

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

A Study in the First Principles

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From the Book of the Same Name by John Stott

BASIC CHRISTIANITY - FOREWORD

In 1997 I was studying D.A. Carson's book on the Sermon on the Mount to help me complete my lesson notes for the adult Bible class I was teaching at Beverly Shores. Carson referred to a book by John R.W. Stott entitled Basic Christianity.

In this short paperback book, originally published in 1958, Stott sets forth eleven lessons covering the "milk" of the word in which he argues convincingly from the scriptures that we need a Savior and that Savior is Jesus Christ.

According to Stott: "We must commit ourselves, heart and mind, soul and will, home and life, personally and unreservedly to Jesus Christ. We must humble ourselves before him. We must trust him as our Savior and submit to Him as our Lord; then go take our place as loyal members of the church and responsible citizens of the community. Such is basic Christianity, and the theme of this book."

These lessons are a distillation of Stott's book, using his chapter and paragraph headings to construct the outline. I have preached these lessons as sermons, but they would also be suitable for Bible study or home studies as well.

Warning: Both Stott and Carson bring their own denominational biases to their work, so care must be taken when using their materials. This is a fair warning when following any outline or book written by a man; none of us are inspired. If you do purchase Stott's little book you will see that I have modified much of what he has said concerning the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins.

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BASIC CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

- Many people today reject the organized church, yet claim to be followers of Christ. Perhaps His appeal to them lies in the fact that He was anti-establishment and His teachings were revolutionary. But do they really believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world?
- No study of Christianity can begin without an acceptance of Christ as a historical figure. He was a man; He grew, worked, sweated, rested, slept, ate, drank, suffered, and died just like every other man. Yet the key to believing in Christ is believing that he was more than just a man - He is God! If He was not God in human flesh then Christianity is destroyed.
- Historical evidence of the deity of Christ exists which include: His own claims, His strength and gentleness, His righteousness and compassion, His care for children and love for out-casts, and His self-mastery and self-sacrifice. Compelling circumstantial evidence exists to show that once He died He did not stay dead, but rose to live again.
- Suppose it is accepted that Jesus is the Son of God, is that all there is to basic Christianity? If not, what more needs to be known?
 1. He came into this world to save sinners. He is the heaven sent Savior, who can restore us to fellowship with God the Father.
 2. Christianity is more than just a creed; it is a system of belief that demands action. Our beliefs must be translated into deeds.
- To begin a study of basic Christianity and the Christian claim that we can find God in Jesus Christ, we must first agree that God is seeking us and we must ourselves be seeking God.

LESSON 1 - THE RIGHT APPROACH

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. "In the beginning God..." - we cannot anticipate God, because He has always made the first move. The Bible does not show man looking up for God as much as it shows God reaching down to man. The God of the Bible is not remote, aloof, uninterested, or indifferent to the needs of mortal man. He is not sitting in Heaven waiting on us to pester and nag Him into action. His plan for us is already in place.
- B. This characteristic of anticipating man's every need can be seen:
1. In creation - it was He who brought this universe and its contents into existence. (Gen. 1:1.)
 2. in revelation - through the prophets, Apostles, and Jesus. (Heb. 1:1,2.)
 3. in salvation - through His Son. (Lk. 1:68.)
- C. Our study concerns itself with revelation and salvation. God has spoken and acted through His Son Jesus Christ to bring His religion (Christianity) into this world. A religion that is not just pious talk, or a collection of rules and regulations, but is instead the "gospel" (Rom. 1:1-4); a declaration of what God has done for man through Christ!

II. DISCUSSION

A. God Has Spoken

1. Man was born to ask -Why? But God cannot be explained to man's satisfaction, because He is infinite and we are finite. He is out of our reach, as Job asked, (Job.11:7) "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" - No way!
2. God has chosen to show everyone a glimpse of Himself - (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19,20). This is His general revelation.
3. God has further determined to reveal even more of Himself to His Chosen people, first the children of Israel, and now followers of His Son. This revelation is specific and inspired and is chiefly expressed in the birth, baptism, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Jesus Christ.
4. God has made himself known through His Word - namely Christ (Jn. 1:1,14). Salvation will come through this Word, even though His ways will seem foolish to man. (1 Cor. 1:21.)
5. Since God today is neither audible, physical, nor tangible the empirical, experimental methods of modern science, sociology, and psychology fail to reveal Him. Yet there was a time when He chose to clothe Himself in a human form and walk this earth. (1 Jn.1:1)

B. God Has Acted (not just spoken)

1. Man is not only ignorant, he is sinful. While His Word can dispel us of our ignorance, action on the part of God is needed to remit us of our sins.
2. Preparation for this salvation was begun with Abraham and had its culmination in Christ. (Mt. 1:21; 1 Tim. 1:15; Lk. 19:10, 15:3-7.)
3. The non-Christian religions have nothing to compare with a God who loved, came after, and died for a world of lost sinners!

C. Man's Response

1. To many today the Bible is history - if not myth or fable. God has left it to us to help spread His Word, but mainly He has left it up to the individual to "seek." Man's refusal to seek has always been God's chief quarrel with us. (Ps. 14:2,3.)
2. Jesus tells us, "Seek, and you will find." But how should we seek?
 - a. diligently - (Heb. 11:6.) Apathy is a hindrance.
 - b. humbly - Pride is an even greater hindrance than apathy. Jesus loved the little children because they were teachable. They were not full of pride, self-importance, and a critical mind, but possessed minds that were humble and receptive.
 - c. honestly - our prejudices must be set aside, our minds must be open. (Jer. 29:13.)
 - d. obediently - we must be prepared to reform our lives - repent. God's promises to us rest on a moral condition, that is we must take action. We cannot just believe we must be ready to obey. Most people do not reject

Christ on intellectual grounds, but on moral grounds. They will not live up to His standards.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. If we are truly seeking God, we must set aside apathy, pride, prejudice, and sin and ignore the consequences of persecution, ridicule, and scorn.
- B. The hardest obstacles for us to overcome are our intellectual prejudices and our moral self-will because they are expressions of fear, and fear is the greatest enemy of the truth.
- C. The search for God is inconvenient because we must rethink our entire outlook on life and readjust our lives accordingly. It is a combination of intellectual and moral cowardice that makes us hesitate. We do not find, because we do not seek, we do not seek because we are afraid of what we might find.
- D. We must open our minds to the fact that Christ may be true. If we are diligently, humbly, and honestly seeking God, then we must come to the Book that reveals Him to us, find His will for us, and become obedient to that will.
- E. Sit down tomorrow and read the gospel of John, then begin to reread it a chapter a day. Before you read from John, read Acts 10 and go to God in prayer and tell Him you are an honest seeker of the truth and are in search of the Savior of your soul. This type of prayer worked wonders for Cornelius; it can do the same for you. God will reward all honest seekers, the promise of Christ is plain: "Seek, and you will find."

