/her life. We have seen that this is described as ‘putting on Christ’ but the new life which we live is also described in a very special way.

“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you
are that temple.”
1Corinthians 3:16-17

We must be clear about what Paul means in this passage. He does not mean that we have the Holy Spirit power of God or that it works within us to change us in any way. God does not give us His Holy Spirit power to perform miracles nor will He change us so that we become more Christ-like without any effort on our part. Perhaps these words will help us to see what he does mean.

“For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be **spiritually minded** *is* life and peace...
But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.
Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Romans 8:6, 9(RSV)

The apostle Paul picks up this idea again in Philippians 1 and 2 when he writes about believers having the ‘spirit of Jesus Christ’ or the ‘mind of Jesus Christ’. This is a lovely idea for us to think about. If we fill our minds and lives with godly thoughts and godly ways then we are like God’s temple. The temple was the place where people came to worship God, so the idea is that by honouring God in our everyday lives we are seen by Him as worshipping Him in the things we say and do. If we do this then we truly become part of His family, His sons and daughters, chosen by Him to be in His Kingdom.

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?
What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?
What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,
and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”
2Corinthians 6:14-18

Questions

1. What does ‘Godliness’ mean?
2. Whose example should we follow when baptized?
3. Why is it wrong to get drunk?
4. Why is it wrong to gamble?
5. What does it mean to be spiritually minded?
6. What does 2Corinthians 6:14-18 mean practically for your life today?



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 11

Marriage and Family Life

The Principles of Marriage

The relationship between a husband and his wife is the most important human relationship that we can achieve in our lives. It is in marriage that we can learn how fully to love another person, how to forgive one another, how to be considerate and caring, how to be selfless. The Bible tells us a great deal about the principles of marriage and what it should mean for disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus spoke these words about marriage to his disciples.

"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,
and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife,
and they shall become one flesh'?
So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not
man separate."
Matthew 19:4-6

Jesus was reminding his disciples of the way in which Adam and Eve came together as man and wife. The Lord God brought Eve to Adam in the Garden of Eden and this is recorded for us in Genesis 2. However it is obvious from the way Jesus described a man leaving his parents that there are lessons for men and women of all generations, not just for the first man and woman (who were created directly by God), and we can learn the following points from what he said in Matthew 19.

1. In the beginning God made two sexes and brought a man and a woman together. He did not bring a man to a man or a woman to a woman; homosexuality is abhorrent to God and is strictly forbidden in the Bible. (Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26-27, 1Corinthians 6:9-10)
2. Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman. Adam was not given many wives, just one.
3. The marriage union is ordained by God, when Eve was brought to Adam God spoke to them both the words commencing 'Therefore...' In the beginning marriage was a solemn, serious commitment made by two people in the presence of the Angel of the Lord.
4. God intends that this joining, or 'union', of a man and woman in marriage should last as long as they both remain alive. God forbids anyone to break this union that He has blessed and later in the Bible we are told that He hates divorce.

"Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.
Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

"For the man who hates and divorces, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."
Malachi 2:14-16

These words are not easy to follow and we need to think carefully about them. Malachi was writing about events in Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah. These events are recorded in Nehemiah 13. Jewish men had divorced their Jewish wives and had married foreign women. They had put away the wives whom they had married when they were young, when both had shared a belief in God. They had been seduced by women who did not share their faith and had married them. In doing these things they made the same mistake as their ancestors who were seduced by pretty girls and turned away from God (Numbers 25). We can summarise Malachi's warning like this.

1. Your wife is supposed to be your good friend and partner. You should be faithful to her because you made a solemn promise (a covenant) when, as a young man, you took her to be your wife.

2. God wants godly offspring - that is God-fearing children. So God commands that husband and wife should stay together for life, as one flesh that must never be separated. In doing this they will be able to provide a good home in which their children can learn to serve God.
3. Every husband must be faithful to his wife for all of his life.
4. God hates divorce and men must not put away their wives and take new ones.

We need to think further about the idea of a 'Godly offspring'. The very first instruction that God gave the newly married Adam and Eve is found in Genesis 1.

"And God blessed them (Adam and Eve). And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 1:28

When we put this verse together with those from Malachi 2, which we have already considered, we can see clearly the purpose of God. He wants the earth to be filled with people, but they must be people who are God-fearing and who worship Him. It is the responsibility of husbands and wives together to bring up their children in this way.

The Place of Sexual Relations

We have seen from Matthew 19 that the physical union of a man and woman within marriage is a God given gift. It is an act of tenderness and love between two people who come together as one and the Bible tells us that this union must be respected and kept pure and that it is spoiled by adultery.

"Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." Hebrews 13:4

We are taught that two people become one flesh (1Corinthians 6:16) - but *only two*. Before a man or a woman marries, they should not have sexual relations with another person. When they are married they should be faithful to their husband or wife. We need to look again at the words of Jesus in Matthew 19.

"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast (be joined) to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." Matthew 19:4-6

1. A man shall leave his father and mother – this does not mean that he should now ignore his parents and have nothing to do with them. It means that his new wife now becomes the most important person in his family and he needs to put the care of her first.
2. He will be joined to his wife – the word Jesus used means 'to join closely, to be glued to' and it is unlikely that Jesus was describing sexual union in this way. Rather he is teaching us that a mental and spiritual union comes first; there should be 'a meeting of minds' between the husband and his wife. This understanding between a man and a woman should first be developed in courtship and engagement so that there is a clear understanding between them about what is really important to each of them before they commit to a joint life together in marriage.
3. The two become one flesh – sexual union comes *after* a husband is joined to his wife in the way described above.
4. The husband and wife are joined together by God – Jesus uses a different word here to that used in Point 2 above. This joining by God means 'to be yoked or united together' as two oxen might be yoked to pull a plough. The wife is the help given to the husband by God (Genesis 2:18) so that they might both work together for the Lord as they await the Kingdom of God. When Jesus talked about being yoked together with him (Matthew 11:29) he used a very similar word and we shall return to this idea later.

