

THE 43RD ANNUAL LECTURESHIP

# SEEK

DISCIPLING FOR JESUS

APRIL 23-26, 2017



*ALWAYS BIBLICAL ALWAYS BALANCED*

# SEEK: DISCIPLING FOR JESUS

2017 Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies Lectureship

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## Lesson 1 - Discipling for Jesus

# THE HOPELESS CONDITION

*Wayne Miller*

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

**Ephesians 2:11-12**

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The letter to the Ephesians has been called “the most profound book in all the Bible,” unequaled by any “portion of the New Testament.” Obviously, students of God’s Word may take exception to such a lofty estimation. But the fact remains that Ephesians deals with nothing short of the eternal purpose of God and definitely deserves acclaim.

In the text of Ephesians 2:11-12, the apostle Paul used a contrast of what you were to what you presently are, where you were in the past to where you are in Christ, to instruct them about the joys of Christianity. In other words, the apostle desired them to remember the chosen riches of being in Christ and the purpose of Christ’s glorious body, the church.

### The Heart of the Message

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Alienation characterizes our world. Strife exists between nations; in many cities, gangs mark off their territorial boundaries, even killing those who cross them. In our homes domestic struggles abound. Unfortunately, this world is not a one-for-all-and-all-for-one place!

In the world of Paul’s day, two groups of people—the Jews and the Gentiles—were completely alienated from one another. It is said that a prominent rabbi, when asked why God created so many Gentiles, replied, “So there might be fuel enough for the fires of hell.”

The hostility between these two groups was so intense that it was unlawful for a Jew to help a Gentile who was giving birth. For Gentiles, the feeling was mutual, they despised Jews.

In Ephesians 2:11-12, the apostle Paul wrote to Christians who were Gentiles. He reminded them that in Christ, all racial hatred, dislike, mistreatment, and alienation between human beings were to end. The use of “therefore” (v. 11) ties this former state to the preceding paragraph, which ended with the expectation of God that Christians saved by grace through faith should walk in good works.

Paul pointed out the former state of Gentile converts (Eph. 2:12). He used a five-fold description of their helpless, hapless, and hopeless condition apart from Christ.

*First, they were without Christ.* That is, the Gentiles had no Scripture that promised a coming Messiah. Therefore, they did not share the Jews' anticipation of the Messiah as He came through Israel (Rom. 9:4-5). The Gentiles did not know that all history found its meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ.



*Second, they were alienated from the commonwealth!* In their former condition, the Gentile converts had enjoyed no rights of citizenship with God. They were excluded from citizenship in the nations of Israel. Excluded suggests “estrangement.” They were not included together with God’s chosen people, separated from special privilege. The Gentiles did not receive the natural citizenship rights that belonged by birth to the descendants of Abraham.

*Third, the Gentiles had been strangers to the covenants of promise.* The Greek text has an article before “promise,” making this phrase read, “strangers to the covenants of the promise.” “Strangers” are those described as “not of one’s own family, therefore, “having no share in something.” Israel was a covenant nation.

The promise must speak of the one God made to the patriarchs concerning the coming of the Savior (see Gen. 12:7). God made the covenants or agreements with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. The Gentiles had not received the promises such as, “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession: and I will be

their God” (Gen. 17:7-8). [All scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] Because the Gentiles were outside the commonwealth, they did not partake of the privilege which was pledged to Israel.

*Fourth, the Gentiles were described as having no hope.* Being outside the chosen nation of Israel, the Gentiles had no covenant relationship with God and no promise of the coming Messiah. Therefore, they lacked hope in a Savior and salvation. The Gentile’s pagan religions reflected their longing for a future life, but Paul spoke of the fact that they were without real hope. They had no hope because they did not have Christ.

*Fifth, the Gentiles were without God in the world.* In one sense, they did have God, as “He did not leave Himself without witness” (Acts 14:17). Though they worshipped many gods, they did not have the true knowledge of God. They had resembled mariners who without compass and guide were adrift in a rudderless ship during a starless night on a tempestuous sea, far away from the harbor. Nothing less than that is meant by the gloomy, awe-inspiring phrase “without God in the world.”

## **Messages for Today**

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- **We Must Understand a person’s condition “outside” Christ.**
- **We Must Understand what is accomplished “through” Christ.**
- **We Must Understand what one can become “in” Christ.**

*We must understand a person’s condition outside of Christ.* The apostle Paul began Ephesians 2:1-3 with the sad description of those who live outside of God’s purpose of salvation for his church. The purpose of man is to glorify God, sins and trespasses prevent the fulfillment of this purpose. This death was not physical, as they were very much alive physically. However, they were spiritually dead before becoming Christians.

The ancient prophet said, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). When one is separated from God because of sin, he is dead in his relationship to God. In the wording of our text, this individual is a stranger, with no participation in covenants and promises that God has with his people. This person, outside of Christ, has no basis of hope.

*We must understand what is accomplished through Christ.* Thankfully, Paul had some really good news for the Gentile Christians: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). Just as verse 4 began with “but God,” so does verse 13, making all the difference between what the Ephesians had been before coming to know Christ and what they were in Christ.

The apostle Paul begins verse 13 with “but now.” “Formerly” (v. 11) is in contrast to “now” (v. 13). The difference between “far off” and “near” was

the fact that these Gentile converts were “in Christ.” In the Old Testament, Gentiles were referred to as those who were “far off” (1 Kgs. 8:41; Jer. 5:15), while Israel was thought of as “near” (Ps. 148:14). However, the rest of Ephesians 2 refers to both Gentiles and Jews who became a newly created community of believers in Christ.

*We must understand what one can become in Christ (2:14-22).* Paul declared that these two groups could have a peaceful relationship. This was only possible because “Christ Himself, He and no other, is our peace” (v. 14). Christ is presented as “our peace” because both peace among men and the peace between men and God are bound up in the person of Christ. Through the work of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles now have access to God (v. 18).

In verses 19 through 22, Paul summarized verses 14 through 18 and drew some conclusions, illustrating his point with three analogies. There is only one nation (2:19); and every member has his citizenship in heaven. There is only one family (2:19); we are all brothers and sisters in God’s household, no matter what racial, national, or physical distinctions we may have. There is only one temple (2:21); it is not man-made, but is comprised of men and women who serve as living stones for this spiritual temple.

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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How grateful we should be to have the privilege of being Christians. The wonderful news is that every individual is invited to respond to the love, mercy, and grace of God which are available by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross!

Before Jesus we were all without hope, but Jesus turns lives around. He offers hope, which gives us hope!

### **Discussion Questions**

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1. What barriers do I have that need to be broken down?
2. How can we not take the joys of Christianity for granted?
3. How often do I reflect on being helpless and hopeless without Christ?
4. Think of ways that Christ has made such a difference in your personal life.

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## Lesson 2 - Discipling for Jesus

# THE HEAVENLY COMMAND

*Mark Hanstein*

*“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”*

**Matthew 28:18-20**

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When Jesus declared that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations . . .” (Luke 24:47), he entrusted the salvation of all mankind to human hands. [All scripture references are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.]

The book of Acts records the far-flung efforts of the Lord’s disciples in carrying out this Great Commission. They lived in a time when being a follower of Christ involved great personal risk and sacrifice (e.g., Acts 8:1-4). Yet, “the gospel . . . was proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (Col. 1:23) in the first century alone.

What caused our ancient counterparts to accomplish this great feat? Why were they so bold and uncompromising (Acts 5:29), as they “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4)? What made those early Christians so determined in this task that their enemies accused them of turning “the world upside down” (Acts 17:6)?

### The Heart of the Message

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*They were motivated by the Man.* They realized that, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). They recalled that Jesus’ ministry was all about making disciples who would love God and do His will (e.g., Matt. 4:18-22; 11:28-30; Luke 9:23-27, 57-62; 12:49-53; 14:25-35; John 8:31). They remembered that Jesus’ death justified them, saved them, and reconciled them to God (Rom 5:8-10). They recognized that Jesus is, “He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen” (1 Tim. 6:15, 16). As, “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), the crucified Jesus deserved their love and obedience. This motivated them to submit to His authority (cf. Matt. 28:18) and, “Go into all the world . . .” (Mark 16:15) to do their Master’s bidding.

*They were motivated by the mandate.* They understood that striving to, “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19) meant to make the most

significant difference in the lives of other people—the saving of their souls, “from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10). The depth of their conviction was expressed by the apostle Paul—“Therefore, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men . . .” (2 Cor. 5:11). They rightly understood that Christ commissioned His church to carry out the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 4:1ff; 5:18), and gave them “the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19) to preach throughout the world. They rightly viewed themselves as “God’s fellow-workers” (1 Cor. 3:9). They embraced Jesus’ mandate as they observed that the number of lost souls in the world was staggering and every soul was precious. Thus, they begged others “on behalf of Christ [to] be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20-21).



*They were motivated by the message.* They were convinced that the gospel was truly the “good news” people needed to hear. They were convinced that only the gospel was “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). They were convinced that they had the truth. Thus, it had to be faithfully taught and preached if anyone was going to be saved for eternity. There was no other message that would lead to the saving of lost souls (Rom 10:17). They were courageous and perceptive as they ascertained that the lost were truly lost and needed to be rescued from sin and its consequences. Paul expressed their conviction—“For I wish I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3; cf. 10:1). And, “To me the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8).

## Messages for Today

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- **We must be motivated by the Man.**
- **We must be motivated by the mandate.**
- **We must be motivated by the message.**



*We must be motivated by the Man.* The Bible says, “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). God, “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Does this motivate us to evangelize the lost, to share the gospel that saved us, with any and all we meet in the world? Do we recognize that we live in a world full of lost people? They are our families, our friends, our neighbors, as well as strangers and foreigners. Do we realize that our Lord was all about beckoning any and all to follow Him and trust Him so they can “enter into life” (e.g., Matt. 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)? Are we following in His soul-winning footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21; cf. Matt. 28:18-20)? Are you elders and preachers, in particular, making evangelism a priority so that the church will effectively continue the work of Christ in the world?

*We must be motivated by the mandate.* The heavenly command to “preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15) has not changed. Yet, among us our focus has changed. We have turned inward, preferring to satisfy our own “needs.” Our zeal for taking the gospel to the world has been replaced by an apathy toward the lost. Evangelism no longer has the priority it once did because it hinders the social activities of the local church. Oh, we may say the right things about soul-winning and even quote the Bible to that end, but our hearts tend to be unconcerned by the fact that the overwhelming billions of people in our world are lost. Consequently, the world will remain unreached as long as the Lord’s people remain unmoved by the spiritual condition of the lost. And, the Lord’s church will remain unmoved as long as individual Christians remain uncommitted to this God-given task of soul-winning.

*We must be motivated by the message.* It is through the gospel of Christ that God makes “an appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20) to the lost. “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). Jesus’ disciples teach people “to observe all that [He] commanded” (Matt. 28:20; cf. John 6:44, 45; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). Yet, among us many are making the wrong appeal to the lost world. Instead of confronting people with the saving gospel, several simply seek to get them to change churches, as if that is what evangelism is. Others set the gospel message aside, making an appeal to the fun and games, the social activities of a congregation to draw people into the church. But, how can one be truly converted to Christ and saved from sin without a proper response to the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4)?

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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In his first inaugural address, Ronald Reagan spoke of one Martin Treptow, who was killed in battle during World War I while trying to carry a message between battalions under heavy artillery fire. On his body was found a diary. On the flyleaf, under the heading, “My Pledge,” Treptow had written these



words: “America must win this war. Therefore, I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone.”

Can the modern-day Christian’s stance be anything less than Treptow’s when it comes to Jesus and his cause? We are not alone in this evangelistic endeavor. Jesus promises, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Let us rise up to this great and awesome challenge of reaching the lost with the saving message of Jesus Christ.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why should these motivating factors move us to be evangelistic?
2. Biblically, what does it mean to be lost?
3. Who are the lost (in our community, our nation, our world)?
4. What are some of the obstacles to evangelism and how do we overcome them?
5. What should be expected of church leaders regarding effective evangelism by a local congregation?

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## Lesson 3 - Discippling for Jesus

# THE HAUNTING CAUTION

*Drew Kizer*

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

**Matthew 28:18-20**

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The Christian’s mission is to “make disciples” (Matt. 28:19-20). [All scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.] If we are not doing this, the Lord is not pleased. While that is a simple conclusion to draw, most of us will admit that we are not very evangelistic. Why do we have so much trouble following the very clear marching orders issued by our Lord?

Origen, a Christian theologian who lived in Alexandria during the third and fourth centuries, was the son of a respected Christian leader named Leonidus. When Origen was 17 years old, his father was captured and imprisoned. Origen wanted to stand by his father’s side and face martyrdom, but his mother wouldn’t allow it. When he insisted, she prevented him from leaving the house by hiding his clothes. Origen was brave enough to face martyrdom, but not brave enough to go outside without his clothes.

Talking with a friend about Jesus is for many of us the equivalent of going outside naked. Why are we so uncomfortable warning people about the danger they are in because of sin and the redemption that is available through Christ?

The book of Ezekiel can help. A prophet who preached to the exiles by the Chebar canal, Ezekiel was given the tough assignment of revealing the truth that it was the fault of his own people that they were conquered. It was sin that broke down their city walls. It was sin that razed God’s temple to the ground. Ezekiel’s message did not make him popular, and at times he may have been reluctant to share it with others. Therefore, the Lord issued a “haunting caution” to the prophet (Ezek. 33:1-9). As we study God’s warning, we receive a similar admonition that should stir us to preach the gospel with more urgency.

## The Heart of the Message

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*The curse: all have sinned and deserve God’s punishment.* The Lord raises the possibility of bringing a “sword upon the land” (vv. 2-3). “Sword”

is a metaphor for the Babylonian armies who took God's people captive and destroyed Jerusalem along with its temple.

Everyone had been condemned because of sin, but God did draw distinctions within the people, revealing that some of them had hope. In particular, four individuals were described: 1) the wicked person, or impenitent sinner, whom the watchman fails to warn and who dies in his iniquity; 2) the wicked person whom the watchman warns, but who does not turn from his way and who dies in his iniquity. A parallel passage adds two more categories: 3) the righteous person who turns from his righteousness whom the watchman fails to warn and who dies in his sin; 4) the righteous person whom the watchman warns and who does not sin because he heeded the watchman's warning (Ezek. 3:20-21).

*The caution: God has appointed watchmen who have a grave responsibility.* The picture the watchman evokes conjures up the silhouette of a lone soldier in his watchtower, keeping his eyes on the horizon while the city sleeps. His calling includes both *watching out* for the dangers of sin (Hos. 9:8) and *watching for* signs of divine deliverance (Mic. 7:7).



This was the second time God cautioned Ezekiel about his role as a watchman for Israel (cf. Ezek. 3:16-21). At first, the caution was for Ezekiel himself, who may have been a little reluctant to share an unpopular lesson. Nobody wants to hear a watchman. His alarm is never good. After the prophet's initial call, he delayed for seven days (Ezek. 3:16). Perhaps Ezekiel needed a little prodding in the form of this caution. The second time, the caution was a defense of the prophet before the people. God's Word through him had proven to be true (Ezek. 33:21). Perhaps the people were ready to "shoot the messenger," and God was reminding them that their watchman was only doing his job.

*The consolation: there is hope for salvation.* Repeatedly, God warns the watchman that if he fails to do his job, God will punish the sinner for his iniquity, “but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand” (vv. 6, 8; cf. 3:18, 20). In other words, the watchman would be held responsible for the violent end that came about because he failed to warn the people. What role did the prophet have in the destruction of his people? Were the people punished because of the watchman’s failure to warn? No, “that wicked person shall die in his iniquity” (v. 8). The watchman’s guilt makes sense only in the context of the possibility of forgiveness. God appoints watchmen to encourage repentance and reveal the hope of deliverance. If there is no hope for salvation, there is no need for a watchman.

## **Messages for Today**

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- **God still has watchmen.**
- **Watching is challenging.**
- **Without watchmen, the people remain condemned.**
- **God will hold us responsible for failing to sound the alarm.**

*God still has watchmen.* The Great Commission is every Christian’s calling (Matt. 28:19-20). We have been told to warn the ungodly (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). Jesus tells us to watch: “Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” (Mark 13:35-37).

Due to the gifts, opportunities, and roles that differ from person to person, the responsibility is stronger with some, particularly leaders in the church. Preachers (1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:2; Jas. 3:1) and elders (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:2; Heb. 13:17) are held to a higher standard.

*Watching is challenging.* The scriptures sometimes use repetition to describe how tedious watching can be (Ps. 130:6; Isa. 21:11-12). Good watchmen frequently repeat fundamental lessons that may have been missed before (Heb. 5:12-14; 2 Pet. 1:13; 3:1). A greater challenge lies in the rejection faced by faithful men and women who refuse to compromise God’s truth. The truth often offends (1 Cor. 1:18, 23 Gal. 4:16), but God’s people must continue to preach it out of love (Eph. 4:15).

*Without watchmen, the people remain condemned.* In one sense, the people are condemned because of their sins. God did not condemn them, nor did the watchman. But in another sense, a neglectful watchman condemns because he keeps quiet about the hope of redemption (cf. John 3:18-19). Eternal life is at stake. How can we neglect to warn the world about the judgment of God?

*God will hold us responsible for failing to sound the alarm.* An old hymn pictures the neighbors, family members, and friends of neglectful watchmen

on the day of judgment crying, “You never mentioned him to me.” How many people are lost because no one ever showed them the way to life?

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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You don’t have to be an eloquent gospel preacher to fulfill your evangelistic obligations. God has given you unique gifts and opportunities. All he expects is for you to use what you have to bring the light of Christ into a dark world of sin. During an Atlantic crossing, a severe storm arose and a passenger lay in his bunk, seasick. In the darkness he heard the cry, “Man overboard!” as someone was swept from the deck. The man lay there thinking there was nothing he could do. Then another thought occurred to him: “I can at least put my lantern in the porthole.” As it turned out, the man who fell overboard was rescued, and when he gave his account of what happened the next day, he said, “I was going down for the third time when someone aboard ship put a lantern in the porthole. It shined on my hand, and a sailor in a lifeboat grabbed me and pulled me in.” One small light can do so much!

Don’t neglect the gifts and opportunities God is giving you. We can do something. We must, or God will hold us responsible.

### **Discussion Questions**

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1. List the four types of people the watchman might encounter.
2. What is the twofold calling of the watchman?
3. Who are God’s watchmen today?
4. Are we all expected to share the gospel in the same manner?

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## Lesson 4 - Discipling for Jesus

# THE HEARTBREAKING CRY

*Bill Watkins*

*“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”*

**Luke 16:19-31**

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There have been many books and articles written over the years about life after death. A few that come to mind are *Heaven is for Real*,<sup>1</sup> the now-debunked *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven*,<sup>2</sup> Dr. Eben Alexander’s book *Proof of Heaven*,<sup>3</sup> Betty J. Eadie’s near-death experience recounted in her book *Embraced by the Light*,<sup>4</sup> Dale Black’s *Flight to Heaven*,<sup>5</sup> Don

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<sup>1</sup>Todd Burpo and Lynn Vincent, *Heaven is for Real* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>Kevin Marklarkey, *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

<sup>4</sup>Betty J. Eadie and Curtis Taylor, *Embraced by the Light* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994).

<sup>5</sup>Dale Black and Ken Gire, *Flight to Heaven* (Bloomington, Mn.: Bethany House Publishers, 2010).

Piper's *90 Minutes in Heaven*,<sup>6</sup> Annie Kagan's *The Afterlife of Billy Fingers*,<sup>7</sup> Dr. Melvin Morse's book *Closer to the Light*<sup>8</sup> and Raymond A. Moody Jr.'s work, *Life After Life* <sup>9</sup> All of these and more share some common themes, and all of them share a common flaw. The flaw? Once a person has truly died, there is no coming back apart from a miracle of God (cf. Heb. 9:27). Most of them "reveal" a heaven that is in conflict with the biblical description of the Christian's eternal destiny.

Fortunately for us, Jesus at one point pulled back the curtain of death and gave us a glimpse into the afterlife. That revelation is in our text. When we grasp the messages from Jesus in this passage, they are far more motivating and informative than all of the books man has ever written on the subject of life after death.

## The Heart of the Message

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The rich man, who died unprepared for eternity, found himself in a terrible and painful place. When he saw Lazarus, the man he had ignored in life, in a place of feasting and joy he asked Abraham, "'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'" [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Even though he was in torment, no help could come to him.

When he realized that there was no hope for himself, he asked for his surviving brothers to be rescued from his fate. He said, "I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment." He believed "if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He was wrong.

The tragic truth is that there are those in torment who have only one prayer left: "Please don't let the people I love come here!" If there is one thing that could make eternal torment worse than it already is, it would be the knowledge that those I care for are also there.

There are several lessons to learn from the account to the rich man and Lazarus.

*There is real consciousness after death.* Luke 16:19-31 is the story of two men who lived, and died, and continued to be themselves even after death.

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<sup>6</sup>Don Piper and Cecil Murphey, *90 Minutes in Heaven* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Revell, 2004).

<sup>7</sup>Annie Kagan, *The Afterlife of Billy Fingers* (Charlottesville, Va.: Hampton Roads, 2013).

<sup>8</sup>Melvin Morse and Paul Perry, *Closer to the Light* (New York: Ivy Books, 1990).

<sup>9</sup>Raymond A. Moody, *Life After Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976).



We are not bodies that happen to have spirits. We are eternal spirits who have been given temporary bodies for spiritual expression. When our bodies have dissolved, our spirits will still be as alive as ever.

There is no soul-sleeping. There is no dissolving of our consciousness into the eternal ocean of being. We are who we are and we always will be.

*There are only two possible spirit destinations.* One is described as Abraham's bosom. The other is described as a place of torment.



The realm described by Jesus is called “Hades.” The word is used ten times in the New Testament. It does not describe Hell, but instead means the realm of disembodied spirits who are awaiting the resurrection. Hades has two sides. One is a place of feasting and joy. The other is a place of real pain.

Once a person has died, his destiny is unchangeable. Abraham said it this way: “between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.”

*After death, there will be a new assessment of people.* When he was alive, the rich man found it easy to overlook the beggar who was at his gate. After he died, that former beggar became incredibly important to him. He said, “Send Lazarus!”

In this life, we often love things and use people. That is a reversed value. Our job while we are alive is to love people and use things. Just after we die, we'll know that. The challenge is to live according to that principle while we're still on earth.

*After death, there will be a new consideration for family.* When he came to realize that there was no comfort or change that could come to him, the formerly rich man thought about his family. He desperately wanted for his five brothers to escape his fate.



Knowing that eternity is forever, that judgment is certain, and that there is only one answer that will make that eternity one of joy and peace, why is it that we wait so long to tell our loved ones about the power of the gospel to save them? What will you tell them on the day they stand before God and ask why you didn't warn them?

*After death, there will be a new appreciation of the word of God.* When he asked for Lazarus to go back and warn his brothers, Abraham told him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." Today we have Jesus and the apostles – the New Testament.

Knowing that they were unlikely to pay attention to the word of God, the rich man said, "No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent." This would surely get their attention.

What Abraham said next is astounding: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead." If we refuse to hear the word of God, there is nothing on earth that can save us.

## Messages for Today

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- **The Gospel is the power of God.**
- **We are creating our eternal destiny today.**
- **We must make a difference!**

*The Gospel is the power of God.* Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Christ is the only answer and the gospel is the only means by which sinful people can be saved from the wrath that is to come.

*We are creating our eternal destiny today.* When our time comes to face our inescapable mortality, we will either be with Lazarus or the rich man. That destiny is not decided in the moment of our death. We are creating that eternity now, while we live.

