

Practicing Christianity

By William R. Cunningham

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this series of lessons is to get you the student to understand the impact of Christianity on the world, how living the Christian lifestyle (practicing Christianity) can have a profound effect on those in your personal sphere of influence, and to get you to step out and do what Jesus commanded us, His disciples, to do.

INTRODUCTION

Being a Christian is more than going to heaven when you die. Being a Christian is more than being a member of a church, practicing a set of religious dogma, or being a good person. However, many people seem to believe that Christianity is a mere religion where people just follow the rules of the “Christian religion.” Not realizing who we really are in Christ as Christians can make us ineffective in the world around us in showing the love and carrying out the will of God in the earth.

We will examine practicing Christianity in this series of lessons. By “practicing Christianity” I mean doing what Jesus Christ commanded His church to do and living the life of the Spirit of God that we have.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

The word “Christian” appears in the bible only 3 times.

- ***{Acts 11:26} [26] and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers, and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.***
- ***{Acts 26:28} [28] Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?”***
- ***{1 Peter 4:16} [16] But if [anyone suffers] as a Christian, he should not be ashamed, but should glorify God with that name.***

What was meant by the word “Christian” in these passages? The word “Christian” here comes from the Greek word *Christianos*, which meant a follower of Christ or adherent of (believer of, belonging to) Christ. Prior to being called Christians they were called believers, brethren, and saints.

We note that the designation “Christian” was not what the believers called themselves, but rather what non-believers began to call them. We note that the disciples were first called Christians. The disciples here were not the 12, but other followers of Christ.

The people of Antioch correlated the behavior and speech of the disciples as being those who belonged to the one of whom they were speaking, namely Jesus Christ. That is why they called them “followers of Christ,” i.e., Christians.

King Agrippa used the same terminology when he was speaking to Paul. Paul was basically sharing the gospel to Agrippa and Agrippa resisted it and subsequently rejected it. Peter likewise used the same term to identify those who were followers of Christ and where being persecuted.

FOLLOWER OF CHRIST

What does it mean then to be a follower of Christ? A follower of Christ is someone who adheres to Christ. Consider the following passage.

- *{Matthew 1:21} [21] She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.”*
- *{John 3:16} [16] “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*
- *{Romans 6:23} [23] For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Jesus came to save his people from their sins. We are saved from our sins when we put our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (believe in Him).

{2 Corinthians 5:17} [17] Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.

These and many other passages reveal to us that a follower of Christ is indeed one who has been saved.

{Ephesians 2:8} [8] For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—

It is important to note that the salvation provided by God through Jesus Christ is not something that we deserve or earn (See Isaiah 64:6). Salvation is a gift that we receive by believing that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (See 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). One becomes a follower of Christ, i.e., a Christian, not because of what one has done, but what Jesus has done.

A follower of Christ is also one who has been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

{John 14:6} [6] Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

We are reconciled to God (as Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 5) by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the way to God. This sets Christianity apart from religions (Christianity is not a religion in this sense). Religion says that the way to the Father (to be loved, blessed, approved, etc.) is by works, i.e., following the rules to earn your way to Him/heaven. Christianity says the way to the Father is simply through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus did all that is necessary for us to be reconciled to the Father and we just need to believe that.

When a person puts their faith in Jesus Christ a real change takes place at a spiritual level, i.e., they are born again and therefore declared righteous by God.

{Romans 5:1} [1] Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ultimately a Christian is one who has been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Christians are members of the family of God through Jesus Christ.

A people are Christians not because they performed a particular task, followed a set of specified rules, etc. They are Christian because of what Jesus Christ did and the fact that they believed it.

WHAT A CHRISTIAN IS NOT

We have found above that a Christian is one who is saved and follower of Christ. People tend to have very misinformed ideas about what a Christian is. Here are some things that do not make define you or cause you to be a Christian.

1. Go to church regularly
2. Pray regularly
3. Do good deeds
4. Are nice or good
5. Love others
6. Preach and/or teach the bible
7. Follow the commandments
8. Baptism (as an infant or adult)

Christianity is not a religion in the sense that we think of religions. It is not a set of rules, dogma, procedures, etc. that one must follow in order to receive something from that religion's deity. Consider that there are even those who call themselves Christian who operate in a religious manner. They think that being a Christian means that they keep the 10 commandments, don't work on Sundays, tithe, etc.

We find that Jesus Christ revealed the complete opposite. There were times when he didn't follow the law in a strict fashion. Here are some examples.

1. John 8:1-11 – The woman caught in adultery. Jesus did not condemn her according to the law.
2. Matthew 15:1-11 – Jesus did not enforce the traditions of the elders on his disciples
3. Matthew 12:1-8 – Disciples picking heads of grain on the Sabbath, which Jesus did not forbid.
4. Matthew 12:9-12 – Jesus did work (healed a man) on the Sabbath

Following the rules do not make you a Christian. It does not make you any closer to God than if you did not follow the rules. We come to the Father only through Jesus Christ not by following the rules/laws/commandments.

WHAT DO CHRISTIANS DO?

Christians are not those who follow the rules as we have explained above. Christians are those who belong to Christ and are reconciled to God. However, a Christian has the Spirit of God and that Spirit will be expressed in their lifestyle (Faith without works is dead – **James 2:14-26**).

{Matthew 5:16} [16] In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

{Matthew 28:18-20} [18] Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Christians are characterized by their faith in Jesus Christ. As members of the body of Christ, the family of God, Christians live by the Spirit of God. This is evident by the fruit that produced by the Christians as described by Paul.

{Galatians 5:22-23} [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, [23] gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Jesus Christ taught much on the Kingdom of God and therefore how we as believers should operate. Of note is His sermon on the mount as recorded in Matthew chapters 5 – 7. Jesus' parables also provide insight into how we should operate according to the Kingdom of God. Ultimately we as believers should seek the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness as the number one priority. A Christian will live a spiritual life according to the way of God (the operation of His Kingdom).

With that said we need to understand the place of works within the context of the Christian lifestyle. In most if not all religions you perform in order to obtain. With Christianity you perform based on who you are. In some religions, for example, you do good deeds and obtain the benefits thereof according to that religion. With Christianity you do good deeds because of the Spirit of God in you. Consider this illustration. In other religions you put a bunch of apples on an orange tree so that you can call the tree an apple tree. The number of apples necessary to declare the tree an apple tree is determined by that religion. In Christianity we become the apple tree and we produce apples. There is no transformation in religion, but in Christianity we are transformed by the renewing of our minds because we have been infused by the Holy Spirit causing our spirit to be transformed (made alive, born again).

QUESTIONS

1. How does one become a Christian?
2. What does the life of a Christian look like?
3. If a Christian is not defined as one who follows the law then what place does the law or even some rules have in a Christian's life?
4. What does it mean to be reconciled to God?
5. What does it mean to be justified?

JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the focus of the Christian faith. Christianity does not promote doing good deeds, but rather Jesus Christ. We want to be more and more like Jesus, which means that we do not have to worry about following the law or living up to God's standards because Christ did that and we abide in Him. So the law is fulfilled in us through Christ.

- Romans 10:4
- Matthew 5:17
- Romans 8:1-11

Who is Jesus Christ? The bible reveals much about Jesus Christ. A few passages are listed below.