When we think of marriage in this way we can understand a little more clearly how important it is and why we should respect God's teaching about the need for faithfulness. People who break God's

commandments about sexual relations are called fornicators, or adulterers. (Fornication means any kind of unlawful sex; adultery means unlawful sex by a married person.) Those who continue to commit fornication or adultery will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Most of the book of Proverbs was written by King Solomon. He was a man who had many wives and many women – we are told that he had 1000 of them (1 Kings 11:3)! Yet none of them brought him the true happiness which comes from a Bible based marriage (Ecclesiastes 7:27-28). Perhaps because of his own unhappy experiences, he wrote much about sexual relationships in the book of Proverbs. In one vivid passage, he wrote about the harm adultery causes. (Proverbs 6:27-35). He wrote that immorality is like a fire out of control, it destroys the lives of all it touches and brings great harm and unhappiness.

Preparing for Marriage

Choosing a Wife

True disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ know that they should only marry someone who shares their faith. However, sometimes it is very difficult for a disciple to find a husband or wife who shares their beliefs. Some men and women in this situation are able to remain unmarried for all of their lives. They do this in response to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19:12. Jesus recognised that this is a very difficult thing to ask and his words tell us the divine ideal in this situation. It is not a commandment to all disciples in this situation. The very first thing we should do if we wish to get married is to pray about it and to entrust the matter to the Lord God.

The Bible warns many times about the dangers of marrying someone who does not share one's beliefs.

- In Genesis 6 we are told;

“When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.”
Genesis 6:1-2

Those called ‘the sons of God’ were the descendants of Adam through Seth, who began to ‘call on the name of the Lord’ (Genesis 4:26). Spiritually they were a ‘godly seed’ as described above. In contrast, the ‘daughters of man’ had no interest in worshipping God and the resulting wickedness brought the terrible judgement of God upon the earth by the Flood (Genesis 6 and 7).

- Abraham and Isaac opposed their sons’ marriages with the heathen Canaanites (Genesis 24:3-4; 28:1-2).
- The Law of Moses forbade the Israelites to have anything to do with these people or to take their daughters as wives (Exodus 34:15-16) and Moses specifically forbade the children of Israel to inter-marry with the foreign nations around them (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).
- Joshua reinforced the same message (Joshua 23:12-13).
- King Solomon’s foreign wives turned his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:1-11).
- Ezra (Ezra 9:1-2, 12) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:23-27) met the same problem and spoke of the evil of these alliances.

You will find it helpful to look up all of these references in your Bible.

In the New Testament Paul makes it very clear that a believer is not free to marry an unbeliever:

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?”
2 Corinthians 6:14-15

“A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”
1 Corinthians 7:39

Those who are considering marriage must remember that complete fulfilment can only be achieved when both partners belong to the Lord. Where there is no unity of thought, belief or purpose,

a marriage has no real spiritual foundation. It is not surprising that so many such marriages become just two people living together or they break down completely.

True followers of Christ must always keep the following clear in their minds. Whoever has not obeyed the Gospel is not a member of God's family and will not be in the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns to the earth. This is God's judgment, not ours. So, however charming, tender, kind and gentle a person may be, he (or she) is not part of God's family until they have obeyed the Gospel. Many people are 'good' people according to the judgement of the world and we might be attracted to them and think that we can find a marriage partner amongst them. However, God only accepts into His family people who have accepted His salvation through Jesus Christ. He asks of us that we exercise similar judgement when seeking someone to marry and to join us in forming a new family together.

This call of God must be kept firmly in mind, for our salvation depends upon our faithfulness to it. Our loyalty to God and to Jesus must come first, if our faith is a real faith - and this includes our friendships and our marriage partner. Jesus was very clear about this when he said;

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

In some countries the extended family, or the village in which we live, can exert strong pressure about marriage and family matters. If we are in Christ then we must obey him. If our family or village wants us to do something which is against his commands - like marrying someone who does not share our faith - then we should resist this pressure for the sake of obeying our Lord and for our own spiritual well-being. In marriage we form a partnership with our spouse, helping each other through life towards God's Kingdom. This cannot happen if we marry an unbeliever because our family wanted us to!

A man generally has only one opportunity to find a wife for himself. Once he has taken a wife he should stay with her always. If he makes a wrong choice he may have to pay for his mistake by being unhappy for the rest of his life.

The Bible often warns us of this, sometimes in very blunt language!

"It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.
It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman."
Proverbs 21:9, 19

"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised."
Proverbs 31:30

Men admire beautiful women; in countries where bride price has to be paid a woman's beauty often determines her price. After all, it is a very natural thing for a man to want a beautiful wife. However, if a man is concerned only with a woman's beauty, he may find himself married to an unsuitable wife. Look back at the proverbs quoted above. The first tells us that life with the wrong sort of wife can be very miserable. The second tells us that beauty alone is not enough; what really matters is that a woman should have reverence and respect for the Lord God.