*We must make a difference!* While there is life there is hope, not only for us, but for the people we meet. Make a difference – starting today!

## A Message of Hope for You

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Your eternal destiny does not hinge on your talent, your resilience, your intelligence, your education, or your wealth. It hinges on your response to the word of God.

God's intention is not to condemn you, but to save you (John 3:17). He has given us his Son and his word as a lifeline to an eternity of peace, joy, abundance, and celebration.

Don't wait until it's too late. Don't neglect the great salvation that God has offered. There is real rescue and real life for those who respond to the work, word, and invitation of God.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What is the purpose of Hades and why are people assigned there?
2. Why did the rich man end in a place of torment?
3. Do our actions toward others have a part in our eternal destiny?
4. In view of this passage of Scripture, what changes do I need to make starting this week?
5. In view of Luke 16:14-15, how revolutionary was this teaching of Jesus?

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## Lesson 5 - Discipling for Jesus

### THE HOPEFUL CALL

*Jim Laws*

*“Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.”*

**Acts 16:6-10**

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#### The Heart Of The Message

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Luke, the inspired historian of the beginning and growth of the church (Acts), records the call to Macedonia, moving the mission efforts west under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Though the exact route of Paul's journey has been debated by various schools of thought, the text makes clear God wanted Paul to focus his efforts west, known today as Europe. God knew the best way to maximize the evangelistic work. From Paul's perspective and ours (if placed in his position) one might think heading north would be ideal. The missionaries evidently wanted to preach in all the cities and villages through which they passed, but the Spirit directed them elsewhere. They were not permitted to turn to the right, to enter Bithynia, nor to the left to enter Asia, (wherein Ephesus was the leading city), nor to turn back. There was but one direction—forward. Therefore, the evangelists by-passed Mysia. Why not go into these promising locations for teaching? From our perspective Troas, an important port city with a sizeable population, would have seemed a reasonable work location. Not much time was spent there, since Paul received another vision during the night from the Holy Spirit of the need to go to Macedonia. Luke includes these important, historical facts that God was guiding the work of the traveling evangelists. Paul was not rebellious; he knew if guided elsewhere, the larger good might result, and so was content.

Notice the step-by-step record given in the text: 1) The Spirit forbade (Gr. *ouk eiasen*, allow, let, or permit) the mission to Asia (Acts 16:6); 2) The Spirit forbade the mission to Bithynia (Acts 16:7); 3) Paul journeyed to Troas (Acts 16:8); 4) The Spirit gave a vision of a man in Macedonia (Acts 16:9),

and 5) Paul took a “straight course” to the Spirit’s call (“a direct course” Acts 16:11). [All scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.]

Several important points should be considered: 1) Paul’s original plans were important plans. There were cities in Asia that needed to hear the gospel message and there were others, who needed strengthening; 2) Cities in Asia would be reached by Paul, but not just yet; 3) Paul was not given a reason for a change of plans; the door was merely closed by the Spirit; 4) God knows best *what* to do and *when* to do it; perhaps the people would not be as receptive, as they would be at a later time. Much speculation can be made, but one thing is for certain, God knows best!

## Messages For Today

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- **The faithful gospel preacher will not allow closed doors to discourage him.**
- **The man in the vision cried for help; Paul’s heart was stirred by it.**

*The faithful gospel preacher will not allow closed doors to discourage him.* When the Spirit closed the door on Paul’s plans for Asia, Paul kept going; he did not quit; he was not deterred or discouraged! Since Paul was called to preach the message of Christ, he committed himself to the task with amazing resolution; never losing his focus by distraction. May each one of us consider our own reaction to such a closed door. Think of the consequences, if Paul had let discouragement rule his work. He might have chosen to quit, and Europe would not have heard the message of their salvation! Never be discouraged by closed doors. We will not receive a vision from the Spirit, as did Paul during the days of the miraculous, but we must be sensitive to God’s providential plan and work in our lives. God does know what is best in time and opportunity. He opens and closes doors, both to protect his children and to create venues of greater service.

*The man in the vision cried for help; Paul’s heart was stirred by it.* The man in the vision was “urging him...” (Acts 16:9, ESV). What servant of the Lord would not be moved by such a call? When Paul saw the vision, Luke recorded “immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia” (10). Paul was receptive to the urgency and need of the work. He realized the man in the vision was not just one man calling for help, but represented the continent of Europe. (It is important to remember every person is significant to God; consider Peter’s mission to the house of Cornelius in Acts 10-11). It is possible for us to become de-sensitized to the needs of others and fail to see a door of opportunity opening. Let’s not turn a deaf ear to a call for help by passively failing to recognize God’s providential prospects. Let us seriously respond to God’s great work and act quickly, while the door remains open.

## A Message Of Hope For You

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To be a faithful, effective minister for Christ, you have *to know* and to *believe* in the biblical message. Faith will grow, as we carefully study God's word (Rom. 10:17). We are enjoined to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt; 22:37). Endless hours of devotion to preparation and training, both in the text of Scripture, as well as the acquisition of necessary skills to understand and teach the message to others, will be required. It is simplistic to think by listening to sermons preached by others, you will somehow become qualified, or competent, to deliver God's message with skill and accuracy. Great gospel preachers are men who have sacrificed for the work they accomplished for the Lord. Their sacrifice was amazing. Contemplate the life and work of an apostle of Christ in the first century by studying 2 Corinthians. Understand what it takes to successfully confront false teaching that many have accepted for generations and currently promote. Going into Europe with the gospel for the first time was no easy task; today our task will not be easy, either! Prepare yourself, for error is clever, determined, unrelenting, and, yes, even vicious. Since your work is the greatest work in the world, learn all you can and learn from others, especially New Testament Christians, who know what is involved in carrying the message across the street to your neighbor, or to the one in need across the ocean. Lastly, realize that armed with knowledge of God's word, with all your training and preparation, and with God's providential care, you can accomplish his work of saving men's souls!



In verse 10 Luke includes himself with the evangelistic team, using the plural pronoun “we”. This change in the person of the narrative must not be missed. As you read through the text, observe the shift from “they” and “he” (Paul) to “we.” No doubt Luke joined the traveling companions. There was wisdom in the company traveling together. The strength, physically and spiritually, would be needed to accomplish this great mission in Europe, a place where the gospel had not been preached. It reminds us of the Lord's

limited commissions, when he sent out the disciples two by two (Matt. 10). Support and strength from one another would be needed, as these men faced obstacles Satan set before them. The ability to work together harmoniously multiplies their efforts and the rewards for Christ. We need such a cooperative spirit among us. As someone once said, “it is amazing how much we can get done, if we don’t worry about who gets the credit.” One wonders how much damage has been done when faithful brethren, harboring petty positions, refused to cooperate with one another for the good of Christ and the Gospel. Certainly a compromise in the faith, or a deletion of one tenant of the gospel, is not being espoused, but we recognize the common good achieved by the ancient evangelists working together as a team. We must do the same.

The obedience to the Macedonian call was immediate (11). There was no wasted time; the travelers simply responded to it. The text states, “...we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” The term conveys the idea of “putting it together;” or “concluding” (*sunbibazontes*) (10). Though some discussion may have taken place between them at the time, still no time was lost, as they embarked upon the European mission. Of course, adequate preparation is always wise, but sometimes we talk too much and fail to act with alacrity. After prayerful reflection has ended, it is time to act! Let us never forget to pray and plan, but like the ancient travelers, let’s have the courage to bring those plans to reality.

## Discussion Questions

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1. When considering your work and service to the Lord, have you given thoughtful consideration to your commitment? How determined are you? Do your spouse and family have the same measure of commitment you do?
2. How flexible are you working with others? Are you the kind of person that must have your way? Are you willing to look at a situation and make adjustments to accomplish the work?
3. Have you first taken this matter to the Lord in prayer? When you have done so, have you made the proper plans and preparation to carry out the Lord's work? Are you ready to act?
4. How serious are you in studying the Bible, God's word? How many Bible passages do you read each day outside of the regular Bible class and worship service?
5. Examine and give objective evaluation to your motive in your work for the Lord. Ask yourself the question, "Am I doing this because I truly believe in the work, or am I obeying God, because I want to be the focus of attention? Do I truly want people to see the greatness of God and how important Christ is to our salvation? Just how important is the church of Christ to me?"

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## Lesson 6 - Discipling for Jesus

# THE GREAT COMPULSION

*Clarence DeLoach*

*For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*

**2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

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This great passage gets to the heart of Paul's objectivity and incentive for his life and ministry. Since the time of his conversion, he spoke of the grace of our Lord, which was "exceedingly abundant with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 1:14). [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] He was driven by grace! Listen to his explanation for his faithful labor, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). Paul labored from grace, not to grace! This should be the pattern of life and ministry of all the redeemed.

### The Heart of the Message

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The text for our present study is a part of a larger context in which Paul is defending the integrity of his ministry. False teachers at Corinth and other places had impugned his motives. They were saying and doing all they could to discredit Paul in the eyes of the Corinthians. Paul wanted them and us to know that his motivation for preaching was honest, sincere, and incorruptible. His allegiance to Christ, his devotion to truth, and his genuine concern for the Corinthians was pure and complete. And while it did not set well with Paul to defend himself, he found it necessary lest the Corinthians be deceived by his smooth talking critics. In the context, he gave several motives for the defense of his ministry.

*Reverence for God, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."* (2 Cor. 5:11a). The word, "therefore," connects to what Paul had said about the judgment seat of Christ before which all believers will be made manifest. Paul was motivated to preach the gospel in view of the coming judgment. Such gave him reverence and awe in the presence of God, and a deep sense of obligation to let all men know of the gospel of reconciliation.

*Concern for the church "that you may have something to answer those who glory in appearance and not in heart"* (2 Cor. 5:12b). He wanted the



church at Corinth to be informed and equipped to answer those who took pride in appearance. His priority was not what men thought or said about him, for his conscience was clear. But his main concern was for the well-being, the unity and edification of the church.

*Devotion to the truth, “for if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you” (2 Cor. 5:13).* Paul’s absolute and steadfast stand on the truth revealed to him by Christ (Gal. 1:12) caused some to think of him as “beside himself,” but Paul would explain, “we are fools for Christ’s sake” (1 Cor. 4:10). Even Jesus’ family thought that he had lost his mind in his teachings and actions at Capernaum (Mark 3:21). When the people of God take a zealous stand for divine truth in our present culture, don’t be surprised when you are called dogmatic, fanatic, or bigot.



*Passion for the lost, “therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).* The burden in Paul’s heart for the salvation of the lost, which incorporates all the other motives listed, was the major reason for defending the character of his ministry. His mission was to preach the gospel, and he could say, “woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). Paul was so passionate about the preaching of the saving gospel that no person, group or influence would be allowed to hinder his proclamation. The expression “in Christ” sums up simply and yet profoundly the significance of sinful man’s redemption. It speaks of our security in him who alone bore our sins at the cross. It speaks of our acceptance in him with whom God is well pleased. It speaks of assurance for the future in him who is the resurrection and the life. It speaks of the inheritance of glory that awaits the redeemed.

*Gratitude to the Savior, “for the love of Christ constrains us” (2 Cor. 5:14).* This is the great summary! It sums up reverence for God, concern

for the church, devotion to truth, passion for the lost—this was Paul’s great compulsion!

An examination of the details of the text demonstrate in a clear way Paul’s motivation for ministry.

*The love of Christ.* The grammar in the verse itself does not prove whether it is his love for us, or our love for him. However, the context clearly shows that it is Christ’s sacrificial love for us. God sent his Son to die for us (John 3:16). “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

*Constrains us* describes the effect of Christ’s love upon Paul and his companions. It speaks of the motive for every redeemed soul. Such love calls for giving our best in service to Christ. His love is reciprocated by our love. The constrained life will manifest itself in total commitment to our Lord. Jesus will be the Lord of our lives. Paul’s extreme life of self-denial, cheerful submission to horrible sufferings, sacrificial zeal, even at times appearing to others as being beside himself, cannot be explained on any other basis than “the love of Christ constrains me.” Every faithful child of God has no other constraint—not the praise of men, emulation, friends, knowledge, or rewards. It must be the love of Jesus Christ and his death for us, or our faith is perverted.

*Because we judge thus,* reflects how Paul reasoned about the death of Jesus. Paul often reasoned from scripture, and so should we. It reflects his thinking as he analyzed the extreme value of Jesus’ sacrifice, and its implication for our lives. For no other reason Paul could say, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

*That if One died for all, then all died.* The truth contained in this phrase was the key factor that motivated Paul to vigorously defend the integrity of his apostolic ministry. If the false teachers at Corinth were to succeed in discrediting him, then he would lose the opportunity to glorify Christ and express his sincere appreciation to Christ through his ministry. The truth here is fundamental to the gospel Paul preached. One died for all, and once for all. Unlike the endless offerings under the Old covenant, which could never take away sin, Jesus, “by one offering has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14).

*Then all died* expresses the truth that all who accept his substitutionary death on their behalf, have indeed died with him. In describing how we identify with Christ in his death, Paul said, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). And in verses 7-8, “For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”

Paul was so overwhelmed with gratitude that our holy God sent his own Son to die as the substitute to pay the penalty for his sins. From that great reality flows reconciliation, justification, forgiveness and peace with God. No wonder Paul could say, “I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). This was his grand compulsion!

## Messages for Today

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- **The love of Christ for us will destroy the attitude of selfishness.**
- **The love of Christ will motivate our passion for him.**
- **The love of Christ will compel our outreach for souls.**

*The love of Christ for us will destroy the attitude of selfishness.* Selfishness was a part of the old life that was crucified with Christ. No longer do we live unto ourselves because “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). In teaching the Corinthians about their own bodies, Paul said, “you are not your own, for you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

*The love of Christ will motivate our passion for him.* Paul’s passion was to know Christ, live for Christ, preach Christ and live with him in eternity. To the Corinthians, he said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Mark captured the passion of Jesus in Mark 1:35-39. He was passionate about prayer, for “He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” He was passionate about preaching, “let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come.” He was passionate about people, and Jesus “moved with compassion, put out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I am willing, be cleansed.’ Paul imitated Jesus’ passion for prayer, for preaching, and for people.

*The love of Christ will compel our outreach for souls.* His passion for Israel was that they be saved. It grieved him, that though they had a zeal for God, it was not according to knowledge. They had not submitted to the righteousness of God (Rom. 9:1-3; Rom. 10:1-3). May the love of Christ impel us to make every effort we can to “bring glad tidings of good things” to sinful men (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

## A Message of Hope

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Let selfishness be gone! Our lives are not our own. We lost them! He saved them. We are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Our life is different. We see the world differently. Our message is not, “look what the world has come to, but look who has come to the world!” Christ is our purpose, our mission, our life. Why? Because the love of Christ constrains us! Those of us who died with Him, but are now alive in him are placed under restraint to serve Him.

Let us glory in his love as our Savior, substitute, mediator, and Lord. As sinful creatures we were bound for eternal destruction, but by grace He took our place, died in our stead and was raised for our justification. This is our hope! A hope steadfast and sure! Hallelujah!

Two stanzas from Isaac Watts' great hymns we can joyfully sing:

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay  
The debt of love I owe!  
Here, Lord, I give myself away  
'Tis all that I can do.<sup>1</sup>*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small!  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all!<sup>2</sup>*

That is our grand compulsion!

### Discussion Questions

1. List five motives for the integrity of Paul's ministry.
2. Is the "love of Christ" in 2 Corinthians 5:14, Christ's love for us, or is it our love for him?
3. On what basis can you explain the self-denial, extreme suffering, and steadfast zeal in the life of Paul?
4. Name three things that the love of Christ will motivate in us.
5. How did the writer of Hebrews describe our hope? (See Heb. 6:19).

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<sup>1</sup> *Alas, and did my Savior Bleed?*

<sup>2</sup> *When I Survey the Wonderful Cross.*

## Lesson 7 - Models of Evangelism

### JESUS

*David L. Lipe*

*Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

**Luke 19:9-10**

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When one thinks about a pattern for reaching lost people with the gospel of Jesus Christ, for most, Jesus himself would be considered the epitome of success in evangelism. After all, he came with the very mission “to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). [All scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] David Chadwell<sup>1</sup> asked an insightful question concerning Jesus’s effectiveness in reaching the lost when he raised the question, “how did you personally determine Jesus’ effectiveness in reaching the lost?” At least two possible responses might be made to this question: (1) Jesus was successful in reaching the lost because of the *number* of people he reached and (2) Jesus was successful in reaching the lost because of the *kind* of people he reached.

Concerning (1), throughout his public ministry Jesus spoke to thousands of people and thousands even followed him; however, the results of his ministry seem disappointing. (a) After his bread of life discourse, many of his temporary disciples left him and Jesus even asked the twelve, whom he had chosen, whether they would leave him (cf. 6:26-68). (b) In spite of the fact that Jesus came to save people, the Samaritans on one occasion would not even receive him (Luke 9:51-54). (c) With the exception of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, none of the religious authorities of the day responded positively to Jesus. (d) On the last day before his crucifixion, one of the disciples he had chosen, Judas, betrayed him. Peter, one of his closest disciples, denied him. All the disciples were scattered like sheep the night in which he was betrayed. The multitudes cried out for his death. Finally, at the cross only a few women and fewer men stood by him as caring friends. (e) Following his death, Judas hanged himself and the eleven were in hiding. Just before Pentecost, about 120 brethren were gathered together. From these considerations it does not appear that Jesus was successful in reaching the lost because of the number of people he reached.

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<sup>1</sup> David Chadwell, “Reaching the Lost Like Jesus.” *Reaching the Lost* (ed. David L. Lipe; Kosciusko, Ms.: Magnolia Bible College, 1983, pp. 8-14). I am in debt to brother Chadwell’s work for valuable insights.

In regard to (2), there are a number of people Jesus was not able to reach. As mentioned, besides Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus never reached any religious or politically prominent person. The rich young ruler was not impressed with Jesus' demands. Even among the twelve, no prominent person was to be found. We know little about most of them. Some were fishermen and one a hated tax collector. Most of those who were responsive to Jesus were poor, downtrodden, and social outcasts. If one were to measure Jesus' effectiveness based on the number of people he reached or on the kind of people he reached, one would be disappointed. So, why should we believe Jesus was effective in reaching the lost? In spite of the above considerations, different reasons might be given demonstrating that Jesus was effective in reaching the lost; indeed more effective than any other.



## THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

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*First, Jesus was effective in reaching the lost because he challenged people to make real decisions.* This is taught in both precept (Matt. 6:24; 10:37-39) and example. (1) When a certain scribe said that he would follow Jesus, Jesus did not respond with gratitude for his decision. On the contrary, he knew the scribe did not fully understand what he was saying; therefore, Jesus gave him some additional information to think about before he made his decision (Matt. 8:19-20). (2) Any person considering being a disciple must count the cost of his decision (Luke 14:26-27). Jesus gave two parables to illustrate the cost of discipleship: (a) the man who was going to build a tower (Luke 14:28-30) and (b) the foolish king who was going to declare war on his enemy (Luke 14:31-33). Several other examples could be noted including the Samaritan woman (John 4), the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-22), and the adulterous woman (John 8).



*Second, Jesus was effective in reaching the lost because he practiced what he preached.* Jesus' effectiveness was not based on a particular method of evangelism. We do not oppose effective methods, but we should not be deceived into thinking that all that is needed to be effective is the right method. Methods are effective only when used by righteous people. Jesus' effectiveness was based on his person and his life. Jesus was always honorable, deserving of respect, upright, moral, and genuine in everything he said and did. He was never justly accused of wrong (John 8:46). Not only did Jesus teach people how to live, he demonstrated how to live in his own life.

*Third, Jesus was effective in reaching the lost because he was flexible in declaring his message.* When Jesus taught a person, he always determined the person's need and met that need in a way the person could understand. Three examples serve to illustrate this. (1) The Samaritan woman needed a spiritual life she did not have. Jesus focused on her need by offering her living water. He did not focus on her personal problems and sinfulness. Jesus taught her on a level she could understand (John 4). (2) The rich young ruler needed to understand that he had to make a choice between his desire for eternal life and his personal possessions. Jesus challenged him to confront his need and choice (Matt. 19:16-22). (3) Nicodemus needed to understand that his own righteousness was not sufficient to please God and that a new birth was necessary (John 3). In all of these cases, Jesus exhibited flexibility in his teaching. Even though Jesus was flexible, many still did not respond to his appeal e.g. the Pharisees and Sadducees.

*Fourth, Jesus was effective in reaching the lost because he knew that serving God and loving people were not mutually exclusive.* Jesus always served the Father who sent him and also loved people. No less than eight times in the gospels is it said that Jesus had compassion for people (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; Luke 7:13). Jesus felt compassion for people because they were hungry, lonely, and like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus knew that serving God did not exclude loving people. He always had time for people and their problems. Serving his Father actually included loving people.

## MESSAGES FOR TODAY

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- **We must challenge people to make real decisions.**
- **We must practice what we preach.**
- **We must be flexible in sharing the message.**
- **We must understand that serving God and loving people are not in conflict.**

*We must challenge people to make real decisions.* Effective evangelism is not the result of dominating and coercing one into doing what we want them to do. This is manipulation. Effectiveness is helping a person make a

real decision based on his or her own free will and understanding. One can make a real decision when he or she understands the problem one faces and the solution to the problem. An effective teacher will help the person decide on this basis.

*We must practice what we preach.* We will never be effective in reaching the lost unless we learn that: teaching Christianity without living it will not do; living Christianity without teaching it will not do. We must both teach and live Christianity. Nothing hurts the cause of Christ more than for one who claims to follow Christ to fail to truly live the Christian life. Methods of evangelism can only be effective in the hands of those who are committed to living the righteous life. Note carefully these passages (Ezra 7:10; Acts 1:1; Rom. 2:21-24).

*We must be flexible in sharing the message.* An effective evangelist is not one who has a fixed method that has been memorized to be used on all people. An effective teacher will be able to study with people “where they are.” He must be able to listen to questions and give intelligent responses based on Scripture. Responses cannot be “canned” answers. An effective teacher will be one who has a good understanding of a person’s need and be able to provide a solution. This will require flexibility in sharing the message.

*We must understand that serving God and loving people are not in conflict.* In our attempt to reach the lost we must not sound as though we do not care for people. If we would reach people for Jesus, people must know that we genuinely care for them. People must know that we are really interested in them and the problems they face.

## **A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU**

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Jesus was effective in the mission for which he came to this earth. He is our perfect example (1 Pet. 2:21). If we would be effective in reaching the lost today, we would do well to learn from Jesus. We must understand that in our best efforts we will never reach some people. In such cases, we must never become hostile but always show care and respect. We should never forget that our commission regarding the salvation of others is to teach. If we teach out of love and concern, then we have fulfilled the commission given to us and be successful regardless of an individual’s decision.



## Discussion Questions

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1. Discuss how effective Jesus was in reaching the lost at the close of his ministry.
2. How did Jesus help people make real decisions and how can we do the same?
3. Discuss the importance of practicing what one preaches.
4. Think of some ways one might be flexible in evangelistic methods.
5. Discuss whether serving God and loving people are mutually exclusive.

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## Lesson 8 - Models of Evangelism

# THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

*Trent E. Key*

*Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.*

**Acts 8:4-5**

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Before the final ascension of our Lord, the marching orders of the Great Commission were declared before the Apostles (Matt. 28:18-20). He gave unto them the model by which disciples are made. The formula for discipleship is not left to our speculation.