- The son of God (Ps 2:7, Hebrews 1:5, Matthew 1:18, John 3:16, Matthew 3:17, Matthew 26:63-64, Matthew 16:15-16)
- Savior of the world (Matthew 1:21, John 1:29, John 3:17)
- God almighty (Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23)
- Image of God (Hebrews 1:3, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15)

QUESTIONS

6. How does one become a Christian?
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9. What does it mean to be reconciled to God?
10. What does it mean to be justified?
11. Who is Jesus Christ

CHRISTIANS AND THE LAW (RULES)

- **Romans 5:1-2 (NLT) {1} Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. {2} Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.**
- **Romans 10:9-10 (HCSB) - {9} if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. {10} With the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation.**
- **Galatians 3:24 (HCSB) - {24} The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith.**
- **Ephesians 2:8 (HCSB) - {8} For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—**

Read also Romans 3:19-28, Romans 4:1-25 (the example of Abraham), Romans 5:6-11, Romans 11:6, Galatians 2:16, 21, Galatians 3:5-6, 14, 22, Philippians 3:9

These scriptures inform us that we are justified (declared in right standing with God) by faith in Jesus Christ not by works of the law. We can't earn salvation, but rather God has provided it as a gift. This brings up the question of the place of works. Does the fact that we are justified by faith mean that we can live anyway we want because what we do doesn't matter? Is there a lifestyle requirement for Christians since we are saved by grace not by following the rules so to speak?

Christians are not those who follow the rules as we have explained above. Christians are those who belong to Christ and are reconciled to God. However, a Christian has the Spirit of God and that Spirit will be expressed in their lifestyle (Faith without works is dead. See James 2:14-26).

Also consider what Jesus said.

{Matthew 5:16} [16] In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

{Galatians 5:22-23} [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, [23] gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Works follow faith. Christians do good works because of who they are. The good works come from the Spirit of God that is in us, i.e., the fruits of the spirit. We do good works because the goodness of God is in us. Note that this does not mean that doing good works necessarily means you are a Christian.

ACTION THROUGH WORKS

A Christian will therefore shine their light—the light of the spirit within them quickened by the Holy Spirit. With that said there are some things that Jesus told us to do, those who are His followers.

{Matthew 28:18-20} [18] Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

See also **Matthew 7:15-21** and **Luke 6:43-45**.

Jesus told His disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He also told them to teach these new disciples to observe everything that Jesus taught them. There are a plethora of things that Jesus taught His disciples and there were specific things that He told them to do.

1. Heal the sick
2. Cast out devils
3. Raise the dead
4. Love thy neighbor
5. Forgive
6. And more

Jesus Christ taught much on the Kingdom of God and therefore how we as believers should operate. Of note is His sermon on the mount as recorded in Matthew chapters 5 – 7. Jesus' parables also provide insight into how we should operate according to the Kingdom of God. Ultimately we as believers should seek the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness as the number one priority. A Christian will live a spiritual life according to the way of God (the operation of His Kingdom).

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you put a bunch of apples on an orange tree so that you can call the tree an apple tree. The number of apples necessary to declare the tree an apple tree is determined by that religion. In Christianity we become the apple tree and we produce apples. There is no transformation in religion, but in Christianity we are transformed by the renewing of our minds because we have been infused by the Holy Spirit causing our spirit to be transformed (made alive, born again).

WHAT CHRISTIANS HAVE COMPARED TO THE WORLD

Consider the following scriptures.

- 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19
- 2 Corinthians 6:16
- Ezekiel 36:27
- 2 Timothy 1:14
- Romans 8:9, 15
- 1 John 2:27
- John 15:7

Christians have the Spirit of God dwelling in them.

{1 John 4:4 (HCSB)} You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

{Romans 8:37 (HCSB)} No, in all these things we are more than victorious through Him who loved us.

Imagine that the creator of the entire universe loves you. Imagine the one who sustains all things cares about you and wants a relationship with you. What does that mean in your life? We can gain a lot of confidence when we realize who we are in Christ.

How can you apply the fact that the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in you? How can you appreciate that the Spirit of God lives in you?

- Sickness of you or your loved ones
- Financial problems
- Tough decisions
- Marriage problems
- Family issues
- Occupational decisions
- And much more

Do you consider that the creator of the universe cares about you or do you just go with the flow of whatever comes your way? We have God on our side, but do we live our lives like that? Does the life of the Christian look any different than those of the world?

TRUST AND DEPEND ON GOD

Matthew 4:4 (HCSB) — 4 But He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (See also Deuteronomy 8:3, Proverbs 18:21, 12:18, Luke 6:45)

Psalms 119:105 (HCSB) — 105 Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.

We discussed the advantages that Christians have over the world in the last lesson. However, none of those amount to anything in our lives if we don't trust God. It is imperative that the Christian believe what God has promised in order for those promises to take effect in our lives. The following are some of many Scriptures that encourage us to trust/believe God.

- **Proverbs 3:5–6 (HCSB) — 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; 6 think about Him in all your ways, and He will guide you on the right paths.**

Note: The phrase “think about Him” comes from a Hebrew word that is translated several ways in various versions of the bible. For example in the NLT version it is rendered, “Seek his will.” However, the actual meaning is to be aware of, to know, to notice, become known, find out, be made aware of. A more accurate interpretation would be to be aware of God or to recognize God’s presence in all that you do.

- **Mark 11:22–24 (HCSB) — 22 Jesus replied to them, “Have faith in God. 23 I assure you: If anyone says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, all the things you pray and ask for—believe that you have received them, and you will have them.**
- **Matthew 21:21–22 (HCSB) — 21 Jesus answered them, “I assure you: If you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you tell this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done. 22 And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”**
- **Mark 9:23 (HCSB) — 23 Then Jesus said to him, “‘If You can’? Everything is possible to the one who believes.”**
- **Luke 1:37 (HCSB) — 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.”**

At the foundation of Christianity is faith in God. The foundation of the Christian lifestyle is faith, i.e., trust and dependence on God. At the heart of the day-to-day activities, short-term and long-term goals is faith in God. Not only are we saved through faith (See Ephesians 2:8), we also live by faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 (HCSB) — 4 Look, his ego is inflated; he is without integrity. But the righteous one will live by his faith.

The word faith in the above passage is from a Hebrew word that means honesty, steadfastness, trustworthiness, faithfulness, firmness, fidelity. Of course our steadfastness is based on God since we cannot even depend on ourselves (consider Proverbs 3:5-6). This is in contrast to the unrighteous.

FAITH

We have discussed faith above, but let us talk a little more specifically about it. First of all what is faith and what impact does it have on the Christian’s life?

Hebrews 11:1 (HCSB) — Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.

See also the entire chapter of **Hebrews 11, Romans 8:22-25, 2 Corinthians 5:7**

Hebrews 11:6 (HCSB) — 6 Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him.

Faith is a necessity not only to be a Christian, but also to live as a Christian. We must trust God. We must have confidence in God not only for the culmination of the salvation we have, but also for everyday life.

Colossians 2:6–7 (HCSB) — 6 Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, overflowing with gratitude.

In the same way we have received Jesus Christ (by faith) we are to continue in that faith.

The bottom line here is that faith is not only very important to the Christian, it is also necessary. First of all we cannot become Christian without faith. We cannot please God without faith. We cannot operate as Christians without faith.

The Word of God admonishes us and instructs us to HAVE FAITH IN GOD. We are told to Trust God. We tend to put our trust in so many other things besides God such that we never really learn to trust Him. When we have a headache we immediately do what we have learned to trust in, namely take medication. When we are ill we run to the doctor with little to no thought of the healing available to us and promised to us by God. When we are in trouble we run to others besides God. When we have money issues we do everything except rely on God. The body of Christ have learned over the years to put its trust in everything but God and we therefore live defeated lives knocked to and fro by the true enemy.

