

RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH
or
What Is the Real Gospel?

Introduction

Salvation is simple. At least, it should be. But the reality is that over the course of two thousand years different versions of the gospel have developed within Christianity. Unfortunately, because some of these versions have been promoted by major figures in Christian history, false versions of the gospel have gained standing and credibility, and confusion has been the inevitable result.

It is the purpose of this course to study the basic elements of the gospel directly from the Bible. The hope is that through this study the process of salvation will once again become clear and simple for the sincere student of the Bible.

The study of doctrines and prophecy is a fascinating and productive area of study, and should never be neglected by one who is trying to learn God's will for his or her life. But underlying all of the doctrines of the Bible is the subject of how God saves a sinner from guilt and condemnation, and prepares that sinner for eternal life in a new world where sin will never again rear its ugly head. We must not be guessing as to how this salvation process works. We dare not take someone's word for how it works, no matter how influential or educated that person may be. We absolutely must know for ourselves what the Bible really teaches about salvation.

The best Biblical introduction to this course is found in Romans 1:16. **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."** It is the attempt of this course to bring this text to its full meaning and power. More than any other subject, we want to understand this text clearly.

This course will be divided into four sections, each dealing with a separate aspect of the salvation process. The lessons and subjects are as follows:

Lessons 1-4 -- What Is Sin?

Lessons 5-8 -- How Did Christ Live?

Lessons 9-12 -- What Are Justification and Sanctification?

Lessons 13-16 -- What Is Biblical Perfection?

As you study these lessons, be sure to ask the Holy Spirit to guide your mind before you open God's Word. Only the One Who inspired the Word can bring the meaning of that Word home to our minds.

Lesson 1
TWO DEFINITIONS OF SIN

Before we begin our study of the Bible, we have to lay out some basic issues which will guide all of the studies to come. The pivotal issue in any study of the gospel is the simple question, What Is Sin?

What did Jesus come to do?

"And thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21

- (A) _____ Jesus came to be a good teacher.
- (B) _____ Jesus came to save lost mankind.

It is sin which has caused us to be lost, and the gospel is the good news of how God saves us from sin.

Now most of us have assumed that we know what sin is, but as is typically true for most things that we assume without examining them carefully, our assumptions may simply be unproved suppositions that need careful rethinking.

Right at this point, we are a little like a patient who makes an appointment with a physician. The most important thing the doctor can do for that patient is to give him or her a correct diagnosis of what is wrong. If the diagnosis is wrong the prescribed remedy will not work, and may even make things worse. But if the diagnosis is correct, then the remedy has a good chance of succeeding.

It is exactly the same in our study of salvation. If the diagnosis of sin is correct, then the gospel remedy for sin will solve the problem, and we can have full assurance of salvation. On the other hand, if our definition of sin is unbiblical and based on misinformation, then our gospel is likely to be just as unbiblical and based on centuries of Christian tradition instead of the Word of God.

The crucial question is, What is the nature of sin for which man is considered guilty, so guilty that he must die in the fires of hell unless he is rescued by the grace of God? We must be precise in defining the nature of this sin, so that we will know just what it is that the gospel rescues us from. Of what must we be forgiven? What must be healed for us to escape eternal death?

What is our most serious problem?

**"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."
Romans 3:23**

- (A) _____ Our problem is poverty.
- (B) _____ Our problem is lack of education.

(C) _____ Our problem is sin.

But the real question is, How did we all sin? What caused us to come short of the glory of God? The answer we give to this question will affect every other decision we make about the way of salvation.

We know that Adam chose sin voluntarily. We know that he became guilty because of his choice. But what about us? Are we guilty because of Adam's sin; because we were born as descendants of Adam? Are we guilty because we have inherited a fallen nature from him? Or are we guilty because we choose to repeat Adam's sin?

To this question, two basic answers have been given in Christian history. These will be classified as Definition A and Definition B.

Definition A -- Our condemnation before God is the result of something called "original sin." Now original sin does not mean Adam's choice to sin. It means the state in which we are born because of Adam's sin. Because of Adam's sin, we are born sinners. Some say that we are guilty or condemned because we have inherited sin from Adam. Some say we are guilty or condemned because we are born as sons and daughters of Adam, who was the head of the race. Some say that we are guilty or condemned because we are born into a separated state. We are born apart from God, and that separation is our guilt. Some say that we are not even guilty for any of these things, but that we are born condemned as part of a fallen race.

But the common denominator in all of these views is that we are guilty or condemned because we are born into the human family. Our condemnation is based on our birth into a fallen world with a fallen nature. We are born lost because of our inheritance of a fallen nature. Even though we may choose to do many wrongs things in our lives, we are lost sinners primarily because of our birth, before any choices take place. Sin exists in us before choice or even before knowledge. Sin exists in us before we can understand anything about right and wrong. Sin resides within us because of our birth into a fallen race.

Thought question: What is the accepted solution for this problem?

This definition of sin is the reason that some Christians believe in the necessity of infant baptism. If we are lost because of our fallen nature, at birth, it is extremely important that we be baptized immediately to wash our sin away.

Definition B -- This definition says everything the previous definition says except for one thing. This definition says that when Adam sinned, something changed in Adam's nature, which changed his nature from a perfect, obedient nature to a distorted, self-oriented nature. We all inherit this fallen nature from Adam, which means that it is more natural to do wrong than right. The one difference in this definition from the previous definition of sin is that we do not

inherit guilt or condemnation. We inherit everything that Adam could pass on to his children, but we are not born condemned sinners. We become sinners before God, lost and condemned, when we personally choose to rebel against God's revealed will.

Thought question: Is infant baptism necessary in this definition?

These are the two classic definitions of sin in Christianity. Depending upon which definition we choose to believe, the issues of righteousness by faith will be colored differently. What we believe about justification, sanctification, and perfection will be different, depending upon the decision we make about the nature of sin.

Definition A comes to us with impressive credentials. It was developed very early in Christian history. From the fourth century this definition has been the accepted, orthodox belief of most Christians. This was even the accepted belief during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Inevitably this belief has become the dominant view of most churches today. But as is true with all accepted beliefs, we must ask the question, Is this belief based on Scripture or on tradition? Many teachings which have become accepted in modern Christianity are not based on Scripture but on ancient traditions. Our question must always be, What does God say?

As strange as it may seem, two different gospels are built upon these two different definitions of sin. One gospel tries to solve the problem of being born a lost sinner and living constantly in a state of sin, while another gospel deals with the problem of a rebellious will and negative choices. One gospel is concerned with the nature we inherit, while another gospel focuses on the character which God wants to develop in us.

If we want to be sure that we are believing and living the true, Biblical gospel, then we must be very careful to learn from the Bible what sin really is, and on what basis we stand as condemned sinners in the sight of God. Now we are ready to open the Bible to learn what it says to us.

Lesson 2 Result of Sin and Penalty of Sin

Before we can understand what sin really is in our personal experience, we need to look back to what happened when Adam and Eve sinned in the beginning of this world's history. What did God do in that emergency, when all of God's plans for the human race were being altered by the choices of His first created beings?

What was the penalty for their sin?

**"Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."
Genesis 2:17**

- (A) _____ They would suffer pain.
- (B) _____ They would live long lives.
- (C) _____ Immediate death.

This is a puzzling verse, because we know that Adam and Eve did not die immediately. Yet God was very clear that immediate death would be the penalty for disobedience.

Why didn't Adam and Eve die immediately?

**"...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."
Revelation 13:8**

- (A) _____ God forgot what He had said.
- (B) _____ Jesus' death saved man from immediate death.
- (C) _____ God changed His mind about the penalty of sin.

Adam and Eve did not die on the day that they sinned because the Substitute was placed between the penalty of death and Adam that very day. Jesus Christ took Adam's place, and personally paid the penalty for Adam's sin by dying on the cross.

There is a remarkable insight on what happened in the Garden of Eden in the following comments. "Why was not the death penalty at once enforced in his case? Because a ransom was found. God's only begotten Son volunteered to take the sin of man upon himself, and to make an atonement for the fallen race....The instant man accepted the temptations of Satan, and did the very things God had said he should not do, Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, 'Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man's place. He shall have another chance'....As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour....As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary." S.D.A. Bible Commentary, vol. 1, pp. 1082-1085.

What we have learned is that Jesus' atoning death directly affected Adam and Eve and the whole human race. Jesus paid the penalty for Adam's sin, exactly as specified in Gen. 2:17. In doing this, Jesus gave Adam and Eve and the human race another chance to make different decisions about obedience and disobedience. The suffering and later death experienced by Adam and all of us was the result of sin, rather than the penalty of sin. The penalty was paid by Jesus Christ. Adam soon offered a lamb sacrifice, showing that he understood that the death penalty had been paid. But the result of sin (the curse of sin) has been a part of human existence to this day.

Does all death imply guilt?

"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Luke 13:1-5

- (A) _____ They died because of their personal sins.
- (B) _____ They died because they were worse than everyone else.
- (C) _____ They died because they lived in a sin-cursed world.

Here we see that death was not the direct result of their personal sins. They were not more guilty than others. The death they died was not the penalty of sin, but the result of sin, which has affected all who have lived on this earth.

Does suffering imply guilt?

"And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." John 9:1-3

- (A) _____ The man was blind because of a sin-cursed world.
- (B) _____ The man was blind because of his parents' sin.
- (C) _____ The man was blind because he sinned before his birth.

Jesus is saying that blindness is not the penalty of sin, but is the result of sin's curse resting heavily on the earth and the human race. There is a clear distinction between the penalty of sin and the result of sin.

When can we have everlasting life?

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." John 5:24,25.

We have everlasting life when we _____ on Jesus.

Notice that we have everlasting life when we believe, which can be today. However, even for those who believe and have everlasting life, they will still die

and must be raised from the dead at Christ's second coming. Here we have a clear distinction between the first death, which Jesus called a sleep, and the second death, from which there is no resurrection. The first death is the result of sin pervading this earth, while the second death is the penalty for sin. While we cannot escape the results of sin, we can escape the penalty for sin by believing in God. This means that we can possess everlasting life even while we must die the first death. Thus the first death (and all suffering) cannot be the penalty for sin. Simply put, everlasting life means no second death, which is the penalty for sin. For further study, read 1 John 5:12,13.

Conclusion: This means that we must divide the basic idea of sin into two separate parts--evil, and guilt. Evil includes all the things which inherently result from sin, which includes suffering and death. Guilt includes condemnation and the second death. So we have two different consequences of Adam's sin. We have the curse--the inherent results of sin--that human beings, animals, and all nature experience which leads to the first death. We also have guilt, which only human beings experience, and which leads to the second death.

Now the atonement of Christ covers both of these consequences of sin, but in different ways. The atonement must deal with guilt by forgiving it, and with evil results by recreating and restoring what the curse of sin has done. In addition, forgiveness can be ours today, while recreation must wait until the second coming. Forgiveness is not needed for the results of sin, but only for the guilt of sin.

Thus the terms forgiveness, justification, righteousness, sanctification, salvation, and the gospel apply particularly to the guilt and penalty of sin. There is a fundamental difference between the result of sin and the penalty of sin. We are not guilty or condemned or lost because of being born into a sinful world. We suffer many results of Adam's sin, including physical defects and a fallen nature. But this is not the sin for which we are guilty or condemned. The sin for which we will be lost eternally comes from something else, which will be the subject of our next study.

This is why there is no guilt applied to a cat who tortures a mouse to death, while we hold a human being guilty for torturing someone. The cat is simply following its instincts--its fallen nature--without any knowledge of right and wrong, while human beings can be held guilty because of a conscious choice to do wrong. All animals and human beings suffer because of the results of sin, but they are not condemned automatically because of those results. Guilt applies only to moral responsibility for choices made. Guilt demands prior knowledge and willful rebellion.

