

Lesson 1: THE NATURE OF GOD

Man cannot know God or what God is like apart from 'revelation'. If God does not reveal Himself to man, it is impossible for him to discover God for himself. God Himself must take the initiative and this is exactly what He has done in His Word, the Bible.

1. God is a Spirit Being

God is Spirit (John 4:24). A spirit being does not have flesh and bones. In other words, it is invisible, with no physical body (Luke 24:39).

To say that 'God is spirit' is to mean that God not made up of any physical substance and cannot be seen with our physical eyes. This is why God forbade His people from making any images of Himself (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 4:14-20; Isaiah 40:25).

What is spirit may, however, choose to manifest itself in visible form. God has manifested Himself on "certain occasions" in the Old Testament (Genesis 16:7-10,13- The 'angel of the Lord' is the 'Lord Himself'; 18:1-2; Exodus 24:9,10) and on a "permanent basis" in the New Testament through Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:23; John 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16).

2. God is a Personal Being

God is not a 'thing', a 'power' or an 'influence'. God is not some impersonal force but a Being with a Personality. It is the faculties of mind, will and emotions that constitutes personality or makes one a Personal being (not 'flesh' or 'physical substance' that makes one out as a person).

God hears, sees, knows, loves, hates, grieves, creates, provides, destroys, laughs, cares,..... and is therefore described as having personality (Genesis. 1:1; 6:6; 18:20; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Psalm 94:9-10; 104:27-30; Proverbs 6:16; John 3:16; Acts 14:15; 1 Peter 5:6-7). Because God is a personal being, it is possible to have a relationship with Him.

3. God is a Triune Being

The God of the Bible exists as 3 persons- the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), the Holy Spirit. We have one God revealed in Three Persons or Three Persons in One Being described as the Holy Trinity. By the word 'Trinity', we mean 'Threefold' or 'Three-in-one'. While the term is itself not found in the Bible, we use it because the Trinitarian or Triune God is revealed through the Bible (Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Psalm 45:6-7; Isaiah 6:8; 48:16; Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; Luke 1: 35; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14)

The core truths that form this foundational doctrine are these:

(i) God is Three Persons (ii) Each Person is fully God (iii) There is only One God.

a. God is Three Persons

The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is not the Father. They are three distinct Persons; we are able to distinguish one from the other (John 14: 26; 15:26; 16:7; John 17:1, 13; Acts 7:55)

The Father is in Heaven (Matthew 6:9). The Son, after coming to the earth to do the Father's will, is now in Heaven seated at the right hand of the Father (Mark 16:19; Acts 7:55-56). The Holy Spirit is on the earth. He makes the Presence of the Father and the Son real to us (John 16:7, 16). Through the Spirit, the Father and the Son dwell in the believer (John 14:17, 19-20, 23).

b. Each Person is fully God

The Father is fully God (John 6:27; Romans 1:7; 1 Peter 1:2). The Son is fully God (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1; 8:57-58; 10:30,33; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; Revelation 1:8, 17). The Holy Spirit is fully God (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 6:19; Hebrews 9:14).

In the working of the Trinity, even while each Person is fully God, we observe that the Son chooses to subject Himself to 'the Father' (Matthew 20:33; Mark 13:32; John 14:28, 31; Acts 1:7; 1 Corinthians 15:24, 28) and the Holy Spirit seeks to glorify 'the Father and the Son' (John 16:13-15; Acts 10:45-46; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

c. There is only One God

The 3 distinct Persons in the Trinity have the same Nature and Purpose. They stand by each other and work together (John 5:19; 8:29; 14:26; 16:15). It is in this sense that they are 'one' (John 10:30).

To summarise: We do not have 3 'separate' Gods; we have only One God who exists as Three 'distinct' Persons (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Romans 3:30; 1 Timothy 2:5; James 2:19). If we take away any one Person from the Trinity, the God of the Bible is incomplete.

It is possible to 'distinguish' between them but it is not possible to 'divide' them. The problem with the Jews was that they wanted to believe in the Father without believing in the Son. Jesus told them that this was impossible (Luke 10:16; John 5:23; 15:23).

How the Triune God functions

The Triune God is Co-Equal and Co-Eternal. But each Person has a different role to play-

1. Creation

God the Father spoke "And God said" (Gen. 1); God the Son carried out the creative orders or decrees "Through Him all things were made" (Jn. 1:3); God the Spirit was sustaining or maintaining the presence of God in creation "And the Spirit of God was hovering..." (Gen. 1:3)

2. Salvation

Repentance is towards God the Father (Acts 20:21); Faith is on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21); Conviction is by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8)

We believe in Jesus and become the Father's children (Jn. 1:12-13). The Holy Spirit gives us the boldness to approach God as our own father and thus bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16).

3. Prayer

Prayer is to God the Father (Mt. 6:6, 9); In the Name of Jesus (Jn. 16:26); By the Spirit (Rom. 8:26)

4. Confession of Sins

1 Jn. 2:1- We confess our sins to the Father. The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:7). As a High Priest, Jesus pleads before the Father for us (Heb. 2:17-18).

5. Worship

God the Father has highly exalted Jesus the Son and given Him a name which is above every Name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

The worship is ultimately directed to the glory of God the Father.

Phil. 3:3- We worship God the Father, in the Spirit, rejoicing in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Worship is primarily to the Father; Rejoicing/Celebration is in Jesus and His work; Enablement is by the Spirit.

Lesson 2: GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

The word 'salvation', which has the same root with such words as safe, saved and salvage, is a very big word with many shades of meaning and is at the very heart of what we believe. So, in this study, we are going to examine seven factors involved in salvation.

1. SALVATION IS FROM SIN. (Matthew 1:21; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18)

We have all got troubles. We experience various kinds of difficulties. But the basic problem of man, the heart of the disease, is sin.

WHAT IS SIN?

'Sin' may be defined as "an inward attitude of rebellion towards God, which is expressed in outward acts of disobedience". Each one of us has this rebellious nature and what we are is soon confirmed by our actions! (Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:20-22; James 4:17; 1 John 3:4)

WHAT IS THE RESULT OF SIN?

The result of sin is death (Romans 6:21, 23; James 1:15).

Death is both a 'state' and a 'fate'. It is both a 'present reality' and a 'future destiny'.

The present reality: From the moment of birth we are all spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-2; Colossians 2:13). We have an evil heart and are alienated from God (Ephesians 2:11-12; Colossians 1:21; Titus 3:3). Measured by God's holy standard of perfection, we can never fully glorify or honour Him (Romans 3:23). Furthermore, we are totally helpless to remedy this condition (Jeremiah 13:23; Isaiah 64:6).

The future destiny: Every individual who dies in his sins will perish (John 3:16). He will be completely cut off from God for all eternity without being able to relate to Him or respond to Him. This fate was described by Jesus as hell, a place originally prepared for the devil and his evil angels (Matthew 25:41).

2. SALVATION IS BY GRACE. (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8)

Grace is divine magnanimity, divine generosity. It primarily refers to the "favour of God" (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). It is the unmerited or undeserved kindness that God showers upon human beings- an act of mercy freely given to the needy. It refers to God choosing to be good to us who deserve nothing but condemnation and punishment. Through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, fulness of grace has been manifest and the riches of grace has been opened up (John 1:17; Titus 2:11).

All this means two simple things: bad deeds are no 'hindrance' and good deeds are no 'help' when we come to God for salvation. It does not matter what 'dreadful things' we have done in the past- they cannot put us beyond the touch of God. And it also does not matter what 'good deeds' we may have done before- they cannot win us the approval of God.