THE TRUE ENEMY

- **1 Peter 5:8 (HCSB) — 8 Be serious! Be alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.**
- **Matthew 13:39 (HCSB) — 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.**
- **John 8:44 (HCSB) — 44 You are of your father the Devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has not stood in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of liars.**

There are many occasions recorded in Scripture where Satan is shown to be the enemy of God and therefore of God's people. Satan is the real enemy NOT GOD.

The problem is that many people blame God for the issues that arise in their lives. There are even teachings in some churches that identifies God as the one who makes us sick, kills us (e.g., at a funeral it is said that God loved that person more), and much more. We are quick to go on a witch hunt when bad things happen to us. We immediately assume that God is punishing us for something or perhaps trying to get through to us when the whole time it is Satan doing what the Bible says he does; steals, kills, lies, and destroys. Satan has been opposing God's purpose since the beginning, i.e., the Garden of Eden.

God is not making us sick, killing our loved ones, making life difficult for us, etc. In many cases it is Satan coming against us through a plethora of methods. Sometimes we cause trouble for ourselves by not obeying God's word. Sometimes our own ignorance causes us to go on a path other than what God has instructed for us.

We don't study the bible so we tend not to know the truth of God's word. We don't spend time in true fellowship with God so we don't build an intimate relationship with Him. Because of our ignorance we are destroyed because we believe whatever Satan throws our way.

Hosea 4:6 (HCSB) — 6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will reject you from serving as My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your sons.

A rule of thumb to consider is:

GOD IS GOOD

SATAN IS BAD

In the next lesson we will move on to the topic and activity of prayer.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you trust God?
2. What areas do you find it difficult to trust God or that you don't trust him as much as in other areas (e.g., you may trust God more for finances but not health)
3. What are some things that God has promised you that affect your daily lives?
4. What do you think Satan has stolen from you in the recent past?

OTHER RESOURCES

Here are some resources that I came upon that I thought might be of interest to you.

- Justification by Faith – Charles Spurgeon - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOk7eRuwrq8>
- “True Prayer – True Power” Charles Spurgeon - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0p-mRMR8m4>
- “The Dangers of Doubting” – Charles Spurgeon - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNB3yk3wtSw>

PRAYER

Luke 18:1 (HCSB) — 1 He then told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not become discouraged:

Philippians 4:6–7 (HCSB) — 6 Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible defines prayer as “*The addressing and petitioning of God. A classic definition of Christian prayer is “an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies” (Westminster Shorter Catechism).*”¹

The Lexham Theological Wordbook defines prayer as “*Prayer is intentional communication with God and can be spoken or written. It is often petitionary in nature, though it may take many other forms, as well. Both the ot and the nt assume that God hears and responds to the prayers of his people.*”²

The New Bible Dictionary defines prayer as “*In the Bible prayer is worship that includes all the attitudes of the human spirit in its approach to God. The Christian worships God when he adores, confesses, praises and supplicates him in prayer. This highest activity of which the human spirit is capable may also be thought of as communion with God, so long as due emphasis is laid upon divine initiative*”³

The Lexham Bible Dictionary defines prayer as “*Communication with God, primarily offered in the second-person voice (addressing God directly). May include petition, entreaty, supplication, thanksgiving, praise, hymns, and lament.*”⁴

The Easton Bible Dictionary defines prayer as “*is converse with God; the intercourse of the soul with God, not in contemplation or meditation, but in direct address to him. Prayer may be oral or mental, occasional or constant, ejaculatory or formal. It is a “beseeching the Lord” (Ex. 32:11); “pouring out the soul before the Lord” (1 Sam. 1:15); “praying and crying to heaven” (2 Chr. 32:20); “seeking unto God and making supplication” (Job 8:5); “drawing near to God” (Ps. 73:28); “bowing the knees” (Eph. 3:14).*”⁵

¹ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (p. 1745). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

² Lowery, D. D. (2014). Prayer. D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

³ Thomson, J. G. S. S. (1996). Prayer. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., pp. 947–948). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁴ Hardin, L. T. (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Prayer. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁵ Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Easton’s Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines prayer as communication with God. Prayer involves several important aspects: Faith, Worship, Confession, Adoration, Praise, Thanksgiving, Dedicated action, Request, and Effectiveness.

Tyndale Bible Dictionary defines prayer as the addressing and petitioning of God.

Prayer can be thought of as communion with God. It is human interaction with an infinite God. For the purposes of this study we are going to consider prayer as a means of communicating with God by petitions, worship, or fellowship.

Prayer is communion with God for the purpose of petition, worship, or fellowship.

WHAT TO PRAY FOR

Consider the following scriptures.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 - Always pray
- John 15:7 - Prayer and abiding in the Word of God
- Mark 11:22-26 - Prayer and faith in God
- Romans 8:26-27 - The Holy Spirit will help us to pray
- Matthew 21:21-22 – Pray for “whatever” with faith
- Luke 18:1-10, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 – Always pray

These scriptures reveal that we should pray about everything and on all occasions. We should have a disposition of prayer. Don't neglect anything from prayer, which include the things you need and want. This doesn't mean that we treat prayer as puppet strings or that we seek God's command for everything that we do. It does however mean that in everything we should pray and use the wisdom of God and His word to make decisions. For example, you should pray for health, education, children, your house, your car, decorating a room, your job, your business, etc.

We can pray for the things that we need and the things that we want. Besides, in the overall scope of things, we really don't know the difference between specific wants and needs. Only God knows what we really need. See Psalms 37:4.

We should avoid coming to the point where we depend on ourselves such as our job or business. We have to always remember that God provides and it is because of Him that we have the thing that we have. Allow God to be active in your life and one way of doing that is through prayer.

PRAYER REQUIRES HEARING AND WATCHING

One day there was a situation in the church I was attending as a teenager. I don't recall the issue, but I remember a few of us discussing it and I proclaimed, “I prayed about it.” The minister looked at me and said, “Well what did God say?” I had no answer. Praying about something may only be part of the task in many cases. If we are asking God for something then we need to hear from God so our prayers require an answer in order to be complete.

The answer to prayer may come in the form of a result, e.g., someone is healed or delivered, receiving something, or a revelation from God. Whenever we pray we should expect this result. Pastor Marianne Unger said this during her sermon on 1/31/2016 at Heidelberg Church. We should have confident expectation of our prayers and the exercising of our faith. After all. What's the point of praying if you don't believe God will provide for you? This means that when we pray at we should listen to what God is saying. God hears us when we pray so we should hear him as well (See 1 John 5:14-15).

[Watch](#)

Matthew 26:36-46

Ephesians 6:18 (HCSB) — 18 Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane he asked his disciples to stay awake with him. He went off to pray and upon returning to where the disciples were he found them asleep. He asked them again to stay awake and pray so that they wouldn't enter into temptation. However, they still could not stay awake and consequently pray. Perhaps Jesus needed them to pray with him or for him.

We can learn from that incident. We should stay awake mentally, i.e., be alert, and pray. We can pray about what we observe to bring it in line with the will of God or to combat evil. After all how do you fight demons? You can't do it physically because they are spirits. Therefore, we must fight them spiritually by using our confession and prayers backed by faith in God revealed to us by His word.

We can know what to pray for by watching. What is going on in your family, neighborhood, job, school, etc.? What is going on with you personally? Use that information to pray accordingly.