CHRIST'S PERSON: LESSONS 2 - 4

LESSON 2 - THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. To find Christianity we must begin our search with Christ. Has God spoken to us in these last days through Jesus and is Jesus truly the Son Of God?
- B. Two essential reasons why our search for Christianity must begin with Christ:
 - 1. Christianity is Christ - without Him there is no Christianity. Therefore we must find out who He is.
 - 2. By showing that Christ is the one and only God-Man we can answer many other questions that have bothered mankind from the beginning such as: the existence of God and His character, man's duty and destiny, life after death, the purpose of the Old Testament, and the meaning of the cross.
- C. To investigate Christ we must turn to the Gospels. For the purposes of this lesson we will accept these writings as a historically accurate record of the life and teaching of Jesus. Using this historical record we can prove that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son Of God. To be worthy of not only our admiration, but also of our worship Jesus must be shown to be not just God nor just a godly man - but an entity possessing all the characteristics of both God and man.
- D. To prove our case for Jesus as the Christ we will call Him as our first witness. The Gospels contain four different claims that Jesus made on His own behalf. While claims of this sort does not constitute proof as such, they will lay the foundation on which proof can be constructed.

II. DISCUSSION

- A. His self-centered teaching - He was constantly talking about Himself. While other great religious teachers of the ages have deflected praise and pointed away from them towards perceived truth, Jesus pointed to Himself and said, "I am the truth, follow me."
 - 1. Note His use of the personal pronoun in such passages as: Jn. 6:35; 8:12; 11:25,26; 14:6; Mt. 11:28,29.
 - 2. He affirmed that Abraham, Moses, and the Old Testament in general bore Him witness: Mk. 8:29; Jn. 8:56; 5:46; 5:39; Lk. 24:27,44.
 - 3. He claimed Isa. 61:1,2 referred to Him.
 - 4. His commands to "follow Me" and "come to Me," as well as His call for his followers to obey Him and confess Him before men were accepted by them as what they must do. Mt. 11:28-30; Jn. 6:35, 7:37.
 - 5. Not only did He call on His disciples to follow and obey, but He expected all men to seek God through Him. Jn. 6:29; 3:36; 8:24; 16:8,9.
 - 6. He demanded a love above that man has for one another. Mt. 10:37; Lk. 14:26.
 - 7. The Holy Spirit would be His advocate after His departure. Jn. 15:26; 16:14.

8. Christ demanded humility from others and in all other aspects of His own life demonstrated an attitude for all of us to copy, yet when it came to establishing His deity He minced no words.
- B. His direct claims - He clearly believed Himself to be the Messiah sent by the Father to establish the Kingdom.
1. He accepted titles such as: the Son of Man and the Son of God that were reserved for the Messiah. He was not a sign of the Messiah to come, but the Messiah to which all the signs pointed. Mk. 1:15; 14:61,62; 8:27-29.
 2. He claimed not only to be the Messiah, but also deity:
 - a. He spoke of God as His Father, Jn. 5:17; 10:30; 14:10,11.
 - b. While we all are the sons of God, Jesus qualified His special relationship with God the Father, Mt. 11:27.
 - c. He claimed that the attitude man took toward Him was also man's attitude toward God. To know, see, believe, receive, hate, or honor Him, was to do the same to God the Father. Jn. 5:23; 8:19; 14:7; 12:45; 14:9; 12:44; 14:1; 15:23; Mk. 9:37.
 - d. He claimed to have always existed, Jn. 8:48-59.
 - e. He did not rebuke Thomas for calling Him, "my Lord and my God." Jn. 20:26-29.
- C. His indirect claims - He exercised functions on this earth that properly belonged to God.
1. He claimed to forgive sins, Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 7:36-50
 2. He claimed to bestow life - He styled Himself as "life," "the bread of life," "the resurrection and the life," "the living waters," "the Good Shepherd." Jn. 6:35; 14:6; 11:25; 15:4,5; 4:10-15; 10:28; 17:2; 5:21; Mk. 10:17,21.
 3. He claimed to teach the truth in a direct and dogmatic manner - he astounded everyone with His manner of teaching with "authority." Mk. 6:3; Jn. 7:15,46; Lk. 4:32; Mt. 7:28,29.
 4. He claimed He would judge the world.
 - a. He would come back at the end of the age, arouse the dead, sit on the throne of glory, and judge mankind for His Father. Jn. 5:22,28,29; Mt. 25:31-46.
 - b. Man's exclusion from heaven will be marked by His words, "I never knew you." Jn. 12:47,48; Mt. 10:32,33; 7:23.
- D. His dramatized claims - miracles, signs, and wonders. His miracles were more valuable for their spiritual significance, than for their supernatural character. He used his miracles to substantiate and visualize His claims, illustrate His moral authority, and dramatize His words.
1. The Apostle John relied on the power of Christ's miracles when writing his Gospel. His entire work is designed around six or seven of Christ's great signs. Jn. 20:30,31.
 2. Whether changing the water into wine, feeding the five thousand, opening the eyes of the man born blind or raising Lazarus from the dead, Christ's miracles

pointed to Him as the Messiah and to his message as the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. Jn. 6:35; 8:12; 11:25.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. These claims are historical, Jesus really made them. If they are true then we can no longer regard Jesus as just a great teacher. If they are false then He is either the greatest liar or the most deluded man to ever live.
- B. If He was a deliberate impostor, how do we account for His lack of guile and hatred of hypocrisy?
- C. If He was sincerely mistaken, where are the characteristics that one in that condition usually exhibits? His character indeed appears to support His claims. This leads us directly to our next study: The Character of Christ.

LESSON 3 - THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Through the years there have been many false christs and pretenders to God's throne. Investigation and time bear out that they are not who they claim to be. Their character does not support their claims. They exhibit characteristics that show them to be either lunatics or liars.
- B. Jesus on the other hand, does appear to be who He claims to be and His character bears out His claims. There is no discrepancy between His words and His deeds. To back-up the extravagant claims made by and for Jesus would take an extraordinary character - one never exhibited before or since.
- C. Jesus cannot be readily classified. To put Him in the list with the great religious leaders of history does not do justice to His character. It is the very purpose of this study to show that Jesus stands alone - in a moral category that holds no one else. This can be seen not by comparing Him with the other so-called great men, but by contrasting His character against the character of all other men who have ever lived.
- D. The chief characteristic that sets Jesus head and shoulders above the rest of mankind is His sinlessness. He is the only person to ever survive this earth-life and remain in that condition. The fact that He remained sinless is the very thing that qualified Him to be our Savior; otherwise He would be like us - in need of salvation.

II. DISCUSSION - Evidence for the Sinlessness of Christ

A. What Christ Himself Thought

1. Jn. 8:1-7 - The woman taken in adultery. Jesus knew that all men present had sinned. Yet, in the same chapter He denied that he could be convicted of sin (8:34,35,46). According to Him, He always did those things that pleased the Father (8:29).
2. The very nature of His teaching placed Him in a moral category by Himself. Contrast His attitude towards His sinlessness to the Pharisee who prayed to be seen of men. His sinlessness was a fact He implied rather than asserted, for example:

MAN	JESUS
lost sheep	The Good Shepherd
sick with sin	The Great Physician
in the darkness of sin and ignorance	The Light of the World
sinners	The Savior
hungry	The Bread of Life
dead in trespasses and sin	The Resurrection and the Life
tempted and sinned	tempted yet did not sin
estranged from God	One with the Father
Submitted to John's Baptism - for remission of sins	Submitted to John's Baptism - "to fulfill all righteousness"

3. His unbroken communion with the Father sets Him apart for two reasons:
 - a. He possessed the ability to see into a man, to know the thoughts and intents of his heart, to see hypocrisy in a man. He saw none of these within himself!
 - b. His self-conscious purity sets Him apart from saint and sinner alike. In general, as man's spiritual knowledge increases he realizes that he is further from God than he ever dreamed. But Jesus never experienced this awareness of sin, because He was free from all sense of sin.