Lesson 3
Sin As Choice

Is it really true that guilt is the result of one's personal choice and is not the result of our birth as children of Adam? Does the Bible teach that sin and guilt and condemnation come from choice, not from the fact that we are born into the human family beset with the inherited results of sin?

How do we know what sin is?

"I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet....For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Romans 7:7-9

- (A) _____ We know what sin is because we feel it.
- (B) _____ We know what sin is because the law tells us what it is.
- (C) _____ We know what sin is because we are born sinners.

It is a knowledge of God's law that makes us sinners in God's sight. We sin when we know what God's will is and choose not to obey God.

What caused sin for the Jews of Christ's day?

"If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin....If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father." John 15:22,24

It was when the light (Jesus) came to them that they were counted guilty of sin. Because of their knowledge of Jesus and what He had done, they were responsible for the way they related to Him.

When were the Pharisees guilty of sin?

"Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." John 9:41

- (A) _____ The Pharisees were sinners from birth.
- (B) _____ The Pharisees were righteous.
- (C) _____ The Pharisees committed sin by rejecting light.

Jesus is telling the people of His day that sin is not counted as guilt when there is no opportunity to know the truth. The Pharisees were certainly born with the same fallen natures with which we are born, but this did not automatically make them sinners. Jesus is making sin and guilt dependent on knowledge and understanding. What changes evil and sins of ignorance into personal sin and

guilt is light available and understood. When we understand God's will and choose to disobey, we are guilty sinners in the sight of God.

When do we sin?

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James 4:17

- (A) _____ When we know God's will, we can sin.
- (B) _____ Even if we don't know God's will, we can still sin.
- (C) _____ Sin has nothing to do with knowledge.

Notice again that knowledge and sin are tied closely together. If we do not know what is right, the concept of sin is nonexistent.

What is the difference between temptation and sin?

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." James 1:14,15

- (A) _____ We sin when we are drawn.
- (B) _____ We sin when we are enticed.
- (C) _____ We sin when lust conceives.

Definition A (sin as nature) places sin in the drawing and enticing of our fallen nature, while Definition B (sin as choice) places sin in the choice to yield to the drawing and enticing process. The drawing or pull of the fallen nature is temptation, not sin.

A very clear and simple illustration of this text is the following: "The sin of evilspeaking begins with the cherishing of evil thoughts....An impure thought tolerated, an unholy desire cherished, and the soul is contaminated, its integrity compromised....His own consent must first be gained; the soul must purpose the sinful act before passion can dominate over reason or iniquity triumph over conscience." Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 177

It is not the impure thought or unholy desire itself that makes us sinners. These are part of our fallen natures, which we inherit and can do nothing to prevent. It is the cherishing and tolerating of these pulls of the fallen nature that constitute sin.

Another statement is just as clear. "If light comes, and that light is set aside or rejected, then comes condemnation and the frown of God; but before the light comes, there is no sin, for there is no light for them to reject." Testimonies, vol. 1, p. 116. "There are thoughts and feelings suggested and aroused by Satan that annoy even the best of men; but if they are not cherished, if they are repulsed as

hateful, the soul is not contaminated with guilt, and no other is defiled by their influence." Review and Herald, March 27, 1888.

We are not sinners because we have these thoughts and feelings as a result of inheriting a fallen nature. We are only contaminated with guilt when we choose to cherish these thoughts.

What sin are we responsible for?

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." Ezekiel 18:20

- (A) _____ We are guilty for our fathers' sins
- (B) _____ We are guilty for our sons' sins.
- (C) _____ We are guilty for our own sins.

How does God deal with sins of ignorance?

" The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Acts 17:30

All of us have participated in wrong things when we didn't know they were wrong. We have all broken God's law ignorantly. God, in His great mercy, does not hold us guilty for this. He does not have to forgive us for these sins of ignorance, but He chooses to wink at or overlook these, because our hearts were not in rebellion against Him.

Conclusion: The concept of sin and guilt and condemnation applies to chosen rebellion against God, just as in the Garden of Eden. God does not hold us responsible for inheriting bad equipment. He is interested in the state of our mind and attitude, not in the defects of our nature. Sin is all about rebellion and choices, not about inheritance and equipment.

There are two concepts that do not work well together--inevitability and responsibility. If sin is inevitable--because of inheriting a fallen nature--then I am not responsible for it. It is someone else's fault and problem. However, if sin is my own choice, then I alone am responsible, and must deal with it directly, rather than casting blame on someone else.

Sin and guilt reside only within those higher faculties of the mind responsible for choosing evil, not in the lower nature which suffers the effects of natural law and are a part of the earth's cycle of sin. Sin, at its root, is self-love. Thus sin is always determined by our motives, in the choice to put self first. Sin is the choice to separate from God by putting self first. Sin is the choice to cherish evil. Sin is the choice to remain ignorant of God's will. Sin is the choice to be careless of our abilities and responsibilities.

Lesson 4
What About Original Sin?

If the Bible does not teach that we are sinners by nature, condemned and lost because we are born in a world of sin, why has original sin become the majority belief among most Protestant and Catholic Christians? As is true for most errors in doctrine, there are some texts which seem to support the doctrine of original sin. This final lesson will look at these texts, to see if they really teach that we are born condemned and lost.

What does "in sin" mean?

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Psalm 51:5

Does this text say that we are born condemned and lost? _____

Notice that David does not say that he was a sinner from birth. Some Bible versions say this, but that is a theological interpretation rather than a correct translation. Where else could David have been born except in iniquity and sin? His mother and father were sinners, and he was born in pain because of the sin of Adam and Eve. David was born in a sinful world to sinful parents. If a child would happen to be born in a family of thieves, where thievery was practiced and taught by the parents, he would be born in thievery. Would this in itself make him a thief? Likewise, to be born in sin does not automatically constitute one a lost and condemned sinner. It does mean that one's circumstances from birth are extremely undesirable, and that one is most likely to end up a sinner.

Are we "children of wrath"?

"...and were by nature the children of wrath." Ephesians 2:3

Does this text say that we are born condemned and lost? _____

This text clearly says that our fallen natures deserve nothing but wrath. Our fallen natures are not righteous, and the only just response to our natures is destruction. Our inheritance from Adam is definitely not good. We need to search the Scriptures a bit more for a solution.

Are we born condemned?

"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Romans 5:18

Does this text seem to say that all men are condemned? _____

This text states rather unequivocally that all men are condemned because of Adam's sin. This is exactly what the text says. Once again, we need to search the Scriptures a bit more.

There are some rather unique texts in the New Testament which speak of Christ's work for the whole race of mankind. Following are a few of them.

Did Christ die for all men?

"If one died for all, then were all dead." 2 Corinthians 5:14

- (A) _____ Christ died for just the righteous.
- (B) _____ Christ died for all.

In some very important sense Christ's death affected all human beings. That includes Adam and Eve, and it even includes Cain and Hitler. In some way all were dead because of the atonement of Christ.

What other texts say similar things?

"...who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."

1 Timothy 4:10

"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2:2

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." 2 Corinthians 5:19

Christ's redeeming work includes not only the sins of those who have repented and believed in Christ, but He has done something for all the sins that have ever been committed. The work of the atonement was a work of reconciliation--a removing of barriers to fellowship and love. In other words, there were no hindrances on God's part to man's restoration to Edenic unity and harmony. Now the only barrier would be on man's part, if he refused to accept what Christ had done for him.

What do all men receive from Christ?

"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Romans 5:18

Now we return to the text which speaks most clearly of the damage Adam did to the human race, but this time we must read all of the verse. How many were condemned because of Adam's sin? All men. What about those who have never even heard of Adam and who have never heard of the Biblical record of creation and the fall? Are they still born under condemnation? All men--the human race--were legally destroyed by Adam's sin. Irrespective of knowledge or choice, every human being was doomed by Adam's rebellion.

But is this the whole story? Right in one verse we have the complete picture. Not only were all men affected by Adam's sin, but all men were affected by Christ's life and death. The same "all men" who were doomed by Adam's sin were freed from condemnation by Christ's righteousness. To put it simply, what Adam did to the human race, Christ undid for the same human race. But what about those who have never heard of Christ and the Biblical record of the atonement? Do they still receive the free gift? All men--the human race--were legally reconciled to God by Christ's life and death. Irrespective of knowledge or choice, every human being was reconciled by Christ's atonement.

The word "justification" in this verse has the meaning of "acquittal," being cleared of charges brought against one. In Romans 5 all mankind is acquitted of the correct charge of rebellion which has been brought against the whole human race. In other words, the race--and all individuals in the race--are no longer under condemnation. Corporate condemnation through Adam is cancelled by corporate acquittal through Christ. Because of Adam's sin, we suffer under many of the curses of sin, one of which is inheriting a fallen nature, but this in itself does not constitute separation, condemnation, or lostness.

Conclusion: Now we can see the total picture. If it is true that we are all condemned through Adam, it is far more importantly true that we are all freed from that condemnation through Christ. If the first part is true, then the glorious truth is that the second part is just as true. Just as Adam condemned all men, Jesus freed all men from condemnation, both without personal involvement or choice, and both at the same instant of time. All human beings were given a second chance to make up their own minds about the gift of personal salvation.

Some believe that the texts about the first Adam are enough to prove that we are all born under condemnation because of Adam's sin. But those statements alone are not enough. What we must have, if it really is true that we are born into this world as lost sinners, is a clear text that we stand condemned because of Adam's sin. Without this statement, there is no support for the belief that we are born lost sinners.

The practical reality of all of this is that while we are born in a sinful world with a fallen nature, we are not born lost sinners. We become lost sinners later by willfully choosing to sin when we know the difference between right and wrong. Unfortunately, an entire gospel system is based on the false belief that we are born sinners. This false gospel changes the Biblical teachings about justification, sanctification, and our present assurance of salvation.

But with a correct diagnosis of what sin really is, we are free to study the Bible further to understand how salvation really works. The gospel is full of good news from beginning to end. Happy studying!

Lesson 5
The Word Became Flesh

Why should we study the subject of Christ coming into our world as a human being at this point? Because just about everything we need to know about salvation and righteousness by faith can be learned by a careful study of the life of Christ. Most of the misunderstandings about how a person is saved can be easily cleared up by studying how Christ came into our world, how He lived on a day-to-day basis, and how He met the temptations of Satan.

So we will study the most important subject in the world in the next four lessons. What kind of a man was Jesus? What nature did He take? How was He like us, and how was He different from us? Can we really live like He did, or is that totally impossible for us?

Where did Jesus come from?

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Philippians 2:6

- (A) _____ Jesus only looked like God.
- (B) _____ Jesus was fully God.
- (C) _____ Jesus was an angel.

The first thing we must understand about Jesus is that He did not begin life as a baby in Bethlehem. This text tells us that Jesus did not have to seek for equality with God, as Lucifer tried to do. For Lucifer it was robbery, but for Jesus it was His by right. John 1:1 tells us that "the Word was God." If Jesus had not been fully God, His sacrifice on Calvary would have been of no more value than a martyr's death. He could not have saved any soul from condemnation and death.

What did Jesus become?

"But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Philippians 2:7

- (A) _____ Jesus only looked like a human being.
- (B) _____ Jesus was a real human being.
- (C) _____ Jesus became an angel.

The second thing we must understand about Jesus is that He became a real human being. He not only came into our world, but He became a man who could experience life just as we all experience it. The original Greek word for the phrase, "made himself of no reputation," really means "emptied himself." In order to become a man, Jesus must empty Himself of certain divine qualities which He had exercised freely in His previous existence as God.