THE FOUNDATION OF PRAYER

The foundation of prayer is the word of God because our prayers are based on what God has promised, i.e., made available to us or given us. We pray in agreement with the will of God and therefore with confidence. The following are only a few scriptures that give us insight into prayer.

1 John 5:14–15 (HCSB) — 14 Now this is the confidence we have before Him: Whenever we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. **15** And if we know that He hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked Him for.

Matthew 21:21–22 (HCSB) — 21 Jesus answered them, *“I assure you: If you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you tell this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done. 22 And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*

John 15:7 (HCSB) — 7 *If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.*

Psalms 37:4 (HCSB) — 4 *Take delight in the LORD, and He will give you your heart's desires.*

James 5:14–15 (HCSB) — 14 *Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. 15* *The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will restore him to health; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*

James 4:1–3 (HCSB) — 1 *What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you? 2* *You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask. 3* *You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires.*

See also:

- Jeremiah 33:3 – God will answer
- Luke 11:5-13 – Keep on seeking and pursuing God for an answer
- Luke 18:1-8 – Never give up when praying
- Exodus 32:9-14 – God relented because of Moses' plea
- Matthew 15:21-28 – Keep praying even when God is silent. Do not give up.

When we pray we should be familiar with the word of God. Our prayers should be in confidence because we know what God has promised us or otherwise made available to us.

Another important point, which is implied by the above, is that we should know the will of God. How do we know the will of God? We know the will of God from knowing His word and by being transformed (**Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 2:6-10-from Isaiah 65:5**). For example, if you are sick what is God's will for your situation? The bible

plainly reveals to us that God wants you well. How do we know this? We know this because in every situation where sickness was involved we see that Jesus healed. He never turned anyone away with an explanation of why they could not be healed.

There is no account of God turning anyone away in the OT or NT who came to him for healing whether Jew or Gentile. See **Exodus 15:26 and Jeremiah 32:26-27**. There is one exception. That exception is that Jesus could not do many mighty works in his home town because of their unbelief (See **Mark 6:1-6**). We can thwart God's provision simply by not believing, i.e., not receiving. If you go to God, then you will realize your blessing/provision/desire. If you don't go to God, then you will not realize your blessing/provision/desire. **The exception is unbelief.** We will discuss more of this in a future lesson when we discuss the hindrances to receiving from God.

Many times we pray based on our experience or in unbelief and not from the word of God. We tend to believe whatever the doctors tell us as final, whatever our checkbooks shout out at us, or whatever others say to us. We spend less time praying consistent with the word of God and more consistent with unbelief, i.e., lack of faith in God. We will talk more about this in a future lesson.

SUMMARY

The following points were made in this lesson pertaining to prayer.

1. Prayer is communicating with God spiritually for the purpose of request, worship, and fellowship.
2. We should pray about everything
3. We should be alert when we pray—be aware
4. We should listen to God when we pray
5. The word of God should be the basis of our prayers

We will continue our lesson on prayer in the next lesson. We will discuss the following points about prayer from scripture.

1. Praying in faith versus praying in unbelief
2. The importance of believing for the outcome when you pray, i.e., confident expectation.
3. The importance of persistence
4. The importance of hope when we pray
5. The effect of fear on our prayers being realized—The Peter effect
6. The importance of seeking God
7. Believing what the word of God says versus believing what you see at the moment.
8. Praying for others
9. Your questions

THE FOUNDATION OF PRAYER

Based on what we have learned thus far we may conclude that the foundation of prayer is the word of God and faith in God. Effective prayers are based on what God has promised, i.e., made available to us or given us and we therefore take action because we have faith in God to do what he promised. We pray in agreement with the will of God and therefore with confidence. The following are only a few scriptures that give us insight into prayer.

1 John 5:14–15 (HCSB) — 14 Now this is the confidence we have before Him: Whenever we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked Him for.

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John 15:7 (HCSB) — 7 If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.

Psalm 37:4 (HCSB) — 4 Take delight in the LORD, and He will give you your heart's desires.

James 5:13–15 (HCSB) — 13 Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. 15 The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will restore him to health; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

James 4:1–3 (HCSB) — 1 What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires.

See also:

- **Jeremiah 33:3 – God will answer**
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- **Exodus 32:9-14 – God relented because of Moses' plea**
- **Matthew 15:21-28 – Keep praying even when God is silent. Do not give up.**

When we pray we should be familiar with the word of God. Our prayers should be in confidence because we know what God has promised us or otherwise made available to us. Sometimes we may pray for things that God has already provided. Therefore, it is most beneficial to know the word of God so that you can more precisely pray within the will of God with confidence and therefore expectation.

Another important point, which is implied by the above, is that knowing the will of God is very beneficial when we pray. The Apostle John said that if we pray according to God's will that we will have what we pray for (1 John 5:14-15).

How do we know the will of God? We know the will of God from knowing His word and by being transformed (**Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 2:6-10-from Isaiah 65:5**). For example, if you are sick what is God's will for your situation? The bible reveals to us that God wants you well. How can we say this? We know this because in every situation where sickness was involved we see that Jesus healed. He never turned anyone away with an explanation of why they could not be healed. There is no account of God turning anyone away in the OT or NT who came to him for healing whether Jew or Gentile. See **Exodus 15:26 and Jeremiah 32:26-27**.

There is one exception—sort of. That exception is that Jesus could not do many mighty works in his home town because of their unbelief (See **Mark 6:1-6**). We can thwart God's provision simply by not believing, i.e., not receiving. If you go to God, then you will realize your blessing/provision/desire. If you don't go to God, then you will not realize your blessing/provision/desire. **The exception is unbelief.** We will discuss more of this in a future lesson when we discuss the hindrances to receiving from God.

Many times we pray based on our experience or in unbelief and not from the word of God. We tend to believe whatever the doctors tell us as final, whatever our checkbooks shout out at us, or whatever others say to us. We spend less time praying consistent with the word of God and more consistent with unbelief, i.e., lack of faith in God.

Another very important aspect of prayer that the scriptures revealed to us is faith. We must believe that we received what we pray for and not doubt. We must have faith in God to carry out his word in or through us. We will talk more about faith later.

AN INTERESTING REVELATION ABOUT KNOWING GOD'S WILL

We typically want to know God's will when we are about to do something or pursue something. However, consider the following passage of Scripture.

Exodus 3:11–12 (NASB95) — 11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” 12 And He said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”*We can summarize as follows.*

Typically when we think of a sign we think of this sign occurring before we proceed. Sometimes we want confirmation that God really wants us to do something. This passage of scripture reveals to us that perhaps sometimes the sign is after the fact. That is, you must exercise your faith to do what God called you to do and after you have done it then you will know it was indeed the work of the Lord behind it all. Therefore, if it is not God’s will then it won’t work (See Romans 8:28). A pastor many years ago stated this situation like this: “Where God guides, He provides.”

Sometimes the only assurance we have is faith. Note that God told Moses that He would be with him. This implies that Moses would be able to discern God’s presence along the way (See Romans 12:2). We could say that if Moses hadn’t been able to free the Israelites then God didn’t send him. If God truly did send him then AFTER Moses led the people out of Egypt then they would worship on that mountain, Mount Sinai. Likewise, sometimes we confirm that it was indeed the will of God after we have done it.

FAITH

Proverbs 3:5–6 (NASB95) — 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

Hebrews 11:6 (NASB95) — 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Hebrews 11:1 (NASB95) — 1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Why bother praying if you don’t trust God to do it? If you doubt God then you shouldn’t expect to receive from Him.

James 1:5–8 (HCSB) — 5 Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 An indecisive man is unstable in all his ways.