B. What Christ's Friends Said - why we can confidently rely on the witness of the Apostles.

1. They lived in close proximity with Jesus for three years. While they found fault with each other, they never found any of the sins they found within themselves within Jesus.
2. The Jewish heritage of the Apostles makes their testimony that much more trustworthy. They were well aware of the OT's teaching on universal sin. All have sinned and gone astray.
3. Their testimony is indirect, making it that much more credible.
 - a. Peter - 'a lamb without blemish or spot,' 'he committed no sin...' (1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22)
 - b. John - While John condemned all unrepentant men as sinners, he found Jesus to be without sin (1 Jn. 1:8-10; 3:5)
 - c. Paul - (2 Cor. 5:21)
 - d. The Hebrew writer - (Heb. 7:26; 4:15)

C. What Christ's Enemies Conceded - in debate men will often turn to mud-slinging when they have no basis for their point of view. Such was the case with the enemies of Jesus.

1. Mark (2:1-3:6) lists four examples of such unfounded criticism.
 - a. Blasphemy - The man sick of palsy (Mk. 2:1-12). If only God can forgive sins (v. 7) and only God can cause miraculous healing (v. 12), then it is not blasphemy for Jesus to say "your sins be forgiven."
 - b. Evil associations - Eating with the publicans and sinners (Mk. 2:14-17). While eating with the sinners would not make Jesus a sinner, the Pharisees self-righteousness would cause them to see it as sin. Jesus' intentions are made plain in (v. 17), "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
 - c. His religion was frivolous - "Your disciples do not fast" (Mk. 2: 18-22). They accused Him of not taking His religion seriously, yet we can see from His life and teaching that this could not be further from the truth.
 - d. He was a "Sabbath-breaker" - (Mk. 2: 23-3:6). This was an accusation based on the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees, not God's law. Elsewhere they berated Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, yet their traditions allowed a man to pull his ox out of a ditch on that day. He was no Sabbath-breaker, but indeed a breaker of the traditions of man - traditions that were not God-given.

2. When the time came for His detractors to produce real charges against Him as he was on trial for His life, they could find no one to bring true charges against Him. Finally, they hired false witnesses and they could not agree among themselves. They could bring no religious charges against Him that would stick, so they trumped up false political charges.
 - a. These charges were not accepted by the governor, as being worthy of death. (Mt. 27:24)
 - b. Even Herod found Him innocent. (Lk. 23:15)
 - c. Judas admitted his sin, "I have betrayed innocent blood," before he committed suicide. (Mt. 27:3,4)
 - d. The thief on the cross rebuked his companion, "this man has done nothing wrong." (Lk. 23:41)
 - e. The Roman centurion at the foot of the cross, "Certainly, this man was innocent." (Lk. 23:47)

III. CONCLUSION: What We Can See For Ourselves

- A. The record of the four gospels gives us our own view of the character of Christ. We can see Him as a baby, a child, a young man and an evangelist. We see Him in private with His disciples and in public with the multitudes. We see Him among those that adore Him and among those that abhor Him. We see Him during His acceptance and during His rejection. And exactly what do we see? Consistency.
- B. We do not see a crank, a fanatic, or an eccentric.
- C. He is Divine, yet human. He gets tired, thirsty, and hungry. He experiences the full range of human emotions: love, joy, anger, and sorrow.
- D. While His teachings are self-centered, He remains totally unselfish. In thought he rated Himself first, in deed - last. He exhibited the greatest self-esteem and the greatest self-sacrifice. He knew He was the Lord, yet He became the disciples' servant.
- E. He made the greatest sacrifice, was misunderstood, misrepresented, despised and rejected, flogged and crucified, yet said at the end, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do."
- F. He did not seek to please Himself, but only to do the will of His Father. The utter disregard for self is called agape in the Bible. We call it love. "Jesus was sinless because He was selfless. Such selflessness is love. God is love.

LESSON 4 - THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. If the resurrection is true, then it has great significance. Modern skeptics are not the first to reject it, (Acts 17:31,32).
- B. While the resurrection does not establish the deity of Christ, it is consistent with it. A person who was conceived in a supernatural way would be expected to leave in a supernatural way. His birth and death were both natural (physical), his conception and resurrection were supernatural.
- C. Whenever Jesus predicted His own death, He predicted His resurrection as well. He further described His resurrection as a sign. This is confirmed by Paul (Ro. 1:4) and Peter (Acts 2:29-31).
- D. Luke tells us there are "many infallible proofs" concerning His resurrection. (Acts 1:3). It is the purpose of this lesson to examine this evidence.

II. DISCUSSION - What is the Evidence?

- A. The Body Was Gone - On the Sunday after the crucifixion, the women went to the tomb and were surprised to find it empty (Mt. 28:1-7; Mk. 16:1-7; Lk. 24:1-7; Jn. 20:1). Within days the disciples were preaching that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. The tomb was empty, the body had gone. How could this be explained apart from resurrection? Five theories have been proposed:
 - 1. The women went to the wrong tomb - it was dark, they were confused and distraught. The gospels say that dawn was breaking and they were on a practical mission to anoint the body. Even if they did initially go to the wrong tomb, Peter, John, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea could verify the correct tomb. Also, scripture gives us angelic testimony and that of the risen Savior Himself.
 - 2. The swoon theory - Jesus did not die on the cross, but fainted and was buried alive. He later awoke and freed Himself from the tomb. This theory contradicts the testimony of the centurion and the soldier who pierced His side. This theory would further have us believe that Jesus survived the rigors of the cross plus the cold dark tomb for up to 36 hours, before removing the stone and eluding the guard to escape. Next He would then appear to the disciples as totally healthy and then mysteriously disappear after 40 days.
 - 3. Thieves stole the body - no evidence exists for this theory. Why would thieves steal it? How would they elude the guard?
 - 4. The disciples removed the body - From Matthew's account we know that this is the rumor that the Jews spread (Mt. 28:13). Yet they are the very ones that had Pilate set a watch to avoid this situation (Mt. 27:62-66). The preaching of all of the Apostles would be made an outright lie if they had removed the body. Even more fantastic would be the martyrdom suffered by them all for the sake of such a lie.