What did Jesus leave behind?

"I can of mine own self do nothing." John 5:30

- (A) _____ Jesus used all His powers as God.
- (B) _____ Jesus used some of His powers as God.
- (C) _____ Jesus could do nothing by Himself.

The most amazing thing we learn about the Incarnation is that Jesus laid aside His omnipotence when He became a man. If Jesus was truly going to live as a man and act as a man, He could not act as an all-powerful God. He must live and act in the only way that it is possible for normal human beings to live. Whatever He did on earth, He did in the same way that we all do it. Since we do not have special powers over nature and life itself, He relinquished His powers in order to experience life just as we do.

How did Jesus do His miracles?

"The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works....He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do." John 14:10-12

- (A) _____ Jesus performed miracles by the Father's power.
- (B) _____ Jesus did not perform any miracles.
- (C) _____ We cannot do what Jesus did.

This is one of the most amazing statements in the Bible. First, Jesus tells us that the works He performed were not done by His own power or ability. He depended on the Father for His power, just as we can do. Jesus voluntarily suspended the exercise of His own power so He could show us what power is within the reach of all human beings. Second, Jesus tells us that if we believe in Him we can do the same works that He did--and even more! The proof of this promise can be seen in the many miracles performed by normal human beings throughout the Bible record. Moses and Elisha and Peter and Paul had no more power than any human being, but God performed remarkable miracles through them.

Did Jesus remember His previous existence?

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." Luke 2:52

True ___ False ___ Jesus knew all things as a baby.

To grow in wisdom, one must be lacking in wisdom and must learn. Therefore Jesus, as a man, could not have been omniscient, knowing all things, or learning would have been impossible. "The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee....He gained knowledge

as we may do....He who had made all things studied the lessons which His own hand had written in earth and sea and sky." The Desire of Ages, p. 70.

Because no human being has a memory of previous existence, Jesus came to live in the same way, without knowledge of the past. Gradually He learned more about God and salvation. Gradually He became aware of who He was and what His mission was. If Jesus would have had His previous existence to rely on in moments of temptation, then His daily living and dealing with human problems would have been totally different from our situation.

Did Jesus know the future?

"Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." Mark 13:32

Who only knows the future? _____

In this text Jesus is speaking of His second coming. While He was on earth, He did not know when He would be coming back, because the Father had not revealed that to Him. During His life on earth, Jesus did not know the future, except as the Father revealed the future to Him. Once again, since none of us know what the future holds, Jesus came to live under the same conditions and knowledge that we all must live under.

What else did Jesus leave behind?

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." Isaiah 53:2

- (A) _____ Jesus was especially handsome.
- (B) _____ Jesus had a beautiful place in which to grow up.
- (C) _____ Jesus' appearance was like other human beings.

Jesus had to leave behind the majestic glory which was His as the Creator in order for human beings to exist in His presence. When people looked at Him, they saw nothing physically unusual about Him. If they were to follow Him, it would have to be because of His teachings, not His appearance.

Conclusion: In summary, Jesus laid aside several aspects of His deity. He chose not to use those aspects of His deity which set Him apart as God. He would live as a man among men. It was the man Jesus who made decisions and who met life's problems. That is the tremendous risk of the Incarnation.

While it is correct to say that Jesus did not cease to be God when He became man, Jesus laid aside those attributes by which He functioned as God, so that He could live as a man. It is at this point that the wonder of the Incarnation baffles our understanding and humbles our pride. While we are always seeking to be

more than who we are, Jesus laid aside most of what He was to take our form. Jesus truly did "empty Himself," so that He could be like me! He experienced our weakness and natural inabilities. The great Creator became a limited human being, having to depend totally on His Father for everything He did.

What a tremendous gift God has given us in Jesus! Can we respond to this gift by giving Him our weaknesses and inabilities? He is just as willing to give us power and knowledge as His Father was willing to give these gifts to His Son.

Does Jesus great gift to us inspire you to surrender your heart to Him?

Lesson 6 Christ Took Our Nature

Much debate has centered on whether Jesus took our fallen nature or Adam's nature before the fall. Even though this may seem like an unimportant point, it really has tremendous implications for the kind of life we can live day by day.

What kind of human being was Jesus? What kind of inheritance did Jesus receive from Mary? Was He exempt from the laws of inheritance by which we are born? Did His nature pull Him toward sin like ours does?

What flesh did Jesus take?

"God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Romans 8:3

True ___ False ___ Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh.

The first thing to understand is that the word "flesh" in this text, and in many other New Testament references, means fallen nature as we know it in our own natures. It refers to the basic equipment we all inherit as a result of Adam's sin. Sinful flesh in this verse means the fallen nature which we all share from our birth.

But what does it mean when we read that Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh? What does "likeness" mean? Does it mean "real" or "similar to"?

What likeness was Jesus made in?

"And took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." Philippians 2:7

- (A) _____ Jesus was made in the likeness of angels.
- (B) _____ Jesus was made in the likeness of princes.
- (C) _____ Jesus was made in the likeness of normal men.

The same Greek word for "likeness" is used in both verses. Was Jesus made similar to human beings or did He become a real human being? I think all would agree that when Jesus came down to this earth He became a real man. But we don't have to rely on our common sense or deductions here.

How did Jesus come to earth?

"Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." 1 John 4:2,3

- (A) _____ Those who believe that Jesus came in the flesh are wrong.
- (B) _____ The spirit of antichrist says that Jesus came in the flesh.
- (C) _____ Those who are of God say that Jesus came in the flesh.

Remember that flesh in the New Testament means our fallen nature. Here we have conclusive evidence that Jesus was not only a real flesh-and-blood human being, but that He really did take our flesh. In Philippians 2:7 we read that Jesus took the likeness of man. Clearly this means that Jesus really became a human being. Here "likeness" means "real." In Romans 8:3 we read that He came "in the likeness of sinful flesh." Did Jesus just look as if He had sinful flesh, or did He actually have sinful flesh?

The Expositors Greek Testament comments on this verse: "But the emphasis...is on Christ's likeness to us, not His unlikeness;...what he (Paul) means by it is that God sent His Son in that nature which in us is identified with sin." (Vol. 2, pp. 645,646) It would seem that if we are to interpret likeness in Philippians 2:7 as our actual human nature, then we must interpret likeness in Romans 8:3 as actual sinful flesh.

What did Jesus actually take?

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." Hebrews 2:14

True ___ False ___ Jesus did not take our flesh and blood.

Jesus actually took the same flesh and blood that we receive at our birth. This debate about the nature of Christ could easily be settled with some basic questions. Was Jesus born with the same "flesh" with which we are born? Does the Bible teach that He had a special exemption from our "flesh" so that He could have a perfectly sinless nature?

How much like us was Jesus made?

"For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren." Hebrews 2:16,17

- (A) _____ Jesus took the nature of angels.
- (B) _____ Jesus took the nature of Adam.
- (C) _____ Jesus took the seed of Abraham.

If Jesus was born in the seed of Abraham, then we only have to ask the question, What nature did all the seed (descendants) of Abraham receive? Clearly they all received fallen nature as a birthright. Notice also that the text says that Jesus was made like his brethren (us) in all things.

Another inspired reference supports this conclusion. "It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life." The Desire of Ages, p. 49. (Emphasis supplied)

What are the results of the law of heredity for us? What nature did Jesus' ancestors inherit? The answer to these questions is all too obvious. The only possible conclusion is that Jesus came with the same heredity that David and Abraham had.

Conclusion: There is no inspired evidence that Jesus inherited only the physical results of the fall, such as hunger, weakness, thirst, and mortality, but that He did not inherit dispositional traits. These areas cannot be separated. If the law of heredity was operative, it was operative totally. If we receive traits of character from our parents, then Jesus received traits of character from His mother, for she was a fully human mother. If we do not believe that she was immaculately conceived, then we must believe that she had the same fallen nature than all human beings possess, and that she passed that nature on to her Son. There is no inspired evidence to suggest that the chain of heredity was broken between Mary and Jesus.

The only reason that this clear Biblical evidence is denied is because many Christians believe that to have a fallen nature is to be a condemned sinner. Therefore, they say, it would have been impossible for Jesus to have received a fallen nature from Mary, because that would have made Him a sinner, too, and He could not have been our sinless Saviour. This is the reason for the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary--to protect Jesus from any stain of sin. This is why many Christians talk about Christ being "exempted" from the normal laws of heredity. The real issue here is the nature of sin (Lessons 1-4) . This is why we

began this series of lessons on righteousness by faith with the study of sin. If we do not understand the Biblical definition of sin, we cannot understand the Incarnation of Christ, and we will develop a false gospel, based on false premises about sin.

If Christ did not fully descend to our level, Satan would have cried "Foul" immediately, and nothing in the name of justice would have been accomplished in answering basic questions in the plan of salvation. To place Him above our nature, living in Adam's perfect nature, is to obscure the amazing victory He gained for us.

Where does the strength of our temptations lie? Surely within our fallen nature. Christ knows by experience what it means to be tempted from within. We can rejoice that Jesus did not sidestep the ugliness of being born into a fallen world, to fallen parents, with a fallen nature. We indeed have a Saviour who is very near to us. He did not quarantine Himself from the disease of a fallen nature, giving us instructions by long distance communication, but He stepped right into the battle zone with us. He takes our hand and will lead us out of the quagmire in which we find ourselves, if only we do not resist. Praise God for such a Saviour!

Lesson 7 No Sinful Habits

As important and comforting as it is to understand that Jesus took our fallen nature when He came into our world, there is another aspect of the Incarnation that we must study if we are to correctly understand how He lived while taking human form. Jesus really was different from us in several ways, and we must understand these differences if we are to have a balanced picture of the Incarnation. Modern errors in the study of the Incarnation have usually been the result of overemphasizing either the ways in which Christ was like us or the ways in which He was different from us.

Where did Christ come from?

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:...and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

- (A) _____ Jesus began in Bethlehem.
- (B) _____ Jesus is the everlasting Father.
- (C) _____ Jesus had a beginning at some point.

This amazing text tells us that it is appropriate for us to call Jesus the everlasting Father. While we cannot understand this fully, it tells us that Jesus existed from

all eternity just as the Father did. This is the most significant difference between Jesus and human beings.

What did Jesus decide before He was born?

"Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:...Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God." Hebrews 10:5-7

- (A) _____ Jesus decided to do God's will.
- (B) _____ Jesus decided to be born in a human body.
- (C) _____ Jesus decided to stay in heaven.

Two correct answers

This text is quoted from Psalm 40:8, which is a prophecy of Jesus becoming part of the human family. Before He began His life on earth He chose to be obedient to the Father. The decision we make when we are converted or born again, Jesus made before He was born. Therefore He was born under the controlling power of the Holy Spirit. His will was surrendered to God from His birth, while our will is surrendered to God only at the new birth.

Who did Jesus choose for His mother?

"And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS." Luke 1:31

_____ True _____ False Before He was conceived, Jesus knew who His mother was.

The angel was sent to let Mary know that she would be the earthly mother of Jesus. Since this happened before Jesus was conceived in her womb, it is obvious that Jesus was part of the heavenly planning process which resulted in the virgin birth. Jesus had the remarkable privilege of choosing His earthly parents!

Who took the place of an earthly father for Jesus?

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee." Luke 1:35

- (A) _____ Joseph was Jesus' father.
- (B) _____ An angel was Jesus' father.
- (C) _____ The Holy Ghost took the place of a father for Jesus.