Behaviour before Marriage

In New Testament times, Corinth was a very wicked city - like many cities today. The Apostle Paul wrote twice to the disciples who lived there and his letters contain much sound, practical advice for disciples of all generations. In 1Corinthians 6 he gave six reasons why believers should avoid, or flee from, sexual immorality.

1. Immoral people will not be in the Kingdom of God.

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."
1 Corinthians 6:9-10

2. Disciples are forgiven all their past sins when they are baptized and this includes immorality. They begin a new life in which they leave these things behind.
 "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."
 1 Corinthians 6:11
3. Disciples belong to the Lord; they commit their bodies to his service, therefore they are not free to do as they wish with them.
 "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."
 1 Corinthians 6:13

 "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."
 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
4. Their bodies (which they have committed to Christ) will be raised from the dead.
 "God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power."
 1 Corinthians 6:14
5. Their bodies are described as being part of Christ's body and immoral unions spoil this unity with Christ. The believer is one with the Lord in spirit, meaning there is a unity in thinking and attitude. You cannot be 'one with the Lord in spirit and also of 'one flesh' with an immoral person.
 "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!
 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."
 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him."
 1 Corinthians 6:15-17
6. Fornication is a sin against one's own body.
 "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body."
 1 Corinthians 6:18

Sexual relations before marriage are very common in many countries. People who have no intention of getting married will have intercourse together. This should not happen between true Bible believers. Intercourse is intended only for those already married and is an expression of heart and mind between a married couple. Casual sex is totally unscriptural; it makes nonsense of the sanctity of the marriage bond and encourages unfaithfulness after marriage.

Family Life in the Lord

Bringing up Children

We have already looked at the prophet Malachi's teaching about marriage. He said that its main purpose was for godly children to be raised and we should consider this further. To begin, let us look at two Proverbs:

"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it".
 Proverbs 22:6

"Discipline your son for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death."
 Proverbs 19:18

These words are as true today as when Solomon wrote them three thousand years ago. It is the parent's duty to train up a child in the way of the Lord. If they do this, even when old he or she will not forget this teaching and the importance of it.

This proverb does not mean that it is the parents' fault if their child, when grown up, rejects God's teaching. Solomon also wrote these words:

"My son, **if** you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you,
 making your ear attentive to wisdom
 and inclining your heart to understanding;
 yes, **if** you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,
if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures;

then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
Proverbs 2:1-5

We must bring up our children to understand the Gospel message, if we do this they will never forget it, but acceptance of it must come from a mature, adult heart.

Both father and mother should be involved in teaching their children these things and in correcting them when it is necessary. In some countries, physical punishment of children is forbidden by law whilst in others children are still beaten very harshly indeed. As ever the Bible gives us the right view about what we should do.

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”
Ephesians 6:4

The language Paul uses here is very interesting and he tells us of three stages in the guidance and correction of children.

1. ‘Bring them up’ - the words carry the meaning of to nourish or to feed. Just as we give our children natural food, we are responsible for giving them spiritual food also.
2. ‘In the discipline’ - this does not mean physical discipline but rather teaching. When a child does something that is wrong, we should teach it the right way, carefully explaining the reasons behind our decisions.
3. ‘And instruction’ - finally Paul uses a word which means admonishment or correction but note that this is to be used last, after the previous two stages. Punishment should never be so harsh or unjust that it makes our children angry and resentful against us; that will simply turn them away from the truth of the Bible.

Barrenness

Sadly, sometimes a married couple cannot have children. There may be physical problems that prevent conception. On some occasions things can be put right medically but at other times a husband and wife may have to accept the fact that they are not able to have children.

We know that in some countries this can be a major problem and husbands even divorce their wives because of it. This should *not* be so in the Lord - we know that children are a gift of God but we also know that, if we are in Christ, God is in control of our lives. We have to accept that God knows what is best for us and for our spiritual development however hard it seems to us.

“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”
Romans 8:28

Abortion

This should not be an option for sisters in Christ under almost all circumstances, because:

1. Conception is given by God (Hebrews 11:11; Ruth 4:13)
2. He oversees the development of the child in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16)
3. God is there at birth (Psalm 22:9; 71:6; Galatians 1:15).
4. The child is an inheritance from Him (Psalm 127:3).

An abortion is usually requested to do away with an unwanted pregnancy and this is wrong for all the above reasons. However, there may be medical exceptions where, for example, a mother’s life may be at risk due to damage to her foetus or womb. Such cases should be made a matter of prayer and husbands and wives should decide together the right course of action in conjunction with their doctor and according to their own consciences.

Respect for Parents

When the Children of Israel left Egypt and reached Mount Sinai, God gave them His law through Moses. The first part of this we know as the Ten Commandments and the sixth commandment is as follows:

"Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God is giving you."
Exodus 20:12

Paul calls it the 'first commandment with promise'. If the children of Israel cared for and honoured their parents, then they would have prospered in the land of Canaan. The whole basis of society, the way in which they were to live together, was that of honouring parents and respect for family life. Jesus condemned the leaders of his day because they had rejected this commandment (Mark 7:6-15) and it led to a break down of family values in their society, just as it does so often today.

Christ and His Ecclesia

We have seen so far that the Bible teaches us a very powerful lesson about both marriage and family life and that marriage for disciples of Jesus Christ is quite different to marriage for non believers. There is one Bible passage which explains, more than anything else, why this is so.

"For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

because we are members of his body.