5. The authorities (Roman or Jewish) took the body - to defeat the possibility of the resurrection. By having the body in their possession they could prove He was not resurrected. But when the disciples began to preach the resurrection, they did not produce the body to dispel the teaching. They threatened and beat the disciples and told them not to preach Jesus, but that would have been unnecessary if they would have just produced the body.
- B. The Grave Clothes Were Undisturbed - Lk. 24:12; Jn. 20:1-10. What made John believe when he went into the tomb? Not just the absence of the body, but the presence of the grave clothes affected his judgment. Jesus was not where a dead man should be. He was neither in the tomb nor in the clothes and 100 pounds of spices in which he had been laid.
- C. The Lord Was Seen - in extraordinary places and in extraordinary ways. He made at least ten separate appearances to as few as one person and to as many as 500 over a period of 40 + 1 days after His crucifixion and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-8; Acts 1:3). What explanations can be given for this massive body of eyewitness testimony concerning the risen Christ?
1. They were invented stories - the straight forward accounts lend themselves to being the truth. Man would have conjured up more elaborate stories. Man would have had the disciples sure of the resurrection, instead of being in doubt and fear. If the writers of the NT were tragically misled, they were not deliberately misleading. They believed what they saw and they recorded it for us to believe as well.
 2. They were hallucinations (an apparent perception of an external object, when no such object is present) - if the witnesses truly believed what they saw; then they must have hallucinated it. Hallucinations are most often associated with people that are neurotic, psychotic, or under the influence of drugs. While some witnesses might have fit this profile, it would be implausible to expect all of them to fit it. Normal people have also been known to hallucinate as a climax to periods of exaggerated wishful thinking, when circumstances of time, place, and mood are favorable. The Gospel narratives lack both of these characteristics. In contrast to wishful thinking the disciples were 'afraid,' and 'would not believe it.' When Jesus did appear 'they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.' Some (such as Thomas) doubted his return. The disciples were not gullible; their faith was grounded in verifiable facts. Also, there were no outward circumstances that would lend themselves to hallucinations. Jesus was seen on a road, in a room, on a mountain, at the seashore. He was seen in places that had no special significance to the viewers.
 3. They were true! The risen Lord was seen. The only alternative left once we dismiss the possibilities of inventions and hallucinations.
- D. The Disciples Were Changed - compare the disciples of the Gospels to the same disciples in the book of Acts. They are changed. Why? We cannot discount the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as the catalyst for this change. It is the resurrection and ascension of the Savior that unleashed the mighty power of the Spirit among these men.

Two examples:

1. Simon Peter - He denied Christ three times, He cursed and swore that he was not a disciple of Jesus. Upon realizing his error he is utterly dejected. Yet we turn only a few pages in our Bibles, perhaps less than 2 months in real time and we see the most dynamic preacher (except for Jesus Himself) that Christianity has ever known. What made this difference in his life? The resurrection changed Peter's fear into courage.
2. James the brother of the Lord - In the Gospels he is represented as not believing in Jesus, yet in the first chapter of Acts he is listed among the assembled disciples. Later still we see him as a leader (if not the leader) of the Jerusalem church and the writer of one of the most dogmatic Christian letters of the Bible. Paul tells us the risen Savior appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). This marks his change from doubt into belief.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. The resurrection changed Saul the Pharisee into Paul the Apostle, the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday, and the remnant of Jewish believers into the church of Christ.
- B. In the past three lessons we have seen a modest carpenter become a peasant preacher and die a criminal's death. He has made remarkable claims concerning Himself, He appears to have been morally perfect, and He rose from the dead. Are we led to the same conclusion as doubting Thomas, "My Lord, and My God!?" (Jn. 20:28)

MAN'S NEED: LESSONS 5 – 6

LESSON 5 - THE FACT AND NATURE OF SIN

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The first four lessons in this series have been about Christ - His Deity, Lordship, Sonship, and that He is the Savior of sinners. We have attempted to show who He was, yet if He is the Savior of sinners we must also look at His work.
- B. To understand the work that Jesus came to do, we must understand who we are as well as who He was. His work was done for us because of our sins and His unique competence to provide salvation from those sins.
- C. When we finally see the sinners that we are, we will see and understand the wonder of what He has done for us. Sin is not just something the preachers thought up so they could maintain their jobs; it is a fact of human experience.
 - 1. Sin is not merely a problem of man's society, lack of education or poor environment - it stems from within each and every man. Every man contains within him a hard core of selfishness which leads him to sin.
 - 2. Why do we have laws, contracts, door locks, and receipts? Because man sins we cannot trust each other and we need protection from one another.

II. DISCUSSION

- A. Sin is Universal.
 - 1. Confirmed by the Old Testament - The King (Solomon): "There is no man who does not sin." The Preacher: "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." The Psalmist: (read Ps. 14). The Prophet: (Isaiah) "all we like sheep have gone astray."
 - 2. Confirmed by the New Testament - The Apostle Paul (Rom. 1-3) shows that all have sinned, both Jew and Gentile (read Rom. 3;22,23). The Apostle John is even more explicit (read 1 Jn. 1:8,10).
- B. The Nature of Sin - What is it?
 - 1. It is a shortcoming, a lapse, a slip, a blunder, a missing of the mark as in target practice, a disposition that comes up short when compared to that which is good. It is transgression, going beyond the boundaries, lawlessness, against justice.
 - 2. Sin's reality implies the existence of some moral standard or code that we can fail to keep or violate outright. James says, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." John says, "Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness, sin is lawlessness."
 - 3. No matter what moral code has been set before man; he has transgressed it or failed to keep it. For the Jews it was the Law of Moses, for the Gentiles it was the law of conscience. For us today it is the law of Christ.

4. Yet many today feel that they are "good people," not perfect but good enough to get by. Why do they feel that way?
 - a. They have not set a very high standard for themselves to keep. It is easy to think yourself a great high jumper if the bar is never set more than knee-high (Stott).
 - b. Man overlooks God's concern with the thought behind the deed and the motive behind the action (as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount).
- C. The Ten Commandments - an example of a moral code that man was (is) unable to keep (Ex. 20:3-17).
1. You shall have no other gods before me - God demands man's exclusive worship. Nothing can be set ahead of God. Not our families, our jobs, our recreation, or our possessions. Sin is the exaltation of self at the expense of God. To keep this commandment we would have to do as Jesus said, "love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind.
 2. You shall not make for yourself a graven image - God demands man's sincere and spiritual worship (Jn. 4:24). Handmade idols are of course expressly condemned here, but what of mental idols? We have attended worship, said prayers, and read the Bible, but have we really worshipped, really prayed, and really let God speak to us through His word? (Read Isa. 29:13; Mk. 7:6)
 3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain - God demands that man respect His name. This respect includes refraining from profane language, but further includes control of our thoughts and deeds. To call God "Lord" and then disobey Him is to take His name in vain. To call Him "Father" and then not to trust Him is to take His name in vain. Anytime we talk one way and act another we are taking His name in vain - we are hypocrites!
 4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy - God demands that man worship Him consistently, continuously, and periodically. As the Sabbath was the Lord's Day for the Jews, so Sunday is the Christian's Lord's Day. It is a day in which time must be set aside for Him, for His worship and His service.
 5. Honor your father and your mother - this command is transitional. The first four deal with man's duty to God and the last five deal with man's duty to man, this command has aspects of both duties. Parents represent God's authority to children, yet young people are often the most disobedient, selfish, and inconsiderate in their parent's own homes. Parents are due our respect and affection, if they do not receive these things from us as physical children, can God expect to receive them from us as His spiritual children?
 6. You shall not kill - Jesus took this command beyond physical murder and extended it to "heart murder." John said, "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer." We can kill with a look, with a word, with our anger, with gossip, with neglect, with cruelty, with spite and jealousy. Instead we must do all within our power to foster health and life in others.
 7. You shall not commit adultery - this includes any sexual activity outside the marriage relationship. It includes not just actions, but thoughts as well. As Jesus said, "everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery

with her in his heart." This command embraces every possible abuse of a sacred and beautiful gift of God. Each one of us must have a right, healthy, and honorable attitude towards each other.