No human being has ever had the Holy Spirit for a father. The truth of the virgin birth is one of the most amazing facts of Scripture, which we can believe, although we can never understand it.

What was the result of this miracle conception?

"Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35

True_____ False_____ Jesus was born holy.

This is the most remarkable difference between Jesus and human beings. No human being is born holy, although we are born innocent of guilt. Jesus was holy from His first entrance into the world, and He remained holy for the rest of His life.

Did Jesus ever sin?

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Corinthians 5:21

True_____ False_____ Jesus never sinned.

Since we know that "all have sinned," (Romans 3:23) this is another obvious difference between Jesus and human beings. From His birth to His death, Jesus never yielded once to the temptations of Satan or to the promptings of His fallen nature.

Conclusion: While we will never be able to explain fully the workings of the Incarnation, we are able to ascertain some basic facts. Jesus' birth was clearly different from all others born into this world. Perhaps the most significant difference for the purposes of our study was that Jesus chose obedience to God before He was born, and thus He was born under the controlling power of the Holy Spirit. For us, all of this cannot happen until we are converted and choose to surrender our lives to God.

The practical result of this difference for Christ was that He did not develop the same sinful habits as a young child which all of us develop as children. His character was not warped toward disobedience and rebellion by sinful habit patterns developed at a very young age. Although His nature was the same as our nature, with all the same potential for disobedience which is in our nature, His character was pure and holy from birth. Once He was able to choose for Himself, He always chose to keep His character surrendered to God..

Does all of this give Jesus an unfair advantage over us? Not really. I can have the same controlling power of the Holy Spirit and the same victory over sin when I choose to surrender my life to God. I can have Jesus' connection with God and His character by the process of the new birth. This is all God asks of me. I am not asked to live a sinless life from birth to death, as Jesus was. I am only asked to believe in Jesus, to be born again of the Holy Spirit, and to make Jesus the Lord of my life and all that I do.

However, if Jesus did not inherit the same nature that I do, that does give Jesus an unfair advantage over me. No matter what choices I make, I cannot change my fallen nature. No matter how fully I surrender to God, I cannot have the sinless nature that Adam had. If Jesus' perfect obedience was based on the fact that He had an unfallen nature, then He had an advantage which I can never have. If perfect obedience is restricted to those with unfallen natures, then I can never obey perfectly. One of Satan's major arguments was that God's law was unfair for fallen human beings, because they could never obey it. The only way Jesus could disprove this lie of Satan was to take fallen nature and obey God's law in that fallen nature.

As a result of our study thus far, we can conclude that since Jesus' obedience to God was based on the Holy Spirit's control of His life, then I can also choose that control for my life, and I can come to live a life of total obedience to God. I can have the same "advantage" that Jesus had!

Lesson 8 How Was Jesus Tempted?

On the basis of the previous three lessons, we can now come to some practical conclusions. We want to know what difference all of this makes for our daily lives. I am tempted constantly, both by outward and inward temptations. How does Jesus' life help me with my daily struggles? Here is where we can tie this study to our overall subject of righteousness by faith.

How was Jesus tempted?

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:15

- (A) _____ Jesus was tempted in similar ways to us.
- (B) _____ Jesus did not sin because He did not have our temptations.
- (C) _____ Jesus was tempted in the same ways we are tempted.

We begin this study with the most important text on this subject. Here we learn that our High Priest is very close to us and very sympathetic to our struggles. He can be "touched" with our weaknesses, because He struggled with those same weaknesses. Jesus was tempted in all points as we are tempted. Since most of my temptations arise out of the drives and impulses of my fallen nature, if Jesus did not take this fallen nature, then He could be tempted on different things than I am tempted on, but He could not be tempted in all points that I am tempted on. He could not be tempted on my temptations to selfishness, pride, anger,

discouragement, lust, appetite, carelessness, rebellion, and a host of other temptations which arise out of my fallen nature.

But this text says that Jesus living without sin was not because He avoided 90% of my temptations by not taking a fallen nature, but He lived without sin in spite of being tempted in all the same ways that I am tempted. What an encouragement this should be to us who must live our entire lives fighting against a nature that wants to destroy us. Because of Christ's living with us, and taking our nature, we have hope that sin and failure are not inevitable results of being born into a sinful world with a fallen nature.

What did Jesus not do?

"I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." John 5:30

"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." John 6:38

"Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." Luke 22:42

- (A) _____ Jesus did not carry out His own will.
- (B) _____ Jesus did what His will told Him to do.
- (C) _____ Jesus did His Father's will.

Two correct answers

Why would it be necessary for Jesus to say this if His own will was perfect and could be trusted implicitly, because it was part of a perfect nature? Adam before his fall would not have to pray this prayer, because his will and God's will were in perfect harmony. Would we not expect Jesus to seek both His own will and His Father's will, since in an unfallen nature they would be expected to coincide? But we find this astonishing prayer of Christ repeated several times in His ministry. Jesus clearly saw a difference between His own will and His Father's will. If Jesus did take our fallen nature, then this prayer is natural and easily understood. Our will is part of our fallen nature, and by itself our will leads us to make bad choices. In fact, our will is probably the biggest problem we must deal with on a daily basis. When the will is surrendered to God, we obey. When the will is unsurrendered, we disobey. It is only by denying our own wills that we can have a relationship with God. The reality is that we must pray this prayer of Christ every day of our lives.

The following insight may be helpful here. "The human will of Christ would not have led him to the wilderness of temptation, to fast, and to be tempted of the devil. It would not have led him to endure humiliation, scorn, reproach, suffering, and death. His human nature shrank from all these things as decidedly as ours shrinks from them....What did Christ live to do? It was the will of his heavenly Father." Signs of the Times, Oct. 29, 1894

Jesus' will and His nature, in and of themselves, were not in harmony with the will of God. It was the daily work of Christ to deny that will and nature which He inherited from His mother, and to live instead by His Father's will. The daily experience of Jesus in righteousness by faith is exactly the experience we must have. The key element of our daily Christian walk is to surrender our will and desires to God, and to replace our fallen will with God's will, which is the Holy Spirit controlling our lives. Then everything else in the Christian walk will fall into place rather easily. It really is easy to obey God when the will is surrendered to Him.

Jesus came to this earth to show us how to deal with our weaknesses and our temptations, and our primary weakness is our faulty will. If Jesus really came to live at our level, He must live the way we live. Jesus our Saviour truly experienced our feelings and desires and temptations. He knew what it was like to feel the temptation to rebel against God, and that temptation arose from within His nature. Jesus had to meet the battle as we do. He must "fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss." The Desire of Ages, p. 49

Why was Jesus tempted in this way?

"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Hebrews 2:18

- (A) _____ Jesus was tempted to satisfy Satan.
- (B) _____ Jesus was tempted to help us.
- (C) _____ We don't know why Jesus was tempted.

The word "succour" means to help and strengthen and encourage. Jesus went through the depths of temptation to show us a way out of failure and despair. He came to live at our level to give us hope. Because of His victory over His own nature and will, He can help us with our identical struggles.

What should be our attitude?

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:16

- (A) _____ We must be afraid to approach God.
- (B) _____ We don't know if God will help us.
- (C) _____ We know that we can find grace and help from God.

Because Christ is truly our elder Brother, and has gone through our daily struggles, we can have full confidence that in His name we can approach the very throne of God, and know that our needs will be supplied. Because Christ took our nature, and was tempted in all points as we are, all fear is gone, and we can know that there are answers for all our seemingly insoluble problems.

Conclusion: Jesus overcame by dependence on His Father's power. He did not use His own powers or the power of an unfallen nature. "He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us." The Desire of Ages, p. 24. The power of a sinless nature is not offered to us. For Adam it was natural to do right. For us it is natural to do wrong. If the power of Adam's unfallen nature had been possessed by Jesus, that would have been a mighty power not freely offered to us.

Jesus' victory was remarkable, not because as God He acted like God, but because as man He did not act like every other man. Jesus lived a life that Satan said could not be lived. He lived a life that was supposed to be impossible to live. If Jesus had lived a sinless life on any level other than our fallen level, the question, "What does that prove?" would never have been answered.

If Jesus took a perfect nature He would have bridged the gulf between God and man, but the gulf between unfallen and fallen man would still need to be bridged. If, however, Jesus took our fallen nature, then He bridged the whole gulf from fallen man in his dire need to God.

The practical results of this study for us is that we now know how salvation works. We can experience righteousness by faith by looking to Christ. He overcame through daily surrender and prayer. He let the Holy Spirit control the daily decisions of life. And every member of the human family can access the power of God just as Jesus did. Christ "laid hold on the throne of God, and there is not a man or woman who may not have access to the same help through faith in God. Man may become a partaker of the divine nature." Selected Messages, book 1, p. 409.

Our Saviour and Lord is both our Substitute and our Example. He gives us both the assurance of salvation and the power to live above sin. He has demonstrated that we no longer need to live in rebellion. Jesus proved that with God the impossible is possible. Because of Jesus our future is bright with hope. Because of Christ's victory in our fallen nature, the way is now prepared for God to do the impossible in us. What is totally impossible from a human perspective is simply God's opportunity to accomplish the impossible once again.

If we really want to know what righteousness by faith is and how it works, all we need to do is to take a long, lingering look at Jesus. It is so easy for us to allow the press of daily living to obscure our view of Jesus. Will you take more time to just look at Jesus?

We are all sinners. Not by birth or by inheritance or by bad luck, but by our own choices to do things our way instead of God's way, the only way of happiness and peace. This means that all of us, no matter how cultured or refined we may be, are condemned, lost sinners. It is only when we recognize this basic fact of life in a fallen world that we have any hope of anything better. By our own choices we deserve to be excluded forever from the life that was originally planned for the human race. It is only when we realize our desperate situation that we will reach out to God for deliverance from our hopeless plight. In the next four lessons we will explore God's solution to our very serious problem. God has provided a way out of our dilemma, and we want to be sure that we find His remedy, rather than a humanly invented remedy which might make us feel good as we proceed on our way to destruction.

How many have sinned?

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Romans 3:23

_____ True _____ False Most human beings have sinned.

The Bible tells us in many ways that every human being is a sinner, justly deserving separation from God, which means destruction. None of us can claim to be good or righteous, no matter how morally acceptable our lives may appear, because deep within our characters is the root of selfishness, which we have nurtured all our lives. We live for self, which is exactly the opposite of God's way and which leads to self-destruction. The only comfort that we can take is that all of us are in the same predicament together.

What must I do to be saved?

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Acts 16:31

- (A) _____ We are saved by living better lives.
- (B) _____ We are saved by believing on Jesus.
- (C) _____ We are saved by going to a priest or minister.

Since we have no way to solve our problem on our own, God has provided a way out. He has made His solution simple and clear, so that no one is excluded from His solution because of lack of education or wealth. Every human being, no matter what his or her circumstances may be, can turn to Jesus for help. If we will believe that Jesus lived and died to save us, then we have taken the first step out of the hopeless situation in which we all find ourselves.

Are there many ways of salvation?

**"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."
Acts 4:12**

- (A) _____ Salvation is possible only through the life and death of Jesus.
- (B) _____ There are many ways of salvation.
- (C) _____ If we do the best we can, we will be saved.

The Bible is very exclusive about the way of salvation. In many different ways it says that only through God's provided way--the life and death of God's Son--is salvation possible. No human teacher or philosophy or religion can save us. No matter how many millions may follow another way of salvation, there is no hope of escape unless we follow God's way. All other solutions to the problem of sin are dead ends, leading only to destruction.

What about those who don't know about Jesus?