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."
Ephesians 5:23-33

We saw earlier that, in marriage, God joins a man to a woman and that the word used by Jesus carries the idea of being yoked together. In Matthew 11 we read these lovely words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

This use of similar words to describe a marriage in the Lord, and a disciple's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is quite deliberate. From the beginning, the whole relationship between a husband and his wife pointed forward to the relationship between Jesus Christ and his ecclesia. He is described in Scripture as the bridegroom and the ecclesia as his bride. God joins true believers together with him. When we want to know how a husband should behave towards his wife in marriage, we should look at the Lord Jesus and see how he cared for his disciples, how he loved them and protected them. When we want to know how a wife should behave towards her husband, we should look at the disciples of the Lord. They were men who looked to Jesus for guidance and teaching. They were the ones chosen by him to help him in his work. They belonged to God and God gave them to Jesus (John 17:6), just as a woman is given to a man as his bride.

We expect Jesus Christ to be faithful and true to us and, in turn, we have promised to be faithful and true disciples to him. Therefore we should be faithful and true to our husband or wife, as a husband we should seek to love our wife in the way that Christ loves his ecclesia.

In the way we behave in our marriage we follow the example of the behaviour of our Lord.

Questions

1. What are the principles of marriage that we learn from the way God brought Eve to Adam?
2. Why is divorce wrong?
3. What should it mean to a man when he leaves his parents and is joined to a wife?
4. Why should we only marry someone who shares our beliefs?
5. How does the relationship between a man and his wife represent the relationship between Jesus and the ecclesia?
6. Read Ezra 9 and 10. What did Ezra do when he heard of the problem of mixed marriages? What did the people decide to do? What are the lessons for us today?



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 12

The Disciple and the State

In these lessons so far we have considered many aspects of discipleship, particularly those which affect our relationships with other people. In this lesson we shall consider how our discipleship should affect our relationship with the country in which we live and the government of that country.

The Prayer of Jesus for his Disciples

Just before he died, Jesus knew that the time was coming when he would have to leave his disciples and he was concerned for them. He knew that they would face many problems without his presence there to guide them and he told them that he would not leave them without any help as orphans (John 14:18). Later he offered a wonderful prayer asking God to look after them.

“And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

John 17:11-18

We can summarise the main points of these verses like this.

1. Jesus is about to leave the world and ascend to heaven after his resurrection. He asks his Father to keep (to guard, look after) the disciples in his absence.
2. He has given them the Word of God and, because they have chosen to follow him, the world has hated them; they have nothing in common with the world in which they live.
3. Yet Jesus does not ask God to rescue them from the world but that God would keep them out of evil or trouble.
4. They are to be separate from the world (2Corinthians 6:17), sanctified or made holy by the Word of God given to them.
5. Not only are they not to be rescued from the world, Jesus has sent them out into the world to preach the Gospel message (Matthew 10:7).

This sets the pattern for disciples of all generations since the time of Jesus Christ. After baptism they continue to live in a world with which spiritually they have nothing in common. They should preach the Gospel and witness to it by their personal lives, even though men and women will not accept it and may hate them for it. They are not to be drawn back into the world but to be separate from it and it is the Word of God in their lives which will help them with this.

Law Abiding Citizens

The Bible is very clear about the way in which true disciples should behave in this world. They should be the most law abiding citizens of the country in which they live. When the Apostle Paul wrote the

Letter to the Romans, he wrote to disciples who lived in a harsh society. Many of them were slaves and many were treated unjustly. Yet he wrote these words to them:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.”
Romans 13:1-5

It is important to note that *all* authorities are appointed by God - “there is no authority, except from God.” Those in authority are placed there by God, although usually they are not aware of this fact. This means that when a disciple disobeys the rulers of his country, he is really disobeying God. Notice that Paul says that we do this “for the sake of conscience.” We should obey the laws of our country because God commands us to, not because we are afraid of punishment if we are caught disobeying them. The following scriptures develop this thought:

“For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed.

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”
Romans 13:6-8

“Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,

to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”
Titus 3:1-2

“Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,

or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor.”

1 Peter 2:13-17

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.”
Matthew 22:21

Conscientious Objection

However, there may be certain situations in which a disciple of Jesus has to make difficult decisions. Sometimes we have to choose between obeying God or obeying man. Such a decision had to be made by Peter and John soon after Jesus had ascended into heaven. They offended the Jewish rulers when they accused them of murdering the Lord Jesus and they were told by them not to preach again. They responded:

“We must obey God rather than men.”

Acts 5:29

This same principle applies to us today. We must obey the laws of our country, but if we are asked by the state to do something which is contrary to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ then we must refuse to do it, even if there are severe penalties for this disobedience. The most common example of

this is when disciples are asked to fight for their country. Perhaps it is a time of war and the country is in danger from its enemies, the government may demand that its citizens take up arms and fight. God's servants will refuse to do this, their Master told them to love their enemies, and this they must do. They must not fight. This becomes a matter of *objecting for conscience sake*.

In some countries the penalties for refusing to fight are severe. Some disciples have suffered imprisonment and some death because they have steadfastly refused to go to war.

We can summarise how we should respond to any call to military service as follows:

1. No baptized follower of Jesus should seek to be in an occupation which could force him to be involved in violence toward another person. This would bring his allegiance to Jesus into doubt. When Jesus faced death and was being questioned by Pilate he said that his servants would not fight (John 18:36).
2. If an unbaptized person is in military service and, having developed an understanding of the Gospel, wishes to be baptized, he should speak to his commanding officer, explaining the situation. He must find a way to leave military service before he can be baptized.
3. He must make it absolutely clear that, as a follower of Christ, he will not fight whatever the consequences.
4. If we are called up to military service in a time of crisis for our country, we must refuse to do this.
5. The same principles apply in any occupation where the person may be called upon to show aggression toward another human being or carry offensive weapons. Prison warders, armed security guards and policemen are the most obvious examples.