8. You shall not steal - taking anything from a person that belongs to him or is due to him. Tax evasion, dodging customs, working "short hours," or paying less than a sufficient wage for work done are all forms of thievery. Not only did Paul want the thief to stop stealing, he wanted him to start working. To start working so not only would he not resort to stealing, but so that he could aid others.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor - Among man's greatest God-given possessions are his life, his home and honor, his property, and his reputation. Gossip, tale-bearing, perjury, slander, idle talk, listening to as well as passing on rumors, making unkind jokes, creating untrue impressions, and not correcting false statements are all ways to bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet - this command puts God's law beyond simply a legal code. The law of the land cannot touch us for what we think we want, but only for what we actually steal. As lust is to adultery, temper is murder, so covetousness is to theft. What is covetousness? Its wanting what we have no right to want, be it a man's house, his money, or his wife. Paul said, "It is idolatry." In contrast he said, "There is great gain in godliness, with contentment."

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Much of our sins are covert, they take place within our hearts and minds. Yet God is concerned with just that place: our minds - the breeding ground of overt sin. He sees in there, "Before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."
- B. The laws of God shows up our sins for what they really are. Nothing can convince us of our sinfulness like the righteous and just law of God.
- C. Before we can study salvation through Christ it will be necessary to consider the consequences of our sins.

LESSON 6 - THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In the last lesson we examined the nature and universality of sin. Before we can appreciate what God has done for us through Christ it will be necessary to examine the results of our sins.
- B. The seriousness of sin with its evil consequences can best be understood in light of sin's effects upon God, ourselves, and others.

II. DISCUSSION

- A. Alienation From God - sin cuts us off from God who we need to know because of His righteousness and moral perfection (Isa. 33:14; 57:15; 1 Tim. 6:15, 16; 1 Jn. 1:5, 6; Heb. 12:29; Hab. 1:13).
 - 1. Those who have glimpsed God have shrunk back because of their consciousness of their own sins.
 - a. Moses (Ex. 3:1-6) - hid his face from the burning bush.
 - b. Job (Job 42:5, 6) - despised himself upon seeing God in the whirlwind.
 - c. Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5) - saw God in a vision and immediately realized his unclean lips made him lost.
 - d. Ezekiel (Eze. 1:26-28) - fell upon his face in God's presence.
 - e. Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-9) - was struck to the ground and blinded.
 - f. John (Rev. 1:9-17) - fell...as though dead.
 - 2. There is a great gulf between God in His righteousness and man in his sin. "What partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14) The "wages of sin is death," because sin brings forth separation from God. The Bible uses such terms as: outer darkness, the second death, and the lake of fire to refer to the ultimate result of this separation (Mt. 25:30, Rev. 20:14, Lk. 16:19-31).
 - 3. Why does God often seem far away to us? Why are we tempted to say as Jeremiah: Thou hast wrapped thyself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through? (Lam. 3:44) (Read Isa. 59:1,2.) God does not set up the wall between He and We, we do! Without repentance and forgiveness of sins we are bound to be dead through trespasses and sin. (Eph. 2:1).
 - 4. Man is searching for satisfaction and if he doesn't turn to God then he will turn to the world: to sex, drugs, violence, gambling, and even sports. Rest cannot be found outside of a right relationship with God
- B. Bondage To Self - not only does sin alienate us from God, it puts us into captivity.
 - 1. The outward act is the result of an inward attitude. Jesus says that the nature and health of a tree controls the kind of fruit and its condition. He taught that it is man's nature that is the cause of humanity's ills, not education, environment, politics, or economics (Mk. 7:21-23).

2. When Jesus told the Pharisees that they were enslaved, they became indignant. Yet Jesus replied, "Everyone who commits a sin becomes a slave to sin." (Jn. 8:30-34) (See also: Rom. 6:17; Eph. 2:3; Titus 3:3.)
 3. James used the "tongue" as an example of man's inability to control himself without God's help (Jms. 3:1-12).
 4. Man cannot, in and of himself, free himself from the bondage of sin - man needs a Savior! Only the spiritual power found in the Word, Jesus Christ, will give man the necessary willpower to be freed from sin's enslavement.
- C. Conflict With Others - sin's effects on our relationships with others.
1. Our duty to God and others is positively seen in Jesus' distillation of (Lev. 19:18) and (Deut. 6:5), (Read: Mt. 22:37-39).
 - a. The first command concerns our duty to God - He comes first. According to God, He is first, then our neighbors, then ourselves. Satan reverses this order.
 - b. Our nature makes it hard to adjust to other people; we are born truly self-centered. We have a tendency to despise or envy other people, to feel either inferior or superior to them.
 2. Our over-emphasis on "self" makes all our life relationships complicated: husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee, ourselves as a member of society. Most schisms that occur in these relationships could be closed if people were humble enough to take the blame for at least some of the problem.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Conflicts in our earthly relationships would cease if we could replace the spirit of self-assertion with the spirit of self-sacrifice. The Bible calls this spirit of self-sacrifice "agape," we call it "love."
- B. Sin is possessive: its characteristic is the desire to get, while love is expansive: its characteristic is the desire to give.
- C. As a race of beings, humanity needs a massive "attitude adjustment." A "change from self to unself" (H.M. Gwatkin). Man cannot make this change alone - he needs a Savior!
- D. We have used these lessons to expose our sins for one purpose - to convince us of our need for Jesus Christ and to prepare us to accept Him on His terms. (Mk. 2:17 - And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." NKJ)
Only when we realize the seriousness of our ills, will we realize our need for urgent care!

CHRIST'S WORK: LESSONS 7 – 8

Christ's work is the main theme of the Bible. God has sent His son to deliver us from our sins (Mt. 1:21; Lk. 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Jn. 4:14). Through Christ man can:

1. Be reconciled to God through His death;
2. be freed from our bondage to sin by obedience to His will; and
3. have the discord between ourselves and our fellow man replaced by fellowship with God's people through the church.

LESSON 7 - THE DEATH OF CHRIST

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Paul's ministry and message of reconciliation.
1. God is the author of this reconciliation.
 2. Christ is the agent (2 Cor. 5:17-20).
 3. The achievements of Christ's death on the cross had its origins in the mind of the eternal God (Jn. 3:16; Col. 1:19,20).

- B. What is "reconciliation?" (Also translated "atonement." Rom. 5:11 KJV) - The act by which two conflicting parts are made to be in agreement.

1. Paul says that the achievement of this atonement is strictly through the work of Christ.
- 2.

SIN	VS.	THE CROSS
Caused Estrangement		Accomplished Atonement
Created a Gulf		Bridged the Gulf
Broke the Fellowship		Repaired the Break
Wages of Sin: Death		God's Free Gift: Eternal Life

- C. In this lesson we will consider the centrality and meaning of the cross by emphasizing its vitality and achievement.