But where would one go to find the fulfillment of Christ's command? "If one looks in the Bible on how to be converted, he should not look in Genesis, or 2 Kings, or some other part of the blessed book that does not deal with that subject. He should instead look in Acts, which contains many cases of conversions."<sup>1</sup>

The book of Acts is often referred to as "The Acts of the Apostles." However, when the book is considered in its fullness, it could better be described as "The Acts of the First Century Church."

For the perfect model of evangelism to be present today, we must look back to the successful efforts of the first century church.

## The Heart of the Message

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*The first century church navigated through the Scriptures.* As the church began on the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter illustrated with Old Testament Scripture that which convicted and converted his audience (Acts 2:17-21, 25-28, 34-35; Joel 2:28-32; Ps. 16:8-11; 110:1). We might be reminded that Peter didn't choose these words, but it was as the Spirit gave him utterance (Acts 2:4).

When the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from Isaiah, Philip started with that passage, and preached Jesus to him (Acts 8:31-35). His preaching led this man to respond in obedience through baptism (Acts 8:36-38). Earlier, in Samaria, Philip experienced the same results while preaching "things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Preaching Jesus demands a proper and thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. In Berea, the people "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these

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<sup>1</sup>Basil Overton. "The People on Pentecost." *Conversions in Acts* (Winona, MS: J.C. Choate Publications, 1981). 3. Print.

things were so” (Acts 17:11). As a gospel preacher, Paul proclaimed to the Ephesian elders, “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

*The first century church recognized their need for a plan.* Initially, before the church’s existence, Jesus gave his apostles a plan of action. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). After Christ’s church was established in Jerusalem (Acts 2), and the conversion of the first Gentile family (Acts 10), the church continued to fulfill Christ’s plan.



As the Apostle Paul went throughout the world doing mission work, there was much planning involved with each mission. The elders developed his initial team and sent them out (Acts 13:1ff). Paul often entered the places most common for religious discussion in each city (Acts 17:1-3, 16-18). And when one mission was completed, the arrangement for the next was often discussed (Acts 14:21-26). The success of any work requires much planning.

*The first century church noticed opportunities.* First, they noticed great opportunities to assemble for fellowship (Acts 2:43-46; 20:11-12). Often, their efforts to assemble for fellowship resulted in hospitality and conversions (Acts 16:11-15, 25-34; 21:7-8). They also recognized their need to pray for their efforts (Col. 4:4-6; Acts 12:5-19; 13:1-3; 21:3-6). The worker who prays for evangelistic opportunities, recognizes where each opportunity comes from and who truly gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:5-7).

Paul’s evangelism team consisted of encouragers (Acts 9:15ff), hospitable (Acts 17:5-9), fortifiers (Acts 13:1-3, 5; 15:30-35), teachers (Acts 18:2ff; 18:24-19:1), and prayer warriors (Acts 13:1-3; 21:3-6). There was much opportunity for all the body of Christ to be involved (1 Cor. 12:12ff; Eph. 4:11-16).

*The first century church left no one behind.* When the gospel was first proclaimed, the message went to the Jews (Acts 2:5, 10; Rom. 1:16). But when Paul was converted, God appointed him as a spokesperson to the Gentiles concerning their salvation (Acts 9:15). Paul later identified that message was to be pronounced through the whole world by the church, to God's glory (Eph. 3:8-21)

In the first century, the church didn't let one's past hinder their efforts of outreach. Paul consented to the death of Stephen and persecuted the church greatly, but Ananias did as the Lord commanded him (Acts 8:1; 9:10-19). In the minds of men, a sorcerer's conversion may seem strange, but God's promise is for all (Acts 8:9-25; 2:39).

The apostles of Christ even made attempt to preach to those in authority, but were sometimes rejected. King Agrippa's famous rejection is recorded as, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Those are probably the saddest words recorded in the book of Acts.

*The first century church never gave up.* Even in the midst of great persecution, the brethren continued faithfully in their outreach. When most of us would be discouraged and even fearful of losing our lives, the first century church was motivated to keep doing God's work. After the Apostles were tossed in prison, then released and chastised to never preach Jesus again, they all responded, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). "The fact is, gospel preaching had already indicted them with responsibility for the Lord's blood"<sup>22</sup> (Acts 2:23; 3:15; 4:10).

## Messages for Today

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- **We must navigate through the Scriptures.**
- **We must recognize our need for a plan.**
- **We must notice opportunities.**
- **We must leave no one behind.**

*We must navigate through the Scriptures.* The Bible is the sole authority by which we must teach and preach today. In the first century, the Holy Spirit blessed the church with miraculous revelations (Acts 2:4). The Scriptures supply that same instruction for us today. No man is left to privately interpret the Scriptures as he desires, "but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Paul affirms that all scripture thoroughly equips the man of God for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Unfortunately, some will take the time to tell stories in place of Scripture. This is a disservice to those concerned for their soul. The man of God will be judged upon how he taught and handled the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15).

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<sup>22</sup>Wayne Jackson. *The Acts of the Apostles from Jerusalem to Rome*. 2nd ed. (Stockton: Christian Courier Publications, 2005). 59. Print.

*We must recognize our need for a plan.* We've heard it said, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." As this is true in our lives individually, the same is true in the Lord's church. As the elders in Antioch developed the plan for Paul's mission efforts, the elders today are pertinent in providing the plan for their congregation. As the elders lead the congregation to spiritual maturity and good works, the members of the church must stand in support of these efforts (1 Pet. 5:1-5; Heb. 13:17). Every good work is started with an adequate plan.

*We must notice opportunities.* Sometimes, churches wonder why they aren't growing. For most occasions, the problem arises because we fail to recognize these opportunities. Paul said to the church at Ephesus, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever" (Eph. 3:20-21). Occasionally, the opportunities to evangelize will be very clear. But most of the time, we have to work for the opportunities. Nothing good comes to us, unless we are able to do the work for it. The church that prays for prospects of evangelism will be blessed with them (Col. 4:4-6).

*We must leave no one behind.* No one is exempt from needing to hear the gospel. The gospel is truly for all people. We must not be prejudiced with whom we share the glorious message. Today, race and social status seem to get in people's way. But as our children sing, "they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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*Never give up!* Fortunately, we don't suffer the same persecution as our first century brethren. But what if the first century brethren offered the same excuses we often give. "That will never work." "We've already tried that before." "They will never listen to us."

Instead of being discouraged, the church was driven to keep preaching. While Saul was making "havoc of the church," the brethren scattered "everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4-5; 11:19ff). The responsibility of teaching lost souls the gospel is entrusted to every Christian and it is too important of a task to give up on.

The greatest responsibility is one that we have been given by our Lord, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

## Discussion Questions

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1. Who is responsible for personal evangelism?
2. Discuss various roles the church of the first century practiced in outreach.
3. Think of some reasons why some never practice outreach.
4. How can fellowship promote outreach within a congregation?

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## Lesson 9 - Models of Evangelism

# THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHURCH

*Mark Ray*

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.*

**Matthew 28:18-20**

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*We live in a world that needs Jesus.* With a population of over seven billion people on this earth, there are around six thousand who die each hour while around fifteen thousand who are born. Every one of these people is in serious need of the opportunity to hear the gospel. Every one of these people is headed to an eternity of bliss or torment. In light of this population explosion, Christians live under the command of Jesus to make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:18-20), [All scriptures references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] The method of making disciples is baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and teaching them all things that are commanded. This need for evangelism has been the call to the church for centuries and is especially important for the church in our century.

## Heart of the Message

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There are several models of evangelism used in the New Testament that are effective today as well. *A major one is mass proclamation.* In Acts 2 Peter and the apostles preached the very first gospel sermon. Using the proving power of the Holy Spirit along with proof from Old Testament prophecy, Peter confirmed that Jesus had been unlawfully crucified and yet he rose from the grave. The crowd interrupted Peter with the question, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). This mass proclamation harvested 3,000 souls who obeyed the gospel. Other instances of mass proclamation are found in Acts 3, Acts 7, and Acts 17. In our modern day, mass proclamation can be done in lectureships and gospel meetings. In decades past in the last century, the gospel meeting was a primary source of evangelistic work. However, today many of our large gatherings include few outsiders who are unfamiliar with the gospel message. This means that our large public gatherings need to be designed to bring in outsiders and to fulfill purposes other than evangelism.

*Another model of evangelism is through media.* Many of the apostles wrote letters to churches they visited or to areas in which they had influence. While some of these letters are no longer preserved, the ones that remain today



are our inspired scriptures. The letters, or as we know them, the epistles are valuable in that they reach a wider audience than the spoken word. Since they are written, they can be preserved so that they can be passed around to others and they can last through many years. Today we live in an age of media. From television to radio to social media, there are countless ways for the Lord's church to reach to the far corners of the globe with the gospel message. Huge numbers are contacted by a single blog post or tweet. Yet a weakness of this method is that there is so much media being sent out that it has a diluted effect. People today are highly discerning of what they read and the time they spend listening to a message. But well-written and well-designed communication still can accomplish a huge harvest.

*The Bible also has many examples of evangelism through personal relationship.* The apostle Andrew's greatest contribution to the cause of Christ was in who he brought to Jesus. While we do not see many of Andrew's words, it was he that brought Peter to Christ (John 1:40-41). Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside and taught him the way more fully (Acts 18:26). By doing this, they contributed to him becoming a very influential preacher in the early Church (1 Cor. 1:12).

While mass proclamation and media proclamation have their roles in getting the message of the gospel out, the most effective method of reaching the lost in the Twenty-First Century is through personal relationships. For proof of this fact, next time you are in a Bible class go around and ask people who or what influenced them to obey the gospel. While there will be some who were converted by radio preaching or by reading a blog, most people in the congregation will refer to a personal relationship such as their parents, their spouse, a friend a work, or someone who took an interest in them. Therefore, the modern church must utilize the personal relationships of its members to enhance evangelistic opportunity.

## **Messages For Today**

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- **Meet people where they are.**
- **Turn conversations to a spiritual purpose.**
- **Don't lose sight of your purpose.**
- **Disregard distractions.**

We see some good rules for influencing others for Christ in our personal relationships as we read John 4. As a first rule of influence, we see that *Jesus met people where they were*. While he did spend time in the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus often went to people rather than expecting the people to seek him out. In John 4 we see that Jesus had to go through Samaria and he met the lady at the well as she was gathering water for her family. A second principle we see for personal evangelism is *Jesus naturally turned everyday conversations toward the spiritual realm*. He took the lady's task of gathering water and began a discussion of the living water of the gospel.



He took her question about worship and explained how the gospel led people to worship in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). A third principle shown by Jesus *is he never lost sight of his purpose in teaching*. As the apostles sought to interrupt Jesus so he could eat he said, “My food is to preach the gospel.” Later *he would tell the apostles to disregard distractions* and “Lift up your eyes and see the harvest.” There are times our good works in the church actually become a distraction to our reaching out to others. It is good to feed the poor and it is good to be known as a supporter of the community. But when we focus on social work to the neglect of saving souls we fail in our purpose of preparing people for eternity.

## **A Message of Hope For You**

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*Our culture today looks much like the culture of the First Century church.* We live in an environment of pluralism (a view that truth depends on individual perception), moderate persecution (there is a segment of our population that is adamantly against Christianity), and a good number of truth seekers who will obey if approached with the gospel message. So how are we to present the gospel to this twenty-first century world? Paul explains our method in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.



*First, in verse seventeen we see the need to be authentic.* “If you are in Christ...old things have passed away.” One of the major necessities for reaching the lost is a sense of “realness” on our part. Our Christianity must make a difference in our lives in the way we think and the way we act.

*Second, there is also a need to be incarnational.* What this term means is that we participate in the daily lives of others. Just as Jesus Christ was sent by God to live among us (v. 18), so also we must go to the world rather than expecting the world to come to us. It is good to invite people to gospel meetings and to events at the church building. But it’s more effective when

the members of the church go into the community to show God's love and share God's message. This can be done in nursing homes, schools, community events, and in other ways as well.

*Third, we see the need for humility.* Many people in the world think that Christians are prideful and judgmental. They've seen some Christians screaming condemnation to the lost and being self righteous to those who disagree with them. As ministers of God, Paul reminds us that we too are in need of saving grace. Verse 18 tells us that God has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ so that we then can participate in this ministry to reconciling others to God as well. When we remember that we need God's forgiveness as much as everyone else, then we will have the proper attitude in our interaction with the world.

*Fourth we see in verse twenty that Christians must be driven.* That is, when we see that Christ is working through us; we will not let anything get in the way of our leading others to the Lord. While the term for ambassador is a specific term that technically applies to the eyewitness Apostles, there is a sense in which we too are witnesses for Christ's work. We know the power of the gospel and we must work diligently to let others know it as well.

*Fifth, we see that we are to be concise* (v. 21). We should be able to specifically and simply tell others what they need to know to be a Christian. Paul here emphasizes God's work in making Christ be our substitute on the cross. We do not need to preach a complicated gospel that breeds confusion, rather we are to simply spread the good news to all people. This world needs Jesus and we have an obligation to participate in and use our culture in ways that reach the lost.

## Discussion Questions

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1. What are some reasons why the Twenty-First Century church needs to engage in evangelism?
2. What are three models of spreading the gospel found in the scriptures?
3. What are four principles for creating a spiritual conversation used by Jesus in John 4?
4. What are the five key words of our method of evangelism found in 2 Corinthians 5:21?
5. List some ways that you can influence others towards Christianity in this next week.

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## Lesson 10 - Reaching the...

### ATHEIST

*Jason Jackson*

*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

**Romans 1:20**

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How do we reach an atheist? Depends on the atheist. Not all unbelievers are university grads whose personal existence hinges on proving that life is meaningless and ends in nothingness. Some are confused; others are indifferent. Yet when someone denies what seems so undeniably true, what can we do? How can we convince someone to believe in God and the gospel of Jesus Christ? Set your evangelism flowchart aside. There are no easy answers, but faithful Christians should find encouragement in this: atheism is without a rational defense.

### The Heart of the Message

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Objections to faith can be answered.

Consider four objections to belief. *First, some suggest the idea of a Creator is archaic and unnecessary.* “Science” (i.e., Darwinism) supposedly provides the explanation for the diversity of life on this planet. Supporting this is the popular belief in the Big Bang. Together, these conclusions of “science” allegedly replace the superstitions of the past. However popular these “settled conclusions” are, we provide a great service to our family and friends when we invite them to question their *faith* in Darwinism and the Big Bang.

*Second, moral objections arise.* Why would an all-powerful and all-loving God permit the atrocities of the Holocaust, 9/11, and Aleppo? And how can one believe a loving God would banish people to hell?

These objections invoke a lot of emotion, but the underlying assumption seems to be: “If I don’t understand something, it cannot exist.” That does not make any sense. Neither does: “If I am offended by something, it cannot exist.” Furthermore, is it not inconsistent to appeal to moral evils to prove there is no God? If there is no God, there is no objective moral law. We need to challenge our friends to think about the assumptions behind their arguments.

*Third, postmodern thinking needs to be addressed.* Who would be so bold as to claim to know the truth? We are, supposedly, nothing more than the

intellectual product of our particular time and culture. Accordingly, whatever truth may exist, we only see a microscopic portion observable from our tiny slice of existence. Therefore, how could anyone claim their view is the only way and the right way? Postmoderns claim for themselves the right to know what others cannot know. Perhaps helping someone to see this logical inconsistency will open the door for further discussion.

*Fourth, hypocrisy-based objections are raised.* Some suggest that Christianity, or religion in general, is responsible for the problems and wars in the world. Others point to individuals, saying, “I’m a better person than so-and-so, and he’s a Christian.” Again, a common theme surfaces. What does the action of a group of people or one individual have to do with proving or disproving the existence of God? Nothing! Furthermore, how (again) can unbelievers appeal to moral evil to prove that life is without morals, meaning, value, and purpose? If people are simply the product of blind forces of chance and evolution, they are simply acting out their evolutionary instincts of the survival of the fittest, are they not?

Atheism is irrational and indefensible. Logical observations of “the made things” require an all-powerful cause and an intelligent designer (Rom. 1:20). These matters are so clear, Paul declares, that there is no defense for the impiety and injustice among men who exchange the truth of God for the lie, worshipping and serving the creature rather than the one who created (vv. 18-23). Atheism cannot adequately explain the existence and complexity of life or the reality of moral obligation within man. Only Christianity provides a coherent system of belief that fits both the facts of creation and the heart of man. Consider William Lane Craig’s chapter on “The Absurdity of Life without God.”

## **Messages for Today**

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- **We must realize that not all atheists are alike.**
- **We must appreciate that different approaches are necessary for different people.**
- **We must remember that Christians are not responsible for unbelief.**
- **We must understand that the gospel of Christ satisfies the longings of the human heart.**

*We must realize that not all atheists are alike.* Not everyone is a Madalyn Murray O’Hair or a Richard Dawkins. Actually, some are unsatisfied in their unbelief. We must recognize the need to meet their objections with sound reason and respect.

*We must appreciate that different approaches are necessary for different people.* We have different types of relationship currency, and we need to know how to spend it. Perhaps we need to get to know someone better and build up some evangelism capital through good works (Matt. 5:13-16). We cannot underestimate the value of time to allow kindness to do its work.

Eventually, we will acquire more influence leverage. Incidental or casual contact may require book recommendations, links sent by email, and other forms of material, these being our only options because of limited opportunities. When it comes to mass and media evangelism, we should consider what it takes to find seekers and develop systems by which we bring them into our circles of influence. Appreciate the need to think about every person individually. Consider all viable means of influence and persuasion and recognize the time required to develop an authentic relationship.



*We must remember that Christians are not responsible for unbelief.* We do not want to contribute to someone's unbelief. We cannot, however, shoulder the burden of unbelief in the world. We sometimes attribute our inability to reach someone to some personal inadequacy or to not using the right method. We recognize the place for discussions on methods and demographics, but not all will be reached (cf. Matt. 10:14). Is the Jews' unbelief explained by the Lord's methods or his failure to understand them? Is God responsible for atheism? Or are some people disobedient and obstinate (cf. Rom. 10:21)?

*We must understand that the gospel of Christ satisfies the longings of the human heart.* The evidence imbedded in creation and the revelation of God's will is as perfect as he is. Remember what Queen Gertrude said in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." For all the talk about atheism and social injustice, even the unbeliever tries to make sense out of that which he claims is meaningless. Ironically, God made us this way (cf. Acts 17:25-27). Humankind has an insatiable thirst for meaning, value, knowledge, justice, and immortality (cf. Rom. 2:4-11, 14-15). The gospel of Jesus Christ satisfies the longings of the human heart, soul, and mind—even the atheist's.

## A Message of Hope for You

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“I was not raised in the church, nor did I have any connection to Christianity at all,” Dave wrote. Dave was a biology major at CSU Chico, but Darwinism was not satisfying the desire for coherent answers based on evidence. His wife, Judy, who became a Christian not long after they married, suggested to Dave that he read the Bible. Dave replied that he did not even know where to begin. She replied, “How about you start with page one?” God’s word, which is just as perfect as the God who gave it, satisfied the longings and questions of Dave’s soul. Dave became a Christian. Some years later, Dave and Judy were in a motorcycle accident, and Judy was killed. After a number of years, Dave remarried a wonderful lady named Mary. At the time they met, Mary was not a Christian. When they made arrangements for their first date, Dave said, “Be sure to bring your Bible.” And she did.

### Discussion Questions

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1. What is the most difficult objection to faith for you to answer?
2. Why is it inconsistent for the atheist to appeal to evil to prove that God does not exist?
3. How might you reach an atheist with kindness?
4. Why is a one-size-fits-all approach to evangelism problematic?
5. In spite of all the things that make people different, what do all people have in common? That is, what do you know about every man and woman that makes them reachable?

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## Lesson 11 - Reaching the ...

### SECULARIST

*Mike Webb*

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

**Matthew 28:18-20**

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We’ve been given a mission by our Savior to make as many people as possible his disciples, and to teach them his precious word. As we seek to achieve this task, we must understand as much as we possibly can about the people we are trying to reach. Jesus has given us the task to take the good news to everyone. With many, we will have common ground. We can begin our conversation with common beliefs in God, the Bible, and Jesus. With others, we will have no common ground at all because they will be secular. What does “secular” even mean? Secular, put very simply, means non-religious. Phil Zuckerman has written extensively about secular life. He explains what it means to be secular in simple and clear terms. “So to be secular means that 1) a person does not believe in supernatural beings, entities, or realms, 2) a person does not engage in religious behaviors, and 3) a person does not identify as religious and is not a member of a religious community.” As Christians, our lives revolve around the church that Jesus came to establish. Our church family is very important to us, and most of our friends and close relationships are part of this community. Our whole week revolves around church services and activities. This is not the case for secular people.

Secular people maintain a naturalistic worldview in which belief must be supported by evidence. The activities that interest them and in which they are involved revolve around this life and they give no thought to the after-life. Don’t be mistaken, to be secular does not mean that one lacks belief. Secular folks believe in all sorts of things, like loving their spouses and children, or the value of education, or the potential of science, or the importance of protecting the earth. Their lives are just as filled with beliefs as our own – but none of them are beliefs in supernatural deities, or realms.

The religiously unaffiliated, called “nones,” are growing significantly. They’re the second largest religious group in North America. In the United States, nones make up almost a quarter of the population. In the past decade, U.S. nones have overtaken Catholics, mainline protestants, and all followers of non-Christian faiths. As we go into our world on a daily basis, it’s more

and more likely that we will encounter people who are atheist or agnostic or simply don't have any religious affiliation at all. This is not a recent phenomenon. Fifty years ago, *Time* magazine asked in a famous headline, "Is God Dead?" The magazine was asking whether religion was still relevant to modern life in a new age where ideas like communism were spreading and when science was explaining more about our natural world than we had ever known before. We're still asking the same question, but the response isn't limited to yes or no. Many Americans born after that article was printed could honestly respond to the same question with, "God who?" The unaffiliated tend to be several years younger than the population average, and 11 percent of Americans born after 1970 were raised in secular homes.



## The Heart of the Message

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*We are losing too much ground to the world's newest major religion: no religion.* Too many in our neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and families are lost. Many believe that science has replaced the need for a god and disproves a god exists. God has never asked us to believe anything without giving us evidence. Paul makes it clear that God has revealed himself to mankind throughout time, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Rom. 1: 20). [All scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] He has also revealed himself in the Bible. There is the scientific accuracy, the historical accuracy, the unity, and the accurate predictive prophecy of the Bible. There are over 300 prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in the New Testament. When Jesus came, He proved his deity by performing miracles (Heb. 2: 3-4). So many today are misinformed or uninformed about all of the evidence that exists to prove the existence of God, Jesus, and truth of the gospel. We can educate

ourselves and teach the lost. This was Jesus' mission, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). This is our mission as well and we cannot fail.

*We must use different methods to share the gospel with secular people.* Jesus did not teach the religious leaders and Jews the same way he taught the tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. Jesus would take every opportunity to teach the religious Jews during their feasts and festivals and in their places of worship. "The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, 'I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret'" (John 18: 19-20). Jesus took a different approach when taught the secular. "And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him. And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him" (Mark 2: 14-15). Jesus taught these secular people in Levi's house sitting around his table. He took time to get to know them and meet them in their social setting because they would not go to the same places the religious people would be. We also see in the following verses that they would not be welcome where the religious people could be found. Jesus never changed his message, but He did change the location and met people where they were.