These are not easy decisions, especially when they may involve hardship or persecution both for the individual and his family. We shall have to decide what is really important to us – the affairs of this life or the Kingdom of God to come. As ever, it is the Word of God which will comfort and strengthen us.

“God ... will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.” 1Corinthians 10:13

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Luke 12:34

These are very serious matters. They are decisions we need to think through before we are baptized, especially if we are already in one of the occupations mentioned above. It is not a matter of being a pacifist out of cowardice. Jesus would not fight yet he showed the greatest strength of character and was prepared to face death on the cross in order to save his people from their sins. The disciple's role in life is to show perfect restraint in the face of provocation; to love and pray for those who persecute him/her, because in so doing we reflect the love of God which we see perfectly demonstrated in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven...” Matthew 5:44-45

The Disciple and Politics

When the Apostle Paul visited Philippi, he was badly beaten and thrown into prison because he preached the Gospel. God rescued him miraculously but he demanded to see the magistrates; he reminded them that he was a Roman citizen and that they had behaved illegally in treating him as they did. Today we would say that he ‘stood up for his rights’. Roman citizenship was a very special thing and those who possessed it had to be treated in a careful and privileged way. We do not really know why Paul acted like this, but we know that when he wrote to the ecclesia at Philippi some years later he said:

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”
Philippians 3:20-21 (NIV)

Whatever country we live in, if we are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ then we are citizens of the Kingdom of God. We have one king who will rule over us, Jesus Christ, and we are responsible to him. We know what his 'political manifesto' is and what he will do on earth when he returns (read for example Psalm 72). In a sense, if we are baptized, these are the things for which we cast our vote because we are baptized into the 'things concerning the Kingdom of God'.

We have seen that we should be law abiding citizens of the country in which we live, but that we must obey God rather than men if there is a conflict between the laws of our country and the law of God. But what should we do if we think the politics of our government are unjust and unfair? What if there is corruption or favouritism? What should we do if the poor get poorer and the rich get richer? Does the Bible teach that we can get involved in politics to try and get a better government?

Are any of the following acceptable to God in the lives of the disciples of Jesus?

- Voting in political elections
- Joining a political party
- Taking part in political protests
- Becoming a magistrate or other involvement in the community

When we read the Bible carefully we shall see that none of these things are acceptable to God. He alone puts the rulers of the nations in their positions as Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon many years ago.

“...that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men.”
Daniel 4:17

If we *really* believe these words then we will not get involved in politics in any way. We will understand that God has chosen our rulers, even though we may not be able to understand His reasons for doing so. If we vote at an election, how do we know which political party or ruler God has chosen? If we vote against the elected candidate, then we shall be voting against the one God has chosen! We do not know which policies God is introducing into a country and why He is doing so! What we do know is that eventually Jesus Christ will establish God's Kingdom on earth. It is for that time that we hope and pray.

The Apostle Peter saw a world-wide challenge for disciples to develop Christ-like attitudes and patterns of behaviour. He wrote of them as an international family of God:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.
Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.
Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”
1Peter 2:9-12

Why did Peter describe disciples as sojourners and exiles? Think of it this way. When we visit other countries we do not expect to vote in their elections. At the same time, whatever government is in power in *that* country we are expected to keep their laws, pay all our debts and keep out of trouble. The members of Christ's family must act like this wherever they are - at home or abroad - because they do not really belong to *any* country, they belong to the Kingdom of God.

When God's Kingdom Comes

What will happen to the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ when he returns to reign over the world?

The Bible teaches us that they will be given great responsibility in the coming kingdom; they will reign as kings over the earth with Christ. First however, those believers who have died will be raised

from the dead. Together with those who are alive at the coming of Christ they will be judged and those found worthy will be made immortal. This teaching regarding the resurrection is found in many places in the Bible, but the great chapter on this theme is 1Corinthians 15.

The following scriptures give us a picture of what will happen to the immortal believers, both Jews and Gentiles:

"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

if we endure, we will also reign with him:"

2Timothy 2:10-12

"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,

and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

Revelation 5:9-10

"And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them."

Daniel 7:27

These words express the things that are really important for true disciples. This is what they wait and hope for, to share immortality with the Lord Jesus Christ and to help him in the work of ruling over the mortal population in the millennial age. Like the faithful men and women described in Hebrews 11, they are fully persuaded of these things and are willing to be strangers and pilgrims in this life as they await the coming of their king.

Questions

1. Why are disciples separate from the world in which they live?
2. Who chooses who will rule over the countries of the world?
3. What is Conscientious Objection?
4. Why do disciples not vote in political elections?
5. What role will Jesus give his disciples when he returns to this earth?
6. What does Romans 12:18-21 teach us?



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 13

The Problem of Suffering and Poverty

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

This is a very common question, one that disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ may often meet in their lives. We see people suffering in many ways throughout the world and non-believers tell us that this is proof either that God does not exist or that He is a God who does not care – if He did care then He would stop the suffering of the world.

The message of the Bible is that God *does* care.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”
John 3:16

Jesus is God’s only begotten Son, His beloved Son. God cares for the world so much that He asked His precious Son to die on the cross to take away sins.