Here the context is lacking and asking God for wisdom. However, the principle of doubting could be applied to any request. Your doubting could cause you not to experience (receive) what God has for you. A great example of this is **Matthew 14:22-33**. Peter had faith in Jesus’ command for him to come out on the water. However, it came to him that he was on the water and the wind was blowing, etc. and he began to sink. Jesus told him basically that he began to sink because he became afraid and that induced doubt, which countered his faith. Another possible takeaway here is that faith is a choice. Peter chose to believe Jesus and he experienced the effects of that until he chose to believe the wind and water around him.

HOW DO WE GET FAITH?

Romans 10:17 (HCSB) — 17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.

Romans 12:3 (HCSB) — 3 For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.

God has given each one of us a measure of faith (to do what he has called us to do in the body of Christ). We also see that this faith comes by hearing the word of God through the message of Christ (the Gospel). We all have faith to believe because that is how we became Christians in the first place. God gave it to us when we yielded to the gospel.

The bottom line here is that we all have the capability to have faith in or to trust. We can trust God or someone else. The choice is yours. Faith is indeed a choice.

BE A DOER

James 1:22 (HCSB) — 22 But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Matthew 7:24 (HCSB) — 24 “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock.

See also **James 2:14-26** (faith without corresponding action is dead).

Faith demands action. There is no sense in saying that you have faith in something when you never exercise that faith. There is no sense in saying, “I have faith in Christ” when your life shows something different. The old saying, “talk is cheap” is so true here.

Another aspect of doing (living) the word of God is that the more you do it the better you will become at it. We have to learn to trust God, i.e., learn that He is trustworthy or that He can be trusted in the same way we learn to trust people.

Prayer is not a passive activity, but rather one of action. Prayer is surely doing the word as well. It may seem like prayer is just a mental or spiritual activity, but it directly affects what happens physically. For example, you pray to God for provision and you believe He’ll do it. Your prayers are instrumental in receiving the actual physical provision. So we should not think of prayer as a passive thing, but one that is very active. As we will see in the **Prayer Examples** later, our act of praying will cause our heavenly Father to act on our behalf.

HOW TO PRAY

Prayer should come from the heart. In other words, you should pray what is in your heart, something you have been thinking about or meditating over, etc. Prayer should not be a rehearsed endeavor like putting on a show or the like (See Matthew 6:5-15).

A good idea to learn how to pray (how to interact with God) is to review the prayers of bible characters such as Moses, Abraham, etc. We can see “first hand” how prayer was done by those who were effective at it.

One of the first prayers we learn is what is called the **Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)**. Jesus used that prayer to teach his disciples how to pray (See **Luke 11:1-4**). Understanding this model prayer will help us learn to pray as well. However, we may find it very beneficial to know how Jesus actually prayed, which is recorded in John chapter 17. The reader is encouraged to examine John 17 to learn much about how to pray from an actual prayer of Jesus.

Another very effective way of learning how to pray or otherwise communicate with God is by examining the prayers of other biblical figures to see how they prayed. Below is a list of some of those prayers. Notice how the people talked to God, their tone of voice so to speak, and boldness.

PRAYER EXAMPLES

Some examples of prayers in the bible.

- 1 Samuel 1:1-18 (A prayer of Hannah)
- Daniel 1:1-19
- 2 Chronicles 20:5-12 (A prayer of Jehoshaphat)
- Isaiah 38 (Prayer and poem/song of Hezekiah)
- 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 (The prayer of Jabez)
- 1 Kings 18:36-39 (Elijah’s prayer at Mount Carmel)
- Genesis 18:23-25 (Abraham’s prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah)

Talk to God always and in every situation. Don't think of prayer as something you do on your knees with your eyes closed and your hands folded. Prayer is interaction with our heavenly Father. You are talking directly to the one who created the universe....who created you! So be bold because he loves you and cares about you. Be confident because most times He has already made the provisions and all that is required is your faith to receive it. Be consistent because our heavenly Father wants to be a part of your entire life.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Read the prayers listed above and summarize what you have learned from them.
2. Find other prayers of people that is recorded in the bible and summarize what you have learned from those as well.
3. How can you improve your prayer life?

THE MODEL PRAYER

Matthew 6:9–13 (HCSB) — 9 “Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

What is commonly called the Lord's Prayer is recited many times in many churches by many people. However, we should stop to know what we are praying in light of verses 7 and 8.

Our Father

The word “Father” denotes an intimate relationship like one's father. We also note that this rendering is not a designation of a gender for God. The use of “father” does not imply that God's sex is male.

In Heaven

The word heaven literally means sky. “This denotes the sovereignty of God. We know that He is our father who cares for us, but we also recognize that he is above us. He created the earth and everything in it. He created the sky and the universe, etc.

Hallowed be your name

The name of a person denotes their character, person, and authority. The name of a person represents that person in a sense. The name of God denotes God himself.

The word “hallowed” means to honor as holy or set apart. So here we honor God as being holy.

Your Kingdom Come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

This denotes the reign and supremacy of God and that his will be done on the earth just as it is done in heaven. This is also a yielding to God's will instead of our own.

Give us today our daily bread

A declaration of God providing us what we need today. However, the Greek rendering could mean what we need for existence or what we need for tomorrow. In either case we recognize that God is our provider.

Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.

This is a literal rendering of the Greek. However, it refers to sins because of comparison with Luke 11:4 and Matthew 6:14-15.

Do not bring us to temptation

This is a declaration that God does not bring us into temptation or a plea to God to not allow us to succumb to temptation. God does not tempt us (James 1:13-15). Jesus was already tempted by the devil for us (Matthew 4:1). We are tempted by our own lusts not because of God.

Deliver us from the evil one

A declaration that God delivers us from the evil one or a plea for God to deliver us from the evil one. God indeed has shown us how to rid ourselves of the evil one—**James 4:7**.

For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

This ending to the model prayer most likely did not exist in the original. It is not included in various Latin and Coptic versions, and many church fathers among others. However, it brings an appropriate conclusion to the prayer. In it we acknowledge God Kingdom, his power, and his glory.

We should remember that Jesus was teaching his disciples how to pray not necessarily giving them a prayer script especially given what he said about babbling in prayer. We should therefore use this prayer as a model not a script.

Another important thing to consider about this model prayer is that it must be taken in context with what Jesus was saying. Consider that verse nine begins with, "Therefore." Because of what Jesus said from verses 5 to 8 you should pray like "this." What were the points he made about prayer prior to the model prayer?

1. Don't pray to be seen by people. Your prayers are not a show or a means to appear pious like the hypocrites (Scribes and Pharisees – See Matthew 23).
2. Pray by yourself, i.e., alone with the Lord
3. Don't babble, say many words for the sake of saying many words.
4. God knows what we need before we ask him

We also note that in the model prayer that there are no question marks. The prayer is more of a declaration than requests. Because God knows what we need, because we are sincere and truly praying from the heart (intimate communion with him) we know that he will do the things declared in the model prayer.

Given that Jesus taught us that we should always pray and never give up (Luke 18:1-8) and Paul told us that we should pray instead of worry, we can conclude that prayer is more than an act of asking God for things. Prayer evidently interacts spiritual that effects the physical. Our prayers are more than words. Consider the imagery given in Revelations 8:4 (See also Psalm 141:2).

The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much (James 5:17)

See also Genesis 18:23-32, John 9:31, e.g., 1 Kings 17:1, 18:1.

Prayers can change even the intent of God as we saw with Moses in a previous lesson and Abraham above. Prayers are powerful and we should therefore pray always.