## Messages for Today

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- **We can no longer sit in our church building and wait for people to come to us. We must go out and seek the lost (Luke 19: 10).**
- **We must use different methods to teach secular people than we do to teach people who are "churched" and have a faith in God, Jesus, and the Bible.**
- **Inviting secular people to church will not be an effective means of evangelism.**
- **We must be mindful of our daily Christian example and have religious discussions with people that lead to Bible studies (Acts 20: 17-21).**
- **Our homes are valuable resources for work for the Lord.**
- **Our homes should be outposts for ministry instead of fortresses from the outside world.**

## A Message of Hope for You

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It can be intimidating to think about sharing our faith with someone who is not religious. However, we can have confidence in the power of the gospel. As Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1: 16). We can have the same confidence in the power of the

gospel. All we have to do is introduce people to Jesus and the truth. Our task is bringing people to Jesus. We can accomplish this goal if we are willing to realize that we must meet secular people where they are and teach them there until they come to faith.

### Discussion Questions

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1. Have you educated yourself about what your secular family, friends, and neighbors believe?
2. Have you educated yourself about the scientific and Biblical proofs for your faith?
3. Do you start conversations with others about life, faith, and Jesus or just about church?
4. Are you willing to invite secular friends to your house instead of church since they are not accustomed to religious settings and social gatherings?

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## Lesson 12 - Reaching the ...

### MUSLIM

*Kevin L. Moore*

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

**Matthew 28:18-20**

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Muslims comprise over 23% of the earth's population. If current trends continue, it is estimated that by 2050 the number of Muslims worldwide will nearly equal that of professing Christians. Islamic resistance to Christianity has been around for centuries, yet tensions have significantly increased in recent decades, especially since 9/11/01. Islamic governments and militant jihadists have made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the Lord's church to carry out the Great Commission in several places around the globe. If we cannot go to the Muslim world, perhaps God is bringing the Muslim world to us. Multiplied thousands are migrating to countries that allow greater religious freedoms. The majority of Muslims (80%) live outside the Middle East. In the United States, Islam has approximately 3.3 million adherents (about 1% of the U.S. population). "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (John 4:35b). [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

### The Heart of the Message

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*Most Muslims are not fanatical extremists.* Contrary to popular opinion, not every Muslim is a member of a terrorist organization or sympathetic to al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Hezbollah, and ISIS. Our newscasts are dominated by images and stories of such radical movements, and it can be very tempting to throw every Muslim into the same pot. But is this fair? Is it reasonable? The fact of the matter is, more Muslims have suffered at the hands of these extremists than non-Muslims.

When the bulk of our information comes from social media, chances are our perspective is skewed. Rather than presuming to know what all Muslims are like, here's a novel idea. Let's actually get to know our Muslim neighbors. We might be surprised at how friendly, hospitable, and open they are. Yes, there are bad people in the world. Yes, Islamic terrorists are bad people. But not every Muslim is an Islamic terrorist.

*Many Muslims are disillusioned with their religion.* Refugees and defectors from radical Islamic groups are reportedly disgusted by the brutal injustices carried out in the name of Allah. Ritual prayers, five times a day, are compulsory and must be recited in the Arabic language; yet 4/5 of Muslims do not speak Arabic and thus pray without understanding. The God of the Qur'an reveals his will but not himself; he is unknowable. He is a God of wrath and cold indifference. Righteousness is merited by good works, and assurance is not possible in this life because it questions God's sovereignty. Understandably, a number of Muslims are yearning for something more.

*All Muslims need the Gospel.* Muslims comprise one of the largest unreached groups in the world today. The Gospel is still for all, and our Muslim neighbors are lost in sin, separated from God, shackled in ignorance, delusion, and hopelessness. We have the answer to their dilemma (Rom. 1:16), and the love of Christ compels us to do something about it (2 Cor. 5:15).

## Messages for Today

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- **We must overcome ignorance, prejudice, and fear.**
- **Start with commonalities, then address differences.**
- **Bridging the gap.**

*We must overcome ignorance, prejudice, and fear.* A good place to start is to observe the golden rule: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them ..." (Matt. 7:12). As a Christian, I don't appreciate being lumped together with the Ku Klux Klan, the Westboro Baptist Church, prosperity-gospel televangelists, or pedophile priests. We shouldn't assume that every Muslim hates democracy and western civilization and wants to kill us. And even if this were true, to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, the best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a brother.

*Start with commonalities, then address differences.* Christians and Muslims alike believe in the existence of the almighty creator; we are theists, set apart from the atheistic naturalism that pervades our society. We mutually accept the divine inspiration of the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospels, providing a standard of authority on which we can agree. We share a very high regard for Jesus Christ, acknowledging him as the Messiah, born of the virgin Mary, having performed miracles, and having ascended into heaven with the promise to return. The Gospel then takes us further into the presence and redemption of God, where we encounter fundamental differences.

The unitarian monotheism of Islam stands in stark contrast to the trinitarian monotheism of Christianity. The God of the Qur'an is revealed according to his attributes of action, not his nature, appearing to be capricious and arbitrary. The God of the Bible is revealed according to his attributes of essence and is steadfast, faithful, and trustworthy. The God of the Qur'an is unknowable, declaring his will and his acts but not his character. The God of

the Bible has revealed himself and wants to be known (Jer. 9:23-24), most clearly through his Son (Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; 14:7-9).

Nothing is more foundational to the Christian faith than confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 20:30-31), while nothing is more central to the Islamic faith than the absolute rejection of God having a Son. In Islam the idea of atonement is criticized; emphasis is placed on works of righteousness in blind submission to the divine will (Islam means “submission,” Muslim means “one who submits”). The Bible emphasizes submission to God as well (Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:6; etc.), but provision has also been made for when we fall short (Rom. 5:6-11).



*Bridging the gap.* It has to be more than winning an argument. Most Muslims have only a superficial understanding of their religion, with varying degrees of commitment (just like so many professing Christians!). Moreover, each Muslim is different, so there is no one-size-fits-all evangelistic procedure. In fact, there are many disagreements among Muslims themselves on any number of issues. Relationships are very important to them, so the best approach is to get to know them. An environment of courtesy and mutual respect is much more conducive to reasoning together, providing an opportunity to manifest Jesus.

Attacking Islam is generally unfruitful. It is fairly easy to point out the inconsistencies of the Muslim religion by citing cherry-picked verses from the Qur'an without a clear understanding of the context. But consider how effective this is when others do the same with our faith and our Bible. Muslims are taught to deny “the three gods of Christianity,” but they have obviously been introduced to a distorted view of our faith. Have we failed to clearly communicate what we believe? The burden is ours to seek opportunities to provide accurate information.



Unitarianism is an over-simplification of God; he is too big and too complex to be reduced to a single mathematical unit. Because Islamic theology is trapped in the physical realm, the question is often asked, “How can God have a Son?!” Here is a chance to explain God’s spiritual nature (John 4:24). It should come as no surprise that we are relational beings, because our creator is a relational being. How can moral attributes exist apart from relationship? How can God be love if he is an absolute, unrelatable, solitary entity? Before creation, whom did God love? God as a unity of three divine Persons (Matt. 28:19; etc.) makes sense in the context of relationship.

Our Muslim friends also need to know that the relational God of the Bible has invited us into a relationship with him (Rev. 21:3). But this is not possible apart from a clear understanding and acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, with faithful adherence to his teachings (John 14:6; Rom. 5:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:18; 1 Pet. 3:18).

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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With the Lord’s help, Muslims can be won to Christ. We start by seeing them as God sees them – precious souls created in his image for whom Jesus died. As we seek to obey God, which includes loving our fellow man, may we effectively encourage our Muslim neighbors to exchange their confession of Mohammed as God’s prophet for Jesus Christ as God’s Son.

### **Discussion Questions**

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1. What is the common attitude in the U.S. toward Muslims, and what is the basis of this attitude?
2. How can Muslims be reached with the Gospel in countries closed to Christian missionaries?
3. What are some beliefs that Christians and Muslims share in common?
4. What are some teachings and practices of Christianity that would appeal to Muslims?
5. What are some practical ways of doing a better job reaching Muslims with the gospel?

## References

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## Lesson 13 - Reaching the...

### CATHOLIC

*Earl D. Edwards*

*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*

**John 14:6**

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In Wilmette, Illinois, one can visit a beautiful temple constructed by believers of the Baku religion. That temple has nine doors which represent the “world’s nine major religions.” Bahuism holds that one needs the doctrines of all nine in order to possess *truth* in its totality. This is one example of the pluralism of our societies in the modern world.

But in the Bible one sees a very different approach. Jesus, the founder of Christianity, declared, “I am the way, and the *truth*, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6; emphasis added–EDE). [All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] Obviously the two approaches are in conflict, according to Jesus. He is truth in its totality; one does not need Mohammed or any other to be saved.

But when we find ourselves in conflict with others or matters of religion how should we react? Most of us are tempted to immediately muster every argument. Pride causes us to want to show ourselves as superior, better informed. But it is possible to *win* an argument and in the process, *lose* the soul of the person with whom we are discussing! *Love*, instead, will cause us to swallow our pride and seek the approach which has the greatest probability of reaching the prospective convert. In this lesson we will make suggestions about how one can reach a person of the Roman Catholic religion.

### The Heart of the Message

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*Be loving toward such a person and avoid offending him where possible.* Paul instructs us “to walk in love (*agape*) just as Christ also loved (*agapēsen*) you” (Eph. 5:2). To “walk in love” indicates my life should be characterized by love (*agape*) and this love is defined as, “a quality of warm regard for and interest in another, affection.”<sup>1</sup>

That sounds very much like Jesus’ instruction to “. . . treat people the same way you want them to treat you” (Matt. 7:12). Undoubtedly “be loving” would include avoiding a condescending attitude. To be condescending is

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Bauer, et. al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 6.

to suppose the person you are dealing with is, in some sense, *inferior*. The loving person will avoid such. Further, the loving person will presuppose the sincerity of his prospect until and unless the prospect gives clear evidence of insincerity. A good example of presupposing sincerity is seen in Paul's treatment of the Athenians. Though they were given to the worship of "idols" (Acts 17:16) and though some of their philosophers called Paul an "idle babbler" (Acts 17:18), yet the apostle begins his speech to them by saying you are "very religious [*dei daimonestérous*]" (Acts 17:22). It is true that some translate the word differently; "too superstitious" (KJV) but, taken in context, Alford is almost certainly correct in affirming,



Blame is neither expressed, nor even implied: but their exceeding veneration for religion laid hold of as a fact, on which Paul, with exquisite skill, engrafts his proof that he is introducing no new gods, but enlightening them with regard to an object of worship on which they were confessedly in the dark.<sup>2</sup>

In other words Paul lays outside all effort at defending himself regarding the "idle babbler" remark and thinks of how to reach them with the Gospel. And he begins with a compliment which necessarily presupposes the possibility of their sincerity even though they were pagan idolaters! In other words he is loving. What an excellent example for me when I approach Roman Catholics (or anyone else).

*Be knowledgeable.* A second suggestion is that I should be knowledgeable about Roman Catholic doctrine if I wish to convert a Roman Catholic. It is true that many Catholics are not well informed about their own doctrine, but

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<sup>2</sup>Henry Alford. *The Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody, 1958), 195. Cfr. Also J. W. McGarvey, *New Commentary on Acts*, Vol. 1 (Cincinnati, OH: Standard, 1892) 124, where McGarvey says the Athenians were "complimented by his opening remark."

that does not excuse me. In fact, Paul faults his fellow Jews because “they have zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge” (Rom. 10:2). Of course, the Jews lacked the knowledge of the Gospel and our lack would be in a different area, but the principle is the same. As the wiseman said, “. . . it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, and he who hurries his footsteps errs” (Prov. 17:2). As Dave Bland says, “Zeal or enthusiasm must ground itself in reflective thought. Otherwise one engages in activism that has no reality base.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is obvious that one must study and know Roman Catholic doctrines before he can refute them. We cannot here deal with the multiplicity of erroneous Catholic doctrines so we will discuss only one very fundamental one in order to show the need to study to be knowledgeable. I refer to their doctrine according to which there are *two sources of truth*.

The German Catholic theologian, Bernardo Bartmann, quotes Paul in 2 Thess. 2:15 to prove it. Paul there says, “hold to the traditions which you were taught whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.” Bartmann, in his comment on this passage states, “Besides the Scriptures, tradition also is to be received as a source (in and of itself) of the faith . . . ‘È di Fede’”—this means it is a dogma. He *further* affirms—“Christianity has never been a book religion like Judaism . . . if after 30 or 40 years the idea of writing came into apostles’ minds they certainly got the idea through Providence but not by a command of Jesus.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it can easily be seen that *for Catholics a doctrine doesn’t have to be “Biblical to be divine.”* It could have been orally transmitted.

In fact, Bartmann mentions several doctrines that are (according to Rome) *divine* but *not biblical*. “Baptism of children, the number of the sacraments, purgatory, the immaculate conception. . . .”<sup>5</sup>

Marchini (a French Catholic theologian) says, “Generally tradition is of three types—*inherent traditions* are those contained in equally clear form in Scriptures . . . *declarative traditions* are those that clear up concepts that are very vague in the Scripture . . . and *complementary traditions* are those which are not contained in any form in the Scriptures.”<sup>6</sup> Some Catholic scholars have even exalted oral tradition *above* Scripture. Bellarmine—(a counter reform Catholic theologian of the 16<sup>th</sup> century) says, “The Scriptures without tradition are neither necessary nor sufficient. . . . There are some

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<sup>3</sup>Dave Bland. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Solomon*. The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002) 173.

<sup>4</sup>Bernardo Bartmann. *Teologia Dogmatica*. Trans. Natale Bussi (Alba, Italy: Edizioni Paoline, 1956). p.57–59.

<sup>5</sup>Bartmann, 67.

<sup>6</sup>Antonio Marchini. *Lessico Ecclesiastico* (Milan, Italy: Casa Editrice Vallardi, 1953), p. 83.

traditions which carry a more grave obligation than the Scriptures.”<sup>7</sup> So, it is clear that: *It isn’t sufficient to tell a well-informed Catholic that some particular teaching “isn’t in the Bible”!* Because, according to official Catholic doctrine, there is another source of truth other than the Bible—that is, oral tradition. And, once this premise is allowed, then a hundred non-Biblical ideas can stream through the door which is thus opened. It is for this reason that it is believed that the doctrine of *oral tradition* is the *single most basic difference* between Roman Catholics and people who try to go by the Bible only.

But, briefly, how does one answer this reasoning which for some is compelling? The term “tradition” (*paraloeis*) as used in 2 Thess. 2:15, means “the content of instruction that has been handed down.”<sup>8</sup> In effect, it is basically neither good or bad. But if it is religious and it originates with man it becomes very bad so as to make our worship “vain” (Matt. 15:6–9). If, instead, it originates with God and is handed to us through inspired men like Paul it is very good and must be followed (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6; etc.).

But why did Paul tell the Thessalonians to follow his traditions (teachings) both “by letter” and “by word of mouth”? Weren’t all of his teachings (traditions) written? No! It needs to be understood that in the first century these things were in the process of being written. The Christian message began to be preached about AD 33 and the first books of the NT were written about AD 45–50 and the last ones about AD 95. Thus, Christian teaching was, as I understand it, *all oral from about AD 33 until about AD 45*.

Then it was *part oral and part written* from about AD 45 to about AD 95. The approximate date of writing of the Revelation of John, the last of the NT letters, was AD 95. And then—from AD 95 on to the present, *all is in written form in the New Testament*.

Paul’s statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 belonged only to that middle period when part of it was written and part was still oral and that passage is, therefore, *not applicable* to our situation.

Now Catholic theologians would agree with me on some things in this area and disagree in others: *They would agree that God guided his apostles or disciples so that they received “all truth” in the first century.*

The Catholic theologian, Boulenger, cites John 16:13 to prove this.

John 16:13—speaks of the Holy Spirit—and says: “But when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.” Then on the basis of this passage (and John 15:15), Boulenger affirms: “from these texts it is clear that the apostles received the *complete* deposit of revelation . . . therefore,

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<sup>7</sup>Roberto Bellarmine. *Controversiae*. Ingolstadt, 1599, 4:4, 6.

<sup>8</sup>Bauer, 763.

nothing else can be added . . . there can't be any new revelations" (emphasis added, EDE).<sup>9</sup> Thus, *we agree* on *this* principle. Please note this because it is extremely important.

*Further, we certainly agree that at least "some" of that truth was reduced to writing since Catholic theologians do believe that the N.T. is inspired.*

In fact Bartmann, whom I quoted earlier, names all 27 books of the New Testament and concludes that they are all inspired.<sup>10</sup> I, too, believe as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:37 that the things he and the other New Testament writers wrote are "the Lord's commandment."

*Our disagreement comes, of course, in determining how much of that "truth" which was revealed in the first century, was reduced to writing.*

I say all of it that God wanted his church to have for all future centuries was written, the Roman Catholic theologian says only a part of it was (the part in the New Testament). The rest, he says, was handed down orally from generation to generation. Thus, such theologians say there are two sources of truth, or two sources of God's revelation which are on parallel lines. Bartmann admits that in many, even most cases, these doctrines which were supposedly transmitted orally for a few centuries *were then written down* by some pope or council. But, he would emphatically deny that *all* of God's truth is in the Bible.

Of course, if this is true, it should be recognized that those believers who go by the Bible alone have only a part of the truth and therefore risk perdition!

There are many ways one can refute this erroneous teaching. One would be the way the uninspired fathers of the centuries following Christ refused oral tradition. Justin Martyr, who died in AD 165, wrote, "We have not one single command from Christ which would obligate us to believe the so-called traditions . . . I am careful to weigh every matter in the light of Scripture."<sup>11</sup> Many such quotations could be given but time and space force us to limit our refutation to the *contradictions* found between the Bible and the alleged second source of truth. If the Bible and Tradition both transmit truth—they would never contradict one another. They would always run on parallel lines. But on *baptism*, for example, they are at variance.

The Scriptures say, in fact, that the candidate for baptism must hear, believe, and repent before being baptized.

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<sup>9</sup>A Boulenger. *La Dottrina Cattolica*, Parte 1 (Torino, Italy: Societa Editrice Internazionale, 1957, p. 2).

<sup>10</sup>Bartmann, 35–57.

<sup>11</sup>Justin Martyr. "Dialogue with Trypho" in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. J. P. Minge (Paris: 1844–55, p. 95).



John 6:45 says, “They shall all be taught of God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.”

Mark 16:16 says, “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.”

Luke 13:3 says, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

This hearing, believing, and repenting requires a person of a certain age and for the objective person clearly excludes infants. On the other hand, Catholic theologians themselves tell us that Catholic *oral tradition obligated* the Roman Catholics to baptize infants who are incapable of “*believing*” and “*repenting*.” In fact, Bartmann lists it as a dogma that “Children, who do not yet have the use of reason, can be and must be baptized.”<sup>12</sup>

So, the Roman Catholic theologian is really bound to one source of “truth” (Scripture) which tells him not to baptize infants, and to another source of “truth”—for him (that is, *oral tradition*), which forces him to baptize infants! Obviously truth never contradicts itself and, therefore, just as obviously, one of the two must be excluded as a source of truth. I implore all men to keep the Scripture and exclude the so-called “*oral tradition*.”

But isn’t it clear, given the complexity of Roman Catholic doctrine, that one must be knowledgeable in order to be effective in reaching Catholics?

*Be Faithful.* A third suggestion is that, whatever it costs, I must be faithful to Christ and his word. He is the “Head” of the church (Eph. 1:22). He has “all authority” (Matt. 28:18). I “belong” to him (Acts 27:23). I, therefore, have the obligation of being “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10). Indeed, above all, I must be faithful.

## MESSAGES FOR TODAY

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- **Manifest a loving, non-defensive attitude.**
- **Accept the responsibility to study the doctrines you believe to be erroneous.**
- **Understand that your first responsibility is to Christ.**

*Manifest a loving, non-defensive attitude.* As already noticed the Athenians even called Paul an “idle babbler” (Acts 17:18). As David Roper says, that “literally means ‘seed picker’ referring to worthless birds who survived by picking up seeds here and there.”<sup>13</sup> And yet Paul begins his speech to them without words of self-defense. In fact, as noticed, he even begins with a compliment: you are “very religious” (Acts 17:22). Let’s learn from Paul.

*Accept the responsibility to study the doctrines you believe to be erroneous.* It isn’t sufficient to blurt out to your Catholic neighbor that

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<sup>12</sup>Bartmann, 1082.

<sup>13</sup>David Roper, *Acts*, Truth for Today Commentary Vol. 2. (Searcy, AR: Resource Pub., 2005, 105).

“everybody knows that Peter was not the first pope!” That is certainly not true. Otherwise we would not have nearly one billion Roman Catholics in the world. In order to reach (convert) your neighbor you must carefully study Roman Catholic doctrines as well as the relevant Scriptures. We must accept this responsibility.

*We must accept that our first responsibility is to Christ.* We as a church belong to him. He “purchased” us “with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). We must “listen to Him” (Matt. 17:3) in all things. Even when many in our congregation want to justify a young man of the congregation confessing his sins to a Catholic priest so he can marry a Catholic girl, my responsibility is to be faithful and oppose such. When even some Christians in the congregation want to tell a falsehood to the government about the meeting house you are buying because “everybody does it,” your job is to reject such and be faithful to him. Indeed, above all, we must remember that our first responsibility is to him.

## A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

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Some give up on reaching Catholics before they start because “They are so set in their ways!” But the truth is that some can be reached. In early 2012, the author knocked the door of an eighty-year-old Catholic man who lived near Henderson, Tennessee. He reluctantly accepted to study the Bible. After about 15 weeks of study, he obeyed the gospel. It was a struggle for him but the Word did its work and he is now a New Testament Christian. There is, indeed, hope of reaching some Catholics.

### Discussion Questions

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1. Have you learned to discuss religious differences with others in a loving way that does not ring of self-defense?
2. Do you possess and have you studied materials published by Catholics in which they defend their doctrines?
3. Are you committed to defending Christ’s doctrine even if everyone around you is compromising it?
4. Is there a Roman Catholic that you know who might be willing to study the Bible with you?

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## Lesson 14 - Reaching the...

### MORMON

*Gregory Alan Tidwell*

*But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*

**Galatians 1:8**

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The Mormon Church has a worldwide membership of over ten million and is currently doubling every ten years. Almost five million Mormons live in the United States. Their official name is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but they do not mind the term “Mormon” and use it themselves.

Mormonism is a cult, and much useful information can be found in standard works on Cultism. Please remember, however, that the term “cult” is offensive. Mormons are not like the mind-control cults such as the People’s Temple, nor are they like the defrauding cults such as Scientology.

### **The Heart of the Message**

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To understand Mormonism, an overview of their origins and history is required. Joseph Smith founded the movement in the 1820s. Living in upstate New York, Smith claims to have received visions from heaven providing him with golden plates containing the lost *Book of Mormon*.

The backstory, from the Mormon perspective, is that before Christ ascended into heaven, he came to America and worked among the American Indians. While there were godly Indians who obeyed the gospel, there were also ungodly tribes at war with them. As the ungodly tribes began to extinguish the godly Indians, Mormon, the last leader of the Christian tribes composed the golden plates and hid them in a cave in Upstate New York.