However, the righteousness of God means that He will not simply ignore sin and allow it to go unpunished. After Adam and Eve had sinned, God told them that they would die and also that life would become hard. Adam would have to work to feed his family, the ground would be cursed and food production would become more difficult; Eve would have problems in child bearing. When He had told them these things, the Lord God said:

“Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil;” Genesis 3:22

Evil means trouble or bad things of every sort. Sometimes it comes as a result of the sins of men and women and sometimes it comes directly from God (Isaiah 45:7). The evil that God brought upon Adam and Eve, and all those who are descended from them, is experienced as suffering in their lives. Through it God reminds people of the consequences of sin. Why God does this we shall see when we consider the example of Job later in this lesson.

However, not all evil comes from God. Mankind has abandoned God’s laws and, in our lives, we suffer the consequences of our actions and those of our ancestors.

- Wars start because of man’s pride and lust for power (James 4:1)
- Many illnesses are the result of our own behaviour, for example:
 - i. Sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS are the result of immorality.
 - ii. Lung cancer is caused by smoking.
 - iii. Contaminated water is a major cause of dysentery and cholera.
 - iv. A major cause of epilepsy in Africa is from eating pork contaminated with a parasitic worm. Eating pig meat was specifically forbidden under the Law of Moses because of the diseases it may cause.
- Lack of rainfall in many countries is due to the cutting down of trees and the pollution of the atmosphere by western countries.

We cannot blame God for suffering caused in this way. He has given mankind free-will and if we use this to make decisions which bring harm upon ourselves then God will tolerate this until the time comes when He will intervene to send His Son to make the earth very good once again.

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”
Acts 17:30-31

The Example of the Lord Jesus Christ

In the Gospels we read on many occasions of the compassion of Jesus for other people. The Bible uses a strange word for this which suggests that this feeling came from deep inside him, almost as if he felt compassion so strongly that it affected him physically. This language is only used of Jesus in the New Testament, or by him in a parable, as if this feeling for other people and the desire to help them was stronger in the Lord Jesus Christ than in anyone else. We meet these ideas in these two passages:

“When he saw the crowds, **he had compassion for them**, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”
Matthew 9:36

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one **who in every respect has been tempted as we are**, yet without sin.”
Hebrews 4:15

The Lord understands our problems and feels for us because he was tempted as we are. This understanding of our weaknesses and problems is shown in his compassion; he really wanted to help people who suffered and had a need of his healing power or who were hungry without food to eat.

We know that Jesus was given the Holy Spirit power without measure, he could do anything, including taking control of all the kingdoms of the world if he had wished so to do. Yet he resisted the temptation to use his power to do this and it also seems that some of the sick and needy people who came to him for help did not receive a miraculous healing.

“That evening at sunset they brought to him **all who were sick or oppressed by demons**.

And **the whole** city was gathered together at the door.

And he healed **many** who were sick with various diseases, and cast out **many** demons.

And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

And Simon and those who were with him searched for him,

and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.”

And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is what I came for.”
Mark 1:32-38

Mark tells us very clearly that *everyone* who was sick in the city went to Jesus but it seems that he did not have time to heal *all of them* that day. The next day he made a decision not to go back and heal the remaining people but to go to the next town to preach the Gospel message. Jesus understood that he could not use his miraculous powers to take away the suffering of all the people around him fully and permanently. The only solution to the problem lay in the fulfilment of the Gospel message, that God had sent his Son to take away the sins of the world and through the forgiveness of sins would come the permanent solution to the problem of suffering.

Furthermore, forgiveness of sins came through the perfect life and the death of Jesus Christ and we are told that this sinless man *suffered* in achieving this for us.

“For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect **through suffering**.”
Hebrews 2:10

“Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he **suffered**.”
Hebrews 5:8

From this consideration of Jesus we have learnt a number of important points about the problem of suffering.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ understands the problems of people and feels deeply for those who are suffering. Like his Father he cares for his disciples.
2. Even though he healed many people with his Holy Spirit power, Jesus was unable permanently to take away the problems of suffering in this way. We do not have the power that Jesus had and whatever we do to help people, we too are unable to solve the problem of suffering completely.

3. Jesus understood that sin was the fundamental cause of suffering, not necessarily the sin of the person who suffers (John 9:1-3), but the way in which sin had entered the world and dominated mankind ever since.

"Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned."
Romans 5:12

He also understood that the only way in which suffering could be completely removed from the world was through his life and death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

4. The suffering of Jesus helped in the development of his character, through it he learned to be obedient to God.

This last point helps us to see how we should consider suffering in our lives. Problems come upon all men and women whether they are disciples of Jesus or not.

"Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favour to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all."
Ecclesiastes 9:11

The important point is how we understand the difficult things that happen to us. The Bible asks us to accept suffering as a form of discipline from God.

"And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?" My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Hebrews 12:5-11

God does care for those who belong to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ. They are His children and He is a loving Father to them. Just as human fathers train their children and discipline them because they love them, so God trains His children. If we accept the difficult things that happen to us in life as a form of spiritual training by a Father who loves us as His own children, then we shall be able to understand that every experience in life can help us as we journey towards the Kingdom of God.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."
Romans 8:28

The Example of Job

In the Old Testament we are told of the life and sufferings of a man called Job. He was a man who seemed to have everything in life.