Salvation is a 'free gift' (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8). It is a gift which needs to be 'received'. The apostles told people what they must do in order to appropriate the grace of God made available in Jesus Christ.

3. SALVATION IS AFTER REPENTANCE. (Acts 17:30; 20:21)

Scriptural repentance involves three dimensions: thought, word and deed. In passing through these mental, verbal and practical phases, there is a movement from the 'inward heart' to the 'outward life'. To express the latter without experiencing the former is 'morally offensive'; to profess the former without manifesting the latter is 'hypocrisy'.

The word "repent" means literally 'to change one's mind'. It means "to think again", particularly with reference to past behaviour. To repent means to think about things from God's point of view, to agree with His analysis and accept His verdict. It is to come to a "knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:25) about God and one's self.

Thinking differently about former actions needs to be followed by speaking differently about them. Sins need to be confessed (Matthew 3:6, 11). Such confession has two great benefits- particularity and responsibility. That is, we move beyond a superficial, general confession and name sins individually or specifically. It also enables us to admit that we have voluntarily and wilfully sinned against God.

Words of repentance need to be followed by works of repentance. John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul are a few examples of those who expected repentance to be demonstrated in practical ways (Luke 3:8; 19:1-10; Acts 26:20).

The Scriptures clearly teach that "the past needs to be put right" wherever this is possible: Some of this putting right will take the form of 'negative action'. For example, the putting away of idols (1 Thessalonians 1:9), the destruction of objects belonging to the kingdom of darkness (Acts 19:19), the ending of wrong relationships (1 Corinthians 6:11). The past must be brought to a conclusion.

Much of the putting right will take the form of 'positive action'. Reconciliation and restitution are examples in this category (Matthew 5:23-24).

This “turning from sins to God” is the essence of the New Testament word ‘conversion’. The word means to turn around, change course, reverse direction. It talks about the willingness to let go of one’s old life, with all that that involves, and turn to the new life that Christ gives.

4. SALVATION IS THROUGH FAITH. (Romans 4:3, 23-24; 5:1; Ephesians 2:8)

There are five fundamental facets which together constitute full faith, according to apostolic doctrine: historical, personal, verbal, practical and continual.

Faith is Historical: Faith is based on facts, not feelings. It is the facts that are believed which make faith effective. Saving faith is based on historical events, which have already taken place or will yet do so. The heart of it lies in those crucial events which revolve round a historical human being called Jesus around 2000 years ago- His death on a cross, burial in a tomb and resurrection with a body (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Faith is Personal: Christian faith begins in the mind and is transferred to the will. It is not only believing ‘that’ Jesus died and rose again; it is also believing ‘in’ the Jesus who died and rose again. To stop at the historical dimension would turn faith into a credal confession, an intellectual acceptance. The usual sense that faith is used by the New Testament writers is as ‘an attitude of trust’.

Faith is Verbal: Our faith needs to be put into words. But the emphasis is not on the persons ‘by’ whom they are expressed; it is on the persons ‘to’ whom they are addressed. The first and foremost direction of this verbal expression is calling on Jesus by name when seeking salvation (Acts 2:21; 22:16). And this is followed by confessing “Jesus is Lord” before people.

Faith is Practical: Faith is something we ‘do’ rather than something we ‘have’. It is not just accepting the truth of God’s word; it is acting on that truth. It is ‘faith in action’ that saves.

Faith is Continual: In both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the words used for ‘faith’ and ‘faithfulness’ are exactly the same word. Faith needs to be exercised and expressed till the end of our life’s journey. The apostle Paul never rested on his past step of faith on the Damascus road. In the middle of his pilgrimage, he relied on a present faith (Galatians 2:20). At the end of his life, he was able to testify that he had kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7).

5. SALVATION IS TO HOLINESS. (Romans 6:22; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:22)

Salvation is positive as well as negative. There is a turning 'from' and a turning 'to'. We are saved for a purpose, a destiny: and that destiny is holiness.

When we turn to God in repentance and through faith in Christ, He begins to work in us to restore us to the original image of God in which we were created and which is perfectly seen in the character of Christ. So holiness is 'Christlikeness'- it is being transformed into the image of Christ such that His character is fully formed in us.

It is utterly impossible for us to achieve holiness in our own strength. But God never lowers His standards to meet people; He lifts people to meet His standards- by giving them His Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Although there is the 'law of sin and death' present within the believer, one who is filled with the Holy Spirit now has a new capacity and power to lead a holy, victorious life (Romans 8:2). It is as we set our minds on the Spirit, follow His desires and obey His promptings that Christ-like character is formed within us (Romans 8:4-5, 13).

The fruit of the Spirit is the natural outworking of a life which is continually yielded to the Spirit and walks in step with Him (Galatians 5:16). It is not formed by 'struggle' but by 'submission'! Transformation into the image of Christ is a daily process and takes place from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18).

6. SALVATION IS WITH ASSURANCE. (1 John 3:1; 5:13, 19)

The Bible teaches us that as believers, God desires that we should have complete certainty of our salvation and our acceptance before Him. Assurance of salvation is our glorious privilege; it is not pride or presumption to declare that we are children of God.

This assurance comes through 'the Holy Spirit' (Romans 8:15-16; 1 John 4:13). When we are led by the Holy Spirit and are walking in the Spirit, we shall enjoy the continuous witness of the Spirit, that intuitive certainty that the Lord is with us. Also, a 'clear conscience', a 'love for our brethren', and a 'discontinuing of habitual sins' are further means of assurance.

Assurance of salvation is not overconfidence, that whatever we do as believers, our future is absolutely secure. Believers can be sure of their 'present relationship' with the Lord- that they are walking with Him, that they are on the straight and narrow road that leads to life. They can know for sure that they

are on “the Way”, both the ‘way of salvation’ and the ‘way to Heaven’. They can rest in the knowledge that travelling along this road, they are certain to reach the right destination. There is every reason to rejoice and no need for doubt and anxiety in this walk of faith, hope and love!

When believers give in to temptation, one of the first things to suffer is their assurance. That’s when doubts and fears creep in. This is because we have grieved the Spirit who is the source of our assurance. The cure for guilt is forgiveness, which is constantly available to those who freely confess their need (1 John 1:9). With the restored relationship, the assurance will return.

7. SALVATION IS IN PHASES. (John 5:24; Romans 13:11)

Salvation is a process, not a crisis experience. It is continuous and not yet complete in any of us. The first name for the Christian religion was “the Way” (Acts 18:25, 26; 19:9, 23), indicating a progressive journey, rather than a destination we have already arrived at.

There are three dimensions to the salvation experience- a past, present and future aspect. We ‘have been’ saved (John 5:24; Acts 16:31), we ‘are being’ saved (Philippians 2:12-13) and we ‘will be’ saved (Romans 13:11; 1 John 3:2). This is described in the Bible as ‘justification’ (Romans 5:1), ‘sanctification’ (1 Thessalonians 4:3) and ‘glorification’ (Philippians 3:20-21).

In justification, God sets us free from the ‘penalty’ or ‘punishment’ of sin. It is a legal term denoting that a person has been acquitted of all charges against him on the ground of innocence. Justification is on the basis of faith in Christ whereby His righteousness is credited to us. We are now no longer considered guilty before God, no longer reckoned as sinners but treated as saints by God!

Sanctification is the second part of being saved. Having been set free from the penalty of sin and with the broken relationship now restored, we are now set free from the ‘power’ or ‘practicality’ of sin. The grip of sin is broken, and we are made righteous in our lifestyle. This is a daily process which comes as much by faith as justification. We don’t have to produce it ourselves, but we do need to go on trusting or abiding in Christ every moment.