II. DISCUSSION

- A. The Centrality of the Cross - the central message of the Bible is "Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins." Some have called this ever present theme "the scarlet thread."
1. The Old Testament - a religion of sacrifice.
 - a. Abel - bringing sacrifices to God long before the Law of Moses.
 - b. Moses - formalized the system of sacrifices.
 - c. Through the ages all Jews were taught the ordinances of Lev. 17:11 (see also Heb. 9:22). They knew the purpose of blood sacrifice.
 - d. The OT sacrifices foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ. The prophets and psalmists foretold the connection (Zech. 13:7; Mk. 14:27; Dan. 9:25,26; Isa. 53; Lk. 24:46).
 2. Christ's Thoughts (The Gospels)

- a. Jesus recognized Himself to be the ultimate sacrifice as He must "suffer many things" (Mk. 8:31).
 - b. "His baptism to be baptized with," and "His hour was come" (Lk. 12:50; Jn. 17:1).
 - c. He was troubled by His coming ordeal (Jn. 12:27,28).
 - d. He knew His sacrifice was inevitable (Jn. 18:11).
3. New Testament Writers
- a. The Gospel writers spent a disproportionate amount of space writing about Christ's last week on earth and His sacrifice on the cross for it not to be very significant (Matthew: 40%; Mark: 60%; Luke: 33%; John: 50%).
 - b. Paul - (Gal. 2:20; 6:14; 1 Cor. 1:22-24; 2:2; 15:3.)
 - c. Elsewhere in the NT - (Heb. 9:26; Rev. 5:5,6,12.)

B. The Meaning of the Cross

1. Why would Peter's first epistle be used to explain the meaning of the cross?
 - a. Peter (along with James and John) was in the inner circle of Apostles. These Apostles were the ones who were closest to the Savior during his earthly ministry.
 - b. Peter was slow to accept the need for the death of Jesus and even denied the Lord three times when his death was imminent. Yet, when taught by the resurrected Savior and the Holy Spirit, Peter became the champion of the efficacy of the cross (see Acts 2).
 - c. His references to the cross in First Peter are not his main points, but he uses these references to bolster his points, thus assuming the need of the cross to be true. His references to the cross are made to inspire his listeners.
2. Christ died as our example - Peter's first epistle was written during a time of persecution.
 - a. Peter advises his listeners to be good servants (1 Pet. 2:18-25) and bear persecution as Jesus did. We are to "follow His steps," that is, model our behavior after His.
 - b. It is hard not to fight back against evil, to bear unjust suffering and overcome evil with good, but this is the call of the cross.
 - c. The death of Christ on the cross is more than just an example (see Mk. 10:45; Mt. 26:28). His death accomplished more than just a martyr's death (compare Stephen). Humanity was (and is) in need of more than an example - it needs a Savior! Only a Savior can: cleanse us from our sins, give us peace of mind, and reconcile us to God.
 - d. The Apostles associate Christ's coming and death with our sins: Paul - 1 Cor. 15:3; Peter - 1 Pet. 3:18; John - 1 Jn. 3:5.
3. Christ died as our sin bearer (1 Pet. 2:24)
 - a. To bear sin is to suffer its consequences, to bear its ultimate penalty (Lev. 5:17).
 - b. In the Old Testament there are instances where someone else would assume responsibility for the sinner (Num. 30; Lam.)

- c. God allowed the blood sacrifices of the Old Law to bear the iniquity of Israel's sins (Lev. 10:17 KJV; 16:22).
- d. From Hebrews we learn that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin. It would take an ultimate sacrifice such as the one described in Isa. 53 to do that work. "He shall bear their iniquities." "He bore the sins of many."
- e. John the Baptist exclaims... (Jn. 1:29).
- f. Jesus was made "flesh" in Mary's womb, He was "made sin" on the cross (2 Cor. 5:18,19). He voluntarily took the sins of all humanity on His shoulders. His Father forsook Him as He bore our sins (Ps. 22:1). As He triumphed over our sins He "finished: His work.
- g. Yet, we still have work to do, to assure our own salvation. Christianity is not a spectator religion even though Christ's sacrifice was at God's initiative.
- h. Peter's clear teaching: Jesus suffered the penalty for our sins for us.
 - 1) Christ bore our sins on a "tree." (Deut. 21:22,23). Confirmed by Paul (Gal. 3:13).
 - 2)

Compare 1 Pet. 2	to	Isa. 53
He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips		He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth
He was reviled		He was despised and rejected by men
He himself bore our sins		He bore the sin of many
By his wounds you have been healed.		With his stripes we are healed.
You were straying like sheep		All we like sheep have gone astray

* Confirmed by Philip the Evangelist in Acts 8:30-35. The Isaiah passage is about Christ and His mission.

- 3) See also 1 Pet. 1:2,18,19, where Peter compares Jesus to the original Passover sacrifice.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. 1 Pet. 3:18 - Sin separated us from God and Christ had the power to reconcile us to God. He died for our sins "once for all," which means the feat need not be repeated.
- B. Christ's atonement for our sins is a work we could never accomplish on our own. If we could secure our own forgiveness then His death would have been redundant (Gal. 2:21).
- C. Our healing comes through Christ's wounds, our life comes through His death, our pardon comes through His pain, and our salvation comes through His suffering. Won't you take advantage of Christ's work on your behalf even this hour?

LESSON 8 - THE SALVATION OF CHRIST

- I. INTRODUCTION - Christ's work is the main theme of the Bible. God has sent His son to deliver us from our sins (Mt. 1:21; Lk. 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Jn. 4:14). Through Christ man can:
1. Be reconciled to God through His death; (Lesson 7)
 2. be freed from our bondage to sin by obedience to His will (His Word); and
 3. have the discord between ourselves and our fellow man replaced by fellowship with God's people through the church.
- A. Salvation is more than forgiveness. God's plan for us goes beyond forgiveness of our past sins and makes arrangements for our present and our future.
- B. While the death of Christ brings us forgiveness of our past sins, it is His Spirit-given Word and His Body the church that keeps us in a right relationship with God and His people.
- II. DISCUSSION
- A. The Work of the Holy Spirit - the return of Christ to the right hand of the Father did not leave us helpless, but in fact allowed the Comforter to come and dwell in His Apostles. (Jn. 16:7-11; 14:16-18)
1. The Holy Spirit dwells in us as well. (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19; Acts 5:32) This indwelling is a fellowship we also have with the Father and the Son. It is controlled by Their collective teaching.
 2. Therefore we have the Holy Spirit if we obey the gospel and continue to abide in the teaching of Christ.
 3. The gift of the Holy Spirit - Acts 2:38 - deliverance from sin!
- B. The Power of the Word - it is through Christ's Word that we come to the knowledge of how to abide in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.
1. God in us, us in Him - (Jn. 14:23; 2 Jn. 9a.) We must be content to abide in the teaching of Christ if we would have God dwell in us. (Compare to Israel in Lev. 26:11,12)
 2. Christ in us, us in Him - (Jn. 6:53,54,63; 2 Jn. 9b.; Gal. 2:20)
 - a. Through faith in Him - Eph. 3:17; A faith that comes through hearing the Word (Rom. 10:17; 1 Jn. 2:24)
 - b. We abide in Christ when we keep His commandments (1 Jn. 3:24; Jn.15:5-7)
 - c. To receive the Apostles words is to receive Christ's Word (Mt. 10:40, see v. 14).
 3. The Holy Spirit in us, us in Him - (Rom. 8:5-11) - our indwelling relationship with the Spirit is the same as our indwelling relationship with God and Christ - through Their collective teaching and abiding and obeying that teaching.