- He was God fearing in all that he did (Job 1:1)
- He had many children (1:2)
- He was very rich (1:3)
- He was highly respected by everyone (29:7-11)
- His life was full of good works (29:12-16)

Yet in spite of all this, he suffered in a terrible way. His children were killed, his wealth vanished (1:13-19) and finally his own health failed and he became ill in a distressing way (2:6-8). Job's initial response to all of this was:

"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Job 2:10

Although it was men who had stolen his herds and a great wind which had blown down his house and killed his children, Job understood that all of this suffering had come from God. He recognised that he could not just expect good things from God as a right; it was not for him to decide what God should do.

The time came however when 'his suffering was very great' and he wished that God would take away his life (6:9), the only solution to his suffering which he could see was the grave. Job was like so many men, when he suffered in effect he said to God 'why is this happening to me?'

"If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind? Why have you made me your mark? Why have I become a burden to you?
Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be."
Job 7:20-21

Suffering, and the discipline it brings, are an important way God works in our lives. We are not punished for specific sins – there is nothing in the book of Job which suggests that Job had sinned in any significant way even though his friends all told him that this must be so. The chastening of God was to prevent the development of spiritual pride in Job, to make him understand that, although he was a God fearing man in his life, he had nothing to offer God but a humble acceptance of His will.

Towards the end of the book a man named Elihu recognised that Job needed someone who would plead his cause before God.

Elihu said concerning Job:

"If there be for him an angel, **a mediator**, one of the thousand, to declare to man what is right for him,
and he is merciful to him, and says, 'Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom;
let his flesh become fresh with youth; let him return to the days of his youthful vigour';
then man prays to God, and he accepts him; he sees his face with a shout of joy, and he restores to man his righteousness.
He sings before men and says: 'I sinned and perverted what was right, and it was not repaid to me.
He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit, and my life shall look upon the light.'
Job 33:23-28

However much we suffer, if there is a mediator who will plead our cause before God, then this will bring a feeling of peace and acceptance of our lot into our lives. We shall understand that, whatever the problems that face us now, the grave will not be the end but salvation will come in the Kingdom of God. This is the role of the Lord Jesus Christ; he is our mediator, he is at the right hand of Almighty God to plead for us. Faith in this will help us to face whatever suffering lies before us in life, as the Apostle Paul wrote:

"Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,
nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
Romans 8:34-39

Finally, when God had revealed His greatness and power to Job, the man humbled himself completely before God with these words:

"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;
therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."
Job 42:5-6

Job's faith was tested by God through suffering. Through it he developed a more complete understanding of God. It was when he had lost everything, family, wealth, health that he came to understand that God was his only refuge, the only one who could truly help him. In the things that he suffered he became a great type of the Lord Jesus Christ who was 'made perfect through suffering'.

Poverty

When the Lord God led Israel out of Egypt and gave them His laws at Mount Sinai, He gave them commandments about how they should live together as a nation. Some of these laws were designed to ensure that people who became very poor would not be completely ruined by their poverty.

"If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you."
Leviticus 25:35-36

Their neighbours were not allowed to profit from their misfortune for God said:

"Over your brothers the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another ruthlessly."
Leviticus 25:46

This did not mean that lazy people could do nothing and just rely on the generosity of their neighbours; God had commanded Adam to work for food and this principle is true throughout the whole of the Bible, Paul wrote to the ecclesia at Thessalonica:

"For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If any one is not willing to work, let him not eat."
2Thessalonians 3:10

However, God knew that there would always be poor people and He declared that their brothers and sisters were responsible for helping them.

"For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'
Deuteronomy 15:11

The Lord Jesus Christ understood this principle perfectly. We read in the Gospels that he 'stretched out his hand' and helped people in various ways. This was a fulfilment of the principle shown in Deuteronomy 15.

Yet we have seen that Jesus did not solve all the problems of life in Israel during his ministry. Indeed there are suggestions that things were worse at the end of his ministry than at the beginning because people had hardened their hearts to his message; the rich got richer and the poor became poorer. The total removal of poverty will only happen when Jesus Christ returns to this earth and establishes the Kingdom of God in which God's laws will be followed by all nations.

"For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy."
Psalm 72:12-13

This teaching should set the pattern for the way in which rich disciples help their poor brothers and sisters today. They **cannot** remove poverty completely but, if necessary, they can help in a way that ensures that no-one is ruined by poverty.

The responsibility for this lies first of all with the immediate family of the disciple who has a problem. This is what God taught Israel, that first of all a relation was responsible for helping the poor (Leviticus 25:25). If this is not possible then the disciples who belong to the same ecclesia as the poor brother or sister should do what they can to help. Finally, if more assistance is needed then brothers and sisters from elsewhere should be asked for help, but only with the approval of their own ecclesia.

CBM Welfare Fund

Many students of this course will know that the Christadelphian Bible Mission has a welfare fund and it is important to understand how it works.

- The fund was established to help brothers and sisters who are in need. It does not offer help to unbaptized students taking Bible correspondence courses. The reason for this is that some people do Bible courses and even become baptized for the wrong reasons – they look for financial benefit by doing this. This is not new; the apostles met the same problem in their preaching (Acts 8).
- Welfare help is only given in real emergencies where there is no other aid available. It is generally for emergency medical treatment or for famine. It is not given as regular payments to help improve people's standard of living.
- Decisions on welfare help are best made by the senior brothers in the country concerned as they know best the circumstances behind the problem.

The Bible's Answer

The only real answer to the problem of suffering and poverty is the return of Jesus Christ and the setting up of God's Kingdom. When Jesus comes, he will give immortal life to his true disciples who will live and reign with him for ever. Whatever problems we face in this life they are insignificant compared to those things we look forward to, the things God has promised to those who love Him and keep His commandments.