The end of the whole process is glorification, when we are set free from the ‘presence’ or ‘possibility’ of sin altogether- the time when we will live in a world where there is nothing that we can’t enjoy, in which there is no temptation. This completion of our salvation will take place at the return of Christ. At that time, we will be ‘saved’- completely and permanently.

Lesson 3: THE TWO BAPTISMS

Having repented towards God and put one's trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the next fundamental step for the believer is to be 'baptised' (immersed/soaked/drenched) in 'water' and 'Holy Spirit'. These two experiences are essential to properly beginning the Christian life. They are vital to complete the process of 'becoming a Christian'.

BAPTISM IN WATER

There are two extremes in Christendom: one group believes that water baptism is extremely powerful such that it can impart life to a spiritually dead sinner, while the other group believes that there is absolutely nothing that takes place when one is baptised- it is purely a symbolic activity. Both these extremes are to be avoided.

Water baptism is not a 'magical' act; neither is it a 'meaningless' act. It is 'a physical event with a spiritual effect'. The apostle Paul uses the clearest language possible to describe baptism as a definite experience in which a divine transaction takes place in our lives. In Romans 6:2-4, Galatians 3:26-27, and Colossians 2:12 believers are reminded of the event of baptism in which something specific happened in their lives.

In baptism, a 'cleansing' takes place. The cleansing action is inward rather than outward, of the conscience rather than the body (1 Peter 3:21). The person being baptised makes a plea to God as he is immersed (Acts 22:16 describes this as "calling on His name"). God uses the occasion to effect an inner cleansing, which sets the person free from past guilt (Acts 22:16 describes this as "getting your sins washed away").

Baptism is a 'burial' for those who are dead. It is a putting away of the old life and a resurrection to new life (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). How appropriate to this meaning is the act of "total immersion"- submerging and emerging, buried and raised!

So, in water baptism, we break with the past and make a clean start. It both represents and accomplishes the final break with the old life of sin. It marks the death of a sinner and the birth of a saint, the burial of the old man and the resurrection of the new man. It is the "bath of regeneration", enabling a person to "begin again" or be "born again", spoken of by Jesus in John 3 and Paul in Titus 3.

Now while water baptism can deal with our 'past', it cannot deal with our 'future'. While it can enable us to 'start' the new life clean, it cannot help us to 'stay' clean. While it cures us from the 'defilement' of sin, it cannot cure us of the 'dominion' of sin. This is where 'baptism in Holy Spirit' comes in.

BAPTISM IN HOLY SPIRIT

John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus, comprehended the twofold ministry of the Messiah, to “take away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) and to “baptize in the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33). And Jesus Himself told His disciples that on His return to the Father, He would send another Person- the Holy Spirit- to replace Him and dwell in the believer.

Baptism in Spirit is a definite, even dramatic experience, where a believer receives the Person of God's Spirit in His ‘purity’ and ‘power’. The individual is now enabled to victoriously continue the Christian life (Galatians 5:16), to take an active role as a member of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13) and above all, to be a witness to Jesus in the whole world (Acts 1:8).

This is an experience available for anyone who has repented, believed, taken water baptism and sincerely desires to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is an event of which both the recipient and any others are fully aware (Acts 19:2; Galatians 3:2). The language used (“drenched in”, “falling upon”, “poured out upon”, “filled with”) carries the clear implication that it is an experience of which one is fully conscious.

The book of Acts helps us understand the outward evidence of having “received the Spirit”. All the recorded occasions point to ‘unexpected speech’, spontaneously ejaculated. Fluent speech in a language never before either learned or spoken (often described as “speaking in tongues”) is the most common evidence mentioned in the Scriptures that one has truly been filled with Holy Spirit, although other overflows of inspired speech like “praise” and “prophecy” are also mentioned.

Speaking in tongues or unknown languages has tremendous devotional value-

➤ *It brings self-edification (1 Corinthians 14:4). It builds up the believer in spiritual strength and resources.*

➤ *It enhances prayer (1 Corinthians 14:14-15).*

➤ *It enriches praise and worship (1 Corinthians 14:16-17).*

➤ *It has ministerial value:*

It can be a sign to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22). This is what happened on the Day of Pentecost; but it need not be the case everytime (Acts 10:46; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 14:2).

It can be a means of edification to believers, when interpreted (1 Corinthians 14:26).

➤ *It is a gateway to other gifts. It builds faith to step out and operate in the supernatural. And experiencing the tremendous blessing a gift can bring to one's life creates a desire to have other spiritual gifts to bless others.*

The Holy Spirit freely gives various kinds of 'supernatural gifts' to believers. These gifts are given for the benefit of others. When they are regularly used and developed, they become ministries.

Every believer is called to be continually filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). The reception of the Spirit must be translated into a lifestyle of walking in step with the Spirit. As we walk in the Spirit, we are steadily transformed into the 'image' of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18) and the 'fruit' of the Spirit is formed in us (Galatians 5:22-23). The experience which Paul speaks of where the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death" now becomes a reality (Romans 8:1).

Lesson 4: THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

Just like a baby is born into a natural family, God gives us new birth into a spiritual family (Acts 2:41). This community of believers we are placed into is known as “the Church”.

THE CHURCH: Its Nature

The Church has two dimensions. One is the ‘Universal’ church, which is invisible and spiritual in nature, consisting of all true believers everywhere, past and present (Matthew 16:18). The other is the ‘Local’ church, which is the visible and physical body of believers, present in a particular place (Matthew 18:17).

Every believer is already a part of the universal church but must also become a member of a local church. Infact, there is no way we can shirk from our responsibility of being part of a specific church family. In the Book of Acts, new believers were either added to the already existing local church or formed together as a church.

THE CHURCH: Its Purpose

In order to know what we are to do as a Church, we need to look at Christ's ministry while He was on earth because that is exactly what we are called to ‘continue’ and ‘complete’. We should also learn from the local churches mentioned in the New Testament and from the various descriptions of the church such as the body, bride, family, community, flock, army, and so on.

Acts 2:42 to 47; 4:23 to 37; 8:1, 4; 1 Corinthians 12, 14

The early church gave major emphasis to the teaching of the Word of God. The apostles sought to establish believers upon the truths of the Scriptures. The members would gather together and meet with one another on a regular basis. They considered themselves as belonging to one family. Each one took the other's need as his own and adopted whatever means necessary to ensure that the other believer did not suffer through poverty or lack. As a young church that faced many troubles, especially from the outside, they depended fully on God to sustain them. They remembered what the Lord had done for them on the Cross through the breaking of bread and persevered in prayer.

Believers were conscious of their gifts and roles. Each one took up his responsibility and fulfilled his God-given assignment. Some were specifically set apart and sent out to other places to do the work of the ministry.

Broadly speaking, then, the Church is here to obey the Great Commandment and fulfil the Great Commission (Matthew 22:37-40; 28:18-20). The duty of every individual believer is to worship the Lord, fellowship with other believers, grow as a disciple, do the ministry and live as a witness; and the focus of every local church must be on exaltation, encouragement, edification, equipping, and evangelism.

THE CHURCH: Its Structure

God is a God of order. All through the Bible, we see Him organising the processes of creation and redemption, always paying marvellous attention to the minutest detail. His church will also, therefore, function in an orderly manner.

We find certain guidelines for the structure of the Church (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). The organisation and control is not to be in the hands of “any one man” at any level. Leadership in the New Testament was always plural. Each local church was to have “several” elders, not just one (Acts 14:23; 21:17-18). And it was to be a “local” church, with the Christians of a given locality under local leadership (Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5).