- C. Fellowship in the Church of Christ - As we strive to remain in fellowship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit by abiding and obeying The Word, we have a place to come where we can reach out to those of like precious faith - the Church.
1. Who is this "called out body?" (the church) - (Mt. 28:19; 16:18) a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham to bless all nations through his Seed (Gal.3:29)
 2. The church is Christ's Body - every member an organ, with a specific function, needful for the health of the whole. (Rom. 12:5-8)
 3. The local church provides us with opportunities to worship God in Spirit and in Truth, enjoy fellowship with our brethren and to minister to the needy saints.
 4. Whenever we go in this world where the church is active, we are welcome as family
 5. Unfortunately all professed Christians and all so-called churches of Christ, are not in a right relationship with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Why? They are not individually and collectively abiding and obeying the Word.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. It is up to us as individuals to take advantage of the Christ's death on the cross to have our sins forgiven. How? By being obedient to His will and abiding in His Word.
- B. But what does this entail? Hearing (Rom. 10:14,17); Believing (Heb. 11:6), Repenting (Acts 17:30); Confessing (Rom. 10:10); Being Baptized (Gal. 3:27), and Abiding in the Word.
- C. The church of Christ is our refuge here on earth and our family for all eternity. In it we have fellowship with God's people and insulation from the world of sin. Won't you take advantage of Christ's death, His Word, and His church this very hour?

MAN'S RESPONSE: LESSONS 9-11

LESSON 9 - COUNTING THE COST

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Our study thus far: evidence presented for the unique qualifications of Jesus as the Christ, man's need as a sinner, the salvation Christ has won for us on the cross. In the last three lessons of this series we will find the answer to the Philippian Jailor's question: "What must I do to be saved?"
- B. Christianity is a "do something" religion. To simply believe in the deity and salvation of Christ and acknowledge ourselves as sinners in need of that salvation will not make us a Christian. Jesus demands a commitment and actions commensurate with that commitment. This lesson concerns itself with the implications of making such a commitment to Christ.
- C. Christ's offer of salvation demands complete submission to His will. Each one of us is invited to follow Jesus, but will we be willing to pay the price? (Lk. 9:57-62; 18:18-23; 14:25-33) Is it any wonder the world sees the church as full of hypocrites, for many have half-built towers of Christianity that neither the world nor Christ find acceptable.
- D. Jesus has never lowered his standards or modified his conditions to make more converts, but instead invited them to take up their crosses and follow Him. (Mk. 8:34- 38)

II. DISCUSSION

- A. The Call to Follow Christ
 - 1. Jesus' call, "follow Me," involves allegiance, discipleship, obedience, and a willingness to be identified with the Way. To follow Jesus we must forsake all others. His cause becomes our cause. He takes precedence over family, work, and recreation. This involves:
 - a. Renunciation of sin through repentance. It involves a turning away from every wrong thought, deed, and habit. It is an inward change of heart (intellect, emotion, and particularly will) which leads to a change in behavior. In determining what must be renounced for Christ's sake, we must follow the teaching of the Bible and not depend on other men as our example. True repentance might involve restitution. We may have to put things right like Zaccheus the dishonest tax collector. We may have to dispel rumors we started, mend broken relationships, return property, or make apologies. God will not allow us to enjoy the fruits of the sins we repent of, if we expect to be in a right relationship with Him.
 - b. Renunciation of self by surrendering our will to Christ. Jesus uses three phrases to describe this surrender:
 - (1) "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself." This is more than denying things to self, but involves denying self to self.

Just say no to self! Repudiate self and acknowledge Christ in your place.

- (2) "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." To take up one's cross means "to put oneself in the position of a condemned man on his way to his execution." (H.B. Swete - Commentary on Mark) Paul says we are to crucify the flesh, while Luke adds "daily," to "take up your cross."
 - (3) "Whoever loses his life...will save it." "Life" here can be interpreted "self." By committing ourselves (lives) to Christ, we lose that part of our self that causes us trouble. We do not forfeit our personalities and become robots, but instead allow Christ to use our personalities to do His will. Jesus demands our commitment! Why? Because He is Lord! (Phil. 2:10,11)
2. Jesus calls us to make Him our Lord and accept the challenges of His Lordship, by bringing every facet of our lives, both public and private, under His control. This includes such aspects of our lives as:
- a. our work - do we see ourselves cooperating with God in service to man?
 - b. our marriage, our homes and families - we must reconcile our love for these with passages such as: Mt. 10:34,37.
 - c. our money Christ must come before material wealth. We must use our wealth to best serve His cause first.
 - d. our time If "time is money" then we must treat our time like our money. We must put Jesus first here as well. Jesus demands our time. Time for prayer, Bible study, worship on the Lord's Day, serving the members of the church, and more.
- B. The Call to Confess Christ - not only are we to follow Christ privately, He expects us to confess Him publicly. To deny ourselves in secret will do us no good if we deny Him in the open. (Mk. 8:38, Mt. 10:32,33) Jesus knew that the church would be a minority in the world and man does not like to be in the position of the few against the many. Public confession is one of the requirements to obtain salvation, "for man believes with his heart and is so justified, and he confesses with his lips and is so saved." (Rom. 10:10, RSV)
- C. The Call to Be Baptized in Christ's Name - water baptism is also a requirement of salvation. It is spoken of or alluded to over 100 times in the New Testament. (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27; Acts 22:16; Mk. 16:16)

III. CONCLUSION - What are the incentives involved in following Jesus?

- A. For Our Own Sake (Mk. 8:35-37). By losing ourselves in following Christ we actually find our true selves. According to the passage, following Christ is the best bargain we can make. In the long run, it costs more not to be a Christian than to be one.

- B. For the Sake of Others we save our lives by losing it for the sake of the gospel. How is this? Through our proclamation of the gospel in our words and deeds. According to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, we operate as salt and light. That is, as a preservative and as a beacon of hope.
- C. For the Sake of Jesus Himself we save our lives by losing them for His sake. We owe Him that much because of His sacrifice for our sakes. Jesus asks no more from us than He gave, he asks a cross for a cross. Yet even if we give up this earth-life for Him, He still gave up more.
- D. Final Thoughts Christianity is for everyone, but everyone will not be for it. It is for those that want to self-discover the nature of God in us all, to enjoy the adventure and privilege of serving their God and their fellow man, and to express the overwhelming gratitude to the one who died for you. Yield your life to Jesus this very day!

LESSON 10 - REACHING A DECISION

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Some believe that because they were born in a country predominately inhabited by those calling themselves Christians, that they are born Christians. Some believe that they are Christians because they have had a so-called "Christian upbringing." Yet, God requires that every adult makes his or her own decision to be for or against Christ.
- B. There is no "spiritual Switzerland." There is no neutral ground. We either take Him as our Savior or reject Him as a charlatan. No one else can decide the matter for us, we must decide for ourselves.
- C. Mental assent that Jesus is Lord is not sufficient. Belief must lead to obedience. Acknowledging only that I need a Savior and that Jesus is such a Savior is to fall short of salvation. Jesus must further be acknowledged as my Savior and His words obeyed to bring me into a saving relationship with Him.
- D. Rev. 3:20 - Jesus says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me." The Laodiceans to whom these words were addressed were materially wealthy but spiritually complacent. These were those that Jesus said were neither hot nor cold and being such were worthy only of being spit out on the ground. Rev. 3:14-22 - Dare we say, "I need nothing," when without Him we are morally naked, and spiritually blind and beggarly. It is up to each of us individually to open the door to His knock and let Him into our hearts and lives.