The Problem of Pain/Evil

A Very cursory Overview

INTRODUCTION

A question was asked in a previous class about evil in the world. Specifically, the question was about God “allowing” the holocaust. However, that question is a specific incident in the area of theology known as the problem of evil or the problem of pain.

Many people, including Christians have wondered or have been asked that If God is omnipotent and loves us and cares for us, then why does he allow evil to exist on the earth. Why do seemingly innocent people suffer evil? Why doesn't God do something about the evil in the world? If God is omnipotent then he has the power to stop evil from happening. Some may conclude that since evil exists then God is not omnipotent and therefore powerless to do anything much about the evil or he doesn't care. We would then be forced to ask, “Why did God allow Cain to kill Abel?” or “Why did God allow the serpent to deceive the woman?” or “Why did God allow Adam to just stand there and allow his wife to be tricked?” After all the incident of the fall was the beginning of sin and death on the earth and even that incident reveals to us how God interacts with humans on the earth.

There are many books and teachings on this topic. However, I have found that the most helpful resource for this topic is actually the bible. The bible is the revelation of God to humans and if we would read it and perceive it as a revelation, then we will acquire a more accurate perspective of God, i.e., we will know more about him and how he operates. We may have a problem with this subject, i.e., reconciling God with the evils in the world, because we really don't know God. So it becomes expedient that we first know God from his revelation to us. This will help us to understand and reconcile God and evil in the world.

THE PERCEPTION OF GOD

Matthew 5:44–45 (HCSB) — 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Romans 8:32 (HCSB) — 32 He did not even spare His own Son but offered Him up for us all; how will He not also with Him grant us everything?

The bible reveals God to us. We only need to read the bible and take note of how he operates, how he interacts with people, what he does regarding human free will, etc. The bible declares that God does not change (Malachi 3:6), so therefore what he did during Old Testament times is still applicable today.

Therefore, my first suggestion to reconciling the problem of evil is to read the bible and take note at how God interacts with humans, how God actually operates and what he actually does. Allow the bible to show you how things really are and you will have a much better perspective of the whole issue of the problem of evil.

There are a few things that we should consider when we attempt to reconcile the problem of evil.

1. God created humans with free will and he does not typically interfere with everything that people do
2. God interact with humans and otherwise carry out his will through humans
3. The universe is not in the condition that God originally created it in. It is corrupted and so are those who live in it.

WHAT GOD HAS DONE

We saw in the above passage of scripture that God didn't even spare his own son, Jesus Christ, but allowed him to be crucified for us. That whole situation reveals much to us about how things are with God. Why did God have to send Jesus in the first place? Why couldn't God just destroy the evil people and keep the good. The problem with that is that there is no good people (Matthew 19:17).

God is accused many times of causing natural disasters (acts of God), evils that people do to each other, and more. God is accused of not doing anything about evil in the world because he allows it. The bible reveals the exact opposite. God has done everything to stop evil. He has condemned Satan to the lake of fire (Revelations 20:10). God sent his son Jesus Christ to die for our sins so that we would be reconciled to him, which is a definitive way of thwarting evil.

PEOPLE: THE CAUSE OF THE "PROBLEM"

When God created the heavens and the earth he looked at it and saw that it was good, i.e., the way he wanted it. He created humans and that is what messed it all up. Satan came and caused the humans to sin against God and that act introduced sin and death into the world. Humans messed up the world. Soon after that the first murder was committed (See Romans 5:15-19).

The problem with this world is not due to God. If what God created stood then this world would be good. There would be no murder, theft, etc. All would be consistent with the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. However, people do evil things apart from God's ways.

INACTION IS JUST AS BAD

Not only does evil thrive because of the action of evil people, it also thrives because of the inaction of the righteous. When we do nothing about the evil around us we help in perpetuating that evil. When the floods come we put up levies and the like to stop the water. If we do not put up the levies then the water will wash away the city so to speak. We don't resist the devil as God told us to do. Instead we let it go.

WHAT TO DO

James 4:7 (HCSB) — 7 Therefore, submit to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.

This does not mean that we have to get physically involved with the evil done around us.

Ephesians 6:12–13 (HCSB) — 12 For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. 13 This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.

We are fighting a spiritual battle, but spirituality is one of the missing ingredients in the church community. We are busy having dinners, luncheons, fashion shows, discussions, etc. within the church. We do very little to take it to the devil. We do little to resist the devil. What can we do? Here are some suggestions.

1. Learn to pray effectively
2. Learn to be confident and bold in Christ
3. Don't stand there while evil is being done. Resist it by prayer, confession, and ministry
4. Spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in whatever manner God has equipped you
5. Speak against the evil that sprout up in our communities, cities, and nation.

CONCLUSION

God allows evil because man was given the responsibility to take care of the earth and man virtually gave it to Satan by yielding to him. Man has the authority and equipment from God to thwart evil, but we don't use them. God has intervened to thwart evil, but we must do our part and use what God has given us to that effect.

Forgiveness

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Mark 11:25–26 (HCSB) — 25 And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing. 26 [But if you don't forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your wrongdoing.]”

See also Matthew 6:12, 14-15.

SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES OF FORGIVENESS

Let's look at some scriptural examples of people actually practicing the art of forgiveness in the Bible. Notice what the results of their forgiveness was.

- Esau forgives Jacob- See Genesis 33:4,11
- Joseph forgives his brothers - Genesis 45:5-15, 50:19-21
- David forgives Saul - 1 Samuel 24:10-12, 26:9,23
- Solomon forgives Adonijah - 1 Kings 1:53

FORGIVENESS DEFINED

Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible: Ceasing to feel resentment for wrongs and offenses; pardon, involving restoration of broken relationships.

Lexham Theological Wordbook: Forgiveness is the release, on the part of the creditor or offended party, of any expectation that a debt will be repaid or that an offender will receive punishment for an offense. When describing the removal of an inappropriate offense in this way, the removal does not condone the behavior or suggest approval for the offense.

Harper's Bible Dictionary: forgiveness, a term denoted in the OT by words that mean 'send away,' 'cover,' 'remove,' and 'wipe away.' In the NT 'send away' is used most often; forgiveness is also communicated by words which mean 'loose' (Luke 6:37), 'be gracious to' (Luke 7:43; 2 Cor. 2:7), and 'pass over' (Rom. 3:25).

To forgive means to release the resentment that we have for someone because of an offense. Forgiveness is for you not the other person.

When we don't forgive we can actually hinder our prayers being realized, i.e., we may hinder ourselves from receiving from God.

Forgiving does not mean forgetting in the strict sense. You will remember the offense, but will you continue to be offended. True forgiveness is when you remember what happened, but you have diffused the situation such that you do not resent any longer and you refuse to allow yourself to be offended again by the memory of the act.