The New Testament Church did not have an autocratic one-man show, a democratic congregation-driven set-up or even a committee-led hire and fire style of governance; it was a theocratic rule where godly leaders (known as elders, bishops or overseers) were identified, appointed and together ruled the household of God. These elders were ably supported by deacons, who helped with administrative responsibilities and the carrying out of other specific duties entrusted them.

THE CHURCH: Its Future

The Church has an exciting future. Many have tried to destroy the Church and stop it from functioning. But the Lord's promise stands firm that He will build His church and the gates of Hades will never be able to prevail against it (Mathew 16:18).

The future will see the Church ‘completed’. The bride will meet her bridegroom (Revelation 19:6-9). Its members, raised from the dead, will be caught up at His coming to meet Jesus in the clouds, as Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4. And those who are alive at that time will be reunited with those who are dead. When Christ comes, not one member will be missing. His great family will include people of all races, tribes and languages, of every colour and culture, from all time periods, and especially the people of the former covenant, Israel of old (John 10:16).

The Church will then be ‘crowned’, reigning on earth with Christ during the Millennium (Revelation 20:6). And finally, the Church will be ‘glorified’, raised above the angels, set in the “new heaven and earth”. Christ has promised Himself a “glorious” church (Ephesians 5:25-27), and at the end it will indeed fully share His glory!

Lesson 5: THE LIFE OF A DISCIPLE

The mandate given by Jesus to the apostles, and through them to the whole church, was to go into the whole world and “make disciples” of all people groups (Matthew 28:18-20). Discipleship is therefore the heart and core of the Christian faith. There can be no Christianity without discipleship (Acts 11:26)!

The word ‘disciple’ comes from the Greek word *mathetes*, which means ‘a learner’. It implies that there is a Teacher whom a student wishes to follow and become like (Matthew 10:24-25). Similarly, the Christian life is about ‘following Christ’ in a personal, intimate relationship (Matthew 7:23; John 10:27) and becoming like Him (Matthew 28:20a; 1 John 2:6).

In order to understand the essence of a life of discipleship, it is important to grasp the truths of the ‘lordship of Christ’ and the ‘believer as a slave’.

Christ as the Lord

God the Father has made Jesus Christ the Lord of all (Acts 2:36-37; Philippians 2:9-11). The apostles of the early church proclaimed His Lordship to everyone everywhere (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9; 2 Peter 3:2).

The word ‘lord’ does not mean today what it meant when Jesus was here. Back then it meant the “maximum authority”, the “first one”, the “one above everything else”, the “owner of all creation”.

The Greek word *kurios* (‘lord’) in small letters was how slaves addressed their masters. But if the word was capitalized, it referred to only one person in the whole Roman Empire. Caesar of Rome was “the Lord”. As a matter of fact, when public employees and soldiers met in the street, they had to say as a greeting, “Caesar is the Lord!” And the standard response was, “Yes, the Lord is Caesar!”

So the Christians had a problem. When they were greeted in this manner, they would answer, “No, Jesus Christ is the Lord”. That immediately got them into trouble. Not because Caesar was jealous of that name. It was far deeper than that. Caesar knew that the Christians really meant that they were committed to another authority and that given a choice, they would reject him and obey only Jesus Christ. This is why persecution was unleashed against the Christians.

The Believer as a Slave

The servant in the first century was a genuine slave- a person who had lost everything in this world. His liberty, his freedom, his will, even his name was gone. He had been sold in the market as an animal. A price had been hung around his neck, and people had bargained for him. Someone had eventually bought him, taken him home, and bored a hole in his ear so he could wear a ring with his master's name on it. He had thereby lost his own name or identity and would henceforth be known by the name of his master.

Salvation is submission. It means coming to Christ and taking His yoke upon ourselves (Matthew 11:28-29). Jesus died for our sins and was raised again in order that we who live might “no longer live for ourselves but for Him” (2 Corinthians 5:15). We have been bought by the Lord and belong to Him (Romans 14:7-9; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We are now the “slaves” of Jesus Christ (Greek *doulos* meaning “slave”- Romans 1:1; Colossians 1:7; 4:7; James 1:1; 2 Timothy 2:24; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1; Revelation 1:1; 15:3; 19:10).

When we were in the kingdom of darkness, we could do our own will and follow our own desires. Now that we have moved from the rulership of Satan into the kingdom of Christ, we cannot do whatever we like. Christ is the King and Sovereign Ruler. We live according to His wants and wishes.

The Making of a Disciple

While we are disciples of Jesus Christ, we are enabled to learn His teachings and become like Him through association with older and more mature Christians. A disciple is a learner, but from a person, rather than a book, course or system. He is an apprentice rather than a student. It involves instruction and imitation. It is concerned with the practical as well as the theoretical. Relationship with a discipler/a teacher/a leader is, therefore, a vital element in discipleship.

[References- 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; Hebrews 13:7]

Lesson 6: THE STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Scriptures are the food vital for every disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ (Job 23:12; Jeremiah 15:15; Mt. 4:4). Diligent study of God's Word causes spiritual growth (Acts 20:32; 1 Peter 2:2), protects us from lies and deception (Ephesians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:2-3), brings stability in the midst of the storms of life (Matthew 7:24-27), enables us to be approved before God (2 Timothy 2:15) and causes us to be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

THE BIBLE: PUBLICATION FOR STUDY

The Bible is not one book, but many. The word 'Bible' comes from the plural word *biblia* which means 'library' in Latin. It consists of 66 separate books (39- Old Testament, 27- New Testament), written by 40 different authors over 1,400 years and include various types of literature like history, law, letters, songs, prophecy, biographies. Its first book, Genesis, starts at the beginning of the universe and its last, Revelation, describes the end of the world and beyond.

There are essentially two themes in the Bible: "what has gone wrong with the world" and "how it can be put right". The book of Genesis tells us exactly what the problem is, while the rest of the Bible tells us how God is going to put it right by rescuing sinful humanity from itself. So we might say that the 66 books of the Bible form part of one great drama- what we might call the "drama of redemption".

THE BIBLE: PREPARATION FOR STUDY

1. Choose a translation which is easy to understand and which suits your taste. There are many reliable modern translations. We have the New King James Version (NKJV), New International Version (NIV), New Living Translation (NLT) and English Standard Version (ESV). The Amplified Bible gets us closest to the original languages of Hebrew and Greek by giving various shades of meaning for the key words.

2. Study Aids and Study Bibles are helpful tools in understanding the Bible. Bible Dictionaries give the background of people, festivals, cultures, habits, climate and events of the Bible times. And Study Bibles such as the NKJV Study Bible, NIV Study Bible and ESV Study Bible contain useful information. "Unlocking the Bible" by David Pawson is an excellent material which contains both background information and solid teaching.

3. Follow a Reading Plan. Read both the Old and New Testaments without neglecting any portion of the Bible.

THE BIBLE: PROCESS FOR STUDY

There are 3 steps to be followed:

Observation: Find out what the passage 'says' / Discover the Message

Interpretation: Find out what the passage 'means' / Digest the Message

Application: Find out how the passage 'works' / Demonstrate the Message

Observation, Interpretation and Application together lead to TRANSFORMATION! This is the goal of our study of the Word of God.

OBSERVATION

As you study any passage of Scripture or any book of the Bible, train yourself to constantly ask: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Who is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters? Who is being spoken to?

What is the subject or event covered in the chapter? What do you learn about the people, the event, or the teaching in the text? What instructions are given?

When do or will the events occur? When did or will something happen to a particular person, people or nation?