**“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
 “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.
 He will dwell with them, and they will be his people,
 and God himself will be with them as their God.
 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more,
 neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore,
 for the former things have passed away.”**

Questions

1. What is the greatest proof that God does care for the world?
2. What did Jesus have to do to save the world from suffering and sin?
3. How should a disciple see suffering in his life?
4. Why did God chasten Job?
5. When will poverty and suffering be taken away completely?
6. What lessons can we learn from Luke 21:1-4?



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 14

The Grace of God

As we come to the end of this course it is time to look back at all of the lessons and remember what we have sought to achieve. We have seen from the Bible that the new life in Christ is quite different from the life men and women live before baptism. Discipleship requires a commitment to follow the example of the Lord Jesus and he asks that we count the cost of this before we make our decision.

"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?
Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'
Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?
And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.
So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."
Luke 14:28-33

Choosing to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus is the most important decision we shall ever make in our lives, it will affect us now and in the Kingdom age to come.

Sometimes people refuse to make this choice because they say they cannot live up to the standards expected of them. This is very sad. Discipleship is not a heavy burden we take on when we are baptized; rather it is the exact opposite of this. The Lord Jesus takes away from us the heavy burden we carry now.

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
Matthew 11:28-30

When a disciple is baptized, a wonderful feeling of freedom and peace enters his or her life. The great burden of sin has been taken away; they now belong to God's family and, whatever happens to them in this life, they know that God has said:

"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'
So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"
Hebrews 13:5-6

Part of this feeling comes from knowing that freedom from sin is a gift from God, it has not been earned or worked for in any way, and it is given to us through God's grace.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved-...
For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."
Ephesians 2:4-9

Grace is a difficult word to define, we can think of it as meaning an 'undeserved favour'. We did not deserve to be saved from our sins, salvation comes through God's great love towards us; we are saved by our faith in His grace.

We first meet the word 'grace' in the life of Noah in Genesis 6.

"Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."

Genesis 6:8 (KJV)

Note that Noah *found* grace. The implication of this is that grace is something we have to look for and search out. This is something the Apostle John understood for when he wrote his Gospel, he taught us that we particularly find grace when we look at the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 1:14

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

John 5:39-40

We find grace, the undeserved favour of the Lord God, when we read His Word and especially as we look at the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and see a man who is merciful and compassionate, who was willing to die for others.

"My Grace is Sufficient for You"

We know that Saul of Tarsus was a dedicated enemy of all disciples of the Lord Jesus. He was involved in the death of Stephen, the first disciple of Jesus to die for his faith. He wanted to destroy the ecclesia and he put disciples into prison (Acts 8:3). We are told in Acts 9 how he set off to travel to Damascus from Jerusalem so that he could arrest disciples there. On the way the resurrected Jesus appeared to him in power and glory and his conversion into the disciple we know as the Apostle Paul began. Paul was made blind by this experience and Jesus told him to travel on to Damascus. Once there he was contacted by a disciple called Ananias who gave him back his sight.

"So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized."

Acts 9:17-18

There are many lovely ideas in this record. Note how the very first word Ananias says to Paul is 'brother'. This is a man who had been coming to Damascus to put Ananias and other disciples into prison! Yet Ananias knows that Jesus has called him to be a disciple and therefore, as a member of God's family, he will be the brother in Christ of Ananias. The word 'brother' is usually reserved for those who have been baptized; here Ananias uses it because he has had a direct revelation from God about Paul. It is likely that, as Paul regained his sight, the first person he would see was the man who performed the miracle, Ananias, and his name means 'God has been gracious'. The very first thing he saw was a man who represented the grace of God! Paul now understood that he could be saved from his sins by this grace for not only did he receive his physical sight but also spiritual sight so that he could clearly see these spiritual things. When this happened, the very first thing that he did was to be baptized.

We are told by Paul that later he suffered many terrible things as he travelled to preach the Gospel. One thing that really distressed him was an illness that could not be cured. Three times he prayed to God to take it away and the response of the Lord to him was:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

2Corinthians 12:9

It is possible that God was asking him to remember Ananias and how he was given spiritual sight many years ago. In all circumstances Paul was to remember the undeserved favour God had shown him and this would strengthen him to face all the challenges of life and discipleship so that later, from prison, he could write:

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-
that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Philippians 3:8-11

He was a man who gave up a career, friends, wealth, position and health for the Lord Jesus. Yet he tells us that these things meant nothing to him and we know that the strength Paul gained from understanding the grace of God remained with him for the rest of his life. Some of the last words he wrote speak of it to us.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.
It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,
while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:11-14 (NIV)

Just as Ananias, ‘God has been gracious’, appeared to Paul, so God has revealed His grace to us. We **know** about the Lord Jesus Christ, in him we have **found** grace.

It is thankfulness for these things that fills our hearts and strengthens us in our decision to follow the Lord Jesus as his true disciples. It is the grace of God given to us that shows us how to behave and speak to others that we might be gracious people in our own lives (Colossians 4:6). We know that, at times, we shall fail but we also know that, if we confess our sins to the Lord God, He is faithful and just to forgive us. We know that we have no strength or ability, no righteousness of our own to offer God. It is His grace that teaches us to turn our backs on this life and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as his disciples; it is His grace that makes us eager to do what is good and will bring us to His Kingdom.

“He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”