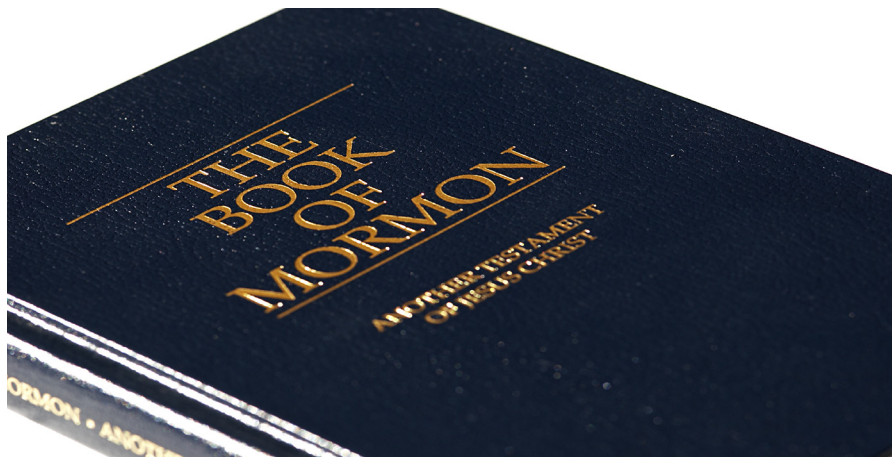
Of course, the existence of these plates is dubious. (Mormons claim after Joseph Smith translated them miraculously into English the plates ascended into heaven.) And, the Indian tribes and events described in the Book of Mormon are unknown to the fields of History and Archeology.

The Book of Mormon marked the beginning of latter-day revelations that have continued through the ongoing revelations claimed by Mormon leaders.

Facing persecution in New York, Smith and his followers went to the frontier. Moving first to Kirtland, Ohio, they planned to establish a permanent community in Jackson County, Missouri. Opposition forced the Mormons to move to Illinois. There they bought the small town of Commerce and

renamed it Nauvoo. After a period of peace, conflicts again arose, and Joseph Smith was killed by an anti-Mormon mob.

Brigham Young took the majority of the Mormons to the Utah Territory. (A small group stayed behind in Illinois, becoming the first of the Mormon splinter sects.) In 1890 the church president ended polygamy (which had been instituted by Smith in Nauvoo), as a condition of Utah entering the Union as a state.



Mormon doctrine comes from two sources: the living prophet (president of the church) and the Standard Works. The Standard works include the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and two nineteenth century works – *The Pearl of Great Price* and *Doctrine and Covenants*. The living prophet is the final authority for the church. He can overturn any prior teaching of a former prophet, even Joseph Smith.

Because of the varied sources of authority, ambiguity can arise. The Book of Mormon, for example, teaches that the Father, Son, and Spirit are one God. Other Mormon writings teach they are three distinct deities.

The Mormons teach there is a continuum between humanity and deity. God was once a man, and if we are faithful Mormons, we can be exalted into a deified state. They teach that there exist many gods, but that we only deal with our Creator. They teach that the Creator came to earth as Adam, with one of his celestial wives, Eve, to found the human race.

Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt, a principal associate of both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, wrote:

We were begotten by our Father in Heaven; the person of our Father in Heaven was begotten on a previously heavenly world by his Father; and again, He was begotten by a still more ancient Father; and so on, from generation to generation, from one heavenly world to another still

more ancient, until our minds are wearied and lost in the multiplicity of generations and successive worlds, and as a last resort, we wonder in our minds, how far back the genealogy extends, and how the first world was formed, and the first father was begotten. (*The Seer*, 132)

While there are many other peculiar teachings of the Mormon church, the teaching regarding God is enough to say no Mormon, who is consistent with this teaching can make the Good Confession and be baptized into Christ. They must stop being a Mormon to become a Christian.

## Messages for Today

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- **Have the right attitude.**
- **Remember the difference of authority.**
- **Give space to God.**

*First, have the right attitude.* Do not engage any prospect with an augmentative and combative attitude. There is a time and place for debate and verbal warfare, but doing personal work is not that place. Be gentle in correcting Mormon error. Rather than harshly contradicting, provide the reason for your beliefs in a kind, but firm manner.

Always remember to respect the dignity of each person. Part of this respect is never viewing a person as a means to an end. Our passion must never be for filling a quota, but for the good of the individuals involved. Also, respecting individuals, we must never use deception. Don't invite someone to your house for supper, but once they are there launch into a Bible study. Be open and honest in every aspect of your work for the Lord.

*Second, remember the difference of authority.* Mormons believe in the supremacy of The Book of Mormon over the Bible, and they believe in ongoing revelations proclaimed by the president of their church. We believe the Bible is the complete word of God. Working with a Mormon, in this way, is very similar to working with a Catholic or a Pentecostal.

This is why converting a Mormon is often a long process. There is much more to work through, and the issue of authority touches everything.

*Third, give space to God.* As Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." (1 Corinthians 3:6). [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Be faithful in planting and watering. Share the gospel as often and as effectively as possible. But, always remember the work of conversion is done by God calling a soul home to himself.

Especially given the complications a Mormon must work through to become a Christian. The best approach is to continue planting the good seed of the word of God and continue lovingly watering the seed through encouragement and kindness. It may take a great deal of time, but the longer a Mormon wrestles with the Bible, the less likely he or she will remain a Mormon.

## A Message of Hope for You

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As we consider making converts from Mormonism to the Lord's church, let's look at a few foundational thoughts.

*First, you cannot share what you don't have.* One reason for the lack of passion in soul-winning is many of us did not have a clear conversion experience. "I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see." are just empty words for too many. It is only out of a profound realization of our own salvation that we will have a passion for sharing salvation with others.

*Second, evangelistic efforts must reflect a mindset of gentleness and of earnestness.* While we must be clear that we care whether or not someone obeys the gospel, we must never permit our zeal to spill over into strident bullying.

*Third, you need to prepare yourself to share the gospel.* You should be prepared by knowing the way of salvation with such clarity you would be able to headline it in a 30-second "elevator speech," or unpack it more fully in a more detailed study. You should, also, prepare yourself by understanding the lost you are trying to reach with the gospel.

"...He who wins souls is wise," Proverbs 11:30 tells us, and the church is to be in the soul-winning business. Too much of our time and energy is poured into social distractions and not into our core business of saving souls.

On the Day of Judgment, every other measure of our time on earth will pale into insignificance beside the question: "Are we going to heaven, and who are we bringing with us?"

### Discussion Questions

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1. Why can someone not be saved and be a Mormon?
2. Why is the Mormon church growing quickly?
3. How is the Mormon religion similar to New Testament Christianity, how does it differ?
4. How is studying with a Mormon similar and different from studying with a Catholic or a Protestant?
5. Why would someone become a Mormon?

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## Lesson 15 - Reaching the ...

# JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

*Jeremiah Tatum*

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*

**1 John 4:1**

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An examination of the Jehovah's Witnesses' organization is a long trek through false doctrine that has undergone developments and changes for over one hundred forty years. Their denial of Jesus and his divine nature affects their entire belief system. Their teachings concerning his atoning work, the plan of salvation, and the kingdom are other issues that remain a far cry from the bible. We have a responsibility to engage with them in a loving way that includes a process by which open biblical discussions can lead to transformation in both them and us. The only way we can do properly approach them is through a knowledge of who they are and what they believe.

## The Heart of the Message

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A Brief History of the Watchtower:

Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) was identified as a Congregationalist when his rise to prominence came.<sup>1</sup> From early influences of Catechism and Presbyterianism, he struggled with the doctrines of predestination and eternal punishment. While a teenager, he was introduced to Second Adventism by Jonas Wendell.<sup>2</sup> He soon organized a Bible class that met regularly from 1870-1875. This group assembled in Pittsburgh, and established some core beliefs that differed from those of Adventism. From their shared belief that Christ's return would be a spiritual or invisible one, Russell authored his first pamphlet, *The Object and Manner of the Lord's Return*.

This production led to contact with other groups with similar views. More publications would follow. The majority of early followers were disenchanted Adventists. The culmination of their union soon resulted in the production of *The Herald of the Morning*, a magazine first published by N. H. Barbour that became the sounding board of the movement. Russell and Barbour then co-authored a book entitled *Three Worlds or Plan of Redemption* (1877).

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<sup>1</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1963, 223).

<sup>2</sup>Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Divine Purpose* (Brooklyn, 1959).



Therein they proposed that Christ's invisible second coming had already begun in 1874.

After Russell and Barbour parted ways over doctrinal differences, Russell continued with *Zion's Watch Tower* and *Herald of Christ's Presence* (1879). Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society (1881) was created and overseen by Russell. By this time, congregations in seven states received their spiritual guidance from the Society's publications. By December of 1884 The Watchtower Society was incorporated.

Macmillan notes their purpose according to Article II of their charter: "The dissemination of Bible truths in various languages by means of the publications of tracts, pamphlets, papers and other religious documents, and by the use of all other lawful means..."<sup>3</sup>

Today this purpose remains, judging by the sheer numbers of their published materials. According to their official website, [www.watchtower.org](http://www.watchtower.org), adherents number over six million and come from 236 countries.

Russell served as president of the society until his death in 1916. He considered his written works "...so indispensable for the proper understanding of the Scriptures that without them one would simply remain in spiritual darkness."<sup>4</sup> Such claims of inspiration led to lawsuits from denominationalists who took exception. In one particular case, Russell perjured himself in court. Having claimed knowledge of the Greek text, he couldn't produce the alphabet when asked. He later admitted he was not familiar with the Greek language.<sup>5</sup>

Joseph Franklin (Judge) Rutherford became the next president of the society in 1917. A special judge of the Fourteenth Judicial District of Missouri, Rutherford joined the society in 1907 and became its legal counselor. He was a more prolific writer than Russell. His presidency stressed the circulation of Watchtower literature, while the former concentrated on righteous works and bible study. The signature change in purpose caused many of the original bible students to leave the movement. At the time of his death in 1942, Rutherford had centered the society in Brooklyn. It had become largely a theocracy, where congregational leaders received their appointment and instructions from the governing body.<sup>6</sup>

Succeeding Rutherford as president was Nathan Homer Knorr in 1942. His work marked the progression of the "ministry school." Doctrinal books were published that served as authoritative guides within the society. *Let*

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<sup>3</sup>Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Qualified to Be Ministers* (Brooklyn, 1955, 303).

<sup>4</sup>Hoekema, 227.

<sup>5</sup>Walter R. Martin and Norman H. Klann, *Jehovah of the Watch Tower*. Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Zondervan, 1959, 20).

<sup>6</sup>*Qualified*, 320.

*God be True* (1952) provided their doctrinal summary. *Make Sure of All Things* (1953) served as a reference book for door-to-door studies. *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* (1958) offered illustrations and easier reading, a format beneficial to the average reader.

Knorr's biggest achievement, according to the Society, was the oversight of the project which led to the completion of *The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (1950). This translation later included the Hebrew text, and has undergone additions and revisions over time. In the meantime, the translation's committee members have remained anonymous. It is highly subjective, not at all scholarly, and presents the Scriptures in light of the movement itself. The Society considers exclusively the New World Translation and their other publications as authoritative.

## Messages for Today

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- **We must understand their teaching on the deity of Christ.**
- **We must attend their meetings and set up time for study.**
- **We must engage in open bible study and build a friendship on common grounds.**

*We must understand their teaching on the deity of Jesus.* According to the Watchtower, the true scriptures speak of God's Son, the Word, as a god. He is a mighty god, but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah. They believe he was the first and direct creation of Jehovah God, that he indeed had a beginning and is thus not eternal. They believe Jehovah is greater in power, and that because Jesus is the Son of God he cannot himself be God.

In the mind of Jehovah's Witnesses Jesus is a created being, inferior to Jehovah. Therefore he cannot be worshiped. He is only viewed as an angel, graduated to savior, who achieved his claim of deity in the process of man's redemption. There is also the denial of the bodily resurrection, as well as the claim of an earthly kingdom to be established at the Advent. The continuation of their ever changing doctrine is sealed by their view of the Holy Spirit. They believe he is moving through their own prophets and teachers. This gives them the perceived authority to produce new teachings and publications and to guide their faithful adherents through the all-seeing eye of the Watchtower.

*We must attend their meetings and set up time for study.* The best way to converse on an even level is to attend and observe their Tuesday and Thursday meetings at the local chapter of the Kingdom Hall. This can be done without actual participation in their worship or classes. Upon attendance they will be very cordial and a bible study would be very easy to set up. They will want to study with you.

If you get involved in a study, accept their offer of publications but only as a means of reference to their doctrines. Compare them with biblical teaching on your own time. Make sure to commit them to an open bible study that

is separate from any outside writings. Talk with them about the deity of Jesus, the nature of the church, the plan of salvation, and the end times. Examine what the bible says on these issues and compare notes with what their publications teach.



*We must engage in open Bible study and build a friendship on common grounds.* It is very difficult to convert a Jehovah's Witness to New Testament Christianity. They feel a deep allegiance to their background, and their fellowship is so tight that people are usually shunned who do not continue with them. If they do leave their belief they also leave their people, and so they are often disenchanted with any form of organized religion for a while. The best thing to do is continue to study and maintain a social friendship with them and encourage them as much as possible to continue to study nothing but the bible.

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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*Remember we are commanded by God to study for ourselves and also give an answer to everyone for what we believe* (1 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15). People who are of the Jehovah's Witness faith will give us a great opportunity to grow and learn through study. In the honest open study of God's word we will be doing our part in the work of evangelism. This process will result in a growth of our own personal faith, will confirm our beliefs, and will give individuals who are outside of Christ the opportunity to be saved.

## Discussion Questions

1. When did the Watchtower Society begin? Who was its founder?
2. What do Jehovah's Witnesses believe about the deity of Jesus?
3. How can we engage in a study with people who follow the teachings of the Watchtower?
4. What struggles can we expect to face as we study the Bible with them?
5. How can we maintain friendships with Jehovah's Witnesses remain outside of Christ?

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## Lesson 16 - What Do I Say?

# “IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST THE ONLY ONES GOING TO HEAVEN?”

*David L. Roach*

*Praising God and having favor with all the people; and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

**Acts 2:47**

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Questions like the one before us are usually the result of what someone has been told about the church of Christ. One source, among many, is the internet. It is filled with misinformation and misrepresentations about the church. Unless these erroneous views are corrected the questioner will never have a clear view of the biblical picture of the church.

*This question is not unique to churches of Christ.* Anyone who believes that there is a heaven to go to (whether they are Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, etc.) must consider the question of “who is going.” There are three choices; “everybody”, “nobody”, or “somebody” is going to heaven. Since it is not “everybody” or “nobody” it must be “somebody.” Does the Bible reveal who the “somebody” is? I believe it does.

*What is “the church of Christ”?* The answer to our question depends on what is meant by the words “church of Christ.” The questioner most likely has been taught and believes that “the church of Christ” is simply “another denomination among many denominations.” As we will see this is not what the Bible means by the term “church of Christ.”

## The Heart of the Message

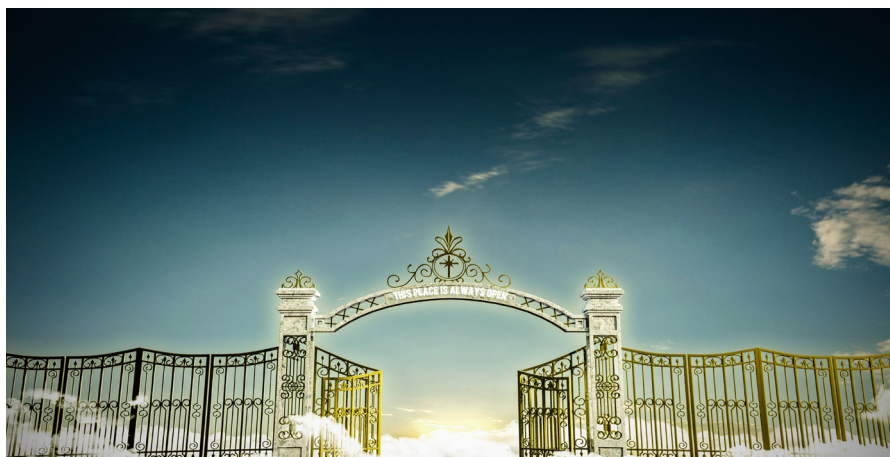
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In order to show what the Bible is referring to by the words “church of Christ” (e.g. Paul uses the phrase in the plural in Romans 16:16) let us begin with something that is perhaps less confusing in the mind of the questioner and that is the subject of *being saved* or *salvation*. As we do so please consider the question presented at the end of each point.

*“The saved are going to heaven.”* Jesus declared that those who *die in their sins* cannot go to heaven (John 8:21-24). [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Each of us will either die “in our sins” or we will die *saved from* our sins. (Matt.1:21). Clearly the saved are those whose sins have been forgiven. Therefore the question of, “What must I do to be saved?” is of extreme importance. It will be addressed later in our study. *Are the saved the only ones going to heaven?*

*The saved are the church.* The saved (those forgiven of sins) form that group/body of people known as *the church*. Jesus is the Savior of that body/church (Eph. 5:23). Each and every time a person is saved from their sins they are “added” by the Lord to this group called “the church” (Acts 2:38, 47). Those who are not saved are not part of the church for the Lord has not added them to it. *Is the church, which is the saved, the only ones going to heaven?*

*The church belongs to Christ.* He purchased it with his own blood (Acts 20:28). He is its builder (Matt. 16:18); its Savior (Eph. 5:23) and its head (Col. 1:18). It belongs to him (Eph. 1:22-23). To say “the church belongs to Christ” is the same as saying “the saved belong to Christ.” *Is the church that belongs to Christ, which is the saved, the only ones going to heaven?*



*The saved are the church of God.* To speak of “the saved” is to speak of “the church of God.” Paul used the term in Acts 20:28 and 1 Corinthians 1:2. This is the church that belongs to Christ as shown in the previous point. There is no difference between the two. *Is the church of God, which is the saved, the only ones going to heaven?*

What answers did you give to the previous four questions? Please revisit them if necessary.

*The saved are the church of Christ.* What has been presented thus far about “the saved,” “the church” and “the church of God” is also true about “the church of Christ.” To say that the church constitutes the saved and the saved are the church of God is the same thing as saying “the saved are the church of Christ.” *Is the church of Christ, which is the saved, the only ones going to heaven?* My friend, how can the answer to this question be any different than the previous four?

As you can see; salvation and the church are inseparable. To speak of the *saved* or *the church* or *the church of God* or *the church of Christ* is to speak of the same thing not four different things.

This is “the church of Christ” to which we are referring; nothing more nothing less. This is the picture of the church that the Bible presents and must be our focus when answering the main question. If this is the case then the answer to that question is a resounding “yes.”

## Messages for Today

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- **The saved are the church of Christ.**
- **The question “What must I do to be saved?” is the pivotal question.**
- **The “seed principle” never fails.**

*The saved are the church of Christ.* According to the biblical picture presented in the study above if one is saved then they are a member of the church of Christ. This very church is referred to by Paul as “the church of God” (1 Cor. 1:2) and “the churches of Christ” (Rom.16:16). Neither is a denominational term. Denominations did not exist in the first century. If necessary the reader is encouraged to reexamine the points above.

*The question “What must I do to be saved?” is the pivotal question.* Since the church is the saved and the saved go to heaven; the question “What must I do to be saved?” is crucial. The correct answer to this question and your response to it will decide whether you are saved from your sins or remain lost in them. This point cannot be overemphasized.

*The “seed principle” never fails.* Paul expressed the “seed principle” in Galatians 6:7. It operates spiritually as well as physically. The seed of the kingdom is the word of God; the gospel (Luke 8:11-15; Matt. 13:19). The preaching of this “gospel seed” was commissioned by Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:46f). This commission began in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2). When that message was taught and that “seed” was planted in the hearts of people it resulted in about 3,000 being saved that day (Acts 2:38, 41). Those *saved* were *the church* for the Lord added them to it (Acts 2:41, 47).

The same “seed” that was planted on Pentecost was also planted throughout Acts. For example the preaching of Philip in Samaria (Acts 8) and the preaching of Paul and Silas (Acts 16) was the *same* “seed” planted by Peter in Acts 2. They were not different seed. If this same seed is planted today in the hearts of people it will yield the same results. The “seed principle” demands it. The result will be persons being saved and added to the church by the Lord like on Pentecost. This “seed principle” will never fail.

If this “seed” is not planted then salvation cannot occur. If salvation cannot occur then the church cannot exist or even come into being since the church is the saved. It matters not what name one attaches to a particular group of people. It cannot be the church of the Bible.



Teachings like “faith alone” or the “sinner’s prayer” were *not* the “gospel seed” planted on Pentecost and therefore cannot result in salvation and consequently the church. They are “denominational seeds” that result in denominations; not the church (of Christ) we read about in the Bible.

## A Message of Hope for You

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You can be part of the church; the church of Christ; we have been studying about in this lesson. It is not man who adds people to Christ’s church; you do not “join” the church like a social club and you are not “voted” into it. It is Christ who does the adding to his church and he adds those who are *saved* (Acts 2:47).

If you will do what they did at the beginning on Pentecost (remember the “seed principle”?) you will become what they became. They were *saved* by believing/trusting in Jesus; turning from their sins in repentance and being baptized/immersed *for the forgiveness of sins* (Acts 2:38). When they were saved they became part of Christ’s church, the church of Christ (Acts 2:47). May each of us do likewise.

### Discussion Questions

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1. The question before us is not unique to the churches of Christ. Who else must answer the question, “Who is going to heaven”?
2. What are several things that show that the church belongs to Christ?
3. According to the Bible do the terms “the saved,” “the church,” “the church of God,” and “the church of Christ” refer to the same thing or different things?
4. What is the “seed principle” and how did it work on Pentecost? Read Galatians 6:7 and Acts 2.
5. How can a person today become part of the church we’ve been studying about in this lesson?

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## Lesson 17 - What Do I Say?

# “WHY DON’T YOU BELIEVE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?”

*Jason Jackson*

*For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

**Romans 15:4**

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We must affirm without hesitation that we believe in the inspiration of the Old Testament scriptures and that they continue to speak with power and authority today. But the Old Testament does not constitute religious authority today for the incorporation of mechanical instruments of music into Christian worship, the religious burning of incense, a limited priesthood, sabbath keeping, or dietary restrictions—to name a few matters. We must make a distinction between accurate and inaccurate handling of the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

### **The Heart of the Message**

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*The Old Testament is inspired of God.* Paul says to Timothy, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). [All scripture references are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.] The sacred writings known by Timothy since childhood were “scripture,” inspired by God (cf. vv. 14-15).

The Lord himself referred to an Old Testament text as “the word of God” and “scripture” (John 10:34-35; cf. Ps. 82:6). In the New Testament, Old Testament passages are called “scripture” fifty times. Additionally, kindred expressions like “to write” or “it is written” are found ninety-two times, and the New Testament also contains thirty-three fulfillment statements relative to Old Testament texts. When the Old Testament spoke, God spoke (cf. Matt. 19:4-5; Acts 13:33-35; Heb. 1:5-7).

*The Old Testament contains commands that are no longer binding on men today.* Some commands in the Old Testament were unique, like God’s call of Abraham and the test to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 12:1-9; 22:2). Not even people living at that time were obligated to leave their native lands or offer their sons as burnt offerings.

Other Old Testament commands were given to the nation of Israel as part of the law of Moses. The Lord Jesus Christ announced the end of Mosaic

restrictions on food (Mark 7:19), the imminent inclusion of the Gentiles (Matt. 8:5-13; cf. Acts 15:13-18), the establishment of the new covenant in his blood (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20), and commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8).

With Christ's first coming, the old covenant was fulfilled, nailed to the cross, torn down, and replaced. The covenant made with Israel has been fulfilled (Matt. 5:17-18; Gal. 3:23-29). Even the Old Testament announced the end of the covenant with Israel (Jer. 31:31-34). And the Old Testament scriptures themselves revealed the law's limitations in that it showed that God reckons righteousness by faith apart from the works of the law (Rom. 3:21-4:25; cf. Rom. 1:16-17).