Where did or will this happen? Where was it said?

Why is something being said or mentioned? Why would or will this happen?

How will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

INTERPRETATION

We must remember to interpret verses based on their context: Immediate context (Words above or below that verse), Overall context (Passage or Chapter), and Ultimate context (Context of the Book/Bible).

Ask yourself: Is my interpretation of this verse consistent with the theme, purpose and structure of the book in which it is found? Is it consistent with the other Scriptures about the same subject or is there a glaring difference? Am I considering the historic and cultural context of what is being said?

APPLICATION

There are questions which will aid in applying the truths of the passage: **SPACE**.

S- Is there a Sin to confess?; P- Is there a Promise to claim?; A- Is there an Attitude to change or develop?; C- Is there a Command to obey? Is the teaching restricted to a specific Culture- if so, what is the underlying timeless principle?; E- Is there an Example to follow or Error to avoid?

Once this is done, work it out in your life by preparing an action step. Such a step should be personal, realistic and provable.

Lesson 7: THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

While prayer is present in all religions and practised in all faiths, Christian prayer is distinct and unique. We pray to a living God who is near to hear us and powerful to answer us (Deuteronomy 4:7; Psalm 65:2; Hebrews 11:6). Here, prayer is not a mere ritual or technique but an intimate conversation with God, which is birthed out of a personal relationship with Him.

The Principles of Biblical Prayer

1. Prayer to the Father (Matthew 6:6, 9; Ephesians 1:17; 3:14)

The word “Father” tells us which Person in the Triune God is to be addressed in prayer and it also shows us that our God has a fatherly heart.

- Through faith in Jesus and the reception of the Holy Spirit, we have the boldness and intimacy to draw near to God the Father. Now we can call Him “Abba” (Daddy or Dear Father) (Romans 8:15-16).
- Because our God genuinely cares for us like a father, we don’t need to use flowery language or lengthy phrases in prayer. Infact, the Lord strictly forbade the use of ‘vain repetitions’ or ‘flattering expressions’ to impress God and somehow get one’s needs met. He taught us that we are to be sincere and simple in prayer- praying from our heart and in ways we are comfortable with.

2. Prayer through the Son (John 15:16; 16:23-24)

We are to pray ‘in the name of Jesus’. This is not merely a tag or phrase we attach at the end of our prayer; rather, it is the ‘ground’ on which we must approach the Father and such a basis gives us the ‘guarantee’ that our prayer will be accepted and answered.

When Jesus said that we could come before the Father and ask for anything in His name, He was telling us that if we approached the Father based on our faith in Him, then the Father would give us the same attention and answer that He gives His Son, that He would treat us in the same way that He treats His Son. So, in other words, our praying ‘in the name of Jesus’ is equivalent to Jesus Himself praying to the Father, which in turn guarantees results to our prayer.

3. Prayer in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20)

Every prayer is to be made in the Holy Spirit- that is, as inspired and directed by the Spirit. The Spirit of God helps us by giving us the passion to pray, the perception for prayer and the persistence in prayer.

There are two kinds of prayers which the Holy Spirit births in us- prayer with the ‘human mind’ and prayer with the ‘human spirit’. The first is prayer in a language known to us. Here the mind is fully

involved with conscious thoughts, which the Holy Spirit has placed there in some way, whether through an impression, a burden, a memory or circumstance. The second prayer has various forms. It involves prayer in an unknown language as well as prayers with groans, sighs, tears.

The Practice of Biblical Prayer

1. Prayer by Myself

Jesus emphasised praying 'in secret' (Matthew 6:5-6). Any person in the Bible who knew God intimately was a man who learned how to get alone with God. There are several examples- Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Daniel.....

Praying in secret can be a duty before it becomes a delight. At first, we do it by faith knowing that God is present and attentive. But soon, especially as a result of being filled with the Spirit, our prayer times will get energised.

There is no fixed posture in prayer, although kneeling down is a good and common one found in the Scriptures. The important fact is that we are totally involved in our prayer and do it earnestly.

2. Prayer against the Devil

Satan has a special interest in the earth and especially among human beings. He is described as the "prince of the power of the air"- dwelling in the places above the atmosphere and longing to establish a kingdom of darkness on earth (Ephesians 2:2; 6:12).

There are two matters we will consider: 'what the devil can do to us in prayer' and 'what we can do to the devil in prayer'.

'What the devil can do to us': He will either try to 'stop us from praying completely' or try to 'hinder us from praying effectively'.

He does the first by attacking any three parts of our personality depending on our temperament. He attacks the will by making us lazy or busy; he attacks the mind by making us doubt whether God is attentive and our prayer is effective; he attacks the heart by taking away our passion for the Lord. So the most valuable prayer is when we do not feel like it or when we are having a battle to do it or when our mind is confused!

He does the second by trying 'to get us unbalanced'. He makes us think that it is the length of a prayer which determines its effectiveness or keeps us focussed on only one dimension of prayer like either praising, asking, confession, liturgical prayer, or spontaneous prayer.

'What we can do to the devil': The devil binds bodies in sickness, blinds minds in deception and blocks spirits from experiencing full liberty in Christ. Through prayer, we can see people set free from the works of darkness.

3. Prayer without hindrance

There are various factors that can disrupt our communication with God:

- When the person is not right with God- Through sinful attitudes (Feelings of bitterness or resentment towards God) or sinful actions (Consciously, deliberately continuing to do something of which God does not approve)
- When the person is not right with others- Through failing to seek the forgiveness of those we have wronged (Matthew 5:23) or holding unforgiveness towards others (Mark 11:25)
- When the person is not right with himself- Wandering thoughts or distractions can be a problem. The best solution is to chase them, catch them and then commit them to the Lord! It is also wise to use words in prayer- a verbal prayer keeps us alert and is therefore more helpful than a mental prayer.
- When Satan is causing resistance- Here, we pray to God, confess His promises and wait for His victory (2 Corinthians 12:7-8; 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18; 3:10; 2 Timothy 4:18).

Sometimes, inspite of everything being right on our part, we may still find God not answering. This is possibly because He is testing our faith and sincerity, and training us to be persistent in prayer (Matthew 15:21-28; Luke 11:5-13).

Lesson 8: HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD

God desires to personally 'direct' and 'guide' His children (Psalm 32:8; 73:24; Isaiah 48:17; 58:11; John 10:3; Acts 8:29; 9:10; 10:19; Romans 8:14). His relationship with His people is likened to that of a 'Shepherd' and his 'sheep' (John 10:11, 14). This describes both the 'availability' of a shepherd to guide as well as the 'necessity' of the sheep to follow lest they go astray and become lost.

Every New Testament believer can receive guidance from God. This truth is clearly demonstrated by God speaking to people of all categories in the Book of Acts. He guides Peter who is an 'apostle' (Acts 10:19-20), Philip who is a 'deacon' (Acts 8:26, 29), and Ananias who is a 'disciple' (Acts 9:10-16).

Channels of Communication

1. The Scriptural Channel

God speaks primarily through the Scriptures (Psalm 119:105; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The apostles and the early church continually looked to Scripture for guidance and understanding (Acts 1:20; 2:16-21; 4:11, 24-26; 15:15-19).

The best way to hear God speak to you is to spend regular time reading, studying and meditating on His Word. It is foolish for someone to seek God's will but neglect the regular reading of His Word where He has already revealed His heart and communicated His will for us.

It is dangerous to try and receive a word from God based on simply opening the Bible randomly and pointing to a verse. For one thing, this kind of method is like forcing a Sovereign God to speak to us in our time and in our way. Another thing is that this method can deceive us into assuming that God has spoken a particular word to us when in fact He has not. A third problem with this method is that it is a sign of indiscipline and an attitude of irreverence towards God's Word.