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Acts 17:30

- (A) _____ Those who don't know about Jesus will be lost.
- (B) _____ God doesn't care if we are ignorant.
- (C) _____ God does not hold us responsible for what we do not know.

We serve a very merciful and fair God. While the only way of salvation is the life and death of Jesus, God does not hold individual sinners responsible for the ignorance of their age or culture. He will take into account the circumstances of a person's life, especially regarding the light or truth available to that person. If a person responds to God and obeys God with limited understanding of Him, Jesus' atoning blood will cover that person, as long as there is a sincere and complete yielding to God.

What is justification?

"Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Romans 4:6-8

- (A) _____ Justification is forgiveness.
- (B) _____ Justification is righteousness imputed to us.
- (C) _____ Justification is freedom from sin.

Two correct answers

The first thing to understand about justification is that God forgives our sins. Since we can do nothing to change our past choices, God simply forgives us or pardons us. We are no longer guilty sinners. This is the declarative aspect of justification. To be justified is to be pardoned, to be acquitted, to be counted

righteous. God declares me forgiven and pardoned, without my performing any works to earn my forgiveness.

How was Abraham justified?

"For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

Romans 4:2,3

- (A) _____ Abraham could be proud of his justification.
- (B) _____ Abraham was justified by believing God.
- (C) _____ Abraham was counted as righteous.

Two correct answers

Doing good works, even the best of works, does not provide or earn justification. Justification is a gift of God's grace, undeserved and unearned. When we believe in God's promises and accept Christ's life and death for us, we are counted righteous. We are justified or declared to be righteous.

Why are we able to be saved?

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved.)" Ephesians 2:4,5

_____ True _____ False Salvation is totally by God's grace.

The only chance any of us have for salvation is the fact that God is love. Only because of His mercy and grace toward us do we have any hope of a way out of destruction. No matter what we learn about justification and sanctification, we must never forget that salvation is by grace, totally undeserved and unmerited. We can cooperate with God's justification, but we can never contribute to our justification. Nothing we do, not even our faith, can justify us.

What is the result of justification?

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1

The great gift of justification provides for us what no good deeds or valiant effort can provide--peace with God. Guilt is gone, fear is gone, uncertainty is gone. They are replaced by peace and joy, because we are counted righteous for Christ's sake.

"Pardon and justification are one and the same thing. Through faith, the believer passes from the position of a rebel, a child of sin and Satan, to the position of a loyal subject of Christ Jesus, not because of an inherent goodness, but because Christ receives him as His child by adoption....The grace of Christ is freely to justify the sinner without merit or claim on his part. Justification is a full,

complete pardon of sin. The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is no more to doubt God's forgiving grace." (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1071)

Justification by faith is the most basic principle of the gospel. It is the bottom line of salvation. If we do not experience justification, we have no hope of salvation. Justification is adoption into the family of God. God declares me righteous.

Lesson 10 Justification Experienced

Just as with every crucial aspect of salvation, Satan has provided a counterfeit justification, by which salvation is promised but not delivered. Just as there were false gospels masquerading as the truth in Paul's day, so we have false gospels today promising what they cannot deliver. And multitudes of sincere Christians have bought into Satan's version of the gospel, because it sounds so good. What is this popular counterfeit of true justification? Basically, it is limiting justification to Lesson 9 alone. It is restricting justification to God's declaration that we are righteous. In other words, it is making half of justification the whole gospel. Many Christians believe that justification is limited to pardon and forgiveness and declaration alone. In this lesson we will see that there is another vital aspect of justification. Without this dimension, justification is hollow and unsatisfying.

What is the second aspect of justification?

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:5-

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- (A) _____ Justification is regeneration.
- (B) _____ Justification is renewing.
- (C) _____ Justification is only declaring.

Two correct answers

Look carefully at how God saves us. The washing of regeneration does not refer to the waters of baptism, but to the washing of the heart. This is a heart

experience--a complete transformation. It happens in the mind. It changes my values and my attitudes. The Holy Spirit renews my mind. No longer am I self-centered; now I am Christ-centered and others-centered. Now I have the mind of Christ.

When this washing and renewing have been accomplished by Christ and the Holy Spirit, then I am justified and saved. There is more to justification than being pardoned from past sins. This is justification experienced in the inward life. It is crucial to understand that justification follows regeneration and renewing.

How did Jesus describe salvation?

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

_____ True _____ False The new birth happens after we are saved.

Jesus did not use the word justification as often as Paul did to describe the work of salvation, but Jesus was very clear about how we are saved. He said that the new birth is an essential prerequisite to salvation. In its most basic expression, justification experienced is the new birth. The new birth does not follow justification; it is justification.

What does it mean to be "in Christ"?

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17

- (A) _____ To be in Christ is to be declared new.
- (B) _____ To be in Christ is to be declared new and made new.
- (C) _____ To be in Christ is to want to become new.

To be in Christ is to be in salvation, or to be saved. The one who is "in Christ" is a new creature, a new person. God creates a new person with new motivations and desires. Jesus compares this process with being born all over again.

What must happen to the "old man"?

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin....Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:6,7,11

- (A) _____ When our old man is crucified, we don't sin as much.
- (B) _____ The old man is only counted as dead.
- (C) _____ The old man and sin die together.

The old man is our old way of living, in which selfishness and self-love rule our lives. This old man must die and be replaced by the new creature which is produced by Christ and the Holy Spirit in the new birth. Notice that to reckon ourselves to be dead is the same as actually being crucified. To be declared dead is to be actually dead. And when the old man is dead, sin is dead at the same time. Just as the old man and sinning are synonymous, so the new creature and obedience are synonymous. Thus justification and obedience should also be one and the same thing. It is because this is not always true that we begin to doubt our experience and wonder if we are really justified. It is at this point that we must once again rely on the first half of justification, because we must be forgiven again for sins committed.

How does God deal with this problem of sinning?

"My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John 2:1

- (A) _____ Sin cannot be forgiven after the new birth.
- (B) _____ It is God's purpose that we do not sin.
- (C) _____ Jesus will forgive us if we sin.

Two correct answers

Because of God's great mercy, He continues to forgive us if we sin after the new birth. But we must never think that sin is necessary or inevitable after being justified, because it is God's plan and desire that we do not sin. He really wants us to be dead to sin, and alive to obedience. We must never mistake the mercy of God with the plan of God. He does many things for us because of His love and mercy which He wishes He would not have to continue to do, namely, to continually forgive us for continued sinning. God's plan of justification includes making us new creatures, which means being dead to sin.

What is God's way of achieving this goal?

**"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 2:5**

_____ True _____ False We can actually have the mind of Christ.

If this text is really true, then there is a way to participate in God's plan. If we daily walk with Christ and behold Christ and commune with Christ, then by a miracle of the Holy Spirit we will actually think like Christ and make decisions like Christ, and resist sin like Christ. The seemingly impossible becomes a reality! Perhaps we need to spend more time and energy learning how to have the mind of Christ each day.

Additional Study: "God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David

had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.' Psalm 51:10." (Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 114) God's forgiveness is more than declaring; it is reclaiming, transforming, and renewing. It is a clean heart created within us. This is not sanctification. It is part of forgiveness. Justification transforms at the same time that it declares. Pardon is an inward transformation.

"Having made us righteous through the imputed righteousness of Christ, God pronounces us just, and treats us as just....'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' " (Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 394) This statement is not in harmony with the current definition of justification in the Christian world. It says that before God pronounces us just, He makes us righteous. Justification by faith is being made righteous. Current Christian theology says that justification is being declared righteous, and making righteous comes later, in sanctification. But what we have studied tells us that justification is making us righteous inwardly as well as declaring us righteous legally.

"As the sinner, drawn by the power of Christ, approaches the uplifted cross, and prostrates himself before it, there is a new creation. A new heart is given him. He becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus....God Himself is 'the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.' Rom. 3:26." (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 163) Justification is receiving a new heart from God, becoming a new creature. Right now there is a major attempt being made to separate the transforming power of the Holy Spirit from justification; to put transformation totally within the process of sanctification. But what we are finding in these statements is that transformation and making righteous are part of the justifying process, after which God declares us righteous. Justification is simply another name for the new birth, the new creation, the new heart.

"By receiving His imputed righteousness, through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we become like Him." (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1098) Notice that imputed righteousness comes through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Some today want to say that we are justified by Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Nowhere does inspiration support this separation of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Both are involved in justification and sanctification. It is clear that imputed means more than accounting and crediting. "To be pardoned in the way that Christ pardons is not only to be forgiven, but to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. The Lord says, 'A new heart will I give unto thee.' The image of Christ is to be stamped upon the very mind, heart, and soul." (Review and Herald, August 19, 1890)

Conclusion: The first part of justification is to be pardoned--forgiven--of my sins. The second part of justification is to be transformed in the new birth experience. Justification is both declarative and experiential. The current popular understanding of justification is that it is the first part only. The second

part--new birth--is said to be part of sanctification. This means that we can be justified and saved before the new birth happens. This means that even if the new birth experience is not changing my life from the inside out, I am still justified and saved. This unbiblical separation between declaring righteous and making righteous is doing more than any other teaching to allow Christians to tolerate sin in their lives, since they believe that they are justified even when open, unforgiven sin is active in their lives.

The reality is that we are dealing with two different gospels here, both competing for our allegiance. Satan's counterfeit of the gospel is no less real and destructive than his counterfeit of God's day of worship. We need to be very sure that we know from our own study and experience what the gospel really is, so that we can say with Paul, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Romans 1:16.

Lesson 11 Sanctification Declared

Justification and sanctification are terms to describe two parts of the process of salvation. It is critically important to understand their relationship to each other and to the status of the one who wishes to be saved by the atoning death of Jesus Christ. What part does sanctification play in the saving process? Two different gospels arise from two answers to this question. Let us examine the inspired evidence regarding sanctification.

What does "sanctify" mean?

"And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." Genesis 2:3

- (A) _____ Adam sanctified the seventh day.
- (B) _____ God sanctified the seventh day.
- (C) _____ God blesses what He sanctifies.

Two correct answers

The most basic meaning of sanctification is "to set apart for a holy use." When God finished creating the earth and all life upon it, He set apart the seventh day as a memorial of His creative acts. God put His special blessing upon this day, because it was to be set apart for all time for the human race to use in a holy way.

Who does the sanctifying?

"Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you." Exodus 31:13

- (A) _____ God sanctifies us.
- (B) _____ Man sanctifies himself.
- (C) _____ God and man together do the sanctifying.

The Sabbath was not set apart just as a holy day, but it was to be a sign or symbol that just as God sanctified the Sabbath, He sanctified His people. His people were also set apart for a holy use. It is very important to note right at the beginning that God does the sanctifying. He sanctified the Sabbath and He sanctifies us. It is currently popular to think that while God does the justifying, God and man together do the sanctifying. We must understand that in the process of salvation, it is God's work from beginning to end, both in justification and sanctification. Now we have a part to play in responding to God's saving work. We believe, we respond, we surrender, we cooperate. But these are only our responses to God's grace. None of these responses earn or merit our salvation. At the most, our responses give God the permission to do His justifying and sanctifying work in our lives.

What part did sanctification play in the sanctuary?

"And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy. And thou shalt anoint the laver and his foot, and sanctify it....And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office." Exodus 40:10,11,13

- (A) _____ Aaron sanctified himself.
- (B) _____ Aaron sanctified the altar and the laver.
- (C) _____ God sanctified the altar, the laver, and Aaron.

When God instituted the sanctuary system for Israel, the first thing He did, before any ceremonies were carried out in the sanctuary, was to set apart the furniture and the priest for holy use. Before any sacrifices for sin were offered in the sanctuary, God sanctified the altar for its holy use. And it is important to note that God sanctified Aaron in exactly the same way as He sanctified the altar. It was God's work from beginning to end. From that point on, the sanctuary and the priests were set apart for holy use.