Righteousness

RIGHTEOUSNESS DEFINED

Conformity to a certain set of expectations, which vary from role to role. Righteousness is fulfillment of the expectations in any relationship, whether with God or other people.⁶

Righteousness is the conformity or obedience to a standard or obligation that is normally understood to be morally good, such that the expectations and requirements of relationship toward God and neighbor are satisfied.⁷

RIGHTEOUSNESS (Heb. *šēdeq*, *š^edāqâ*; Gk. LXX and NT, *dikaïosynē*). The Heb. *šēdeq* probably derives from an Arab. root meaning 'straightness', leading to the notion of an action which conforms to a norm. There is, however, a considerable richness in the biblical understanding of this term and it is difficult to render either the Heb. or Gk. words concerned by a simple Eng. equivalent. One basic ingredient in the OT idea of righteousness is relationship, both between God and man (Ps. 50:6; Je. 9:24) and between man and man (Dt. 24:13; Je. 22:3).⁸

righteousness, the state of being in the right, or being vindicated. 'Righteousness' renders an important Hebrew root, *šdq*, that appears over five hundred times in the OT and a Greek root, *dikaio-*, that appears over two hundred and twenty-five times in the NT. The KJV and RSV employ 'righteousness' terms about three times as often as 'justification' words, but both must be considered in grasping what is a single biblical concept. English has two possible translations: 'right, righteous, righteousness, be or declare (or make) righteous,' from an Anglo-Saxon root *rightwise*; and 'just, justice, justification, justify,' from the Latin *justitia*. The interrelatedness of the two concepts is seen in Rom. 3:21-24: 'the righteousness of God has been manifested...for all who believe. ...they are justified by his grace.'⁹

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Biblically the word righteousness describes the relationship, along with its expectations and what is normal, between people and God. It means that we are in right relations with God and therefore in right standing. This is why John could say that all unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). All things that are not of God's standards and way are transgression of those standards and way and therefore sin.

Pastor Gary Whetstone of Victory Christian Fellowship (Newark Delaware) illustrated the effects of righteousness in his righteousness bible study curriculum as "The ability to stand before God as if you have never sinned."

⁶ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (p. 1860). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

⁷ Anderson, G. P. (2014). Righteousness. D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁸ Milne, B. A. (1996). Righteousness. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 1020). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁹ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary* (1st ed., p. 871). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

It is important to note that the person alone cannot obtain the righteousness of God. We discussed this in our lessons on justification. I would encourage you to review that lesson. Those, and all lessons will be available on the church's website.

We are declared righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ. You cannot obtain righteousness by being a good person, going to church your entire life, giving, etc. We are declared righteous by God when we put our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (See Romans 3:21-24).

Righteousness is freely available to everyone and it is acquired by faith.

SATAN'S DECEPTION

One of the tricks of the devil is to get us looking at ourselves so that we would see how unworthy we are, how bad we are, how dirty we are, etc. He wants us to take our eyes away from Christ (As Peter did when walking on the water) and look at ourselves. That is when we start to sink so to speak. We begin to operate as though we are not righteous because in our minds we base our righteousness on ourselves and our own efforts instead of the redemptive act of Jesus Christ.

Satan tricks us into thinking that we have to save ourselves after Jesus has already saved us. We begin to operate like a caged animal that is free to go because the door is open, but it believes that it is still bound so it doesn't move.

Therefore, it is very important to remember and rehearse the fact that the righteousness that we have through Christ is not by our own efforts or merit. It is freely given to us by God as a result of faith. Don't look at how bad you think you are or how bad you think you have become. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

IMPACT ON PRAYER

When you realize that you are in right relations with God you have much more confidence than if you did not realize that. This is because your heart will condemn you of how bad you are (as far as you are concerned) if you think your righteousness is based on your efforts or merit. See 1 John 3:20. Even if our hearts do condemn us we can still have confidence in God because he knows the truth.

It may be much more difficult to receive from God what you have asked him in prayer when your heart condemns you. You may reason that you are too bad for God to do something good for you and therefore do not pursue. Sometimes a condemning heart may keep us from praying to God in the first place. We should not allow ourselves to operate this way, but instead realize that God loves us and has declared us righteous and therefore we can live righteously in our interactions with God and others.

Application

INTRODUCTION

We have studied a number of things during these lessons. However, it means nothing if what was learned is not actually applied to one's life. In this lesson we will focus on linking the word of God with real life, i.e., applying the scriptures to our normal everyday life. This lesson is specifically designed to use more of a discussion format than previous lessons. Questions will be presented to the class for discussion and answering. Situation questions will also be presented (kind of like word problems in school to apply the facts learned). Answer the situation questions based on your knowledge of God's word, God's power, and what God has done for others in similar situations.

The goal here is to get the participants to become more apt to use the scriptures to real life situations.

THE RESURRECTION

1. What is the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ?
2. Why did Jesus Christ have to die in the first place?
3. What does Jesus' death and resurrection have to do with us?
4. What does Jesus' death and resurrection have to do with the forgiveness of our sins?
5. What is righteousness and what does it mean for a Christian to be righteous?
6. How is righteousness and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ related?

Situation Questions

Someone comes up to you one day and says, "It's hard to please God so that I can get my ticket to heaven. I'm tired and I think I am going to end up apostate." What do you say to him

A friend or loved one comes to you and says, "The doctor says that I have a serious disease and I need surgery and medications for the rest of my life." What is your response as a Christian?

SALVATION

1. What does it mean to be saved?
2. How does a person get saved?
3. How does church attendance, doing good deeds, being a good person, etc. contribute to one becoming saved?
4. What does it mean to put your faith in Jesus Christ?
5. Explain John 3:16
6. Explain Romans 3:21-24
7. Explain Romans 5:1-2
8. Explain Ephesians 2:8

Situation Questions

A Muslim tells you that Jesus was just a good teacher and that's it. What would you tell the Muslim?

A co-worker tells you that he hates God and would never subscribe to any religion with a god in it. What might your response be?

CHRISTIANITY

1. How does Christianity differ from religions, e.g., Islam, Catholicism, Hindu, etc.?
2. What does it mean to be a Christian?
3. What does the word "Christian" mean?
4. How does one become a Christian?
5. Who is Jesus Christ?
6. Who is God (Yahweh)?

Situation Questions

- A neighbor approach you one day as you are returning home from church. He asks you, "Why do you go to church?" What would be your answer?
- You're in the book store in the checkout line. One of the items you have is a bible and bible dictionary. The person behind you says, "I don't believe in that bible crap. I think anyone who wastes their time reading the bible isn't very smart. Why do you waste your money on a bible that is meaningless?" What might your response be?

PRAYER

1. What is prayer?
2. What is the foundation of effective prayer?
3. How did Jesus teach us to pray?
4. According to Jesus who should we pray to?
5. What should we pray for?
6. What are some things that might hinder you from receiving from God when you pray?

Situation Questions

- A co-worker is talking to you and mentions that she is worried about her mother who is very sick. She goes on to say that she is afraid that her mother is going to die and then she starts to cry. What might your response be?
- A colleague is talking with you and during the conversation reveals that he has severe shoulder pain and has to go to the doctor to get shots for the pain. What might your response be?
- Your sibling calls you one day and seems very upset. She says that she was diagnosed with a severe infection and that it could get really bad. She says she has to take medications and may need to be hospitalized. What might your response be?

Worship

OBJECTIVE

What is Christian worship? This lesson is designed to help the student understand what worship is and how to incorporate it in their normal everyday life. We will examine the early church's concept and practice of worship as well as insight from the Old Testament scriptures.

WORSHIP DEFINED

John 4:23–24 (HCSB) — 23 But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

What does the word worship mean? The following are common definitions of the word “worship” taken from Bible dictionaries.

Baker Encyclopedia of the bible

Expression of reverence and adoration of God

Lexham Theological Wordbook

Worship is the reverential response of creation to the all-encompassing magnificence of God

The New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition

‘Worship’ (Old English ‘weorthscipe’=‘worth-ship’) originally referred to the action of human beings in expressing homage to God because he is worthy of it. It covers such activities as adoration, thanksgiving, prayers of all kinds, the offering of sacrifice and the making of vows. Nowadays, however, ‘worship’ is used for any kind of interaction between God and his people, expressed in (but not confined to) cultic or formal activity by a religious group or individuals.