2. The Simple Channel

➤ God speaks through a 'gentle whisper' or a 'still small voice'. E.g. He spoke to Elijah in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:12); He promises to speak to His people through a clear voice (Isaiah 30:21).

The thought that God's Spirit give us can be distinguished from our own thoughts. When the Spirit speaks to us, it will always be clear and specific, not some vague and hazy impression. It will be spontaneous and distinct in nature, clearly standing out from our own thoughts.

➤ God speaks through a 'desire' He puts within us (Philippians 2:13).

God sometimes leads us or communicates to us by instilling a certain longing or desire within us. Sometimes people are afraid to follow their desires because they feel that if they do something that

makes them happy, it can't be from God. Though there is a real danger in projecting our desires on to God and using our happiness as a gauge for God's will, the danger goes both ways. We should never cancel something as not being God's will simply because we enjoy it.

We do not need to be worried about this matter if we are wholly committed to the Lord. This is because the more our heart is one with Christ, the more He will purify our desires to become what He wants.

➤ God speaks through a 'deep burden' He puts within us (Nahum 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1; Malachi 1:1). The prophets in the Old Testament received the message of the Lord through an internal growing awareness of God's concern about a specific matter, person or group of people. God allowed the prophets to feel what He felt about a particular matter.

We need to pay close attention to any deep burden or concern being planted in our hearts concerning some issue or person. This could be the Lord drawing our attention and trying to communicate to us.

➤ God speaks through the 'inner witness of the Spirit' (Luke 2:27; Acts 20:22; Romans 8:14; 1 John 2:27).

The 'inner witness' relates to the testimony of the Spirit within the believer. This may be by gentle promptings or strong urgings. Or it may be by a quiet assurance (an inner peace).

➤ God speaks through our 'circumstances' (Ps. 31:15; 37:18, 23; 139:16; Is. 49:15-16).

God is intimately present in every incident in our lives. He has a purpose for what He does and what He allows. He can speak to us through everyday events we experience if we are alert to His voice.

Note: We should always confirm with Scripture what God seems to be speaking to us directly. God will never speak anything to us that contradicts what He has already spoken in the Bible. His word will always align with the commands and principles laid down in Scripture.

3. The Supernatural Channel

➤ God speaks through 'dreams' (Gen. 41; Dan. 2:24; Mt. 1:20; 2:13) and 'visions' (Old Testament Prophets; Acts 2:17; 9:10; 10:10-11; 16:9).

Dreams are pictures which come to our mind when we are asleep. Visions are pictures which come to our conscious, awoken mind (Acts 16:9). Our minds need to be cleansed and renewed for us to hear God's word clearly through dreams and visions.

➤ God speaks through 'angels' (Gen. 18; Mt. 2:19; Dan. 10:12; Acts 5:19-20; 12:7-8; 27:23-25).

Angels are messengers of God and can reveal themselves to us visibly to minister to us.

➤ God speaks through an 'audible voice' (1 Sam. 3:13-14; Acts 9:7; 26:14).

This audible voice is not 'spooky'. This is very evident from Samuel's example. When he heard the audible voice of God, his initial reaction was to run to Eli the priest thinking that he had called him. This shows that God was speaking in a voice similar to a human being, and not in some strange, unnatural way.

➤ God speaks through 'direct personal revelation' (Acts 9; 2 Cor. 12; Book of Revelation).

The experience of the apostles demonstrates this truth. Paul had a direct encounter with Jesus and a visit to the third heaven; The apostle John was taken up to where he received a message from Jesus.

➤ God speaks through 'prophecies' (Acts 11:27-30; 21:10-11).

God can speak to us through other 'believers'. But there are certain things we should keep in mind when others communicate the mind of the Lord to us:

Does the message agree with the truths of the Word and the principles of the Scriptures? (Is. 8:19-20)

Does the Holy Spirit bear witness within you? (1 Jn. 2:26-27)

Is the message given in a good spirit- out of care and concern? (1 Cor. 13:2)

Does the message have a healthy effect/impact on you? Are you edified, exhorted, and comforted or do you end up confused, condemned, frightened, distressed, and uncertain? (1 Cor. 14:3-4)

Do other godly believers agree with it? (1 Cor. 14:29; 2 Cor. 13:1)

Lesson 9: A LIFE OF VICTORY

The Bible is full of wonderful promises of victory for the Christian. We are called to “reign in life” (Romans 5:17; Revelation 1:5-6; 5:10). We are “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). God “always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

The victorious Christian is described as one who “overcomes” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). In this lesson, we will examine the challenges we as believers have to face and how we can experience victory in these areas.

THE FLESH

By the ‘flesh’, we refer to ‘the sinful nature’ or ‘the human nature without God’. The flesh is also described in Scripture as “the body of sin” (Romans 7).

All human beings are born ‘in Adam’ and thereby inherit a fallen, sinful nature. In our natural condition, sin is our master and we are its slaves (Romans 6:17). We are controlled by this sinful nature that is present within us (Romans 7:5; Colossians 3:5). We live fulfilling its cravings and following its desires and thoughts. As a result, we are ‘objects of wrath’- vessels on whom condemnation now rests and will finally receive the full outpouring of God’s wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3).

In Salvation, we are transferred from the family of Adam and we become members of a new family. This is the family of God and its head is Christ. Just as we inherited Adam’s sinful nature, we now become partakers of Christ’s divine nature (2 Peter 1:3-4). God has dealt with the root cause of our problem by “crucifying our old man”- who we are in Adam- along with Christ (Romans 6:6; Galatians 6:14-15; Colossians 3:9) and “creating a new person” or “a new man” within us (Ephesians 4:24). We have a new heart or a new nature which makes it possible for us to live according to God’s standards (Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 8:10-12; 1 John 2:1, 6).

Now we are set free from the ‘controlling power’ of sin. The flesh can no longer exercise ‘lordship’ or ‘dominion’ over us. While ‘eradication’ of sin has not yet taken place, ‘emancipation’ from sin certainly has. Through the baptism of the Spirit, we are enabled to fully walk in God’s ways (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27; Romans 8:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8).

As long as we live in this body, we will experience the influence of the old nature. We must overcome its cravings and desires because sin leads to death- both physical and spiritual death (Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 11:29-30; Galatians 6:8; Hebrews 3:12). Our victory comes by “walking in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25). The word ‘walk’ is used in two different ways, using two different Greek

words. Verse 16 uses it in terms of ‘going for a walk by oneself’ and verse 25 uses it in terms of ‘going for a walk with others’. So there is walking in the Spirit when we are by ourselves, and there is walking in the Spirit along with the rest of our Christian brothers and sisters.

THE WORLD

The world, referred to here, is *kosmos* (Greek), which has as its basic meaning ‘order’ or ‘arrangement’. It refers to the “entire organized system of society”- the way society functions. Satan rules over this world system (1 John 5:19) and Christians are engaged in a battle with the world and its influence (Luke 16:14-15; 1 John 2:15; 5:4-5).

The world is characterised by the ‘lust of the flesh’, the ‘lust of the eyes’ and the ‘pride of life’ (1 John. 2:16). To be worldly is, therefore, to live under the control of bodily appetites and passions, material cravings and desires, and, self-centred and self-promoting pursuits.

The Scriptures describe the way people of God are expected to live. A whole section of Jesus’ message, popularly known as the Sermon on the Mount, is a clear and concise presentation of His standards and requirements for His disciples (Matthew 5 to 7). As we read through the entire passage, we understand how we are called to be totally different from the crowd and the normal mode of living.