How does God sanctify us?

"And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Corinthians 6:11

- (A) _____ Sanctification is a result of justification.

- (B) _____ Jesus does the justifying, and the Holy Spirit does the sanctifying
(C) _____ Washing, sanctifying, and justifying are all done by God.

The person who is washed from sin, who has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus, who stands justified and pardoned in the sight of God, is also sanctified in that very act. When we are justified and washed, we are set apart for a holy use. God looks at us, not in our filthy garments of sin, but now clothed with the pure righteousness of Christ. We are declared to be sanctified, or set apart for holiness. Just as we are declared to be justified, or pardoned from our sins, we are declared to be sanctified. In this way the thief on the cross was both justified and sanctified, because he had been set apart for holiness. In passing, we might note that Paul places washing and sanctifying before justifying, perhaps to make the point that they are really all part of one saving process.

What does God say about those who are forgiven?

"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Acts 26:18

- (A) _____ Sanctification takes place over a long period.
(B) _____ Sanctification is a result of being saved.
(C) _____ Forgiveness and sanctification occur together.

When Jesus spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus, He told Paul that his mission would be to bring the Gentiles to forgiveness of sins and salvation. If the Gentiles would turn from Satan to God, they would be called sanctified by faith in Christ (the same faith which would justify them). Just as forgiveness of sins is possible only by faith in Christ's life and death, so sanctification is possible only by the same faith in Christ. Both justification and sanctification are received by faith, because both are acts of God and flow totally from God's grace. And it is crucial to understand that both justification and sanctification are necessary prerequisites to salvation. The Bible does not teach that justification saves, while sanctification comes along later as the result of being saved.

Just as justification is declared by God at the moment of conversion, so sanctification is declared by God at the same moment. We are set apart for holiness, and God looks at us through the holy character of Jesus Christ. In this way we can have complete assurance of salvation. It is often said that this understanding of the gospel deprives us of assurance, but this is totally false. When the heart is surrendered and we wear the robe of Christ's righteousness, we have perfect peace and assurance, while we continue to grow in Christ.

Lesson 12
Sanctification Experienced

What we studied in Lesson 11 about sanctification is not the usual understanding of sanctification that comes to our mind. In this lesson we will examine the second aspect of sanctification which is much more familiar to us. Most often we think of sanctification as the growing process in which we walk with Christ on a daily basis after we have been converted. We will study this more familiar aspect in this lesson.

What is God's will for us?

"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more....For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." 1 Thessalonians 4:1,3

- (A) _____ Sanctification is a one-time experience.
- (B) _____ Sanctification is a growing experience.
- (C) _____ Paul was not interested in sanctification.

Paul was deeply concerned that the members of the churches he had established would not remain at their beginning stage of Christianity, but would grow and develop strong Christian characters. This is the daily walk aspect of sanctification. Sanctification is a growing experience, in which we understand more and more of God's will, and our character grows correspondingly.

How do we grow?

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 3:18

- (A) _____ We grow by trying harder.
- (B) _____ Change is very hard.
- (C) _____ We become like Jesus by beholding Him.

As we spend time with God, we see more and more of His glory, and we become more and more like Him in character. Our lives reflect more of His holiness as we spend more time in His presence. Sanctification is not trying harder and harder to be righteous. It is spending quality time with Jesus through Bible study, prayer, and thoughtful meditation so that we allow Jesus to change us into His likeness. Sanctification is allowing the Holy Spirit to take total control of our lives and choices, so that He can perform the miracle of holy living in us. Where previously our self-centered wills made selfish, sinful choices, now our Spirit-centered wills make unselfish, obedient choices.

"At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be a continual advancement." (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 65) "Sanctification is a state of holiness, without and within, being holy and without reserve the Lord's, not in form, but in truth." (Our High Calling, p. 214) It is important to note that we do not grow into sanctification, we grow in sanctification. From the sanctified state in which God places us at conversion, we advance continually in maturity. As long as we do not allow sin to separate us from God, we continue to grow in holiness.

What was Paul's daily experience?

"I die daily." 1 Corinthians 15:31

"Paul's sanctification was a constant conflict with self. Said he: 'I die daily.' His will and his desires every day conflicted with duty and the will of God. Instead of following inclination, he did the will of God, however unpleasant and crucifying to his nature." (Testimonies, vol. 4, p. 299) The fallen nature does not disappear at conversion, and the sanctification experience is putting that nature, with its selfish desires and inclinations, to death every day. Perhaps it is important to remember that natural desires and inclinations are temptations, not sins, even though they remain with us from birth to death. There is a simple bottom line to being saved--we must die daily to our natural desires and inclinations. Then we will have the assurance of salvation, even if the theology of it all may not be fully understood. Every day our selfish nature must be crucified in a new commitment with the Lord. Disobedience and selfish acts are never a part of sanctification, and they must be rejected daily in order to maintain a sanctified experience.

How can we live the sanctified life?

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

- (A) _____ Sanctification is Christ living in me.
- (B) _____ Sanctification is crucifying the old nature.
- (C) _____ Sanctification is half my work and half Christ's work.

Two correct answers

It is absolutely critical to understand that sanctification is not our good works or partly our works combined with God's grace. Sanctification is God's work from beginning to end. It is His grace, His power, His righteousness, all imparted to the willing disciple. Our part is to place our will on God's side and to do the things which allow His grace to continue to flow through us.

What is the secret of success?

"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27

_____ True _____ False Christ dwelling in us is our only hope of success.

The only way we can experience true sanctification is by asking Christ to live within us through the Holy Spirit every day of our lives. It is called a mystery because so few people in the world, even among Christians, experience this on a daily basis. We cannot explain how this works, but we can experience it, and it will make all the difference between victory and defeat in our lives.

Conclusion: Just as there are two parts to justification--being declared forgiven and being transformed--there are two parts to sanctification--being declared holy and growing in holiness. The first part is declaration; the second part is experience. It is incorrect to say that justification is the all-important part of salvation because that is when God declares me to be righteous, while sanctification is secondary because that is my work.

In justification, our part is to believe God, to choose to serve Him, to surrender everything to His control, and to confess our sins. It is God's part to forgive us, to count us righteous, to cleanse us from the filthy garments which we have accumulated over the years, and to create a new person with completely different values and desires than the "old man."

In sanctification, our part is to choose to obey God's commands, to surrender our weak fallen natures to Him daily, and to carry out whatever God makes possible in our lives. It is God's part to count us holy, to dwell within us constantly, to empower our wills to carry out what we have chosen, and to give us the ability and strength to obey Him in all of the areas in which He requires obedience. What God commands, He always enables. The bottom line is: Sanctification is by faith alone, just as justification is, not by faith plus works.

It has become quite popular to say that sanctification is a fruit of the gospel. In other words, we have been saved by justification alone, and sanctification is the fruit or result of our being saved. Once our salvation has been accomplished "up front," then the process of sanctification continues for the rest of our lives. This belief does not agree with 2 Thessalonians 2:13: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Here nothing is even mentioned about being saved by justification. Sanctification and belief are the two prerequisites to salvation. We are saved through sanctification. How tragic it is that Christ's atoning death and the Holy Spirit's work have been divided, so that (as some claim) we are justified by Christ's work and sanctified by the Holy Spirit's work. Justification is not somehow more essential than sanctification.

Sanctification is a vital part of the saving process. It is a causative factor in salvation, not just a result of salvation. If (as some claim) sanctification is only a fruit of the gospel, then it is not essential to salvation. It is nice to have, and it

will come eventually, but it is not necessary to be saved. Very simply, some believe that justification saves, but sanctification does not save. But if sanctification is a part of the saving process rather than a fruit of the saving process, then holiness is essential to salvation and to a saving relationship with God. Dying daily to self is not a hoped-for fruit of salvation; it is a necessary part of salvation. It doesn't just come along at a later time.

Without holiness we will not see God. Sanctification is holiness declared and holiness experienced. If we are not living a sanctified life, we are not saved. To think of sanctification as only a fruit of salvation means that it is an accessory to salvation. We can be saved without fully experiencing sanctification. But God's Word tells us that sanctification is a necessary part of the saving process. Justification and sanctification are united in the saving process. To separate them and to make one part more important to salvation is to do violence to the gospel of Christ.

The false gospel that sanctification is secondary to justification leads to the conclusion that some sin is allowable in the saved experience. But the Bible teaches that sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). When sin is cherished, Satan takes control of the heart, and the Spirit of God is driven out. How could we possibly think that we are in a saved condition while sinning? Self-delusion and rationalization are major components of Satan's attempts to deceive us into a false sense of security. Only when our sins are confessed can we be accepted by God. Some feel that this is a very discouraging understanding of the gospel, since we find ourselves in sin so often. We will study this in more detail in the final lessons of this course.

I would recommend the following practical suggestion about our personal involvement in the justification-sanctification process. "It is for you to yield up your will to the will of Christ; and as you do this, God will immediately take possession, and work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. Your whole nature will then be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; and even your thoughts will be subject to Him. You cannot control your impulses, your emotions, as you may desire, but you can control the will, and you can make an entire change in your life. By yielding up your will to Christ, your life will be hid with Christ in God, and allied to the power which is above all principalities and powers." (Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 514) Even if theological distinctions might be difficult to understand, we can do this. We can yield the will to Jesus. We can allow Him to take full possession of our lives. We can allow Him to do His good work in us. Only in this way will we have any power over our fallen natures and Satan. If we will only yield up the will daily to Jesus, we will have power beyond our ability to explain, and we will not have to rely on a false gospel to give us false assurance of salvation. God's way is always better than human devising. May the gospel of Abraham and Jesus and Paul be our gospel today.

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Lesson 13
Is Perfection Really Possible?

Perfection is a troublesome word. What does it really mean? What doesn't it mean? Some believe that it is spiritually unhealthy to emphasize the subject of perfection. But perhaps part of the problem is that we have not defined our terms carefully. Let us take a close look at this much-avoided subject to see if it is as fearsome as it seems. Perfection has four different meanings, which may be part of the reason it is misunderstood.

How is God described?

"For I am the Lord, I change not." Malachi 3:6

_____ True _____ False God changes periodically.

Only God can be described in this way. Only God never needs to change or adjust His thinking or actions based on new information. Since God knows all things--past, present, and future--there is no possibility that He will be surprised by new information. No created beings, including angels, can be described in this way, for all are subject to new information which will change their ideas and actions. Lack of information will always lead to imprecise and perhaps wrong conclusions.

How is Jesus described?

**"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever."
Hebrews 13:8**

_____ True _____ False Jesus changes periodically.

Since Jesus is described in the same way as God, it is clear that He shares in this unique attribute of God. This is ABSOLUTE PERFECTION. It means that there will never be a mistake made or a misjudgment based on faulty information. Sometimes it is said that human beings can never be absolutely perfect. This is correct, because absolute perfection describes God alone. There is no other absolute perfection. Thus, absolute perfection is never possible for created beings--not for human beings and not for angels. "Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden." (Our High Calling, p. 45)

How was man created?

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them....And God saw

everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." Genesis 1:27,31

- (A) _____ Man was created imperfect.
- (B) _____ Man was in need of much development.
- (C) _____ Man was created in God's image--very good.

God created Adam and Eve in the full perfection possible to finite beings. He made mankind in His own image--as close to God as could be possible for created beings. This is NATURE PERFECTION. Man's very nature was in complete harmony with God and the rest of creation. His mind and body worked perfectly together. He did not have to fight discordant feelings and emotions. His impulses and drives were in balance and in complete agreement with God's laws. Everything worked properly!