It therefore includes not only the human approach to God but also the communications of God with his people, and the whole communal activity that takes place when the people gather together religiously. Such activity is the formal expression of spiritual attitudes which should characterize God’s people at all times (**Romans 12:1**). Insofar as serving other people is a divine command, the fulfilment of it is a part of worship.

The term ‘worship’ is misunderstood if it gives the impression that the major element is what human beings do or offer to God. Biblical religion is primarily concerned with what God does for his people (**Mark 10:45**)

Easton’s Bible Dictionary

ADORE—to worship; to express reverence and homage

WORSHIP—homage rendered to God which it is sinful (idolatry) to render to any created being

Worship is sometimes thought of as something we do, e.g., sing, go to church, etc. However, worship is not really about what we do, but rather a response to God himself. True worship is a human response to God. We respond a certain way in the awareness of and in the presence of God. We should therefore be careful not to consider ritualistic activities as true worship to God.

SCRIPTURE EXAMPLES

Now let’s look at various scriptures that use the word “worship” to identify a particular concept or thought.

Matthew 2:2 (HCSB) — 2 saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”

The word “worship” in this scripture comes from a Greek word that means *to prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore)*. See also **Matthew 4:9-10**. So the Magi (wise men) in this scripture wanted to pay homage to the King of the Jews.

Matthew 15:9 (HCSB) — 9 They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commands of men.”

The word “worship” in this scripture comes from a Greek word that means to revere, adore, devout—religious. See also **Mark 7:7**. This verse gives an example of false worship. The worship here was religious in nature and not true worship, which we will define shortly.

Acts 17:23 (HCSB) — 23 For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

The word “worship” in this verse comes from a Greek word that means *to be pious towards*. In this case the Ephesians were pious towards an unknown God. This is more religious and ritualistic than anything else.

Christian worship is a response to the presence of God that is expressed in a number of ways as shown above. Worship comes from the heart as the person knows who God is and therefore responds worshipfully. Worship is not something that we give to God as if we have something to give him. Worship is something that we offer to God because he deserves it and is worthy of all worship and praise. True worship comes from the heart and therefore implies a certain relationship with God or at the very least knowledge of who he is.

HOW DO WE WORSHIP?

Is there a set way that Christians are instructed to worship God? If we can understand the origin and purpose of worship in the early church, then we can better understand what it is and properly incorporate it into our daily lives.

How do you worship God?

NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

Joy and thanksgiving because of God’s gracious redemption in Christ characterized New Testament worship. Therefore, the early Christian’s worship focused on the saving work of Jesus Christ. Also, true worship occurred under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. See **John 4:23-24 and Philippians 3:3**. Our worship of God is something that is done apart from, but not excluding, outward activity. We worship God in spirit because God is Spirit. True worship therefore, comes from within our very souls and expresses itself outwardly in various ways. This worship may take the form of singing, praising God, praying, crying, falling down to the ground in reference of God, etc.

THE WORSHIP SERVICE

The Christian services were first held in private homes and in the synagogues. The New Testament does not give specific instructions on conducting a Christian worship service. However, there are certain common elements in the early church’s worship service. These are listed below.

1. Prayer—prayer seemed to have had a leading place in the worship service
2. Praise—either individually or collectively by hymns sung together
3. Bible lessons—probably the focus was on the messianic prophecies pertaining to Christ. Bible lessons also included the teachings of Jesus Christ. Please understand that the early church did

not have a New Testament Bible as we do today. Most of their scriptures were actually the scriptures in the Hebrew Bible and then the epistles.

4. Prophecy—inspired preaching by one filled with the Holy Spirit. See **Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:28**.
5. Collection of Contributions—Money, property, and other items were collected to help the poor and to assist those in needs. Since the first Christians were Jews, some of them were ostracized by their Jewish communities and found it hard to acquire items for daily sustenance.

Historically worship was not associated with the Christian church meetings. The early Christians came together for edification by reading the scriptures, praying, and fellowship. Worship was and is something that we do when we come face to face to God so to speak, which can happen during a church service or at home.

Today many churches have what is called a worship service. This is typically the weekly gathering of people at the church building or designated place. We should be careful not to confuse a mere gathering with a set order as worship within itself. Remember that worship originates from the person and is not about what we do. The activities that occur in a typical worship service may not be worship at all, but rather a religious activity that occurs each week. True worship is when the people responds to the presence of God (or their awareness of God's presence). People may use various parts of the worship service to personally worship God. For example, people may sing as an expression of adoration and honor of God. Someone may honor God by reading the scripture.

DIVINE PRESENCE

What would you do if Jesus appeared directly in front of you and you knew exactly who he is?

The awareness of divine presence is essential for Christian worship. Jesus promised that he would be with two or three that came together in his name (Matthew 18:20). So the heart of Christian worship is the power of Christ's presence in a gathered community of disciples. See **John 14:12-14; Acts 2:43-47, 4:9-12, 32-37; 1 Corinthians 5:3-4; Revelation 2:1**.

Therefore, true Christian worship must be in the presence of God (Christ). Without this presence our worship is no more than religious activities.

Also keep in mind that worshipping God could involve service to him. Remember that worship is also to honor and revere him. Therefore, we can honor God in many ways and service is one way we honor God. This could mean being an usher, minister, evangelist, doctor, store owner, helper, police officer, or whatever God has inspired you to do. Our worship is all about God and our response to him and not about what we do or perform.

WHAT WORSHIP IS NOT

Worship is sometimes confused with the expressions of worship. For example, you may hear the term, "Praise and Worship." However, that phrase typically refer to singing songs. People may get the idea that when you are singing in church services that you are by definition worshipping God. Such is not necessarily true. Remember that worship comes from the heart and singing may indeed be the activity used to worship the Lord. However, merely singing does not mean that you are worshipping the Lord. You could just be going through the motions.

Worship is not the act of singing, praying, shouting, speaking in tongues, etc. Worship is what happens in the heart (the spirit of the person) and is expressed in various ways including singing, praying, etc.

KNOWING GOD AND WORSHIP

It is very necessary to know God in order to truly worship Him. That doesn't mean we are experts in theology, but that we do know who God is.

The more we know about God and the more we build a relationship with Him then the more we are able to worship Him. We would consider all that he has done for us, all that He has done overall, and the fact that he loves us. We could then begin to praise him and worship him.

Knowing God induces worship!

CONCLUSION

True Christian worship comes from the heart (spirit) and is a response to the presence of God. The response is particular to the individual as we all have our own way of paying homage and adoration to God. The method of the expression of this adoration and reverence varies. The important thing about true Christian worship is that it is focused on Christ, a result of the awareness of the presence of God, and comes from within.

True Christian worship can be personal and corporate. However, both are fueled by personal experience, i.e., response to God and corresponding expressions of adoration.

Above all else we should understand that true Christian worship comes from within. First there must be knowledge of God and an awareness of his presence (See **Proverbs 3:4-5**). There must also be reverence, honor, adoration, and love for God. From these worship is induced and fueled. We worship God because of who he is. We worship because of our risen Lord. We worship because God's Spirit is in us directing us. We worship because we love God. So adore God, honor Christ, revere the Lord and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

QUESTIONS

1. Define worship?
2. In what ways do you worship God at home?
3. In what ways do you worship God during the Sunday morning service?
4. In what ways do you worship God at work, school, clubs, etc.?
5. Why do you worship God?