Our victory over this world comes primarily by the “renewal of our minds” (Romans 12:2). As we continually feed upon the Word of God and dwell on its teaching, our attitudes and ambitions will change. This in turn will transform our character and conduct.

We must remind ourselves that we are “aliens and strangers on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11) and that this world with its desires will pass away (1 John 2:17). We should open ourselves up to God honestly in order to examine any addiction to fashion, eating, entertainment, career success or hobbies. If we seek satisfaction in the things this world system has to offer us, then our love for God will dissipate and our desire for fellowship with God and fellow believers will wane.

THE DEVIL

The devil is a “deceiver” (Revelation 12:9; 20:7-8). He is the father of lies (John 8:44). He may try to tell us that we can’t have victory, or that God won’t hear us, or that we have committed some unpardonable sin. Being rooted in the Word of God (the Scriptures) is vital to discern his lies and overcome him.

The devil is a “devourer” (1 Peter 5:8). He is looking for someone to pounce on and individuals who are prone to anxiety and anger are an easy prey (1 Peter 5:7,9; Ephesians 4:26-27). One is related to our

“trust” in the Lord and the other is related to our “ties” with people.

We must therefore learn to cast all our burdens onto the Lord trusting in His care and standing firm in our faith. Such steadfastness does not mean that there will be no feelings of anxiety, perplexity or dejection at all. It means that such feelings will not have a lasting effect upon us, or cause us to stop pursuing Christ and following Him (2 Corinthians 4:7-9). The overcomer will continue to seek Christ in every negative situation, and will not succumb to the pressures of the trial. He will find Christ as his strength to endure. He will discover Christ as his source of deep joy and peace in spite of the outward afflictions.

In our relationships with people, there must be no room for bitterness or unforgiveness. The consequences of having such a wrong spirit are serious: our sins will not be forgiven by God and the Enemy will gain a foothold into our lives (Matthew 6:12; Mark 11:25; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11; Ephesians 4:26-27). Should any person have anything legitimate against us, we must make it our utmost priority to get reconciled and pursue peace with them (Matthew 5:23-24; Hebrews 12:14).

The devil is an “accuser” (Revelation 12:10). He tries to remind us of our sinful past or find fault in our present lifestyle. We can answer all of his accusations by the cleansing blood of Christ that secures our righteousness before God (Romans 3:25; 1 John 1:9). Our sinful past has been forgiven and forgotten (Hebrews 8:12), and in our daily life as we walk in the light (honest and transparent before God), the blood of Jesus will continuously cleanse us (1 John 1:7).

Lesson 10: The Balanced Christian Life

Like two sides of the same coin or two wings of the same bird, biblical truth has two equal angles or dimensions to it. Our Christian life needs to be built on what may be described as “twin truths” in order that we may grow up in all things into Christ without being “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14-16 NIV).

1. The Kindness and Sternness of God

God has always been the same- tender and tough, merciful and just, loving and holy, compassionate and righteous (Romans 11:22). But man’s view of Him has often been lop-sided. For instance, when people think of Jesus, the only picture that comes to their mind is that of a gentle Shepherd carrying and caressing His sheep. They forget that the same Jesus carried a whip in His hands and drove out people from the Temple for turning His Father’s house into a market- not once but twice!

Jesus preached about eternal life and eternal condemnation (John 3:16, 18). He promised homes in Heaven and warned of fire in Hell (John 14:2; Matthew 5:22). In His ministry to people, He showered loads of compassion and issued lots of caution. To the man lying at the pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years, Jesus spoke words of healing and words of admonition: “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” (John 5:14 NIV). To the woman caught in adultery, Jesus offered forgiveness and then instructed her, “Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11 NIV).

God has created us in His image: this means that we share some of His features. The fact that we are like’ God in certain ways helps us to have ‘intimacy’ with Him, while the fact that we are ‘unlike’ God in other ways helps us to have ‘reverence’ for Him! It is important that as creatures, we neither get too familiar nor too overawed’by our Creator!

We must remember that God is both our Father and our Judge (1 Peter 1:17), our closest Friend and a consuming Fire (John 15:15; Hebrews 13:29). He bestows ‘abundant kindness, tolerance and patience’ upon us in order that we may come to ‘repentance’ (Romans 2:4). We must learn to come before God with ‘great boldness’ as well as with ‘tremendous awe’, with ‘full confidence’ as well as with ‘holy

reverence'. Like the apostle John, we must learn to lean on his bosom as well as fall prostrate before Him! (John 13:23; Revelation 1:17)

God encourages and warns, comforts and confronts His people. Freedom and discipline are equally vital in our Christian life. God has saved us from sin so that we may now live for Him. He has forgiven us so that we may now walk in holiness. Only as one leads to the other will we finish the race strongly and inherit the Kingdom of God.

2. God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility

God always takes the initiative- He 'sent' His Son into the world so that we may not perish in our sins but receive eternal life (John 3:16); He 'chose' us and appointed us to go and bear fruit (John 15:16). Jesus constantly issued the 'invitation' to people to "Come to Me" or "Follow Me" (Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9; 11:28; 19:21) and said, "No man come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44).

But the other side of this truth is that man has a responsibility to respond to God's initiative. We can either accept the call of God and choose to follow Him or refuse to submit to the Holy Spirit's conviction and come to the Lord (John 5:40; Acts 24:25).

We need to be very clear as to what the work of God is and what we need to do. Problems arise when we fail to distinguish between what God is supposed to do and what we are required to do. There are some issues that clearly belong to the Lord alone- "The battle belongs to the Lord" (2 Chronicles 20:15), "Exaltation comes from the Lord" (Psalm 75:6-7; 1 Peter 5:6), "Vengeance belongs to the Lord" (Romans 12:19), "Judgment is the exclusive right of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

But there are some other areas where we must cooperate. We have to 'work out' the salvation that God is 'working in' us (Philippians 2:12-13). God has declared us to be 'saints' (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1; 1 Peter 2:9); but daily we need to 'walk in holiness' (1 Thessalonians. 4:7; Hebrews 10:14; 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16). We have been made 'sons of the light and sons of the day' through faith in Jesus Christ (John 12:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:5) but now we have to 'live as sons of the day' (1 Thessalonians 5:6-9).

The Lord will 'fight' the Enemy; we need to 'face' the Enemy. The Lord 'arranges' the victory; we need to 'appropriate' the victory. The Lord provides the 'ability'; we need to provide the 'availability'. The Lord will keep us from falling but we need to keep ourselves in the love of God. We may 'cast our burdens' onto the Lord but we must 'carry our responsibilities'.

Especially to be noted is the truth that the Lord's 'coming' back to earth is linked to our 'going' to the ends of the earth. It is only when the gospel is preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations that the end can come (Matthew 24:14). The one who truly loves the Lord's appearing is not, therefore, the one who is always looking up to Heaven and saying "Come, Lord Jesus" but the one who is preparing the way for His return by reaching out to the lost.

God is sovereign and can do anything. But He will not work except in response to our prayer. The reason for this is simple: prayer is the expression of our need and dependence upon God. So the one who does not devote himself to prayer is actually telling God, "I can do it without You" and as a result will not be able to witness God working in his life!

To summarise this twin truth in simple terms: "Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not."

3. Right relationship with God and People

Jesus grew in favour with God and men (Luke 2:52). The apostle Paul always strove to keep his conscience clear before God and man (Acts 24:16). We are commanded to "love God" and also to "love our neighbour" (Matthew 22:37-39). Infact the one who claims to love God and yet hates his brother is a liar, walks in darkness, and is a child of the devil (1 John 4:20). It is the same with submission to human authority- whenever we fail to submit to a governing authority, we are rebelling against God Himself (Romans 13:1-2).