II. DISCUSSION

- A. The one at the door is the God-man, whose claims, character, and resurrection show Him to be the Son of God. He is standing at the door speaking to us, not pushing at the door shouting at us. Yet, the house belongs to Him and He only knocks and asks, not breaks down and demands. He counsels us, when by rights He could order us. This is the freedom He has given us.
- B. Why does Jesus want to come in? He wants to be our Savior and Lord and perfectly meets the requirements to fulfill both duties.
 - 1. He died to be our Savior - By receiving Him, on His terms, we will be able to receive the benefits of His death. By answering His knock, He will enter the house and refurbish it by cleansing us and blotting out our sins. Furthermore, He offers us His fellowship.
 - 2. Jesus will enter as our Lord and Master - there is no use in opening the door to Him if we are unwilling for this to occur. Upon entrance into our house, He will demand access to every room, closet, nook and cranny. No sweeping our mistakes under the rug, nor stowing them away in the attic until He leaves.

3. For Him to come in we must repent. We must determine to forsake evil and follow Christ. We must let Him into our lives and let the rearrangements begin.
4. Is this commitment reasonable? It is certainly more reasonable than any human pact that we might enter into, including the marriage contract.

C. What must we do?

1. Hear His voice - listen to His word. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
2. We must open the door - we must submit to Him as our Lord and Savior.
 - a. It is a definite act - The door is closed tight and Christ will not open it Himself. The handle is on the inside. He knocks, but we must open.
 - b. It is an individual act - no one can make your decision for you. Not family, not friends, not the preacher, not even the Lord Himself. They can help or hinder your decision, but ultimately it rests on you alone.
 - c. It is a unique act - Once you've obeyed the gospel, you are His forever. Can you still be lost ? Yes, but He promises to search for you as a straying sheep. It takes only a moment to open the door, but a lifetime to live up to the expectations of your new house guest. A moment of commitment leads to a lifetime of adjustment.
 - d. It is a deliberate act - Do not expect a supernatural act or an emotional experience. Jesus is at the door knocking even this moment. His fist is on the door, is your hand on the latch?
 - e. It is an urgent act - Prov. 27:1; Heb. 3:7,8. Do not hesitate, there will be no better day. Do not wait until your life is in order, obey now, Christ's word will help you order your life.
 - f. It is an indispensable act - You must open the door. Whispering to Him through the keyhole or pushing coins to Him under the door will gain you nothing. He will still be outside and you will be inside - lost. This is the critical issue – on which side of your door is Jesus?

III. CONCLUSION

- A. This lesson concerns becoming a Christian. There is more to being a Christian than becoming one. You must be in fellowship with the church, you must continue to study and do God's will, you must grow in grace and knowledge, and you must seek to serve God and your brethren.
- B. But first things first - are you prepared to open the door to Christ? To Confess His name before this meeting, to Repent for your sins, to be buried with Him in Baptism for the remission of your sins, to rise to Walk in newness of life? Open the door, let the Savior in!

LESSON 11 BEING A CHRISTIAN

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Becoming a Christian is one thing, being a Christian is something more. This final lesson in this series concerns itself with what being a Christian implies.
- B. This lesson is designed for those that have already been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Those that have already heard the word, believed what was needed to put themselves in a right relationship with God through Christ, and obeyed it. Now What? What must be done to stay in the kingdom? Many denominationalists will tell you - Nothing! The Bible tells us different.
- C. John 1:6-13 - The children of God are those born of God. Those born of God are those that believe on the name of Christ. Membership in God's family, like membership in our earthly families, entails not only privileges, but also responsibilities.

II. DISCUSSION

- A. The Ultimate Christian Privilege The privilege of being spiritually related to God.
 - 1. An intimate relationship
 - a. We receive His care, Mt. 6:7-13, 25-34, 7:7-12.
 - b. He administers discipline, Heb. 12:3-11
 - 2. An assured relationship - 1 Jn. 5:13. Being sure of our salvation is more than just feeling sure. Our feelings really have little to do with the assurance of our salvation - God says that if we keep His commandments we will have eternal life, which says it all! The assurance comes from knowledge of God's word.
1 Jn. 5:10-12 - to doubt our salvation makes God a liar.
 - a. Passages of Blessed Assurance
Christ will receive us if we come to Him Jn. 6:37;
He will hold us and never let us go Jn. 10:28;
He will never leave us Mt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5,6;
God will not let us to be tempted past our own strength 1 Cor. 10:13;
He will forgive us if we confess our sins 1 Jn. 1:9;
He will give us wisdom if we ask for it James 1:5
 - b. The Spirit bears witness that we are God's children Rom. 5:5; 8:15,16
 - c. In Christ's physical absence, we are led by the Spirit through the Word Rom. 8:9-17. Repetitive, continual, unrepentant disobedience is a sure sign that a person does not intend to remain in a saved relationship with God. The Spirit does not dwell in such a man regardless of what that man might say. Righteousness and love are two marks of a true Christian.
 - 3. A secure relationship as a child of God. I can become estranged from Him but He will never totally abandon me. If any abandonment is to take place it will be on my part. Until the day I pass this life, God will be waiting to kill the fatted calf at the return of the "Prodigal Son." When we as children of God sin, we do not have

to start our Christianity over from scratch, but must return to the fold (repent), confess our sins and pray for forgiveness 1 Jn. 1:9; 2:1,2.

- B. The Ultimate Christian Responsibility to Grow . 1 Pet. 2:2 Many Christians are born, but never grow up. God expects us to grow in understanding and holiness.
1. Grow in knowledge - through study, attending classes, meetings, and preaching services.
 2. Grow in holiness - Gal. 5:16,22,23
 3. But how shall we grow? By doing our Christian duties.
 - a. Our duty to God - our relationship with him is not static. He expects two-way communication through prayer and Bible study. In both we need to be systematic and consistent. As you read the Bible look for promises to claim, commands to obey, examples to follow, and sins to avoid. Pray concerning your Bible study and your personal life. Confess your private sins. God is your Father, treat Him as you would treat your father. Update your personal prayer list often.
 - b. Our duty to the Church in God's family, you are not the only child. The Bible often refers to Christians as "brethren." God has added us to the church, but He expects us to attach ourselves to a congregation of His people. As a Christian we have obligations to God that can only be scripturally performed on Sunday, in the presence of fellow Christians. But our link to our brethren must extend beyond the walls of the church building. Think of your relationship with your earthly family. If it is a good relationship, then use that as a model for your relationship with your Christian brethren 2 Cor. 6:14.
 - c. Our duty to the World - showing a concern for the souls of our fellow man. Their spiritual well-being is our first concern. Evangelism: to spread the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, starting in our own neighborhood. We must be the "salt" and "light" of the Sermon on the Mount. "We are the world's Bible," as the hymn says.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. The Ultimate Christian Dilemma "...in the world, but not of the world."
1. The Bible writers stress our earthly obligations that we cannot shirk - to the state, our employers, our family, and society.
 2. Yet, as the song says, "This earth is not my Home, I'm, just a passing through..." 1 Pet. 2:11; Phil. 3:20; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.
- B. The Solution - A Balance Life.
1. We cannot abandon the world, join a monastery or commune and totally insulate ourselves from the world.
 2. Yet, we must not immerse ourselves in this world of sin.
 3. Jesus died so that we might be baptized into His name to rise from that watery grave and walk in "newness of life." He left us His word so that we might live in this world, yet remain members of His spiritual family.
 4. To truly follow Him we must fully dedicate our lives to His service.