The New Testament letters teach that the old covenant ended with Christ's death. Paul states in Colossians 2:14 that "the bond written in ordinances that was against us" (ASV) was nailed to the cross of Christ. Accordingly, Paul concludes: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day: which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Christ's" (vv. 16-17 [ASV]). Paul also taught the end of the law of Moses in Ephesians 2:11-22 by affirming that the dividing wall has been removed by the blood of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ, not works of the law, brings salvation and the reason to rejoice in hope (Rom. 3:27-31; 5:1-11; 6:23; 7:4; 8:1-3).

In Hebrews, we read that there has been a change of law and priesthood (7:11-22) and that there is a new covenant (8:7-13) established by the blood of Christ (9:15). With all this in view, we must be very careful in appealing to the Old Testament to justify some religious belief or practice.

*The Old Testament contains many things that teach, warn, and encourage individuals living today.* The old covenant ended, but the Old Testament is not obsolete. The spiritual principles imbedded in the Old Testament are not moral suggestions. While we will never find ourselves fleeing from Sodom, we must "remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). Although we were not among those who wandered in the wilderness, we must learn that disobedience will exclude us from "the rest" that remains (Heb. 4:1-13).

The Israelites' experiences were written "for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11). Indeed, we also are warned through the condemnation of rebellious angels and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 5-7). These lessons are as necessary today as ever.

Hebrews chapter eleven appeals to sixteen people from the Old Testament (and other general references) to teach Christians about faith. Even though we will never build an ark or live in Pharaoh's household, we *must* live by faith, believing that God is and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6). Although the covenant that God made with Israel is no longer in effect, the Old Testament scriptures still speak with authority and power.

## Messages for Today

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- **We must understand that the old covenant has been replaced by the new.**
- **We must discern the power and authority of the Old Testament today.**
- **We must appreciate the immense spiritual values of the Old Testament.**

*We must understand that the old covenant has been replaced by the new.* The New Testament teaches how to become a Christian, how to worship God today, and how the church should be organized and function. We do not reject the use of mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship merely because "that's in the Old Testament," but because the New Testament authorizes congregational singing of spiritual songs in Christian worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). We do not observe the sabbath because it was never given to all people and was a part of the law of Moses, which was changed (Heb. 7:12) and replaced (8:7, 13; 9:15).

*We must discern the power and authority of the Old Testament today.* For example, Paul referred to truths revealed in the Old Testament to support his teaching in Romans (4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2). "What does the scripture say?" Paul asked, appealing to scriptural authority.

Although we will never offer a lamb, burn incense in the temple, wait for Samuel, or transport the ark of the covenant, we must take heed to the powerful and authoritative truths that worship must be by faith, worship must be authorized, worship must be by the command of the Lord, and we must respect the silence of the Scriptures (Gen. 4:4; Heb. 11:4; Lev. 10:1-3; 1 Sam. 13:13; 1 Chron. 15:2, 13). When accurately handled, the Old Testament continues to speak as only scripture can.

*We must appreciate the immense values of the Old Testament.* The Old Testament is of immense *historical* value in revealing the origin of the universe, mankind, and the history of redemption. The Old Testament is also priceless because of its *evidential* value, which is woven by God into the

fabric of the sacred scriptures by means of predictive prophecy. The Old Testament has great *spiritual* value in revealing God as our Creator, Judge, and Redeemer. The nature and attributes of God—especially the holiness of God—dominate the Old Testament landscape. Christians need to read and study the Old Testament. Preachers need to preach from the books of law, history, poetry and prophecy.

## A Message of Hope for You

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Scripture is as perfect as the God who gave it. God designed scripture, in all its wonderful and amazing variety, to transform our minds so that we may be living sacrifices (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). While the new covenant has replaced the old, it is not as though the twenty-seven books of the New Testament render the thirty-nine of the Old Testament obsolete; rather, we have sixty-six inspired books from God. Sixty-six books to help restore the soul, make wise the simple, make the heart rejoice, and enlighten the eyes (Ps. 19:7-11). Truly, nothing is as valuable; nothing is sweeter (v. 10).

Each book, according to its divinely prescribed role, was written for our spiritual education. By precept and example, we learn to “never give up” and “you can do it.” Indeed, through the perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures, God gives us hope (Rom. 15:4; cf. v. 13). The Bible—the whole Bible—is exactly what your heart and soul needs, because God made it that way. Handled accurately, the Old Testament will help lead you and sustain you on your journey to everlasting life in the glorious presence of God.

### Discussion Questions

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1. In what ways did Jesus reveal the fulfillment and end of the old covenant?
2. Where in the book of Hebrews can we read about the end of the old covenant?
3. How does the Lord’s statement in Luke 17:32 help us see that Old Testament commands to individuals in their historical contexts still provide powerful and authoritative lessons today?
4. Read 1 Chronicles 15:1-13. What principle should we learn about the silence of the scriptures?
5. What are the five most encouraging Old Testament passages for you?

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## Lesson 18 - What Do I Say?

### “WHY DON’T YOU BELIEVE IN GRACE?”

*Dale Babinsky*

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together; and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

**Ephesians 2:4-8**

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Many years ago as my wife and I were celebrating our first anniversary, we found ourselves in the Smoky Mountains at the Sugarland Stables for a relaxing horseback ride through the forest. Amongst the other riders that day was a young couple from Georgia. Following the ride, I approached them with a Star Bible, which included God’s plan of salvation. The man said that they appreciated my heart in giving that to them, but that they had been saved by grace, and not by works. At the time, I was very young in my Christianity and did not know what else to say. Perhaps you have had a similar experience where you have told someone about the necessity of baptism only to have them say that we are not saved by works and baptism is a work. In the conversation they may ask you, “Why does your church not believe in grace?” If this question were posed to you, how would you answer?

### **The Heart of the Message**

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*Christians do believe in God’s grace.* Without the grace of God, none of us could be saved. Indeed the entirety of the Old Testament makes this fact abundantly clear. No one was able to keep the law without sinning, with the exception of Jesus Christ. The scriptures clearly state, “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Paul would go on to say that all of us are sinners, who fall short of the goal of perfection (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, the old law was our schoolmaster. Mankind had to see the desperateness of their own efforts at salvation in order to recognize their need for a Savior in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:24-25).

That grace, that unmerited favor, was bestowed upon us by God through the labor of Jesus Christ, so that each of us might be cleansed from our sins.

“Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28a). God’s grace is an unmerited favor in that there is nothing that we could possibly do to make ourselves worthy of it. There is no work we can do, no benevolence we can share, no words we can speak, which will earn our salvation. Our salvation is not like our paychecks. When we work our forty plus hours, at the end of the week, our employer owes us our paycheck. We have earned that. However, there is nothing that we can do to earn or merit our salvation in the same way. If we could, then Christ’s sacrifice was in vain!

Only by God giving us grace can we stand before him justified. If he gave us what we deserved, if he gave us what we earned, we would receive death (Rom. 6:23). If, on the other hand, we are a child of his, we do not receive what we earned, but we get salvation instead. Far be it for any of us to say that we don’t believe in grace!

*There are works, and then there are works.* Frequently, when someone asks us the question regarding our belief, or lack thereof, in grace, it is in response to a discussion of baptism. Tell someone who believes in salvation by faith only that they need to believe, repent, and confess, and they will generally agree with you. Mention baptism to them, and the conversation quickly shifts to works based salvation. After all, Paul clearly states, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). However, in the book of James it is also written that faith without works is dead, and we are not justified by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26).

How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction? It is important to note just how each of these writers is using the word ‘works’ within the context of their message. Paul is speaking of works of merit, which do not provide our salvation. James is speaking of works of obedience, which are required for us to inherit God’s grace. Since faith without works is dead, can someone be saved by a dead faith? God offers his grace as a gift, but we still need to reach out and take hold of that gift in order for it to be beneficial to us. Jesus said that if we love Him, we will keep his commandments (John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 John 5:2-3). Keeping his commandments requires work!

## **Messages for Today**

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- **We need to tell others of God’s saving grace.**
- **We need to be busy in our work of obedience.**
- **We need to help others to not have a dead faith.**

*We need to tell others of God’s saving grace.* Because God has saved us by sending his Son to die on the cross for our sins, we need to tell others about this wonderful opportunity. If we were to walk into the local big box hardware store and see the brand new Cub Cadet zero turn mower on sale for \$50, we would probably call everyone we know and tell them to get down there and get one of those. Do we realize that our salvation from our sins



is so much more precious than a lawn mower (Matt. 16:26)? We have been given the deal of a lifetime in that God was willing to give us something that we surely did not deserve in saving us from our sins by his grace. Let us not shy away from telling others, with enthusiasm, about “so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him” (Heb. 2:3b).



*We need to be busy in our work of obedience.* God has clearly stated what it is that we need to do in order to obey Him. We need to hear his Word (Rom. 10:17). We need to believe in his promises (Heb. 11:6). We need to confess our allegiance to Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10). We need to repent of what we have done that is not in accordance with his will (Luke 13:3, 5). We need to be baptized for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16). Many times when we speak of obedience to God, we stop after these five needs. However, there is so much more to this. Baptism is not the end of our obedience, it is only the beginning! We need to remain faithful until death (Rev. 2:10). Being faithful is keeping all of the other commandments of Jesus. Loving our neighbors as ourselves. Loving our enemies. Being willing to forgive others so we can be forgiven. All of this is included in our works of obedience as well.

*We need to help others to not have a dead faith.* If we have not works, our faith is dead. If we are not busy in our works of obedience, we will never be able to convince others to be obedient and busy. Therefore, the first step in helping others is to be a good example ourselves (Matt. 5:13-16). The old “do as I say, not as I do” adage does not work, as our actions speak volumes more about us than our words ever will. Once we have swept our own porch, so to speak, we can help motivate others to have an active faith. Indeed, we are commanded to do so. “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the

habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24-25, NASB).

## A Message of Hope for You

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*Because Christ died for the sins of the world, you can have God’s ever saving grace.* Jesus has paid the debt for our sins that we could never pay ourselves. He has made grace abound, so that no matter what sins we might be guilty of, we can have the hope of eternal salvation if we will turn from our ways and seek to be his child. That is the deal of a lifetime! Let us not shy away from proclaiming that message to others. Let us continue to be actively involved in bringing the Gospel message to all, for the Gospel is the power of salvation (Rom. 1:16).

### Discussion Questions

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1. What is the grace of God?
2. How can I get into God’s grace?
3. Is there anything that I must do to stay in God’s grace?
4. What is a faith that works?
5. Am I doing all I can to help show others God’s ever saving grace?

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## Lesson 19 - What Do I Say?

### “WHY DON’T YOU HAVE MUSIC?”

*Jody Apple*

*Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

**John 4:21-24**

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Biblical names of people and places often convey significant thoughts about the individuals and locales they designate. When we hear the names Abraham and Sarah, we know that God gave them new names in anticipation of the day when they would be the father and mother of many nations (Gen. 17:5, 16). When we read about Bethel, the house of God, we are reminded of the altars erected there and the sacrifices offered by the Patriarchs as they worshiped God (Gen. 12:8; 31:13; 35:1, 3, et.al.).

When Jesus traveled through Samaria in route to Galilee, he met a woman from Samaria at a place called Jacob’s well in the city of Sychar, near Shechem. Their encounter takes on greater meaning when we realize the historical significance of this place.

Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, lived here after he left his father-in-law, Laban (Gen. 34). It was here that Dinah, Jacob’s only daughter, was defiled by Schechem (Gen. 34), and here that Jacob’s sons slaughtered the people of the land (Gen. 34). Later, Jacob sent his own son, Joseph, from this place to check on his brethren (Gen. 37). Joshua, Moses’ successor, spoke to the children of Israel for the last time from this place (Josh. 24). Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, threatened to increase the nation’s taxes here, eventually splitting the kingdom (1 Kings 23). And here Jeroboam instituted a system of idolatrous worship that led to Israel’s exile (1 Kings 12).

As important as Sychar/Shechem was in the history of God’s people, Jesus gave it new importance when he taught a Samaritan woman about worship here.

### **The Heart of The Message**

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In the course of their discussion Jesus asked the Samaritan woman to call her husband. She replied that she had no husband. Jesus knew she told the

truth. She had been married five times before and the person she was with was not her husband (John 4:15-18).

The woman, amazed at Jesus' knowledge of her personal life, thought that Jesus was a prophet. Then, for some reason not immediately apparent in the context, she said this: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship" (John 4:19-20). [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.] Her assessment of the differences between *how* and *where* Samaritans and Jews worshiped was much deeper than this.



The tensions between Jews and Samaritans had a long history. During the exile the Samaritans worshiped in ways contrary to the Mosaic law (2 Kings 17:29). After the exile two Samaritans, Sanballat and Tobiah, offered to help the Jews rebuild the temple, but their offer was rejected (Neh. 4-6). The Samaritans instead erected their own temple on Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessing during Moses' day (Deut. 11:29; 27:11-12), and the location of Joshua's covenant blessing (Josh. 24:1-28; 8:33). From the Samaritan perspective Mount Gerizim was the center of worship, but their temple was destroyed a century or so before the New Testament era (circa 130 BC) by the Jews, thus intensifying the strain between the two peoples.

Jesus' response to the woman's observation about worship was designed to show why the Samaritans were wrong, why the Jews were right, but more importantly, explain how God's will about worship was about to change.

*Jesus made predictions. The time was coming when the place of worship would be immaterial.* As long as worship was directed toward the Heavenly Father it would not matter if it occurred "on this mountain" or "in Jerusalem" (John 4:22). At some future point—apparently near—true worshipers would be united (John 4:23).

*Jesus stated obvious principles. Some worship was right and some worship was wrong.* The Samaritan woman knew there were differences between the worship of her ancestors and the Jews. Jesus, though, did not just acknowledge the differences, he inimitably stated that one was *wrong* and that the other was *right*. Concerning Samaritan worship he said: “You worship what you do not know” (John 4:22). Concerning Jewish worship he stated: “We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

The worship that God desired was to be done in spirit and truth (John 4:23) and it was to be in harmony with what God sought (John 4:23). The principle reason why, restated from the prior verse, because “God is Spirit ... those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Those who do so are identified as “true worshipers” (John 4:23).

*Jesus specified practice. The “true worshipers” (John 4:23) are described that way because they:* Made God the proper object of worship in the way that God desires; worshiped God in spirit; worshiped God in truth. Those who were not “true worshipers,” in this case, those like the Samaritans who “worship what you (they) do not know,” failed because they did not make God the proper object of worship in the way that God prescribes (seeks); did not worship God in spirit; and did not worship God in truth.

## Messages For Today

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To those who ask “why don’t you have music,” meaning “why don’t you have music like everybody else,” we reply: What Jesus told the Samaritan woman about worship *still* applies today.

- **The *principles* of worship have not changed.**
- **The *people* who worship have not changed.**
- **The *practices* of worship have not changed.**
- **The *person* of God has not changed.**

*The principles of worship have not changed.* God is still “Spirit.” And God still seeks people to worship him in spirit and in truth.

*The people who worship have not changed.* There are some *who do not know* what they worship. They choose not to worship God in the way God desires. They do not worship God in spirit, and they do not worship God in truth. Yet, there are some *who do know* what they worship, designated by Christ as true worshipers. They continue to worship God in the way that God desires, in spirit and in truth.

*The practices of worship have not changed.* God still desires a specific type of worship (John 4:23). What God seeks will always be a matter of necessity, not option (John 4:20), and what God seeks will always be a matter of knowledge, not intuition (John 4:22).

*The person of God has not changed.* What God desires in worship relates to God’s person, God’s essential nature. That nature translates into key

*propositions* and *practices* based on his character. As sovereign, God created man in his image, to do his will (Gen. 1:25ff). He wants man to worship and give him the glory he deserves (1 Chron. 16:29; Ps. 96:9). God has the right to tell us how he wants to be worshiped (John 4:20-24). He created man with the ability to choose worship that violates his will (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7), but God also has the right to reject worship that does not meet his directives (Exod. 15:9; 1 Kings 12-13; Col. 2:22-23).

Two key New Testament passages describe the worship that God seeks. In Ephesians 5:18-21 God wants us to “be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” When we worship God in speech, in song and in heart, we fulfill God’s desires. In Colossians 3:16 God wants us to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” When God’s word dwells within us, we teach and encourage each other through our heartfelt singing of grace before God. When we do this, we worship God in spirit and in truth as God desires.

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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Though the Samaritan woman’s understanding of worship initially differed from Christ’s, when she heard the truth that Jesus taught, she not only believed Christ, she embraced the truth he taught and told others about both.

Jesus taught her who God was (a Spirit), what God sought (true worship), and how we, by following his will (worshiping in spirit and truth) could be true worshipers. These same truths apply to us today just as they applied to those who live in the first century.



## Discussion Questions

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1. Does God have the right to be worshiped according to his desire?
2. Does God have the right to reject worship that goes against his wishes?
3. Is our worship of God a right, something that we do as our prerogative? Or is it a divinely bestowed privilege, something that must be done according to God's will?
4. In one of Jesus's parables, the host at a wedding feast expelled a man for coming without the appropriate garment (Matt. 22:1-14). What does this parable and principle teach us about God's expectations?
5. When we worship God, are we doing what we want or what God wants?

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## Lesson 20 - What Do I Say?

# “WHY DO YOU TAKE THE LORD’S SUPPER EVERY WEEK?”

*Rob L. Whitacre*

*For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.*

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

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I don’t know of a more fundamental part of Christian worship than the Lord’s Supper. It is the stated reason why early Christians came together on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). When our friends visit the churches of Christ on the Lord’s day, and observe how we partake of the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week, they naturally ask, “Why?” I want to propose that if there is no set time or day for partaking of the Lord’s Supper, than once in a life time would be sufficient. “And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:24). [All scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] Would you not have eaten, communed, memorialized, and remembered the death of our Lord? If there is no set time or frequency, and one takes the Lord’s Supper one time, than the mandate has been obeyed and the communion observed.

## The Heart of the Message

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*The Foreshadowing of the Feast.* Of all the feasts God has ordained, He always gave a certain time and frequency for their observance. The Passover (Lev. 23:5) was always observed on the fourteenth day of the first month. The feast of the Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6) was always observed on the fifteenth day of the same month. Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-16) was always observed 50 days after the seventh Sabbath from the Passover. The Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24) was always observed on the first day of the seventh month. The Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27) was always observed on the tenth day of the seventh month. The Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34) was always observed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. In relation to the Lord’s Supper, let me ask, has God changed? Are we to assume that the

Lord's Supper is different than all the other feasts God has instituted? Paul said the Old Testament was a "shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Col. 2:17).

Moreover the tabernacle was a type of the church with each piece of furniture representing part of New Testament worship. For example, the golden candlesticks typified the word of God (Ps. 119:105). The altar of incense typified the prayers of the Saints (Rev. 5:8-9). The table of showbread typified the Lord's Supper. It is worthy to note that the priests were charged to change the table of showbread every Sabbath (Lev. 24:5-9)! Is this not symbolic of a weekly observance?

*The First Feasts* (Mark 14:25). "Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God "until that day..." Jesus taught his disciples that the supper would be given at a specific time; the time of the kingdom. It was not going to be a casual observance. The Kingdom came into existence in Acts 2, the Day of Pentecost (Mark 9:1, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:1-4). It was then that the early church partook of this Supper for the first time (Acts 2:42). The Lord's Supper is just like any other feast God has ever instituted with a specific time and observance.

*The Frequency of the Feast.* Paul said, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Jesus said we should take it, "until he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). The Lord's supper was not a cultural consideration. It was intended to continue through every generation until Jesus comes. Since Jesus has not come, than we should continue taking it.

Luke records, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). "*Continued steadfastly*" is in the imperfect tense indicating that this was a customary and habitual practice by the apostolic church. Furthermore, the American Standard version, more accurately reflecting the Greek, reads, "in the breaking of bread." This was not a casual meal eaten from house to house (Acts 2:44), but a specific act of worship. If once in a lifetime is sufficient, how could Christians continue "steadfastly" in the breaking of Bread?

"When ye come together therefore into one place, it is not possible to eat the Lord's Supper" (ASV). Due to the conduct of the Corinthians they were not in a position to observe the Lord's Supper as they ought! When did they come together? Paul records, "every week..." (1 Cor. 16:1-2). "Kata" is the Greek word just before the English word "*week*." It means *every*. It is translated as every in Acts 14:23 (every church) and Titus 1:5 (every city). In fact, there are several versions that contain the word "every" in front of week in 1 Corinthians 16:2. There is not doubt the church came together every first day of the week.

Moreover Paul said, “As oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me...” (1 Cor.11:25). It was to be done “oft” in order to never forget Jesus. If it was just observed once in a lifetime or once a year, would that be considered “oft?”



*The Focus of the Feast* (Acts 20:7). Luke recorded, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” The word, “when” in the text is important because it indicates an occurrence that was expected and understood.

You can sing, pray, and preach on Monday through Saturday, but only on Sunday are we authorized to partake of the Lord’s Supper. It was and still should be an expected observance and the primary reason why the Saints assemble on the Lord’s Day.

To illustrate the importance of this observance let’s say an announcement was made that the local community would assemble in the park to unveil a historical announcement. When everyone arrived they could see a veil covering a new memorial. A man began the ceremony by leading the crowd in patriotic songs, a speech was made about it, and a prayer was offered. During the entire assembly everyone could not wait to observe it. Now suppose the crowd was dismissed and told to return home without the official unveiling. People would ask, “Are we not going to observe this memorial?” All over this world, on each first day of the week, there are religious people congregating to sing, pray, preach, and give, but they never unveil the monument!

It was not on the first day of “a” week but the first day of “*the*” week. If the early disciples took it on the first Sunday of the month don’t you think the text would say it? It was not taken on the last day of the month, the first and third Sunday of the month, the first Sunday of the quarter, or the first

Easter of the year. When Moses penned, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exod. 20:8), how often do you think Israel observed it? You don’t have to say every Sabbath because every week has a Sabbath. The Bible does not have to say the first day of every week because every week has a first day! When you were hired and told, “pay day is on Friday” how often did you expect to be paid? When the government states social security checks will come on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, do people not expect to receive it every month? The “every” of these two examples is understood without further explanation or clarification.

Finally, the same language is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:2 regarding our Lord’s Day offering. “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” Isn’t interesting that no one misunderstands this verse by teaching one may give quarterly, or monthly? Every religious groups passes the plate *every* Sunday!

The Fathers of other “Faiths.” It is worthy to note that even some of the early reformers, who are recognized and often quoted by our religious neighbors understood the necessity of a weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper. John Calvin (founder of Presbyterianism) said, “And that custom that enjoins believers to communicate only once a year is unquestionably an invention of the devil whoever were the persons by whom it was introduced...in every week the table of the Lord ought to have been spread before each person.” John Wesley (Methodist) said, “I also advised the elders to have minister the Supper of the Lord on every Lord’s Day.” Adam Clarke (Methodist and respected commentator) wrote, “This text indicates the custom practice was the observance of the Lord’s Supper on every Lord’s Day.” The esteemed commentator Albert Barnes wrote, “It is probably that the apostles and early Christians celebrated the Lord Supper on every Lord’s Day.”

## Messages For Today

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- **First, such frequency of observance will destroy the significance of the event and become common place.**
- **Second, since the Passover was observed annually, why not the Lord’s Supper?**
- **Third, why did the Lord not legislate this issue when he instituted it?**

Before we conclude, let’s briefly answer some of the arguments made by our religious friends who deny the necessity of the Lord’s Day observance. *First, such frequency of observance will destroy the significance of the event and become common place.* I wonder if the Old Testament command to change the showbread each week destroyed its significance. What about frequent prayers and Bible reading? Would this make them less important? What if a husband said to his wife, “honey, I am only going to tell you that

I love you once a quarter so it will mean so much more?” Does the more we do something lessen its significance?