What will happen to us at the resurrection?

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption....In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." 1 Corinthians 15:42,52,53

- (A) _____ We receive immortality at the resurrection.
- (B) _____ We receive immortality in a moment.
- (C) _____ We receive immortality when we die.

Two correct answers

Our corruptible, sinful human nature will be changed by God at the second coming of Christ into an incorruptible, perfect human nature. After that time there will be no more sinful promptings from within our nature. Thus nature perfection, which involves removal of temptation from within, will occur only at the second coming of Christ. We cannot experience nature perfection before then.

How much of our heart does God ask for?

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Matthew 22:37

_____ True _____ False God asks for all of our heart and mind.

At the moment of conversion, when we surrender our lives completely to Christ, we are counted perfect in Christ. The one thing that God asks of us in the conversion process is to give him our whole heart. He will not accept a divided heart, in which we love God and the world equally. The one condition we must meet to be saved is total and complete surrender of our entire lives to God. He

will accept nothing less. Even though we are just beginning our walk with Christ, He accepts our CHARACTER SURRENDER and we are counted perfect in Christ.

How does a plant reveal this process?

"For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Mark 4:28

_____ True _____ False The blade is as necessary as the ripe fruit.

Even though a plant is very immature when the first blade of green appears above the ground, it is no less important than the fully grown plant. Without that first growth, no harvest will be possible. The tiny blade is perfect, because it is all that it could be expected to be. At each stage of growth the plant may be perfect as it grows to maturity. Likewise, when our character is fully surrendered to God, that is a perfect surrender at that time, with the knowledge available to us then. We are fully surrendered to the degree that we understand ourselves and God's will for us. God will accept the full surrender of all that we know about ourselves at that time. Thus our character surrender is perfect, because it is counted as perfect by God. Incidentally, this is the only requirement for salvation, now or in the future. God does not demand wisdom or education or years of living, as is illustrated in the story of the thief on the cross.

What is God's plan for us?

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Ephesians 4:13

- (A) _____ God doesn't care whether or not we grow.
- (B) _____ God expects us to grow to maturity.
- (C) _____ We can never become perfectly mature.

While God is very gracious to give us time to learn and develop, and He counts us perfect during that time, He wants us to grow up to full maturity. He even says that we can grow to the stature of the fullness of Christ. The gospel is a tremendous power that God is willing to share with us, to bring us to heights that we could never imagine. CHARACTER MATURITY is simply the ripening of the harvest in the individual life. We are becoming mature in Christ when we are no longer choosing to sin against God. If Jesus does live within us through the process of justification and sanctification, then when He controls our lives, we do not sin because Christ does not sin.

What can God accomplish in us?

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." 1 John 3:9

- (A) _____ God's plan is that we do not sin.

- (B) _____ God knows that some sin is inevitable.
(C) _____ The new birth makes it possible for us to stop sinning.

Two correct answers

This concept can be expressed in a simple but clear way. Christ in--sin out. Sin in--Christ out. We cannot have both Christ and sin reigning on the throne of the life at the same time. Christ will not accept a divided heart. In a mature character Christ is controlling totally, and therefore we are not making rebellious choices. We are choosing not to rebel against God in thought, word, or action. Right here we are focusing on what God can do, not on what I can't do.

In defining perfection, we have found that the two definitions that are important for our study are those categories over which we have some control. If we believe that sin is by choice, than we will also believe that we can choose to obey. We can choose to surrender, and we can choose to grow to maturity. Because Christ provides the power for victory, a perfectly mature character--like Christ's--is possible for all surrendered Christians.

The new birth brings perfection in Christ, which is always sufficient for salvation. We are saved on condition of complete surrender. The problem is that we interrupt our surrender to Christ. The power of Christ does not change, but our surrender to Christ is not constant. It is the interruptions that can and should cease, for we should let Christ control us totally at all times.

By nature we will always be sinful until Christ comes. But we can decide to make no choices against God's will. We can actually have a sinless character in a sinful nature. If Christ overcame the promptings of His fallen nature by the Holy Spirit's control, then the same power is available to us.

Lesson 14
Victory Over Sin

While definitions are very important in understanding perfection, it may be even more important to search the Bible for realistic, practical ways of experiencing what the Bible promises. It is at this point that we need to have that faith, that complete trust in God that will believe what God says even though it sounds impossible. We know enough about our weakness and our failures. What we want to know is God's power and His promises.

What can Christ do?

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Jude 24

- (A) _____ Christ can keep us from falling into sin.
- (B) _____ Christ cannot keep us from all sin.
- (C) _____ Christ can present us faultless in His presence.

Two correct answers

Is Christ really able to keep us from sinning? Or is sin, in the final analysis, more powerful than Christ? Under inspiration, Jude says that He is able! Thus, falling is not an inevitable reality of our lives, no matter what our past experience might have been. If Christ is really able, then why don't we give Him a chance to reveal His power in our lives?

How much can we really do?

**"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."
Philippians 4:13**

_____ True _____ False We can do most things through Christ.

Do we really believe the promises of God? Are all things possible through Christ? Is it really true that victory over sin is possible? Note carefully that this is possible only through Christ dwelling in us by the process of justification and sanctification.

What else does God promise?

**"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations."
2 Peter 2:9**

- (A) _____ God will deliver anyone from temptation.
- (B) _____ God will deliver the godly from temptation.
- (C) _____ God will deliver the ungodly from temptation.

It is important to note that God will deliver only those who are looking to Him and believing His promises--whom He calls the godly. Now if we are really delivered out of temptation, this means that we have not fallen under the temptation--we have not sinned. Then it is not necessary for us to yield to temptation, because He can deliver us from temptation. He will provide a way of escape if we are willing.

How will God deliver us?

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Corinthians 10:13

- (A) _____ Some temptations are too strong for us.
- (B) _____ There is a way of escape for every temptation.
- (C) _____ I am tempted more than other people.

God has promised that He will not allow any temptation to come to us that is too strong for us, which would make our fall inevitable. This means that a way of escape is possible for every temptation. There is not one temptation that comes to us that makes sin inevitable. God has promised that if we will trust in Him, He will show us the way out of every temptation.

Some practical ways to find that escape route can be easily done if we give some thought to it ahead of time. When temptation comes, do we pray immediately, or would we rather wait until later? Have we memorized Scripture so that we can answer Satan with "It is written" as Christ did? We can even find a way of escape by song. What is important is that we turn our thoughts away from the temptation and toward our source of power.

How did Christ live?

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." 1 Peter 2:21,22

- (A) _____ Christ did not sin because He was God.
- (B) _____ Christ does not expect us to be like Him.
- (C) _____ Christ wants us to follow Him in not sinning.

We know that Christ lived a life without sin, but sometimes we don't want to recognize the fact that He is also our Example, asking us to follow in His steps. Of course, this assumes that Christ was born like we are born, feeling our temptations and experiencing the pull of our desires.

What is possible for us?

"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." 1 John 3:6

_____ True _____ False If we abide in Christ, we will not sin.

If we are in Christ, we are not rebelling against Him, and sin is rebellion. If we abide in Him, we will not sin, because He does not sin in us. If Christ is abiding in us constantly, He will not be sinning in us. Thus as long as we are abiding in Him, we will not be rebelling in thought or in word or in action.

Is overcoming really possible?

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Revelation 3:21

- (A) _____ Only overcomers will be in heaven.

- (B) _____ Overcoming is possible only in heaven.
- (C) _____ Overcoming was only for Christ.

The model of overcoming is Christ, and we can overcome sin just as He overcame it. The Bible is full of these promises, and we must not ignore them in an attempt to defend some remaining sins in our lives.

What must happen to our thoughts?

"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:5

- (A) _____ Most thoughts are good.
- (B) _____ Some thoughts cannot be resisted.
- (C) _____ Every thought can be given to Christ.

This is one of the most powerful promises in the Bible. God knows that we cannot handle our inmost thoughts, and so He offers us a way of escape. If we will just give those thoughts to Christ immediately, He promises to hold them in captivity so that they cannot control us. But we must make the decision to surrender that thought to Christ rather than playing with it and dwelling upon it. If we really want to be Christians, we must be just this serious about our relationship with Christ. Every thought must be in His control, at all times. It is self-obvious that if Christ controls all of our thoughts, sin will not be happening in our lives.

Can we walk in the Spirit?

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Galatians 5:16

- (A) _____ If we walk in the Spirit, we will not sin as much.
- (B) _____ If we walk in the Spirit, we will not sin.
- (C) _____ If we walk in the Spirit, we will not be tempted.

If the Holy Spirit is controlling our lives, we will not succumb to the desires of our natures. The Bible is full of promises that we need not fall and fail constantly, over and over again. God promises that we can overcome and that we can gain continual victories in the battle against the flesh.

What is our only hope of victory?

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Ezekiel 36:25-27

- (A) _____ If we try harder, we can overcome sin.
- (B) _____ A heart transplant is necessary to obey God.
- (C) _____ Only God can cleanse us from sin.

Two correct answers

It is crucially important that we understand that overcoming is a miracle of God's grace, just as surely as Peter walking on the water. No amount of self-control will overcome the pulls of our fallen nature. This has to be a miracle of God from beginning to end. He does the cleansing, He provides the new heart, and He causes us to obey His law. If there is any hope of realizing the promises we have read, then we must take this text very seriously, and make this the constant prayer of our lives.

Additional study: A gospel which has become very popular among contemporary Christians says that once we have been justified, we remain in a justified or saved condition even though continuing sin or cherished sin keeps on recurring in the life. In this gospel, the absence of a sanctified heart does not disqualify us for heaven. One author writes, "Stumbling under grace, falling into sin, does not deprive us of justification. Neither does it bring condemnation."

It is quite evident that this idea does not harmonize with the Bible texts we have been studying in the last few lessons. Isaiah 59:2 warns, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Sin always separates us from God. When sin is cherished, Satan takes control of the heart, and the Spirit of God is driven out. How could we possibly think that we are in a saved condition while sinning? Self-delusion and rationalization are major components of Satan's attempts to lull us into a false sense of security. Anyone who assures you that there is safety in disobedience is teaching a false gospel, which is far more serious than a false day of worship.

Now all of this could be very discouraging for us, except for one thing--God's love. God is not looking for ways to reject us. He is the seeking God, the One who will not let us go, even when we are rebelling against Him. While He cannot save us in sin, He will continue to love us and draw us back to Him. We see this most clearly in 1 John 2:1. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Clearly God's purpose for us is that we do not sin. But immediately we see God's mercy in the very next phrase. When we fall into sin because of our carelessness, we have One who understands our weakness representing us in the heavenly courts. If we go to Him in sorrow and genuine repentance, He will take our case immediately.

We need to be clear that only when our sins are confessed, which is not while we are participating in them, are we accepted by God. When we fall into sin, there are two ways that we can deal with our sin. The human way--Satan's way--is to justify our sin and to excuse it. That is the way of separation from God, and there

can be no salvation while separated from Him. The right way to deal with personal sin is to recognize it for what it is as soon as it happens within us. We see that once again we are dishonoring God and vindicating Satan, and we fall on our knees in deep repentance. There is only one thing that should scare us in this mortal life, and that is watching our hand slip out of the hand of our heavenly Father. Immediately we ask God to reach down and grasp our sinking hand and pull us to safety again. Nothing else matters--not ego or reputation or image--excepting reconnecting with God. As long as the connection is maintained, we have full assurance of salvation.