We must develop our relationship with God and people. We must have a strong 'personal' and 'corporate' devotional life. Our relationship with God should be 'personal', but never 'private'! It is important that we pray in secret and with other believers. We must meet with God and His people on a regular basis. We must learn to 'wait on God' and then 'work with God'- personal worship and public ministry should go hand in hand.

While we must have strong ‘convictions’, we must also be people of ‘concessions’ (not compromise) wherever it is permissible and necessary (Romans 14:1, 22; 15:1). We must make every effort to pursue peace with all men (Hebrews 12:14).

And we must be careful to not harbour any kind of unforgiveness or bitterness in our hearts towards anyone. The consequences of having such a wrong spirit is simple: our sins will not be forgiven by God and the Enemy will gain a foothold into our lives (Matthew 6:12; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11; Ephesians 4:26-27).

In our relationship with people, we must especially learn to offer both ‘appreciation and advice’, ‘commendation and correction’. Jesus and Paul are striking examples in this regard (Revelation 2:2, 4, 13-14). And when discipline is handed out to a believer living in sin, care must be taken such that the person understands his lesson but is not overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:6-8).

There must be nothing that the Enemy or the unbeliever can accuse us of (1 Peter 2:12). Jesus warned us to ‘be wise as serpents’ and ‘innocent as doves’ as we live in this world (Matthew 10:16). This is because the world is watching and observing us very carefully. Like Jesus was constantly under scrutiny for any fault or failure in His words or deeds, we must be on guard against schemes and snares that the Enemy will lay in our path to ruin our testimony.

4. Holy Scriptures and Holy Spirit

The two fastest growing streams in Christendom today are the Evangelicals and the Charismatics. Evangelicals have a love for the content of the Scriptures whereas Charismatics have a passion for the experience of the Spirit. The need, though, is for each group to learn from the other!

We must be filled with the Scriptures and the Spirit (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:18). The Sword of the ‘Spirit’ is the ‘Word’ of God (Ephesians 6:17). The Lord ‘anoints us with His Spirit’ so that we may ‘proclaim His Word’ (Luke 4:18-19; Acts 4:31).

Both solid teaching and supernatural experiences are important. Both Bible study and prayer are crucial to wholesome development. Renewal of the mind and revival of the heart must go together. As a man of God said, “If we give emphasis only to the Word of God, we will dry up. If we give emphasis only to the Spirit of God, we will blow up. But if we give equal emphasis to both the Word and the Spirit, we will grow up!”

All experience must be built on theology, for the actions of the Spirit will always agree with the revelations of Scripture. And on the other side, we must understand that being a 'sound' believer is more than knowing the right Scripture texts, giving the right answers and holding the right views. For theology is more than logic; it is life. Note for instance that the Holy Spirit is to be 'received'- that is a definite 'experience'.

The Old and New Testament Scriptures must be upheld; the fruit and gifts of the Spirit must be manifest. What we believe and how we behave are equally important. Jesus had both character and charismata in His life. There must be a 'declaration' of the Word of God and a 'demonstration' of the Power of God. We must 'defend' and 'confirm' the Gospel (Philippians 1:7). Wisdom and wonders should saturate our lives (Acts 6:8, 10).

5. Obedience in the Little and the Large

The Pharisees were guilty of giving emphasis to the little things by ignoring the weightier matters of the law. Jesus' advice to them was to "practice the latter without leaving the former undone" (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). We need to obey God in the little and the large!

Often, we can be partial with the Scriptures. This is what the priests of Israel were guilty of and what God was upset about (Malachi 2:9). We tend to preach and practice only what we like and what fits into our traditional understanding. Passages we don't agree with are neatly dismissed as 'problem passages'- whereas the problem is really not with the 'passage' but with the 'person' who is reading it!

The Great Commission involves teaching new disciples to obey 'everything' that has been commanded by Jesus (Matthew 28:20). The Lord warned that anyone who broke one of the 'least' of the commandments and taught others to do the same would be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven and promised that whoever practiced and taught every command would be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:19).

We have no right to add or take away from God's Word. Both the Pharisees who 'added' their human traditions to the Scriptures and the Sadducees who 'subtracted' from the Scriptures were told to stick to the truths of the inspired Book (Matthew 12:2-3; 15:2-3; 22:29).

Compromise in the ordinary things will close our access to the great things. For the principle is that whoever is unfaithful in the little will also be unfaithful in the large (Luke 16:10-11).

6. Prosperity and Adversity

The apostle Paul describes it so perfectly for us. "I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I know how to face situations where I am well-fed and having plenty, or in hunger and in want" (Philippians 4:12 paraphrase). When we join with Paul and declare that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me", we must remember that it is primarily about being able to handle prosperity and adversity (Philippians 4:13).

Exciting moments and wilderness experiences, favourable circumstances and unfavourable situations, abundance and lack are both guaranteed to come. When we follow the Lord, there will be experiences of 'green pastures and still waters', and also instances of passing through 'the valley of the shadow of death' (Psalm 23:2-4). We must learn to enjoy times of blessing as well as endure seasons of hardship (1 Timothy 6:17; Hebrews 12:5-11). We should neither become proud when we are blessed nor discouraged when facing trials- we must keep our head in all situations (Deuteronomy 8:10-18; 2 Timothy 4:5).

It is wrong to focus on only one of these truths. God has the right to 'give' and 'take away' (Job 1:21-22). Jesus was born in poverty but was buried in a rich man's tomb! There were 'rich' and 'poor' people both in Israel of the Old Testament and in the early church. Infact the poor believers in Macedonia were an exemplary example to all the other churches for "out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (2 Corinthians 8:2 NIV). It is not 'what' we go through as much as 'how' we go through a situation that is really important!

What believers should recognise is that both prosperity and adversity have a purpose. When we have abundance, the purpose is to 'make us a blessing' and 'increase our giving' (2 Corinthians 8:13-14; 9:11; 1 Timothy 6:18). And when we face adversity, God is trying to 'mould our character' and 'strengthen our faith' (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4). So both must be joyfully accepted and cheerfully faced!

7. Now and Not yet

When the disciples asked Jesus after His resurrection about whether the kingdom was about to be restored to Israel, He replied that it was not yet time for the Father to do so (Acts 1:6-7). They had expected to see it happen then and there but the Lord clarified that it was an event slated for the future.

We must understand that the Kingdom of God has a 'present' and 'future' dimension. The Kingdom has been 'inaugurated' but it still needs to be 'consummated'! While the work of the Cross is complete and perfect, its blessings are experienced over different periods of time, the culmination of which will be at the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For instance, salvation has various phases. We 'have been' saved from the penalty of sin, 'are being' saved from the power of sin, and 'will be' saved from the presence of sin (John 5:24; Titus 2:14; 1 John 3:2). Similarly, although we can experience healing from our sicknesses today, the blessing of a perfectly healthy body free from all physical limitations and defects will be received only at the return of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:52-54; Philippians 3:20-21; Revelation 21:3-4).

Today, we can experience total freedom from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13-14) but the effects of the curse which originated on day of the Fall still awaits its full-fledged removal (Genesis 3:16-19; Revelation 22:3). This old order is still to pass away (Revelation 21:4). Death is still to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26). Creation, which is presently subject to decay, is still to be liberated from its bondage and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:20-21).

Till the return of Christ, we who "have the first-fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly" for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23).