*Second, since the Passover was observed annually, why not the Lord's Supper?* The Lord's Supper is a totally new commemoration memorializing the death of our Lord.

*Third, why did the Lord not legislate this issue when he instituted it?* How do you know he did not legislate it? There are a number of things he said that are not recorded. In Acts 20:35 Luke states that Christ said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” yet we have no record of this statement during his earthly ministry. John said the apostles were guided into all things that Jesus taught, and they taught us to observe it each Lord's Day (John 14:26; Acts 20:7).

## **A Message of Hope For You**

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When and where did Christians change the set time of the Lord's Supper? The earliest record comes from the Council of Agatha in 506 AD. “None should be esteemed good Christians who did not communicate at least three times each year; at Christmas, Easter, and Lent Sunday.” Today, many do not correctly observe this most important memorial as the Bible teaches. Some take away from it, while others add to it. Any alteration from this set day is lawlessness and all lawlessness is sin (1 John 3:4). Our answer to questions about the frequency of the Lord Supper lie within the simplicity of the biblical text. Any honest student of scripture can know the truth.

### **Discussion Questions**

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1. If there is no set time for the Lord's Supper, would once in a lifetime be sufficient? Why?
2. Has God always specified the time of observance for his feasts? Give examples.
3. How does 1 Corinthians 16:2 help one understand Acts 20:7?
4. How did the Old Testament observance of the Sabbath help us understand the frequency of the New Testament observance of the Lord's Supper?
5. Name three common objections to the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper and discuss.

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## Lesson 21 - What Do I Say?

# “WHY DON’T YOU HAVE WOMEN PREACHERS?”

*Derrick Coble*

*Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.*

**1 Timothy 2:11-15**

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Since the 1960’s women have made much progress in leadership positions within the United States. Studies show that women make up 5% of CEOs in the nation’s Fortune 500 companies, about 25% of state legislators are women, and women have made strides in positions which were once male dominated (i.e. lawyers, judges, and physicians). From the secular world, the drive for women leaders has now infiltrated the religious world. In fact, among denominational churches the number of “female pastors” doubled from 1999 to 2009 with 58% of these women affiliated with Baptists, the United Church of Christ, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians. Even among some of our own brethren, women are serving as preachers. This has created a notable difference among those who contend for change and those who are striving to “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3). [All scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] So, the stand which the New Testament church takes regarding this issue comes into question. Confusion exists, and many people ask, “Why can’t women use their talents and serve as a preacher?” The Scriptures give two clear reasons: silence and subjection.

## The Heart of the Message

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*Women cannot preach because they must be silent.* In the context of public worship, the apostle Paul wrote, “Let the woman learn in silence... But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:11-12). This statement is important because it was given in a letter which had the overriding purpose of teaching about our conduct within the Lord’s church (1 Tim. 3:14-15). Males (*andras*) were instructed to take the lead in praying in public worship, while females (*gune*) were instructed to dress and act with reverence in a godly way (1 Tim. 2:8-10). Reverence for God and his Word concerning male leadership would be



demonstrated by women who learned silently within the worship assembly. This silence is literally, “quietness” defined by Thayer as, “descriptive of the life of one who stays at home doing his own work, and does not officiously meddle with the affairs of others.” In other words, women in the assembly are forbidden to interfere with the arrangement that God has given in using men to proclaim his word publicly. A lesson should be gained from the women in Corinth who were interfering with the public messages of the prophets by asking questions. Paul commanded, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak . . . for it is a shame for women to speak in the church” (1 Cor. 14:34-35).



*Women cannot preach because they must be in subjection.* Concerning this, Paul said, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man” (1 Tim. 2:11-12a). God does not allow a woman to take the lead in worship exercising “dominion” (ASV) over a man. The gospel is to be preached with authority (Tit. 2:15) and she is restricted from this. The concept of subjection in worship is sometimes seen in a negative light as “cultural” and “archaic.” Nonetheless, Paul bases his reasoning for this restriction on two timeless principles reaching back to creation: “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:13-14). This is the divine mandate for all churches in every age.

## Messages for Today

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- **We must respect God’s role for women in the church.**
- **We must remember that women have important talents they can use.**
- **We must realize that women are needful in the Lord’s work.**



*We must respect God's role for women in the church.* Every person is under an obligation to submit to the authority of God (Col. 3:17). We have no liberty to “go beyond the things which are written” (1 Cor. 4:6; ASV). History records that, “Jewish women would never have attempted ‘teaching’ in the synagogue, where they occupied a place separate from the men.” Thus, they respected their role under God’s authority. The same respect must be maintained in the church today as “the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man” (1 Cor. 11:3).

*We must remember that women have important talents they can use.* Just because women cannot preach, does not mean that they cannot use other talents in the church. In fact, “each hath received a gift” to be used as a good steward of God’s grace (1 Pet. 4:10; ASV). Paul outlined several of these talents in his letter to the Romans (12:6-8). Women might excel in serving and building others up like Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2). Some might use a teaching talent to instruct children or other women like Philip’s daughters (Acts 21:9). Other women are especially good at exhorting like Priscilla (Acts 18:26), showing mercy like Dorcas (Acts 9:36), or even giving like the women who supported Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). There is something that each Christian woman can do to glorify God in an acceptable way (Matt. 5:16).

*We must realize that women are needful in the Lord's work.* What would the church do without faithful Christian women who humbly serve God? Great women of God embrace the fact that he created them in a supportive position—not a dominating one (1 Cor. 11:9; 1 Tim. 2:15). As husbands love and lead in a Christ-like way (Eph. 5:25), wives are to show reverence for their husbands (Eph. 5:33). Older women are needful in teaching the younger women (Tit. 2:3-4). All women are necessary to the Lord’s cause in being keepers at home and using their domestic skills for good (Tit. 2:5; 1 Tim. 5:14). Timothy had two godly women in his life who were needful to the Lord’s work—his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). They taught him the Scriptures at an early age helping him to develop a sincere faith (2 Tim. 3:15). Concerning the Lord’s body, we must remember, “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him . . . those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary” (1 Cor. 12:17-18, 22).

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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*Christian women are very precious to God.* When a woman is mindful of a meek and quiet spirit in life and worship, God takes notice (1 Pet. 3:2-5). Her silence in worship is not absolute for God wants men and women to sing (Eph. 5:19), greet one another (Rom. 16:16), confess Christ (Rom. 10:10), train children in the assembly, and gain more understanding in a Bible class. This cannot be done in complete silence.

Finally, the demand of subjection is not based on bias against women or a male chauvinist attitude which hinders talented ladies from preaching. We certainly recognize that all are “one” in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28); that is, in equal standing before God concerning salvation no matter what race or gender. There were dedicated women who followed our Lord even to his death (Matt. 27:55) as well as others who labored intently in the gospel (Phil. 4:3). However, Jesus never chose any women to serve as an apostle, nor did He send any of them out to preach. It is simply a matter of God-given limitations for women in the work of the church. No doubt, the value of godly women is indispensable to the Lord’s cause and we are thankful for each of them.

### Discussion Questions

1. Examine how the term, “silence” (*siago*) is used 1 Corinthians 14:28, 30, 34. How does it show that women do not have to maintain absolute silence?
2. What is the argument that Paul makes as to why women cannot teach men in a public way?
3. Name some ways that women can use their talents for the Lord.
4. Name some women who were notable in the Lord’s work.

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## Lesson 22 - What Do I Say?

# “WHAT ABOUT THE THIEF ON THE CROSS?”

*Jeremy Weekley*

*And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*

*And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

**Luke 23:42-43**

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The above passage has often been cited by those who wish to justify that salvation can be received without obeying the call to be baptized for the remission of sins. Can a person be saved without being baptized for the remission of sins? Wayne Jackson’s article, “What About the Thief on the Cross?” is an excellent resource for those studying with individuals who ascribe to this line of reasoning. Wayne observes that there are things we do know and things we don’t know about the thief on the cross. As we examine this question we might ask, “Did the thief steal salvation?”

### The Heart of the Message

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*We don't know much about the thief.* As we begin a study of this passage it is often assumed that we know a lot about this person we call the thief. The fact of the matter is that we don’t know much about this individual. While we do know from scripture that Jesus is crucified among two other individuals we do not know much about either of these men. Even the term “thief” is limiting considering the far-reaching possibilities of this man’s crimes. The term can be used as a description for revolutionaries. Elsewhere, this same term is used to describe Barabbas (John 18:40). The term might be better translated as “criminal” to include a variety of crimes. This man confesses that he is guilty of his crimes (Luke 23:41).

*We cannot know if this man had ever been baptized with John’s baptism or the baptism administered by Jesus’s disciples.* It is interesting to note that the two individuals crucified with Jesus seem to know much about him. Matthew points out that the two robbers were joining in with the chief priests, scribes, and elders as they mocked Jesus about his statements concerning destroying and rebuilding the temple, saving others, and rescuing himself (Matt. 27:44). This could simply be a reactionary response or it could be based on a more intimate knowledge of who Jesus claimed to be while on earth. Luke records that one of the criminals asked the question, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” (Luke 23:39). [All scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.] The other repentant criminal makes

the request to be included in Jesus's kingdom. How would either of these individuals know these facts unless there was some knowledge of Jesus and his ministry? If there was knowledge about Jesus and his ministry, then it could also be possible that the repentant criminal had, at one time, been counted among those who followed John the Baptist's teachings even to the point of being baptized, or even being among those being baptized by the disciples of Jesus. Remember that John's baptism was a baptism unto repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4) and was valid until the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 19:1-7). It stands to reason that the baptism administered by the disciples of Jesus would have the same effect (John 4:1). The speculation can be far reaching in many directions. The fact is that no one can say that with absolute certainty that the repentant criminal on the cross was not baptized at some point in his life. The scriptures neither confirm nor deny this fact.



*We do know the criminal lived under a different law.* This man lived during a time when the Law of Moses was still binding. Galatians 4:4 reminds us that Jesus was born under the Law and in Hebrews 9:15-17 we are reminded that a new covenant (testament) cannot take effect until a death occurs. This man died before Christ gave the great commission commanding baptism. Jesus's mission was not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). It stands to reason that if Jesus is subject to the Law while on earth that this man would have been as well. Therefore, this criminal was subject to the laws of the old covenant. Since the old law is no longer in effect (Heb. 8:13) it would be impossible for a person living today to be saved by the means the repentant criminal was on the day of his crucifixion.

*We do know that Jesus had the authority to forgive sins while He was on earth.* In Mark 2 Jesus heals a paralytic man. What is interesting in the story is what Jesus says to the man when he heals him. Jesus tells the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven," (Mark 2:5). When Jesus is questioned by those

present about his authority to forgive sins Jesus replies, “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (Mark 2:10). Jesus replies by stating that he does, in fact, have authority on earth to forgive sins. Notice that it is the Christ who makes this statement, not a mere human. I cannot take away my own sins, or the sins of anyone else; only Jesus has the ability to do this. When Jesus told the repentant criminal on the cross that he would be with him in Paradise that day, Jesus had the authority to make that statement and fulfill the promise contained in that statement.

*We do know that Jesus promised this man that he would be in Paradise with him.* Jesus had been given authority on earth by the Father. Jesus never lies. Therefore, when Jesus told this man that he would be with him in Paradise we can trust that, given Jesus’s authority and his nature, this man ended up in Paradise that day. Again, we remember that this man is living during a very special time when Jesus is on earth. Jesus is no longer on the earth, “having passed through the heavens,” (Heb 4:14). Jesus has promised that those who are faithful to his commandments, which have been delivered by the Holy Spirit in the written word (2 Pet 1:20-21), will also receive a great reward, but not in the same way as this man because we now live under a new covenant.

*We do know that we are living under a new covenant today with new commands in regards to salvation.* Jesus’s statements in both Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19-20 clearly present baptism as being necessary for obedience if a person wants to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, passages such as Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21, etc. clearly teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. We must also recognize that belief (Jn 3:16), repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-10), confession of Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), and faithfulness (Rev. 2:10) are also necessary for the salvation of our souls. God has given us his word so that we might know what is necessary for salvation (John 20:30-31).

## **Messages for Today**

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- **Change of heart is possible even for the worst of us.**
- **Jesus has the authority and power to save men from their sins.**
- **The Bible clearly communicates what man must do to receive salvation.**

*Change of heart is possible even for the worst of us.* Paul uses his own previous life of persecuting the church to remind us that there is no one who is without hope (1 Tim 1:12-17). The repentant criminal is a great illustration of just how far reaching the grace of God is for those who will turn to Him.

*Jesus has the authority and power to save men from their sins.* Jesus had the authority while on earth to forgive sins. He has that power now in the heavenly realm, but we must remember that He no longer lives on this earth. He has left his word for us to come to know how we may have a relationship with God.

*The Bible clearly communicates what man must do to receive salvation.* While this repentant thief was promised Paradise we must remember that this occurs during the time when Jesus is on earth. The Holy Spirit has guided holy men to record for us what is necessary now to enter into the covenant relationship with God through his Son. Our God does not like confusion and he does not seek to create confusion, especially in regards to the redemption of mankind.

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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While this is a worthwhile study, we should never forget the true picture that both Matthew and Luke want us to see in the account of these two men on the cross with Jesus. This account is not included to cause doctrinal controversy, but rather to give us insight into the gracious act of Jesus's sacrifice. Luke is inspired to include this scene of the cross to remind us that Christ has truly died for all. No matter how far we have strayed, or from what "far country" we have come to know about Christ, we can receive the forgiveness of our sins through Christ and become children of God.

### **Discussion Questions**

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1. What are some facts we know about the men who were crucified with Jesus?
2. What does the New Testament say is necessary for salvation?
3. What lessons can be learned from this account about God's gracious offering of salvation to mankind?

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## Lesson 23 - What Do I Say?

# “WHAT IF MY MOTHER WASN’T BAPTIZED?”

*Tim Hall*

*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

**Colossians 4:5-6**

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People we evangelize may note that their parents were of a different religious persuasion. They may ask, “Do you believe my mother will be lost since she was not baptized the way you teach baptism?” How we respond is vitally important. We must speak the truth of the gospel, but we must speak it in a way that avoids *unnecessarily* shutting down the study.

### **The Heart Of The Message**

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Truth does not change simply because it is inconvenient or offensive to some. When discussing the gospel, Jude exhorts us “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). [All scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] The gospel is “the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16). Would we dilute a vaccine that protects against disease? Neither should we dilute the message of the gospel to make it more acceptable.

Christ’s plan for saving us from our sins involves baptism. He stated it clearly in Mark 16:16: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (see also Matt. 28:19-20). Peter, by inspiration, declared the importance of baptism on the day of Pentecost: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Many other New Testament passages emphasize that forgiveness comes *after* one is buried with Christ in baptism, not *before* (see Acts 22:16, Rom. 6:3,4, and Col. 2:11-13).

It is amazing that many reject clear commands given by the Lord when it comes to salvation! Jesus said “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness” (John 12:46). Without Jesus we have no information at all about how to escape God’s wrath. Yet many honest (and a few not-so-honest) church-goers have chosen darkness by rejecting baptism as a necessary requirement of salvation. “The one who



rejects Me and does not receive My words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (John 12:48).

How we want others to become Christians! Do we help them, though, by telling them what they wish to hear? Those who take that approach fall under the warning given by Paul in Galatians 1:9: “As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.” “Watering down” the gospel plan of salvation to make it more acceptable will result in both the teacher and the student being lost.

Yet even as we determine to speak the truth, we must also speak it in love (Eph. 4:15). We can always seek to do as Colossians 4:6 exhorts, to “let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” We’ll never please all the people we try to lead to Christ, but we can always please God by remaining true to his counsel. When we speak the gospel we must resolve to speak “as one who speaks oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11).<sup>1</sup>

## Messages For Today

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- **Some will be offended by the gospel.**
- **The message of the gospel must never be changed.**
- **Keep the focus on Christ, and not on people.**
- **Say no more than a disciple is authorized to say.**

*Some will be offended by the gospel.* The words of the Jesus were often offensive to his listeners. When He spoke of the need to eat his flesh and to drink his blood, for example, some followers responded, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (John 6:60). Many of them “turned back and no longer walked with Him” (John 6:66). Such rejection never caused Jesus to change his message.

Neither did the rejection of his message surprise Jesus. He commented on how the truth would separate even family members: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother ...” (Matt. 10:34-35). Jesus wasn’t seeking to create division, but He knew it would happen when people would not receive his teachings.

We must not be discouraged by people who are offended by the truth, and give up our attempts to evangelize. (We must, however, do all we can to make sure we are not the reason they are offended!).

*The message of the gospel must never be changed.* Our world is fixated on “tolerance.” We are told we must never view others as wrong. In keeping with the world’s mandate many adapt the gospel to more comfortably

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<sup>1</sup>The New American Standard Version makes Peter’s point clear for us: “Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God ...”

accommodate what the world wants to hear. “*Does the teaching of everlasting punishment make you uneasy? Then we’ll deny God ever conceived of such a place. Does the Bible’s definition of marriage limit your lifestyle? Then we’ll change those definitions.*” Examples of watered-down doctrines are too numerous to list here.



The Bible concludes with stern warnings for those who think of altering Bible teachings: “If anyone adds to [the words of this book], God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city” (Rev. 22:18-19).

Be forewarned: Many people have been taught that baptism is not essential for forgiveness of sins. Some of these will be offended when you teach what Jesus taught on the subject. But his message must never be changed.

*Keep the focus on Christ, and not on people.* After Jesus gave Peter a glimpse of his less-than-desirable future, Peter turned to “the disciple whom Jesus loved” to ask about his fate. Jesus replied: “... what is that to you? You follow Me!” (John 21:20-22). Christianity is designed to be a personal relationship. Each of us will be judged for what we have done – not by what someone else may have done (see 1 Pet. 1:17).

This is the key point when dealing with the issue of loved ones’ beliefs. Jesus stated the principle clearly in Matthew 10:37: “Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me ...” Only Jesus can save. The decisions of others should not distract us from the commands of the Savior.

*Say no more than a disciple is authorized to say.* When pressed by a student to give an assessment of a loved one’s eternal fate, we are wise to refrain. We must say no less than the Lord has told us to say, but neither should we say more. It is not ours to decide the eternal destiny of others.

Abraham spoke words that apply to situations like the one we're discussing: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:25). "And I heard from the altar saying, 'Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are Your judgments'" (Rev. 16:7).

## A Message of Hope for You

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What a thrilling thought it is that God should use us in declaring salvation to others! Like Isaiah, we should respond to the Great Commission with enthusiasm: "Here am I! Send me" (Isa. 6:8).

Like Isaiah, we will also find that people will not always receive the message of God's grace: "Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isa. 53:1).

Christians are blessed to be bearers of the gospel. We can also be relieved to know that judgment is not our responsibility. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others" (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

### Discussion Questions

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1. Why must special care be used with questions about one's parent(s) or loved ones?
2. Is refraining to speculate about a person's eternal fate the same as diluting the gospel?
3. What are some ways you might respond to a person's concern about their parents' destiny?
4. Does God's grace override the necessity of being baptized? Why, or why not?

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## Lesson 24 - What Do I Say?

# “WHAT IF SOMEBODY DIES ON THE WAY TO BE BAPTIZED?”

*Steve Higginbotham*

*“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. 'Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'”*

**Acts 2:37-38**

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“If baptism is necessary to be saved, then what happens to the person who was on the way to the creek to be baptized when a limb breaks and falls on the person, killing him? Are you going to tell me that this person will be lost in his sins?” This is a common question that most of us have heard before. Sometimes, it is asked out of a genuine desire to know the truth, and sometimes it’s asked pejoratively.

Whether the motive for asking this question is pure or sinister, matters not. This is a fair question and deserving of a biblical answer. As we endeavor to answer this question, we must keep in mind that opinions should hold no weight in the conclusion we reach. Rather, we should only be satisfied with “what does the Scripture say? (Rom. 4:3) [All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.]

## The Heart of the Message

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*The proverbial dilemma.* Through the years, variations of this story have been told. Some have the person coming to faith in Jesus while lying in a hospital bed, too sick to be baptized. Others have the person hunkered down in a foxhole with no water in sight. But the common thread in all these stories is this, “What happens to a person who comes to faith in Jesus but dies before he is baptized?”

This dilemma is used to argue against the teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:26; 1 Pet. 3:21 etc.). According to the dilemma, if baptism is necessary for salvation, then it is thought that this scenario creates a problem with the character of God. Would a good God condemn a man to an eternity in hell who believed in Jesus and intended to be baptized, but who had the misfortune of dying just before he was able to

fulfill this command? If such a belief is inconsistent with the character of God, then it is concluded that baptism must not be essential for salvation.

*What proves too much, proves nothing at all.* Those who propose this proverbial “falling tree limb” dilemma, whether they realize it or not, are forced to answer the same heart-tugging dilemma, just at another point in the story.

For instance, what if a man with a receptive, seeking heart is sitting under a tree reading his Bible, and just as this man is about to be convicted that Jesus is the Christ, a tree limb breaks and falls on his head, killing him. Ut, oh! Same dilemma, just at a different point in the story.

What if I were to then say, “You mean to tell me that a good God would condemn a man to an eternity in Hell, who almost believed in Jesus, but who had the misfortune of dying just before he was able to place his faith in Jesus?

If the emotional dilemma of this scenario proves that baptism is not essential for salvation, then the same dilemma would also prove that faith in Jesus is not essential for salvation.

## **Messages for Today**

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- **Emotions do not establish truth.**
- **We must not go beyond what is written.**
- **God will do what is right.**
- **Not all questions deserve an immediate, direct answer.**

*Emotions do not establish truth.* Feelings are deceptive (Prov. 14:12; Prov. 28:26; Jer. 17:9). However, the word of God is absolute and is always right (Ps. 33:4; John 17:17). If we are to answer this question, or any question, we must consult God’s word, not our feelings. Never should we be satisfied with “I think,” “I believe,” or “I feel” for an authoritative answer on any spiritual matter. The only satisfactory rationale for our beliefs is, “What does the Scripture say?” (Rom. 4:3).

*We must not go beyond what is written* (1 Cor. 4:6). If the Bible affirms that faith in Jesus is necessary to be saved (and it does John 8:24), then it is necessary. It doesn’t matter what heart-tugging scenario I can imagine; my scenario cannot change this truth. Likewise, if the Bible affirms that baptism is necessary to be saved (and it does Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, etc.), then it is necessary. It doesn’t matter what heart-tugging scenario I can imagine; my scenario cannot change this truth.

Speculation about what God may or may not do in any given situation is not helpful, but only divisive. If any man speaks, let him speak the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). One might wonder if God would take motives into consideration, or if he would exercise some sort of divine prerogative and



make an exception in such cases, but all that would amount to is speculation. What we must be content with is a “thus saith the Lord!”

*God will do right!* The Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk could not understand how God could be righteous and use the Chaldeans to punish Judah. But Habakkuk was wise enough to know that while he might not be able to understand God’s activity, he did not doubt God’s holiness and justice (Hab. 1:12-13).



Likewise, Abraham affirmed this same truth when God brought judgment upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham asked the rhetorical question, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25).

Mankind finds himself in a precarious and unenviable position when he attempts to critique or pass judgment on the activity of God. God’s word is right, settled in Heaven (Ps. 119:89), even when it hurts our feelings and disagrees with our way of thinking.

*Not all questions deserve an immediate, direct answer.* Jesus even told his hand-selected apostles that he had many things to say to them, but they were not able to bear them now (John 16:12). On another occasion, people with ulterior motives asked Jesus questions and knowing their motives, he refused to answer them (Matt. 21:23-27). There were matters Paul wanted to say to the Corinthians, but due to their spiritual immaturity, they were unable to receive them at the time (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

Likewise, careful consideration of the setting and the person asking this question should come to bear in how directly we answer this question.

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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*Do not delay in your obedience to the Lord!* Your salvation is a matter of urgency! Unexpected tragedies can and do happen. If you know the Lord

commands you to be baptized for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38), then with all urgency, do it! Don't be so casual that you would schedule a time to be baptized when your mother or father, husband or wife can be present to watch. If you truly understood what is at stake, you would act immediately, without delay. One who comprehends what it means to be in sin, wouldn't wait for a more convenient time, but would, at the "same hour of the night," be baptized (Acts 16:33).

In light of Hebrews 10:26-31, I fear for those who have had opportunity to obey the Lord, but who didn't feel it was urgent enough to act upon, and then die unprepared to meet God. Such a *laissez faire* attitude will invite the judgment of God. For one who treats the blood of Jesus as a common thing, tramples his sacrifice under foot, and insults the spirit of God's grace, there remains only a fearful expectation of judgment.

However, the flip-side of that is how thankful we should be that God loves us (John 3:16), wants us to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9), and has revealed his scheme of redemption to us (Eph. 3:3-7), and it's a matter of our choosing as to whether we enjoy heaven throughout all eternity. I hope you will choose wisely.

While we may teach baptism is necessary for salvation, have we ever acted in ways suggesting otherwise?

### Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever heard this question asked before? If so, what are some of the answers that you have heard offered.
2. If this scenario presents a dilemma regarding the necessity of baptism, then how would it also present a dilemma regarding the necessity of faith?
3. Do feelings and emotions have a place in Christianity?
4. Are we able to pass judgment upon God's personal righteousness, and if so, dare we?

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## Lesson 25 - Staying Saved

### TRUST GOD

*Van H. Vansandt Sr.*

*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee:  
because he trusteth thee.*

**Isaiah 26:3**

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The song says, “I trust in God no matter come what may, for life eternal is in his hands. He holds the key that opens up the way that will lead me to the promised land.” It is a beautiful tune which has an even more beautiful sentiment. The song *Each Step I Take*, is something that should be so much more than a mere sentiment. Rather, for the Christian, it should be the very manner of life. Yet it seems trusting God does not seem to be a high priority for mankind as a whole, nor does it come so easy for the Christian.

When I was a boy, I remember vividly the men of the congregation praying for God’s forgiveness for sin and for the many shortcomings. Not till I was older did I realize how many shortcomings a young Christian man could have. In finding this to be true among many, not just one, I have also, over the years found the struggle of truly trusting God to be one of man’s most frequent shortcomings. For this lesson's purpose we will look at why men do not trust God, some of God’s proofs to give man reason for trusting God, and lastly ways individuals can show and produce greater trust in God.

### The Heart of the Message

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First then, let us look at some things which may cause man to not trust God. In Jeremiah 7, the prophet receives the word of the Lord to proclaim to the people. In this message God offers a repair in their separated condition with him, if they will amend their ways. The list of struggles, sins, and improprieties is extensive, but one of the claims God had against them is they had trusted in lying words. “Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord are these” (Jer. 7:4). [All scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.] “Behold ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit” (Jer. 7:8).

The concern should be that God’s children of today do not have the same struggles as God’s children of the Old Testament did. Yet it seems that Christians, may in fact, have the same struggle trusting lying words today. Some are guilty of listening to the lying words of those of their own generation, who know not the purpose and plan of God. Still others have the malady of the children of Israel when they wanted a king. Some wish to be like the nations around them, listening to the lying words of the false

teachers, whose words make them feel good about themselves. In so doing they obtain a sense of security which is not based on God's word, rather on the words of men, the lying words of men. If these are the ways of some of God's people today, then surely still today, "Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit" (Jer. 7:8).



Another cause of a lack of trust in God is simply fear. It is understandable the world has fears. The world is without God, does not know his love, mercy, and kindness toward mankind. The world fears because they are without hope. But New Testament Christians ought not be fearful, yet they are. The wise man said "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe" (Prov. 29:25). We fear the worst. We fear failure. We are our own worst enemy in this vein. Often it has been said "I would become a Christian but I don't think I can be faithful after my baptism." Still others are afraid the teachings of the gospel may offend someone or hurt their feelings. Because of fears like these we do not trust God. Do we not think God is greater than all these fears? Do we not think God is strong enough to solve these meager struggles? Still others fear obedience to the word of God because it will be the same as condemning their ancestors who never followed after the true New Testament teachings of the gospel. The wise man also said "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). The wise man's father said "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth forever" (Ps. 111:10). God can and will help us set aside our worldly fears, if we will but focus on getting a good understanding. For to fear God is to trust God.

Lastly, concerning causes of a lack of trust, James speaks to the problem of wavering. One's faith is a testimony to one's trust. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed" (James 1:6). It is well documented in my home

congregation, that I like to fish. In fact I do not find it strange to use the term love when I speak of fishing. I have even found myself, on a good day, calling myself a fisherman. At one lake in particular, where I have been given permission to fish, there is a boat that the owner allows me to use. I do not bring an anchor with me, rather I do bring a paddle. I have been known to paddle that boat all the way across the lake against the wind. After arriving on the other side I will begin to fish and the wind then takes charge of the direction of the boat. At that point I am no longer in charge of direction of the boat, nor the speed of the boat. All floating decisions are made by the wind. This is James' description of the man whose faith is not what it ought to be. One who does not trust God is in this boat, being moved about without knowledge. Our faith cannot stand if we allow it to be pushed and moved by every wind of doctrine known to man. Our faith therefore, our trust must be in Almighty God.

## **Messages for Today**

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- **God promises to never leave us.**
- **God is good all the time.**
- **God promises to direct our paths.**

Let's look to some of God's reasons to trust him. This certainly will not be a definitive list, but it will be a good start.

*God promises to never leave us.* To the Hebrew brethren, the author gives strong encouragement from the words of the Lord. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that ye may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6). Now then, there is a reason to trust. Only God can make this kind of promise, and it take. Let me illustrate this. When one obeys the gospel, they have made a promise of faithfulness and obedience to God. Yet, as life goes on, at some point that Christian will falter in his faithfulness. He may even leave the Lord for a while. When he realizes his shortcomings, when he returns to the Lord, he must renew his promise of faithfulness to God through his confession and repentance. God never has to do that. God has never failed man, nor will he ever.

Because of God's perfection, his total lack of shortcomings, Christians can and should put their whole trust in him. The weeping prophet gives a similar strong encouragement for trusting in God. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. 17:7-8).

*God is good all the time.* His goodness is described for us in Nahum 1:7: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble: And he knoweth them

that trust in him.” David puts it this way in Psalm 9:9: “The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.” Again in Psalm 62:7: “In God is my salvation and my glory, the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.” These words come from the one who is a man after God’s own heart. The one who had slain the lion, the bear, yes even the great giant Goliath. David, as king, had the power over the lives of men. Yet, he still sought refuge, strength, and hope in God. “It is better to put trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man” (Ps. 118:8). God is our refuge.

*God promises to direct our paths.* We know it is not in man to choose his own steps. “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Knowing this, it makes sense that we find the right one, the always right one, to choose our steps for us. “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3). Does this strike us as too simple? Some seem to think so. This passage teaches us that God has supplied everything man needs for things spiritual, physical, material, social, recreational, vocational, and any other terms ending in al. Maybe this then is the strongest reason to trust God. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5-6).

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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As was recorded in Acts 2, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Knowing some things which cause man to not trust God, and knowing some proofs that God has given that give us reason to trust God, what then should we do? Trust God.

*First we need to commit to God.* Simply stated it sounds so easy, maybe even too easy. Yet, it must not be too easy or more would be applying the concept and therefore reaping the benefit of this commitment. The bible informs us how to go about committing to God. Listen to the words of Jesus first. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought of the things for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:33-34). To truly commit and therefore trust God, one must put God first. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring for thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday” (Ps. 37:5-6). The wise man writes, “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established” (Prov. 16:3). “He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he” (Prov. 16:20). We all know the need for commitment in our homes, the workplace, and in the

church. Sometimes it seems we fail in the day to day trust of God because we have not fully committed ourselves to him.

*Second, we must entrust ourselves to God.* David says “Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I put my trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee” (Ps. 143:8). Also he wrote, “Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou has wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men” (Ps. 31:19).

Lesson learned: God has never done wrong; trust God. God is perfect in his understanding; trust God. God has no desire to lead man in the wrong direction; trust God. He loves us; trust God. Great is his faithfulness; may our trust be the same.

### Discussion Questions

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1. Discuss some shortcomings of man.
2. Why is not trusting God seen as one shortcoming that man may be most guilty.
3. What are some reasons why man does not trust God?
4. List and discuss some biblical proofs for trusting God.
5. What can be done to show full trust in God?

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## Lesson 26 - Staying Saved

### THIRST FOR GOD'S WORD

*Bill Irby*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they shall be filled.*

*As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

**Matthew 5:6; Psalm 42:1-2**

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Our doctors are always reminding us to keep our bodies adequately hydrated. I noted that there is some controversy these days about how much water is the right amount for a person to drink daily. The old standby was “eight 8 ounce glasses of water each day.” Some recommend less and some recommend more. One doctor told me to be sure I got “plenty.” I know from personal experience in equatorial countries that one needs to drink plenty and then a good bit more! We know we will not last very long without water and most of us rely on our thirst mechanism to tell us when we need to drink. But we also know that sometimes that mechanism can be deceptive and we do not drink as much as we need. When that happens a person may develop serious illness quite rapidly.

#### The Heart of the Message

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There is a spiritual parallel to physical thirst. As dangerous as physical thirst can be, spiritual thirst is much worse. As Jesus stated in the Beatitudes the person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is blessed. To be blessed is to be happy in the deepest, spiritual sense. The psalmist said that his soul thirsted for God. The child of God today certainly shares these attitudes of faith. In our time we quench that thirst through our relationship with the word of God.

God's word is the revelation of his mind for and to us (1 Cor. 2:9-13). As such it is not normal literature. It is living and active (Heb. 4:12). It is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). It is a magnificent compilation of the truth we need to know and practice in order to be free from sin (John 8:32, Rom. 10:17).

With this in mind, consider again the parallel we are thinking about. The medical people tell us that if we do not drink enough water, after a while our desire for water will abate. I mentioned equatorial countries. It is not uncommon for people who are unaccustomed to drinking substantial quantities of water to say that they “just are not thirsty.” They may continue to



hold that view up to the time that we find someone to administer intravenous fluids to relieve their dehydration.

The point is plain. God's Word, properly studied and understood (2 Tim. 2:15) is just as essential for spiritual survival as water is for physical survival. But if a person is unaccustomed to reading and studying the word he will not thirst for it. The more one reads and studies the Bible the more one desires to do so. The practice of studying God's word becomes as normal and essential as drinking having a cool and refreshing glass of water. It becomes something that we look forward to as a great joy of life.

For my first seven years of work with the West Hobbs Street congregation I was blessed to work alongside Winfred Clark. Brother Clark was very well known as a talented and careful student of the Bible. He was a master of alliterative outlining. One day he rushed from his office to mine with his Testament in his hand open to a passage and saying with great expression, "I have studied this Book for fifty years and I just saw this today!" This has always stood out in my mind as a great example of the joy and intellectual excitement we can have from studying the word of God. I have tried to thirst for God's word as did my friend Winfred Clark.

## **Messages for Today**

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- **Our thirst for God's word is increased by knowledge of context.**
- **Our thirst for God's word is enhanced by recognition of need.**
- **Our thirst for God's word is satisfied by regular study.**

As we think about developing our own thirst for the word of God, let us consider some spiritual and yet practical points.

*Our thirst for God's word is increased by knowledge of context.* First, we will increase our thirst for God's word by paying close attention to the context of the passage we are reading. I am familiar with the programs and schedules people use to read through the Bible in a year or some other time period. As good as that may be I think we will develop a more refined thirst by concentrating our efforts in a book or series thereof without artificial time restraints.

Reading the Bible must be more than passing one's eyes over the passages. The blessing comes when we read with comprehension. To do that requires understanding the context of what we read. Context includes a large number of things but for the sake of brevity we can define context in terms of a few questions about the part of the Bible we are reading. First, who is doing the writing? Second, who is the intended audience for the particular book or letter? Third, where is the writing taking place? Fourth, when was the writing done? Fifth, what literary form is being used by the writer?

Take for example the book of Acts. Most of the people reading this essay have also read Acts a number of times. Our thirst for reading it again and



again is enhanced by remembering that Luke wrote it in conjunction with his gospel account. As we think about Luke we remember that he was a physician (Col. 4:14) and an able historian (Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-3). We know that he was for a time Paul's companion (the "we" passages of Acts) and that his work as an author has been subjected to modern scholarship and found to be excellent (as with Sir William Ramsay's book, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*). Reading Acts with its author in mind makes the endeavor more fulfilling. So does understanding that the places mentioned in Acts are as real as Knoxville or Athens. Keeping a good Bible dictionary by one's side can enhance comprehension and increase one's thirst to know more. The more you know, the more you will want to know.



*Our thirst for God's word is enhanced by recognition of need.* The Bible is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16-17) truth (John 17:17). There is no other way to know God's will for us apart from the Biblical text. One problem in the world of historical (or denominational) Christianity is the subjectivist concept that individuals have their own separate source of revelation from God. This idea set has the effect of diminishing the importance of the Bible. The Bible, on the other hand, presents itself as an objective body of propositional truth, designed by God for the good of mankind and the saving of his soul (Heb. 5:8-9, John 14:15). Without the word of God we are lost and are hopeless creatures.

*Our thirst for God's word is satisfied by regular study.* We live in busy times and in a culture that is known for absorbing every minute with demands on our time. But we must make time for the word of God. As we have seen, the more we read and study the more we will want to read and study. We crave what we know.

## A Message of Hope for You

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The Bible teaches that certain things result from the study of the word. Thirsting for God's word can result in the salvation of one's soul (John 8:32). Thirsting for God's word can equip us with the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5-11, Col. 3:1-2). Thirsting for God's word gives us the strength to defeat the devil (Eph. 6:10-17, Matt. 6:33).

Think back to the days of Ezra and Nehemiah and their re-reading of God's word. The text has this: "So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God, and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the meaning" (Neh. 8:8). The text tells us that the people wept when they heard God's word. They thirsted. For as long as they faithfully listened to God's word they were blessed.

Such is the case with us today. If we remain dedicated to the word and the principles revealed in that word our souls will be safe and our churches strong. May God help us to keep on thirsting for his word. Physical thirst is dangerous to the body. Spiritual thirst is peril for the soul.

### Discussion Questions

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1. What happens when we read the Bible unaware of context?
2. What are some of the blessings of regular Bible study?
3. Who is responsible for your spiritual growth?

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## Lesson 27 - Staying Saved

# TREASURE THE CHURCH

*Jacob A. Evans*

*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 4:15-16**

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It's one thing to become a follower of Jesus; it's another thing to remain a follower of Jesus. It's possible for us to be saved, but not stay saved (Col. 1:21-23; 2 Pet. 2:20-22). If we hope to stay saved, it is absolutely vital that we treasure the church. By "church," I'm referring to people like us whose sins have been forgiven (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 2:8-9; Col. 2:11-12; Tit. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:21-22). I'm referring to people like us who are in the midst of being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:18). I'm referring to people like us who have the hope of seeing Jesus and being with him forever (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 John 3:2-3). I'm referring to those holy, hopeful people with whom we should assemble each week to worship, praise, thank, and remember the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Acts 2:42-47; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-33; 16:1-2).

To be sure, many people these days have concluded that being an integral part of a local congregation is optional, if not unnecessary or even precarious. Various reasons exist as to why those of this mindset downplay or disparage one's involvement with a local body of Christians. Some are disillusioned by all the division and fragmentation that they see among adherents of Christianity. Others simply desire to be nonconformists. Still others have been "burned" by a local congregation in the past. Indeed, many people are all about believing, but they are not about belonging.

The New Testament teaches, however, that those of us who have entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ have not only been brought to God, but we have also been brought together. I get you. You get me. We get each other, and we need each other. If we hope to stay saved, we must not view the church as dispensable.

## The Heart of the Message

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*The dominant images of the church in the New Testament establish the church's essentiality in the life of Christian. There are three images in*

particular that deserve our attention. Each image undergirds the fact that by virtue of belonging to Jesus we also belong to others.

First, we have been brought together as stones in a building. Unlike modern English usage, the word translated “church” in the Bible is never used to designate a physical building; nevertheless, the church is often compared to a building. Jesus Christ is the builder (Matt. 16:18) and foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) of this spiritual building. The apostles and prophets can also be described as the foundation of this spiritual building insofar as they build on Christ (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:10-11; cf. Rev. 21:14). Christ is also referred to as the “cornerstone” of this spiritual building or house (Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-8). Individual Christians are the “living stones” built on Christ, the “living stone,” to construct a “spiritual house” (1 Pet. 2:4-5). [All scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.]



Second, we have been brought together as parts of a body. Jesus Christ is the “head” of this spiritual body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18). Christians are the arms, hands, legs, feet, etc. of this spiritual body insofar as they accomplish the work directed by the head (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 20, 27). No part of this spiritual body is dispensable, for each part has a contribution to make so that the body remains unified, retains growth, and receives care (1 Cor. 12:14-26; Eph. 4:11-16).

Third, we have been brought together as members of a family (Eph. 2:17-19; 1 Tim. 3:15). This is the predominant image of the church in Scripture. God is our heavenly Father (Matt. 6:9; Rom. 8:15; Eph. 4:6). Jesus is God’s Son (Matt. 3:16-17; Matt. 17:5; Rom. 1:4). By virtue of their relationship to the Father and Son, Christians are depicted as follows: (1) “sons (of God)” (Rom. 8:14-15; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 3:26-27; 4:4-7; Heb. 2:10); (2) “children (of God)” (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:16-17; Phil. 2:15; 1 John 2:1, 18, 28; 3:1-2, 10, 18; 4:4; 5:2, 21); (3) “heirs” (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 3:29; 4:5-7); (4) the

“firstborn (ones)” (Heb. 12:23; cf. Rom. 8:29); (5) “brothers (and sisters)” (Acts 6:3; 9:30; 10:23; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 5:11; Eph. 6:23; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2:1, 13; 1 Tim. 6:2; Heb. 2:11-12). In God’s mind, there is actually something thicker than blood: faith in Christ (Matt. 10:34-37; Luke 14:25-26).

Without Christ, there would be no church, for He is the central reality of every image that is employed to describe the nature of the church. Whether we liken the church to a building, body, or family, interdependence is implied, wherein every stone, part, or member is indispensable. God undoubtedly brought us together because he knows that we are better together.

*The “one-another” passages in the New Testament establish the church’s essentiality in the life of a Christian.* One too many people have either carelessly or deliberately overlooked the New Testament’s emphasis on the communal facet of living the Christian life. Though far from exhaustive, the following statements from the NT sufficiently demonstrate that refusing to become a part of a local congregation of God’s people is a violation of God’s will for his people: (1) “love one another” (John 13:34; 1 John 4:7); (2) “instruct one another” (Rom. 15:14); (3) “have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:25); (4) “serve one another” (Gal. 5:13); (5) “[b]ear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2); (6) “forgive one another” (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13); (7) “admonish one another” (Col. 3:16); (8) “encourage one another” (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11); (9) “build one another up” (1 Thess. 5:11); (10) “pray for one another” (James 5:16).

The recurrence of “one another” in the New Testament represents the significant fact that Christians must not live in isolation. They are called to interact with one another in the context of a local congregation. God never intended for any Christian to travel the narrow way alone. In fact, he has unambiguously commanded Christians not to try and do it on their own. God knows that we will not make it without one another. To refuse to interact with fellow Christians is not only to live in defiance of the clear teaching of Scripture but also to cut ourselves off from those who have our best interests at heart.

## Messages for Today

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- **Respect the spiritual shepherds of your church.**
- **Be present when your church assembles.**
- **Establish meaningful relationships in your church for mutual support.**
- **Reach out with your church to the lost in your community.**

*Respect the spiritual shepherds of your church.* Jesus, the “chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4), desires for every congregation of his people to be under the oversight of a plurality of spiritual shepherds, i.e., elders (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). These men not only have to meet certain qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), but they also share the grave responsibility of protecting,

nurturing, guiding, and equipping the souls under their care (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Since the spiritual shepherds of your congregation watch over your soul, it only makes sense to esteem, imitate, and obey them (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7; 13:17). Respecting and appreciating their spiritual leadership will go a long way in helping you stay saved.

*Be present when your church assembles.* Assembling with your brothers and sisters in Christ should never be dismissed as an optional or unnecessary element in your spiritual life (Acts 20:6-7; 21:4; 28:14; 1 Cor. 11:18, 20, 33-34; cf. Heb. 10:25). Gathering with God's family is crucial to your spiritual fellowship with God and other Christians (John 4:23-24; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 10:16-17). It not only provides an invaluable context for hearing what the world will never tell you (Acts 2:42; Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 4:1-5), but it also serves as an indispensable means of motivation and encouragement (1 Cor. 14:1-33; Heb. 10:24-25). If you desire to prevent a desertion from the faith, gather with the faithful.

*Establish meaningful relationships in your church for mutual support.* Depending on the size of your congregation, you may not be able to cultivate a close relationship with everybody in your congregation, but you can get close to a few. You need fellow Christians with whom you can be real and transparent. You need people who will encourage you and hold you accountable. God desires for you to find physical (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 1 Tim. 5:3-16; James 1:27; 1 John 3:16-18), emotional (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26; 2 Cor. 1:3-4), and spiritual (Gal. 6:1-2; Tit. 2:1-8; James 5:16) support from your brothers and sisters in Christ, and he wants you to offer the same support to them as well. These relationships should not be one-sided; they should be reciprocal. Such reciprocity will keep you engaged, and it will fortify your faith.

*Reach out with your church to the lost in your community.* Every congregation of Christ's people ultimately exists to carry on Christ's mission in the world. That mission is one of seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10). By reaching out with other members of your spiritual family to the lost in your community, you will stay connected to what matters most in this world, and as you see the fruit from your combined efforts, you will experience a joy that you can find nowhere else in this world. If you want to stay saved, get busy honoring the Great Commission with your brothers and sisters in Christ (Matt. 28:18-20).

## **A Message of Hope for You**

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Staying saved is inextricably tied to one's appreciation for and involvement in a local church. By the time our lives on earth come to an end, we will have been a part of various fellowships, groups, or organizations, but the only fellowship that will not dissolve at the grave is Christ's church. That

fellowship will continue for an eternity because Jesus, who created our fellowship, conquered the grave on our behalf. Treasure the church. She will help you stay saved, and she will not leave you even in death.

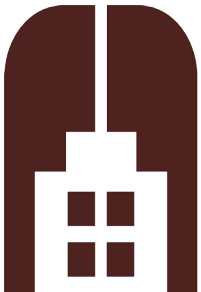
### Discussion Questions

1. Besides those mentioned in the introduction, can you think of some other reasons people might give for refusing to become a member of a local congregation? How might you respond to each of these reasons?
2. What are some other images or words used to describe the church in the New Testament? What is the significance of each one?
3. Locate all the “one-another” passages in the New Testament and discuss the importance of each one.
4. Do you have any personal stories that illustrate the positive impact your church has had upon helping you stay saved? If so, share them.

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**THINKING ABOUT PREACHING?**



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