This means that we have to deal with our personal sins, and not just assume that they will go away. We need to allow God to fix the sin problem in us. "Just as soon as you commit sin, you should flee right to the throne of grace, and tell Jesus all about it." (Signs of the Times, Feb. 15, 1892) Today, let us yield our wills to Jesus and allow Him to take full possession of our lives. If we will only yield up our wills daily to Jesus, we will have power beyond our ability to explain, and we will not have to rely on a false gospel to give us a false assurance of salvation. God's way is always better than human devising.

Lesson 15 The Final Generation

The evidence in the world around us tells us that we are living in the time described in the Bible as the time of the end. Our world is rapidly moving toward a final climax point, and God will soon take the reins in His own hands. If we are alive when these events happen, then it is important to know what the characteristics of this final generation will be, and most importantly, how we can be on God's side when the world as we have known it comes to an end.

What happens before Jesus comes?

"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:11,12

- (A) _____ People will be changing loyalties right up to the second coming
- (B) _____ Character is fixed permanently before the second coming.

This text tells us that those who are wicked will stay that way, and those who are righteous will stay that way at a certain point in time. A short time after this point, Jesus will come "quickly." We call this point the close of probation, because that ends the time when human beings can change loyalties from one side to the other. Probationary time--the time for making eternal choices--has ended. We are not told how long it will be from the close of probation to the second coming, except for the word "quickly." It will not be a long period of time, but it will be an important time period.

How did Daniel describe this time?

"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." Daniel 12:1

- (A) _____ When Michael stands up, a time of trouble follows.
- (B) _____ When Michael stands up, we will have a millennium of peace.

Chapter 11 of Daniel describes events in world history from the days of Daniel to the very end of earth's history. After these world events play out, then Michael (another name for Christ) stands up to begin a new phase of God's plan for earth and the human race. When He does this, a terrible time of trouble for the human race will begin. Once again, we are not told how long this time of trouble will be, but since God's people will be delivered "at that time," it cannot be a lengthy period of time.

What else happens during this time?

"And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled." Revelation 15:8

- (A) _____ The seven plagues fell on Egypt in Moses' time.
- (B) _____ The seven plagues are yet to fall on the earth.

The time of trouble described by Daniel will be like no other time in earth's history because this earth has never experienced disasters like the plagues described in Revelation 16. Only by God's protecting hand will His people be able to survive what is coming on this earth.

How does this connect with the close of probation?

"And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and

cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake." Revelation 8:3-5

- (A) _____ Incense and prayers will continue indefinitely.
- (B) _____ Incense and prayers will come to an end at some point.

These verses describe the work of angels in bringing our prayers for forgiveness to the attention of God. Here we learn that at some point, no more prayers and incense will be offered upon the golden altar, because the censer will be cast into the earth, which will cause much trouble on the earth. This period corresponds to the close of probation and the period of the seven plagues. Shortly before Jesus returns, there will be a time when no more prayers for forgiveness will be accepted by God, and there will be no more changing of loyalties from one side to the other. All decisions will be made, and they will be final. Surely this is the most serious time that has ever been known in all of earth's history.

What time period are we in right now?

**"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree."
Revelation 7:1**

- (A) _____ The angels are holding back the forces of destruction.
- (B) _____ The angels have loosed the winds of destruction.

We are in the period just before the final time of trouble breaks upon the earth. God's angels have been commissioned to hold back the winds of destruction for a specific purpose.

What is that purpose?

**"And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed, and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel."
Revelation 7:2-4**

- (A) _____ The earth will not be hurt until God's people are sealed.
- (B) _____ We don't know what God is waiting for.

This may be the most important text of all our lessons. God says that He will not allow the winds of destruction to come upon the earth until He has sealed His people. This means that we now have the answer as to what is holding up the final events of this earth's history. God is not waiting for more evil to accumulate. He is not waiting for a temple to be rebuilt in Israel. He is not waiting for

pronouncements by the pope in Rome. He is waiting for a special people, a people whom He can seal as His very own. When He has found and sealed this final generation, then the climactic end of this world's history will rapidly follow. (Incidentally, do not get sidetracked by interesting but non-essential questions, like, Are the 144,000 a literal or symbolic number? or, How can there be 12,000 out of every tribe?)

How does God describe this group?

"And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." Revelation 14:1

- (A) _____ God wants His name written in the Hebrew language.
- (B) _____ God wants His name written in people's foreheads.

Now we know what the seal of God is. It is His name, meaning His character, written permanently in the minds of His people. They belong totally to Him and their decision is final. They have decided to be righteous and holy forever. They are all through rebelling. All sin, of every kind, is gone forever from their lives.

What is their spiritual experience?

"And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God." Revelation 14:5

- (A) _____ They have overcome most of their sins.
- (B) _____ They are faultless before God.

This is an incredible, almost impossible, description of a group of human beings--previously sinners like all of us. If we might have any doubt about what "without fault" means, 1 Peter 1:19 and Hebrews 9:14 use this same phrase to refer to Jesus Christ. There is simply no sin in their lives. They are actually living sinless lives in sinful natures, something that Satan said could not possibly be done. This will not happen because God pushes some magic button in their brains or because He takes away their fallen natures to make it easier to obey, but because they have allowed the Holy Spirit to control their lives so completely that they can live the same quality of life that Christ lived while on earth.

Conclusion: If the Bible really teaches that there is a close of probation, and that God is demonstrating something special after the close of probation, then it seems that we must also believe in full character maturity, which means living without yielding to sinful desires. If the priestly ministry of forgiveness comes to an end at the close of probation, that means that there will be no more forgiveness of sins after that time. If the ministry of forgiving sins will have ceased, then it seems imperative that there be no sinning on the part of those who are sealed to God. If we take seriously the Biblical admonitions to overcome sin, the reality of the close of probation, and the challenge of the 144,000, then we must also take seriously the truth of living without sinning.

This can be an overwhelming thought, with lots of room for pessimism and discouragement. Right here, we need to review the previous lessons we studied. First, we are dependent on God's promises and power, not our own abilities. If He can create the world in six days and raise Lazarus from the dead, then He can perform miracles in our lives too. Second, because forgiveness has ended does not imply the end of the enabling power of Jesus dwelling within His people on earth. In fact, we will need Him more and closer than ever before. Christ abiding within--constantly--will be our only hope of success. Third, living without sin is the goal--the end result. Our focus must remain on justification and sanctification, because this is the method of achieving sinlessness. Jesus forgives us of our sins. He comes into our lives with power and victory. As we focus on justification and sanctification, the end result or goal will naturally follow. It will be the natural result of letting God do His full work in our hearts. As an athlete running in a footrace focuses on the next few yards while remembering the tape that is at the end of the race, so the Christian focuses on his relationship with Christ today while remembering that there is a goal at the end of the race.

If God is really waiting for a special group of people before He initiates the final events of earth's history, shouldn't we be spending all our time and energy learning how to be a part of that special group? This needs to be our number one priority, with all other interesting issues a distant second in our lives. Let us strive with all our hearts to be part of God's 144,000.

Lesson 16 Why Is It So Important?

What has been the point of all these lessons on righteousness by faith? Have we just learned some interesting Bible teachings to put in our memory files? Are we now qualified for a course completion diploma? If that is all we have received, our study has been a waste of time. There are much bigger issues at stake here, and we need to see the big picture before the part we play in it makes any real sense. (This final lesson will not be like the previous lessons, with questions and answers to be supplied. Instead, the student is asked to reflect thoughtfully on each text, asking the questions, How does this apply to my daily life? What is the real purpose for my existence? Does God have a role for me to play in the last days of earth's sinful history? Will God's plan be delayed if I fail to carry out God's plan for me?)

Sin is not just about me and my salvation. Sin is dishonoring God and proving that Satan is right in the great struggle between God and Satan. Satan has always claimed that God's law is unfair and cannot be obeyed, particularly by those who have fallen natures. "Satan declared that it was impossible for the sons and daughters of Adam to keep the law of God, and thus charged upon God a lack of wisdom and love. If they could not keep the law, then there was fault with the Lawgiver." (Signs of the Times, Jan. 16, 1896)

The real issue at stake here is the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God. **"Let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."** **Romans 3:4.** Will God's way of handling the problem of sin be upheld and vindicated, or will Satan's accusations win the day? Will the universe be safe for the rest of eternity with God's government? Is God an arbitrary despot with more power than the rest of us, or is He the loving God portrayed in the Bible? These and other questions need final answers before the great experiment of sin can come to an end.

How can God be vindicated when His people are proving Satan right a good share of the time? This is why the sins of believers are far more serious than the sins of unbelievers. The sins of Christians seem to say that God's law and His power are no match for the deceptions of Satan. Unless the divine-human connection shows that God's grace has more power than Satan, what is the point of it all? Justification and sanctification are God's way of revealing His power to transform and restore, not just to forgive and overlook.

God's final generation will have a role to play in the vindication of the credibility of His word. **"And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes."** **Ezekiel 36:23.** We and many generations before us have dishonored God's name and His government by our continued sinning. Before the conflict can end, there must be a resolution of this problem. God must be sanctified, or vindicated, in us, before those who scoff at the God of heaven. In fact, God will vindicate His own name by providing His people with the divine power to obey His law perfectly. "If there ever was a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world." (Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 746)

Thus the perfect character developed by God's people is crucially important in the final resolution of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. This is the real reason for stressing the concept of perfection in God's end-time people. God claims that total obedience is possible. Satan claims that a sinful nature and character make obedience impossible. Who is telling the truth? Only God's final generation can prove that Satan is a liar.

This final generation is described in a very special way. **"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17.** The reason Satan is so angry with the final remnant is precisely because they keep God's commandments, which Satan maintains is impossible. It is over the issue of obedience that the final battle will be waged.

The primary reason for a short period before Christ's coming during which there is no Mediator for sins is to dramatize before the watching universe the reality of God's complete power over sin in the lives of those whose wills are totally and forever united to His will. Some of the very people who formerly betrayed their sacred trust by agreeing with Satan that it is impossible to obey God's law will finally demonstrate that there really is no excuse for sin, that God does have more power than Satan's temptations. The close of probation will play an important part in the final demonstration that God is making before His universe; that, indeed, it is possible for fallen man to obey God's law, which is righteous and good and holy.

Final conclusion: Perfection means being in so close a relationship with Christ that the individual ceases to respond to external or internal promptings to sin. Perfection means entire cooperation with Christ. Perfection means continuous death to self and a denial of one's own independent will and inclination. Perfection is total rejection of egotism and pride. Perfection is a merger of man's will with Christ's will so that the Holy Spirit is in full and final control. Perfection is an unbroken exercise of faith which keeps the soul pure from every stain of sin or disloyalty to God. Perfection is Christlikeness, combining a relationship with God like Jesus had with the qualities of character which He revealed. Perfection is living a mature life in the Spirit, full of the fruits of the Spirit and thus without sin. Perfection means no longer yielding to rebel, sinful desires.

When we are more concerned about God's vindication in the great controversy than about our own salvation, then we have the purest motivation to live a holy life, and God will honor that motive by placing all the power of heaven in our hands. No longer will we have occasional forays into the land of self-indulgence. To silence the last lingering question that perhaps Jesus was sinless because He was God, the final generation will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that men and women with fallen natures can live without sinning. This final demonstration will be the last step in the vindication of God's character, His government, His justice, and His mercy--and the great controversy will be very near its conclusion.

"Christ took humanity and bore the hatred of the world that He might show men and women that they could live without sin." (*The Upward Look*, p. 303) Do we believe God's promise? Can we accept this challenge? Do we see this as the most glorious prospect ever set before God's people? *May God bless your continued*

study of His Word as you reach out for the prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus.